ON KIERKEGAARD’S RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN 1848

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INTRODUCTION

An entry in Kierkegaard’s journal for 1852 reads ‘Then came 1848; that helped. There came a moment when, overwhelmed by blessedness, I dared say to myself: I have understood the highest. Truly this is not granted to many in each generation’ (SKS1 24, 529; JP2 6, 444). He makes several entries in other journals for 1852 and 1853 about the year 1848 in the same tone (SKS 25, 55, 258; PJ3 546, JP 6, 482). Given this, it seems safe to assume that something happened to Kierkegaard, which allowed him to grasp something significant in 1848. In the following, I will call this event ‘Kierkegaard’s religious crisis in 1848’.

It seems that while many researchers have acknowledged the importance of this event, close studies of it have seldom been made. Although his study is rather old, Walter Lowrie made the most rigorous and most representative investigation. Lowrie calls it Kierkegaard’s ‘metamorphosis’, and gives the following interpretation. In 1848 Kierkegaard becomes certain that God has forgiven him his sins in such a way that God has forgotten them, so that Kierkegaard succeeds in breaking out of his fundamental disposition called ‘inclosing reserve [Indesluttethed]’. Although there is some temporary relapse, this metamorphosis happens to Kierkegaard essentially at Easter of 1848 (i.e. SKS 20, 357; JP 5, 443–444).

In the following, I will elucidate Kierkegaard’s crisis by analyzing his journal entries in 1848 in chronological order. In other words, my goal here is to make a contribution to Kierkegaard biography based primarily on a reading of his journals. It will become clear that I present a thesis that contradicts Lowrie’s position: Kierkegaard does not succeed in breaking out of inclosing reserve, and the journal entries for Easter of 1848 do not indicate the climax of Kierkegaard’s religious crisis or his metamorphosis. Nevertheless, something surely happens to Kierkegaard in 1848, and he does grasp something significant in that year.

I. FORMAL ATTEMPT TO RESOLVE INCLOSING RESERVE

On the 19th of April in 1848, which is Wednesday in Holy Week, Kierkegaard makes a remarkable entry into his journal that signals the beginning of a religious crisis.

My whole nature is changed. My concealment and inclosing reserve are broken – I am free to speak.

Great God, grant me grace! . . .
Alas, she [Regine Olsen] could not break the silence of my melancholy. That I loved her – nothing is more certain – and in this way my melancholy got enough to feed upon, O, it got a frightful extra measure. That I became a writer was due essentially to her, my melancholy, and my money. Now, by the help of God, I shall become myself. I now believe that Christ will help me to triumph over my melancholy, and then I shall become a pastor.

In my melancholy I have still loved the world, for I loved my melancholy. Everything has been conductive to a higher tension of the relationship for me; her suffering, all my endeavor, and finally that I have had to experience derision [i.e. the Corsair affair] and now am brought to the point where I am obliged to earn a living have all contributed with God’s help to a break-through (SKS 20, 357; JP 5, 443–444).

To begin with, we need to know what ‘inclosing reserve’ means; in fact, the whole development of Kierkegaard’s religious crisis in 1848 can be traced only on the basis of an understanding of this concept.

Kierkegaard, under the pseudonym of Vigilius Haufniensis, explains the condition and the cause of inclosing reserve in The Concept of Anxiety (SKS 4, 424–431; CA, 112–129): ‘inclosing reserve closes itself off more and more from communication’ (SKS 4, 430; CA, 129), and ‘unfreedom becomes more and more inclosed and does not want communication’ (SKS 4, 425; CA, 124). As to the cause, he says that ‘Generally, a more metaphysical expression is used for evil, namely, the negating [det Negtende]. The ethical expression for it, when the effect [Virkningen] is observed in the individual, is precisely this inclosing reserve’ (SKS 4, 425; CA, 124), and ‘Inclosing reserve is the effect of the negating self-relation in the individuality’ (SKS 4, 430; CA, 129).

