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Paul and Kierkegaard: A Christocentric Epistemology
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The scope of Kierkegaard's work can be characterized in many ways. Kierkegaard has self-identified its scope, at least part of it, in his journals as 'trying to introduce Christianity to Christendom, albeit poetically and without authority' (CUP 2.142).¹ To this end, I contend that Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus is indebted to the Apostle Paul because Climacus recapitulates, recontextualizes, and dialectically presents Paul's Christocentric epistemology in 1 Corinthians. Merold Westphal notes that 1 Corinthians 1:21-25 'plays an important role throughout the Kierkegaardian corpus,' but Westphal does not explain its role.² By filling this lacunae, I reveal the Biblical nature of Kierkegaard's Climacean authorship. My particular aim is to show what role these verses and Paul's epistemology in 1 Corinthians play in Kierkegaard's Climacean texts. I argue that Paul's letter and Climacus's *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* share three similar features: (1) an historical context that engenders their works; (2) an epistemology of a different kind focused on a *who* instead of a *what* that displaces the importance of human knowledge with the importance of God's knowledge in the form of Jesus Christ who is an absolute paradox to the understanding; and (3) an exhortation to the necessity and sufficiency of faith for relating oneself to God's knowledge. These similarities provide the structure of this paper.

In each section I discuss Paul's letter first before turning to Climacus's works. Such a comparison illuminates Climacus's latent and sometimes overt dependence on Paul. Both authors, Paul directly and Climacus indirectly, present the gospel story of the New Testament, how this story should impact a Christian epistemology, and the approach of faith as the only way to relate to this knowledge. As a result, Climacus's dependence on Paul provides important reminders to the Church today about what is most important for the Christian life. Not a sum of

orthodox beliefs, but a relationship with Christ who is the knowledge of God is the essential element of the Christian life.

1. HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

1.1 Disunity Among The Corinthian Christians and Corinthian Wisdom

Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians who had been ‘sanctified in Christ’ and ‘enriched in him [Christ] in speech and knowledge of every kind’ (1 Cor. 1, 5 NRSV). However, not unlike churches today, the church in Corinth had problems: sexual promiscuity, aberrant practices, disunity based on leadership, and hubris among congregants. The abundance of rhetors and knowledge in their culture caused their disunity and hubris. Paul wrote to them so that they would ‘be in agreement and that there be no divisions,’ that they would be ‘*united in the same mind and the same purpose*’ (1:10, emphasis added). Paul appealed to them in this regard because of their factions. They argued primarily over which teacher, Paul, Apollos, Peter, or Jesus, was the superior teacher (1:12). Through such boasting they indirectly boasted about themselves because, in their view, whoever was the disciple of the superior teacher received more honor.³

Paul asked them in consideration of this behavior, ‘Was Paul crucified for you’ (1:30)?⁴ In other words, ‘Can there be any other basis for a common salvation except a *Christ crucified*?’ This question emphasized ‘the absurdity ... and “sinfulness”’ of placing ‘loyalty to human leaders on the same level as loyalty to Christ.’⁵ Paul’s reminder of his status as a mere servant ‘through whom you came to believe’ indicated that the Corinthian Christians were guilty of this incorrect placement of loyalty (3:5). Paul and the other disciples planted and watered a ‘seed’ (i.e. belief in the gospel message) in the church, but God gave growth to this seed. Paul and other human teachers were only God’s servants. God was *the* important element in this process to whom they

must give their loyalty (3:6-7). This misplaced loyalty arose from their obsession with and exaltation of what they understood as wisdom. Paul called their wisdom ‘the wisdom of the world’ (1:20) and those who adhered to it are ‘those who are perishing’ (1:18).

Corinthian culture had an obsession with ‘power, prestige, and pride represented in the Hellenistic rhetorical tradition’ that emphasized ‘the glory of human wisdom and attainment.’⁶ The people influencing Corinthian culture in this way were likely itinerant philosophers, many of whom were sophists.⁷ Consequently, wisdom in Corinth had become ‘the possession of exalted knowledge and the ability to express ... [it] in a powerful and rhetorically polished way.’⁸ This wisdom or exalted knowledge was specifically directed toward ‘superior insight into the knowledge of *divine wisdom*.’⁹ The glory of their human wisdom became tantamount to possessing divine knowledge or knowing in the way the Divine knows. Thus, the content and aim of their faith became synonymous with the best rhetorician and his claim to divine knowledge. Possessors of such knowledge were given power, pride, and honor. The Corinthians boasted in their teachers as having unique, divine wisdom and sought this for themselves.