Inclosing reserve is an ethical expression of evil. A person who holds inclosing reserve hesitates to communicate with other people openly, and this is the effect of the negating or the metaphysical expression of evil in the person. Evil first tempts a person to commit some cardinal sin in such a way that the person negates something divine; this sin then causes the person to commit another sin against other people in such a way that the person hesitates to confide in them.

Now we may study the journal entry for the 19th of April. Kierkegaard mentions, among other things, his life and his resolution in connection with his inclosing reserve.

Kierkegaard means that inclosing reserve has been the fundamental disposition of his life; he committed some cardinal sin in such a way that he negated something divine, and a sense of the sin has hindered him from confiding in other people. Kierkegaard refers to Regine Olsen as a victim of this inclosing reserve (see section 3 for more details). Further, it is due to his inclosing reserve (or ‘melancholy’ as feelings entailed by inclosing reserve) that Kierkegaard became an author. By the way, the view that the cardinal sin for Kierkegaard is his father’s sin of cursing God seems to be commonly accepted: Kierkegaard writes down in his journal entry for February 1846 that ‘how appalling for the man [his father] who, as a lad watching sheep on the Jutland heath, suffering painfully, hungry and exhausted, once stood on a hill and cursed God’ (SKS 18, 278; KJN, 2, 257), and Kierkegaard firmly believed that the punishment for the sin affected the Kierkegaard family decisively (J. Garff, pp. 131–138).

Kierkegaard says that this inclosing reserve is now broken, and he resolves to become a pastor to earn his living.

In reality, however, this journal entry does not mark a final solution to his inclosing reserve. On the contrary, it is a trigger for his religious crisis of 1848, which lasts until the early summer of that year. In fact, the resolution to break out of inclosing reserve and become a pastor soon proves impossible: on the 24th of April, just five days after this
journal entry, Kierkegaard comes to consider what he mentions here as a formal attempt (SKS 20, 359–360; JP 5, 444–445).14

II. FROM THE FORMAL TO THE SUBSTANTIAL ATTEMPT TO RESOLVE INCLOSING RESERVE

An entry in Kierkegaard’s journal for the 24th of April in 1848, Easter Monday, reads as follows.

No, no, my inclosing reserve still cannot be broken, at least not now. The thought of wanting to break it continually occupies me so much and in such a way that it only becomes more and more chronic. . . .

. . . My future becomes more and more difficult economically. If I did not have this inclosing reserve15 to lug around, I could accept an appointment. Now it is difficult. I have long pondered the possibility of a break-through, and because hitherto I have operated essentially as an escapist, trying to forget, I have frequently thought it my duty to make an attempt to take the offensive, particularly since this inclosing reserve can become an occasion of sin for me. . . .

I do believe in the forgiveness of sins, but I interpret this, as before, to mean that I must bear my punishment of remaining in this painful prison of inclosing reserve all my life, in a more profound sense separated from the company of other men, yet mitigated by the thought that God has forgiven me. As yet, at least, I cannot come to such heights of faith, I cannot yet win such cheerful confidence of faith that I can believe that painful memory away. But in faith I protect myself against despair, bear the pain and punishment of my inclosing reserve and am so indescribably happy or blessed in the activity of mind and spirit which God has granted to me so richly and graciously.

If my inclosing reserve is to be broken, it is perhaps more likely to happen in some way or other by God’s helping me into an occupation and then helping me to concentrate fully on this. But to want to break inclosing reserve formally by continually thinking about breaking it leads to the very opposite (SKS 20, 359–360; JP 5, 444–445).

This journal entry mentions two things: (1) the impossibility of breaking out of inclosing reserve and the reason for this (the 1st, 2nd, and 4th paragraphs), and (2) forgiveness of sins (the 3rd paragraph).