With wisdom viewed as knowledge for ‘achievement, success, and the path to esteem and honor ... the cross of Christ ... [became] its very opposite.’¹⁰ For the Corinthians the cross became a point of opposition, hostility, and disapproval—an ‘offense’ (*skandalon*). Grounding belief on it became stupid or ‘foolishness’ (*moría*) because the death of someone on a cross was antonymical to their understanding of achievement, success, or a path to esteem and honor (cf. 1:18, 23). Thus, the Corinthian conception of wisdom stripped the gospel, Jesus Christ crucified, of its power to save. This view of wisdom and knowledge that excluded the cross, the gospel, from the Corinthian Christians’ life motivated Paul to provide an alternative view of wisdom and

knowledge based on the cross of Christ as ‘the power of God and the wisdom of God’ (1:24). So Paul came proclaiming ‘the gospel’ (1:17)—‘the message about the cross’ (1:18) or ‘Christ crucified’ (1:23; cf. 2:2)—in order to assure that their ‘faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God,’ that is on Christ crucified (2:5).

1.2. Hegel as the Motivation for the Climacean Authorship

Kierkegaard’s Climacean authorship appears many years after Paul and does not censure the *same* issues as Paul. Yet, the Hegelianism that dominates Kierkegaard’s education and intellectual climate causes similar problems for Christianity in Kierkegaard’s view. His use of the idea of ‘going beyond faith’ and his concept of objectivity manifests the similarities between his and Paul’s historical contexts. This idea and concept appear in the *Postscript* when Climacus narrates his experience in a cemetery that leads him to his task as an author.¹¹

At the cemetery, Climacus overhears a conversation between a grandfather and a grandson as they stand before the grave of the former’s son and the latter’s father. The grandfather has appropriated Christianity’s truth into his life and is living a life of faith. However, his deceased son has rejected the Christian faith due to his speculative, objective stance and, consequently, has flown past faith. The dead man adheres to the Hegelian tendency of viewing faith as an inchoate stage in a person’s intellectual development that is *aufgehoben* by rational philosophy and speculative thinking. For Hegel, the form of religious consciousness is a *Vorstellung*, a kind of “pictorial thinking,” “imaginative presentation” or “figurative thought,” and such ‘sense bound categories’ inadequately “express the divine.”¹² As such, religious knowing is ‘always consciousness and never self-consciousness,’ but the goal for *Geist* is self-

knowledge as ‘Absolute Knowledge.’¹³ For these reasons Hegel calls for ‘a withering away of the religious point of view.’¹⁴

Thus, the grandfather tells his grandson that his father’s ‘wisdom ... wanted to fly past faith’ promising that on the other side of faith ‘there was a wide range like the blue mountains’ dominated by logical, speculative knowledge that views the world *sub specie aeterni*. These Hegelians believe that when the development of *Geist* culminates in speculative philosophy, it reaches the consciousness of God and ushers its beholder into equality with God. However, this place, says the grandfather, is ‘a specious continent ... a sham eternity in which a mortal cannot live’ because in order for a human to possess or even reside in such a place beyond faith he would have to do the impossible: abandon his existence as a finite, human being. Thus, a human is incapable of seeing the world from a God’s-eye-perspective (1.238). The old man’s speech to his grandson culminates with the demand, ‘[D]o you promise me that you will hold fast to this faith in life and in death, that you will not let yourself be deceived by any phantom’ (1.238).¹⁵

The Hegelian, speculative philosophy that claims to go beyond faith and to achieve divine knowledge shares significant connections with the Corinthian view of wisdom. Both claim that humans possess the ability as humans to possess divine knowledge. Though Climacus does not connect this Hegelian praise and exaltation of human knowledge with power, prestige, and pride, which is dominant in the Corinthian view of wisdom, we can see how such hubristic positions could and likely would arise from the view of Hegelian, speculative reason. As a person moves through the stages of the development of *Geist* and ultimately sees *sub specie aeterni*, those who are more simple minded and who have yet to make such intellectual

developments can easily be seen from this perspective-on-high as lower on the rungs of power, prestige, and achievement.

Moreover, in a similar way that the gospel as Jesus Christ crucified is an ‘offense’ and ‘foolishness’ in the Corinthian view of wisdom, so also is Jesus the God-human an absolute paradox and ‘offense’ to speculative reason.¹⁶ Climacus maintains that the ‘ultimate paradox of thought [is] to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think’ (PF 37),¹⁷ and Climacus shows how Jesus as the God-human is the absolute paradox that human beings cannot understand.¹⁸ Nevertheless, speculative thought attempts to overstep the bounds of human understanding by trying to comprehend this absolute paradox. When it does the relation between the understanding and the paradox is a relation of ‘offense’ (PF 49). The crucified Christ is shameful and therefore offensive and foolishness to the Corinthians. Likewise, Jesus as God incarnate is impenetrable by human understanding and, therefore, an offense to speculative reason, which claims to be able to cognitively master any proposition.