(1) Kierkegaard’s father’s sin of cursing God can be considered as Kierkegaard’s cardinal sin, which hindered him from open communication with others. He says he had been defensively trying to escape from and forget about his inclosing reserve (the 2nd paragraph) by working energetically as an author (SKS 20, 195; JP 5, 401). So on the 19th of April, he attempted to remove inclosing reserve in such a way that he breaks free of it, with the purpose of becoming a pastor to earn his livelihood, and motivated by a sense of duty (the 2nd paragraph). However, this attempt turned out to be failure at least for the time being; his attempt was too formal (the 4th paragraph), because what he did was just think continually about breaking out of it (the 1st and 4th paragraphs). The bottom line is that Kierkegaard’s inclosing reserve is deeply rooted in his cardinal sin against God; a substantial resolution of his inclosing reserve would be possible only if his cardinal sin is brought to a resolution.

(2) This is why Kierkegaard begins to consider forgiveness of sins in this journal entry (the 3rd paragraph). At this point his belief in forgiveness of sins takes the same form as before: while he is confident that God forgives him, he supposes he must bear inclosing reserve as a punishment for these sins. In other words, Kierkegaard has yet to have faith that God forgets his sins, so that he can be free from inclosing reserve.
III. HOPE FOR ‘IMMEDIACY AFTER REFLECTION’

In the following journal entries, Kierkegaard continues considering forgiveness of sins. Motivated by hope for a substantial resolution of his inclosing reserve, Kierkegaard investigates the possibility of forgiveness of his sins in the form of God’s forgetting them (SKS 20, 360–361; JP 2, 147, and JP 5, 445–446).

Along this line, Kierkegaard writes on the 11th of May.

[1] Most men (if at an early age it is indicated that they must bear some suffering or other, some cross or other, one of those mournful curtailments of the soul) begin to hope and, as it is called, to have faith that everything will improve, that God will surely make everything all right etc., and then after a while, when still no change has taken place, they will learn little by little to depend on the help of the eternal – that is, resign themselves and be strengthened in being satisfied with the eternal.

– The person of deeper nature or one whom God has structured more eternally begins at once to understand that he must bear this as long as he lives, that he dare not ask God for such extraordinary, paradoxical aid. But God is still perfect love, and nothing is more certain to him than that. Consequently he resigns himself, and since the eternal is close to him, he finds rest, continually and happily assured that God is love. But he must accept suffering. Then after a while when he becomes more and more concrete in the actuality of life, comes more and more to himself quis finite being, when time and the movement of time exercise their power over him, when in spite of all effort it still remains so difficult to live year after year with the aid only of the eternal, when in a more humble sense he becomes human or learns what it means to be a human being (for in his resignation he is still too ideal, too abstract, for which reason there is some despair in all resignation) – then for him faith’s possibility means: will he believe or not that by virtue of the absurd God will help him temporally. (Here lie all the paradoxes. Thus the forgiveness of sins means to be helped temporally; otherwise it is resignation, which can endure the punishment, still assured that God is love. But belief in the forgiveness of sins means to believe that in time God has forgotten the sin, that it is really true that God forgets.)

[2] This is to say that most men never reach faith at all. They live a long time in immediacy, finally they advance to some reflection, and then they die. The exceptions begin the other way around; dialectical from childhood, that is, without immediacy, they begin with the dialectical, with reflection, and they go on living this way year after year (about as long as the others live in sheer immediacy) and then, at a more mature age, faith’s possibility presents itself to them. For faith is immediacy after reflection ...

[3] ... A life which was a burden to me however much I knew at times all the happy strains but which was all embittered by the black spot which spoiled everything, a life which, if others knew its secret, I perceived would make an object of pity and sympathy from the very outset and a burden to myself ...

[4] For now I see so clearly (again unto new joy in God, a new occasion to give thanks) that my life has been planned. My life began without immediacy, with a frightful melancholy, basically disturbed from earliest childhood, a melancholy which plunged me into sin and dissipation for a time, and yet, humanly speaking, almost more deranged than guilty. Then my father’s death really stopped me. I did not dare to believe that this, the fundamental wretchedness of my being, could be lifted; so I grasped the eternal, blessedly assured that God is love indeed, even though I should have to suffer in this way all my life, yes, blessedly assured of this. This is the way I regarded my life. Then once again I was plunged down, and sympathetically, into the abyss of my melancholy by having to break off my engagement – and why? Simply because I dared not believe that God would lift the elemental misery of my being, take my almost deranged melancholy away, something I now desired with all the passion of my whole soul for her sake and also mine. It was most grievous to have to reproduce my own misery. Once again I resigned myself. Thinking only of making her free, I turned away from such a life, but always assured and blessedly assured, God be praised, that God is love – nothing has been more certain to me.

[5] And now, now when in many ways I have been brought to the breaking point, now (since Easter [i.e. the journal entry for the 19th of April], although with intermissions), a hope has awakened in my soul that it may still be God’s will to lift this elemental misery of my being. That is, I now believe in the deepest sense. Faith is immediacy after reflection. As poet and philosopher I have presented
everything in the medium of imagination, myself living in resignation. Now life draws nearer to me, or I draw nearer to myself, come to myself. – For God all things are possible. This thought is now in the deepest sense my watchword and has gained a meaning for me which I had never envisioned . . . (SKS 20, 362–365; JP 2, 11–12, and JP 5, 446–447).

What Kierkegaard means can be summarized as follows: (a) while ordinary people begin their life with ‘immediacy’ and then come to ‘reflection’, exceptions commence with ‘reflection’ and might reach ‘immediacy after reflection’ which is the Christian faith in forgiveness of sins (the 1st and 2nd paragraphs). (b) Kierkegaard has, as an exception, continuously been under the condition of reflection (the 3rd and 4th paragraphs). (c) Kierkegaard now hopes that he will reach immediacy after reflection (the 5th paragraph).

Let us study each respectively.

(a) To begin, I would like to refer to Kierkegaard’s argument in Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitandum est (Pap. 17 IV B 1, 144–150; JC, 18 166–172), where he gives clear definitions of ‘immediacy’ and ‘reflection’: ‘immediacy’ is non-relation or non-contradiction in self, and ‘reflection’ is the possibility of a relation between the temporal and the eternal in the self, to use the terms in The Sickness unto Death. Understanding these definitions makes it possible to interpret what Kierkegaard means here.

Ordinary people begin their lives with an inner condition called ‘immediacy’: they live only in the dimension of the temporal without feeling any contradiction (see SKS 11, 165–169; SUD, 51–54). This is why it is said that they can naively hope for the temporal help of God.

They may then come to the stage called ‘reflection’: to appreciate the eternal as ideality, so that the relation between the eternal and the temporal arises as a question (see SKS 11, 169–172; SUD, 19 54–56). From another perspective, people become conscious of sin when they become reflective, for sin is essentially related to the gap between the eternal and the temporal. So it is said that although they can find consolation in the thought of the eternal, reflective people begin to undergo much suffering, which arises from the consciousness of sin.

Exceptions commence their life with the condition of reflection, and then they might reach the next stage called ‘immediacy after reflection’: they might come to live the dimension of the temporal without feeling any contradiction, after undergoing much suffering arising from the consciousness of sin. This is possible when their sins, which cause the consciousness of sin, are cleansed temporally, that is to say, when they come to have faith that by virtue of the absurd God forgives them their sins temporally in such a way that God forgets their sins. By the way, Kierkegaard, under the pseudonym of ‘Johannes Climacus’, mentions in Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments that ‘Faith is the objective uncertainty with the repulsion of the absurd, held fast in the passion of inwardness, that is the relation of inwardness intensified to its highest’ (SKS 7, 554–555; CUP, 20 p. 611). This view of faith as a passion to accept the absurd is equivalent to immediacy after reflection.

(b) Kierkegaard has, as an exception, begun his life without immediacy, and has lived under the condition of reflection until this time: while he has found consolation in the thought of the eternal, he has suffered from a consciousness of his sins throughout his life. That is, Kierkegaard’s cardinal sin (i.e. ‘the black spot that spoiled everything’) has caused his inclosing reserve (i.e. the ‘fundamental wretchedness’ or ‘elemental misery of my being’).