Returning to Climacus’s experience in the cemetery, he says that his own studies have led him to ‘notice a dubious relation between modern Christian speculative thought and Christianity,’ and his experience in the cemetery has given his observation decisive significance. He subsequently decides to spend life investigating ‘where the misunderstanding between speculative thought and Christianity’ can be found (1.241). Speculative thought, and the era dominated by it, has deviated from Christianity by forgetting ‘what it means to *exist* and what *inwardness* is.’ Through his objective stance toward life and Christianity the speculative thinker believes he can observe, study, and investigate the historical and philosophical truths of Christianity to attain objective, definitive, and divine knowledge about it (1.242, emphasis his).

Such objective knowledge is available only to God because, for Climacus, truth falls into three categories: (1) objective truth that speculative reason ostensibly claims to possess but is available only to God; (2) human ‘objective’ truth that is an empirical knowledge correctly termed approximation, which means human knowledge is always contingent and incomplete never reaching the fullness of the knowledge at which it strives;¹⁹ and (3) subjective truth, which is the most important truth, the way for becoming an existing human or self and having a God-relationship, and that which speculation or objectivity forgoes.²⁰

Throughout both *Fragments* and the *Postscript*, Climacus attempts to remind his readers what being an existing human means for a life of faith and for the epistemology of a person of faith.²¹ Climacus wants to assure his readers that human understanding and knowledge on its own is unhelpful for recognizing and coming into relation with the object of Christian faith and knowledge: Jesus Christ as the God-human. In the same way Paul assures that faith rests on a person’s *relation* to Christ, God’s wisdom, and not on her own knowledge.²²

2. AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF A DIFFERENT KIND

2.1. Paul’s Task, True Wisdom, and Jesus Christ

The Corinthians’ anthropocentric epistemology—an epistemology focused on rhetorically pleasing epistemic content—has demanded that Paul provide an alternative Christocentric epistemology that revolves around Jesus Christ crucified as God’s power and God’s wisdom (1:24). This emphasis on the crucified Christ provides the basis for a different kind of epistemology that displaces human wisdom and knowledge from the place of prominence in favor of God-become-human-and-savior as the center of knowledge. The cross becomes the beginning of ‘an epistemological revolution’ that reverses the Corinthians’ epistemic values,

view of the power of human wisdom, and emphasis on their own self-sufficiency.²³ Jesus is Paul's 'ultimate epistemic commitment.' Consequently, God's wisdom rightly conceived is 'not *ultimately* cognitive nor *merely* intellectual' but centered on Jesus Christ.²⁴ Such wisdom is about God insofar as Jesus is the revelation of God and about humans insofar as it pertains to how a person relates herself to God's revelation. A person's relation with God's wisdom, Jesus, is the consequential element in Paul's epistemology, not the pleasing presentation of profundities about this wisdom. Thus begins Paul's revolution.

Paul signals this epistemological revolution by proclaiming 'the message about the cross' (*ho logos tou staurou*) without 'eloquent wisdom,' 'lofty words of wisdom,' or 'plausible words of wisdom' (1:17; 2:1, 4). This message about the cross, which encapsulates the whole gospel story of Jesus' life, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and the aftermath of these events,²⁵ is displeasing to the Corinthians' anthropocentric epistemology because '[w]isdom (their thing) and the cross (God's thing) stand in absolute contradiction.'²⁶ Paul evidences this contradiction when he indicates that for 'those who are perishing,' God's wisdom and power exemplified through the weakness of the cross is an 'offense' and 'foolishness' (1:23). Wisdom for them is a means of gaining esteem, honor, and success. Jesus' acceptance of the suffering and death of a criminal shouts 'failure, dishonor, and shame.'²⁷ Thus, the cross for the Corinthians is a humiliating, weak expression of God's power and anything but wisdom. This contradiction between the Corinthians' human wisdom, which they claim is divine, and God's wisdom, which is divine, indicates the trivial point that human wisdom is not divine wisdom. Beyond this banality, however, arise three controversial elements. True wisdom, namely God's wisdom, is the wisdom that transforms a person, and this transformative wisdom should alter the way a person

comports herself toward human wisdom. Consequently, God's wisdom should become the focus of a person's life. So this contradiction shows that human wisdom is only penultimate to God's wisdom who transforms people's lives through their relation to him. Only God's wisdom has this power, not human wisdom.