This implies that Kierkegaard has not dared believe in the possibility of immediacy after reflection: he has not dared believe in the possibility that God forgives him his sins
temporally in such a way that God forgets them, so that he may become free from any suffering due to inclosing reserve. The reason Kierkegaard could not get married to Regine Olsen is that he had been under this condition of reflection and dared not believe in the possibility of immediacy after reflection. In fact, Kierkegaard mentions in his journal entry for 1843 that ‘If I had had faith, I would have stayed with Regine’ (SKS 18, 177; JP 5, 233).

(c) The possibility of immediacy after reflection has now opened up for Kierkegaard: he hopes that he is coming to have faith that God forgets his sins temporally, so that God will remove the temporal suffering of inclosing reserve.

IV. FAITH AS ‘INFINITE SELF-CONCERN’

Let me briefly summarize what we have seen. On the 19th of April, Kierkegaard abruptly mentions that his inclosing reserve is now broken, so that he resolves to become a pastor to earn his livelihood (SKS 20, 357; JP 5, 443–444). Five days later, however, he finds this attempt to have been too formal; he realizes that a substantial resolution of inclosing reserve requires him to confront his cardinal sin, which is its cause (SKS 20, 359–360; JP 5, 444–445). On the 11th of May, Kierkegaard mentions that while he has continuously been under the condition of reflection, he now hopes to reach immediacy after reflection; that is, while he has continuously suffered from inclosing reserve as the effect of his sins, he now hopes to become free from the suffering of inclosing reserve by developing a faith that God forgets his sins, so that his inclosing reserve will lift (SKS 20, 362–365; JP 2, 11–12, and JP 5, 446–447).

After the 11th of May, Kierkegaard continues to meditate on forgiveness of his sins. Presumably in early June, he mentions that he has recently been doing penance for his sins (SKS 20, 380; JP 6, 4). Against his hope, however, he comes to suspect that his faith in forgiveness of sins is not taking the form of immediacy after reflection: although he is still certain that by virtue of the absurd God grants human beings forgiveness of sins temporally in such a way that He forgets their sins (see The Sickness unto Death (SKS 11, 102; SUD, 100) and Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays (SKS 12, 285–286; WA, 169–170) for examples), he becomes doubtful that he can receive such forgiveness in such a way that his inclosing reserve will be removed. Rather, Kierkegaard comes to develop a different idea of his faith several days later.

... If a person could have empirical certainty that God wanted to use him as an instrument (as a king, a cabinet member) – how easily he would be able to submit to everything in every sacrifice. But is it possible to have an empirical or even a purely immediate certainty of a relationship to God? God is spirit. To a spiritual being it is impossible to have a relationship other than a spiritual relationship; but a spiritual relationship is eo ipso dialectical. – How then does an apostle understand that he has been called by a revelation and the like and has an immediate certainty which is not at all dialectical? I do not understand him – but this can be believed. As far as an ordinary man’s relationship to God and to Christ is concerned, this I understand Socratically. Socrates did not know definitely that there is immortality. ... But his life expresses that there is immortality and that he is immortal. Immortality, he says, preoccupies me so infinitely that I put everything into this if. The relationship to Christ is this – a person tests for himself whether Christ is everything to him, and then says, I put everything into this. But I cannot get an immediate certainty about my relationship to Christ. I cannot get an immediate certainty about whether I have faith, for to have faith is this very dialectical suspension which is continually in fear and trembling and yet never despairs; faith is precisely this infinite self-concern about whether one really has faith – and precisely this self-concern is faith. ... (SKS 20, 381–382; JP 1, 107–108)
Kierkegaard stresses that his faith is not taking the form of immediate certainty. That is, it is impossible for Kierkegaard to become certain that God forgets his sins temporally. This means that immediacy after reflection is unavailable for him. He cannot become free from the suffering of inclosing reserve by having faith that God forgets his sins temporally. Roughly speaking, Kierkegaard cannot become certain that ‘now God forgets my sins, so I am free from any concern!’

On the contrary, Kierkegaard’s faith is ‘infinite self-concern’. That is, faith is demonstrated only through unceasing efforts in his condition of reflection: he needs to ceaselessly make efforts to be faithful to God in the face of the suffering arising from his consciousness of sin; only in these ceaseless efforts is faith realized.24

Again, his hope of resolving inclosing reserve must have evaporated by this point of time, because inclosing reserve can be eliminated only when he himself becomes certain that his cardinal sin is forgotten by God. Instead, his view of faith advances into another perspective here.

Soon after the above journal entry, Kierkegaard writes:

In the last analysis, the only thought in which a man can rest is that when he does something according to the best planning, and it nevertheless goes badly – God is the one who can still bring some good out of it, that the best a man really does is not much else than to do badly, and God on the other hand does nothing else than to make it good. O, behind all of self-concern’s anxiety over responsibility, whether one has properly considered everything, behind all despondency over the thought about consequences, whether or not he has made a mistake – there still dwains or shines this assumption or this assurance that one is not therefore without God in the world, that God is present, not as a distinguished indifference but as love which takes part with us in everything. Just as the child, behind all his concern, has the consolation that his father is present – and whatever happens, even if in doing what he thought was the best the child makes a mistake, the father is truly there and can surely bring some good out of it all anyway (SKS 20, 383–384; JP 2, 104).

When faith is infinite self-concern and is realized only in ceaseless efforts in the face of suffering arising from the consciousness of sin, then, Kierkegaard says here, God must be present behind this self-concern.

Kierkegaard’s religious crisis in 1848 is now coming to its conclusion.

V. AWARENESS OF GOVERNANCE: THE CONCLUSION OF KIERKEGAARD’S RELIGIOUS CRISIS

In early June Kierkegaard mentions that ‘To be able to say a total “Amen” to a prayer – O, how seldom, how extremely seldom this happens even with an otherwise diligent and constant pray-er!’ (SKS 20, 379; JP 3, 567). In late June or early July, Kierkegaard comes to express this ‘a total ‘Amen’, that seems to mark the conclusion of his religious crisis in 1848.

I almost feel an urge to say not one single word more except: Amen, for I am overwhelmed with gratitude for what Governance has done for me. That everything actually can turn out for a man this way – I know of nothing that has happened to me of which I poetically might not say it is the only thing which is appropriate to my nature and disposition; I am in want of nothing. I became unhappy in love, but it is impossible for me to conceive that I could be happy without having to become someone else. My unhappiness became my blessing. I am saved, humanly speaking, by one who is dead and gone, my father, but it is impossible for me to conceive of any living person’s being able to save me. Then I became an author, precisely according to my potentialities; then I was persecuted [i.e. the Corsair affair] – but without it my life would not have been my own. Melancholy
shadows everything in my life, but that, too, is an indescribable blessing. That is precisely how I became myself by the indescribable grace and help of God; I could almost be tempted to say by his partiality, if this were not less to me than the blessed thought which I believe and which puts my mind at rest: that he loves every man in the same way.

In all literalness I have lived with God as one lives with a father. Amen (SKS 20, 398; JP 6, 11).

As a result of his long and serious consideration of faith in the forgiveness of sins that was originally motivated by a hope for the resolution of his inclosing reserve with the aim of earning a livelihood, in early June Kierkegaard came to have an advanced view of faith in forgiveness of sins: his faith is infinite self-concern (SKS 20, 381–382; JP 1, 107–108). This view implied that God must be present behind all of such self-concern (SKS 20, 383–384; JP 2, 104). Since Kierkegaard is confident that he has been under the condition of reflection and has had infinite self-concern throughout his life, he is now certain that God has in fact been present behind all his reflection and self-concern, and in this way his life has unconsciously realized faith. This awareness of the care of Governance throughout his life and this awareness that he has been unconsciously realizing faith throughout his life mark the conclusion of Kierkegaard’s religious crisis in 1848.