However, Paul indicates that the gospel as an instantiation of God's wisdom and power is the power to save humans. The cross is the power and wisdom of God because it is 'the point at which, and/or the means through which, God's presence and promise becomes operative as that which...transforms' peoples' lives.²⁸ Paul indicates this when he says, '[I]n the wisdom of God ... God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation [i.e. through the crucified Christ about which they preached] to save those who believe' (1:21). As a result of God's gift through Christ, Paul writes, 'He [God] is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption' (1:30). Paul's indication that God is 'the source of your life' suggests that this transformation of the person occurs only through God's action, not human wisdom and knowledge, of incorporating each person into the body and life of Jesus Christ.²⁹ Accordingly, this indicates that Jesus Christ crucified redefines wisdom and knowledge as a salvific act that transforms a person by providing this person with righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. This transformation implies not only that God frees a person of her sin and guilt and offers her eternal life after death, but God also presently empowers her to live life differently. She is now enabled to live life in the way that Christ has lived his life. Therefore, through Christ, God 'brought an end to human self-sufficiency as it is evidenced through human wisdom.'³⁰ In Paul's words, 'God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong' (1:27). God's wisdom makes the

wise of the world foolish by nullifying their wisdom. Such nullification does not mean that the wise are no longer wise or cannot know things or possess knowledge. Rather, their wisdom is nullified because it is no longer ultimate as they claim, but penultimate to God's wisdom. Additionally, God's wisdom makes the foolishness and weakness of God in Christ true wisdom—the only wisdom that provides salvation and, therefore, the focal point of Paul's epistemology. Accordingly, Christ is wisdom, not in the sense of a philosophical category or proposition, a *what*, but in the sense of a person, a *who*, who is the source of salvation. Christ is 'God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory' (2:7).

2.2. Climacus's Paradox, Absolute Paradox, and Offense

Paul's epistemology inverts the Corinthian epistemology because Paul no longer focuses on wisdom as ultimately cognitive, but focuses on Jesus Christ who redefines wisdom as God's salvific act. Climacus portrays the same epistemological shift of focus by directly recalling Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Climacus writes, '[Christianity] has proclaimed itself as the paradox and has required the inwardness of faith with regard to what is an offense to the Jews, foolishness to the Greeks ... an absurdity to the understanding,' and 'the absolute paradox' (CUP 1.213, 217, 219). Climacus's recapitulation of Paul's letter in this regard is related to 'the issue' in *Fragments*, which Climacus clothes in its historical costume in the *Postscript*. The title page of *Fragments* states the issue: 'can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge' (cf. CUP 1.93). Climacus's understanding of Jesus as the absolute paradox is integrally connected with his understanding of eternal happiness; the incarnation of God is the historical knowledge upon which such happiness is based. By making Jesus the source of this happiness, Climacus too

displaces human understanding and cognitive content with the God-human as the center of his epistemology.

The historical knowledge that Climacus concerns himself with is the incarnation of God in Jesus. The eternal happiness that Climacus ultimately says can be based on such knowledge can be understood as salvation *for this life*. This eternal happiness pertains to the individual's appropriation of the truth that God has become human in order to be the savior and redeemer of each single individual. This appropriation existentially affects how he or she lives in this life.³¹ This existential focus of eternal happiness also arises when Climacus describes the God-human as the source of such happiness. As teacher, savior, and reconciler the God-human gives 'the truth' and 'the condition for understanding it' (PF 15).³²

Christ is the source of this eternal happiness because he saves 'the learner from unfreedom,' which is her sinfulness or 'untruth' for which only she is responsible, and reconciles the guilt incurred from her untruth (PF 15, 17). By saving and reconciling the learner, the God-human brings her the truth and the condition to understand the truth. If untruth is sin and unfreedom, then the truth brought by Jesus is the removal of sin and the establishment of freedom. Accordingly, the God-human gives her freedom and removes her guilt, thereby transforming her into 'a new person' (PF 18). This transformation into a new person empowers the person with the freedom to be a self or to become a fully actualized self living a fulfilled life as a human being. Robert C. Roberts explains that this truth is 'the fulfillment of his [the learner's] nature' or an ethical and religious truth that is 'the fulfillment of the pupil's being a human.'³³ Thus, this truth and the person's understanding this truth pertains to how a person lives, and Climacus insists, 'All essential knowing pertains to existence' (CUP 1.197; cf. 205).³⁴

So the truth and the knowing that Climacus explores in his texts are essential knowing and essential truth, namely knowledge and truth that affects how a person lives. Thus, like Paul, Climacus's epistemology is concerned with being transformed by the truth that God provides.