This awareness makes Kierkegaard certain that he should keep doing what he has been doing up til now: rather than becoming a pastor, he should continue his unceasing efforts to be faithful to God in the face of suffering arising from the consciousness of sin. Let me put in this way: Kierkegaard’s awareness does not eclipse his inclosing reserve, but it enables him to accept this disposition.

Incidentally, what Kierkegaard has actually been doing at this period is, among other things, working on Practice in Christianity (PC was written in the period from mid-April in 1848 to the beginning of 1849, see SKS K12, 66ff.) and working out his theory of contemporaneity with Christ, which seems to have been lost from Christendom (e.g. see SKS 20, 394–395; JP 1, 134–135, 155). Prompted by a conviction formed through the Corsair affair that the masses are untruth (e.g. see SKS 20, 387, 393; JP 6, 7–9), Kierkegaard now resolves to take up the task of revising Christendom, expecting to be persecuted by the masses.

. . . Only now have I reached the point where everything is clear to me. Just as woman becomes quiet and serious when she feels that she is pregnant and thinks of nothing but the child, so also I at present have seen enough in the world, and my task is now clear to me – whether I live an hour more or a hundred years, my task is there before me just the same (SKS 20, 401; JP 6, 13).

It is a matter neither more nor less than a revision of Christianity; it is a matter of getting rid of 1800 years as if they had never been. I believe fully and firmly that I shall succeed; the whole thing is as clear as day to me. . . . (SKS 20, 401; JP 6, 13–14)

It is reasonable to suppose that this resolution will bring Kierkegaard to his attack on Christendom in his later years.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have attempted to elucidate Kierkegaard’s religious crisis of 1848 by analyzing his journal entries in chronological order.

On the 19th of April, Kierkegaard abruptly mentions that his inclosing reserve is now broken, so that he resolves to become a pastor to earn his livelihood (SKS 20, 357; JP 5,
Inclosing reserve is the ethical expression of evil, and it is the effect of the metaphysical expression of evil: evil in a person first tempts a person to commit some cardinal sin in such a way that the person negates something divine, and this sin then causes the person to commit another sin against other people in that the person hesitates to confide in them. Five days later, however, he finds this attempt to have been too formal, and realizes that a substantial resolution of inclosing reserve requires him to confront the cardinal sin that is the cause of his inclosing reserve (SKS 20, 359–360; JP 5, 444–445). On the 11th of May Kierkegaard mentions that while he has continuously been under the condition of reflection, he now hopes to reach immediacy after reflection; that is, while he has continuously suffered from an inclosing reserve that is the effect of his sins, he now hopes to become free from his suffering by developing a faith that God forgets his sins, so that his inclosing reserve will lift (SKS 20, 362–365; JP 2, 11–12, and JP 5, 446–447). In early June, his view of faith advances into another perspective: his faith is infinite self-concern, so it is realized only in unceasing efforts in his condition of reflection. This implies that faith as immediacy after reflection is impossible for him; his inclosing reserve can thus not be eliminated (SKS 20, 381–382; JP 1, 107–108). At the same time, he notices that God must be present behind all of such self-concern (SKS 20, 383–384; JP 2, 104). In late June or early July, Kierkegaard finally becomes certain that God has in fact been present behind all his reflection and self-concern; in this way his life has unconsciously realized faith (SKS 20, 398; JP 6, 11). This awareness of the care of Governance throughout his life and that he has been unconsciously realizing faith throughout his life mark the conclusion of Kierkegaard’s religious crisis. He thereupon resolves to take up the task of revising Christendom, which will bring him to his attack on Christendom in his later years (SKS 20, 401; JP 6, 13–14).

In a journal entry for October 1853, Kierkegaard looks back on the year 1848 in a way that seems to confirm our interpretation.

... Then came 1848. Here I was granted a perspective on my life that almost overwhelmed me. As I perceived it, I felt that a Governance had guided me, that I actually had been granted the extraordinary.

But simultaneously another thought became clear to me, that if I actually should be the extraordinary, I would have to be required to act appropriately in character, be willing to live in poverty, suffer in a way I had not previously imagined.

That was 1848. ... (SKS 25, 258; JP 6, 482–483)

Notes

1 N. J. Cappelorn et al. (eds), Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gads Forlag, 1997–).
6 The following part of the quotation is written in the margin of the same page of his journal, which might indicates that it was added later than on the 19th of April (see SKS 20, 357).
7 Regine Olsen (1822–1904), a Danish woman who was once engaged to Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard made an engagement to Regine in September 1840, but broke it off one year later.
8 The Corsair is a Danish satirical paper in Kierkegaard’s time. Kierkegaard became a butt of ridicule on the Corsair in early 1846 so that he perceived himself to be the victim of harassment on the streets of Copenhagen for several months.
9 It is indeed confirmed that Kierkegaard’s livelihood has been threatened since 1847. See Joakim Garff (transl. by
K 20, 364–365.
10 For details about the concept of ‘inclosing reserve’, see my paper; Yusuke Suzuki ‘On Kierkegaard’s Concept of
11 Søren Kierkegaard (ed. and transl. by Reider Thomte), The Concept of Anxiety (Princeton: Princeton University
Press, 1980).
12 N. J. Cappelorn et al. (eds.), Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Notebooks (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
2007 ff.).
13 In fact, Kierkegaard believed that ‘none of them [i.e. Kierkegaard’s brothers and sisters] were to live beyond age
thirty-three – no longer, that is, than Jesus’ as the punishment of the sin (J. Garff, p. 136, and SKS 20, 122–123; JP 5,
376–377).
14 In contrast, according to Lowrie’s interpretation, Kierkegaard’s metamorphosis essentially takes place on the
19th of April, and the journal entry dated the 24th shows a temporary relapse (W. Lowrie (1942), p. 206).
15 ‘Closedupness’ in the original English translation by Hong. The Danish word ‘Indesluttethed’ is translated by
‘inclosing reserve’ throughout this paper.
16 ‘Immediacy or spontaneity’ in the original English translation by Hong. The Danish word ‘Umiddelbarhed’ is
translated by ‘immediacy’ throughout this paper.
17 P. A. Heiberg et al. (eds.), Søren Kierkegaards Papirer, 2nd ed. vol. 1–16 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1968ff.).
18 Søren Kierkegaard (ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong), Johannes Climacu or De omnibus
19 Søren Kierkegaard (ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong), The Sickness Unto Death
20 Søren Kierkegaard (ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong), Concluding Unscientific Postscript
21 This is presumably due to his father’s religious education in Kierkegaard’s childhood: Kierkegaard mentions that
‘here is the difficulty in my own life. I am brought up by an old man with extraordinary rigor in Christianity; therefore
my life is for me horribly confused . . .’ (Pap. VIII 1, A663; JP 2, 48).
22 At this period, Kierkegaard seldom enters dates in his journal entries. What is evident is (1) his journal NB 5
begins on the 15th of May in 1848 (SKS 20, p. 369), (2) SKS 20, p. 385 (i.e. JP 6, 6) is written around the 11th of June,
and (3) SKS 20, p. 423 (i.e. JP 6, 20) is written after the 9th of July. The time mentioned in the following is presumed on
the basis of these dates.
23 Søren Kierkegaard (ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong), Without Authority (Princeton:
24 It seems that here lies a debatable problem: while Kierkegaard, under the pseudonym of ‘Johannes Climacus’,
expresses his view of faith as immediacy after reflection/passion in his work such as Postscript (SKS 7, 554–555; CUP,
p. 611), here it turns out that he himself cannot attain such state of immediacy, and comes to have another view of faith.
I cannot deal with this big problem in this paper.
25 See note no.8 of this paper for details.
26 ‘An auditing’ in original English translation by Hong. The original Danish word is ‘en Revision’.
27 In this paper, I have avoided using loose sheets (Lose papirer) of Kierkegaard’s Nachlass (e.g. Pap. VIII 1, A663,
673; JP 2, 48, JP 1, 24–25) for the argument because of the problem of their reliability.