Climacus maintains that this essential truth is not merely a kind of cognitive content revealed by God to a person because the 'presence of the god in human form—indeed, in the lowly form of a servant—is *precisely the teaching*' (PF 55; cf. 62 emphasis added). The teaching and the truth are the teacher. This truth is the God-human. In a similar way that Paul places a who, Christ crucified, at the center of his epistemology so does Climacus place Jesus at the center of his epistemology. This means the eternal, essential truth given by God through Jesus is not simply the cognitive content that the person is free. This truth is a person who is the eternal, essential truth about human fulfillment and who makes this same truth, makes himself, available to the learner through a relationship with him. Like Paul, then, Climacus is unconcerned with truth that is ultimately cognitive. He is concerned with the truth that God defines in God's gift of eternal happiness through Jesus. Thus, we hear an echo in Climacus that has originated in Paul. Paul says Jesus as God's wisdom and power offers salvation that affects *this life*. Climacus portrays Jesus as the eternal, essential truth who gives himself to transform a person's way of life. In this regard, Paul and Climacus remind us that salvation is for this life, even if it has implications for the afterlife.

Placing Jesus the God-human at the center of his epistemology, however, prompts some difficulties because this source of eternal, essential truth can be approached incorrectly. The God-human's existence, says Climacus, is a paradox, the absolute paradox, and the understanding's

default approach to him is to understand him, which leads to ‘offense.’ To these terms—paradox, absolute paradox, and offense—we now turn.

Climacus calls the paradox ‘the passion of thought,’ indicating that all human thinking, reasoning, and understanding stretches out toward and desires that which it cannot know (PF 37).³⁵ Understanding, then, has an ‘ultimate passion ... to will the collision’ between itself and an object which it cannot understand; a collision that would be the understanding’s own downfall. This is the understanding’s ‘paradoxical passion’ (PF 39). Climacus maintains that God as ‘the unknown’ and ‘the absolutely different’ is such an object with which the understanding collides and cannot master or understand, but which the understanding continually arrives at in a futile attempt to understand it (PF 39, 44).

The absolute difference between God and a human is the sin of the individual. A human cannot become conscious of her own sinfulness alone because she is untruth. She cannot understand on her own that God is the absolutely different because ‘the understanding cannot come to know this by itself.’ God must give her the truth and the condition, thereby negating her present state of untruth and allowing her to develop a ‘consciousness of [her] sin.’ The understanding needs God to recognize this absolute difference (PF 46-47). However, the truth and the condition can be given only if the teacher is God because all humans are untruth and incapable of drawing truth and its condition from themselves. Yet to ‘put the learner in possession of’ them, thereby transforming her, God must be human (PF 62). Out of love for the learner, God desires to make the difference between them equal and to unite them. So God in ‘the moment,’ the incarnation, reveals God-self through a descent and becomes human (PF 25).³⁶

This contradiction of the Infinite itself becoming finite is ‘the object of faith ... the paradox, the moment’ (PF 62).

Thus, God ‘wanted to be on the basis of equality with the single individual so that he could completely understand him’ (PF 47).³⁷ This transfigures the paradox as that which the understanding cannot understand into the absolute paradox. The paradox *negatively* brings ‘into prominence the absolute difference of sin,’ for which the single individual is solely responsible, but the paradox *positively* wants ‘to annul this absolute difference in absolute equality’ (Ibid). However, the understanding ‘on its own’ cannot understand the ‘duplexity’ of this absolute paradox (Ibid). The absolute paradox is ‘the absurd’ to the understanding in so far as ‘the eternal truth has come into existence in time, [namely] that God has come into existence, has been born, has grown up etc., ... indistinguishable from any other human being’ (CUP 1.210; cf. 1.209, 217).

When a person attempts to understand how the incarnation is possible, why God's love would cause God to become human, and/or why God would rid a person of her sin even though God is not responsible for sin, this person cannot rationally succeed. The absolute paradox is ‘the absurd’—it operates on a different register than rationality. Roger Poole is correct when says, ‘The Absurd in Kierkegaard might best be seen as a category introduced to make livable something that is *unthinkable*.’³⁸ That being said, calling the absolute paradox something that is not-rational, ir-rational, or supra-rational is not quite correct given that these negations of the term *rational* continue to show the priority of rationality. A more correct explanation of the absurd might be to call it *otherwise* than rational because this designation appreciates ‘the radical difference of order’³⁹ involved with the absolute paradox as the absurd.

As the absurd to the understanding, the understanding develops ‘strong objections to’ the absolute paradox. Yet the understanding continually arrives at this absolute paradox because it is the object of the understanding’s paradoxical passion (PF 47). A mutual agreement or ‘mutual understanding’ *can* occur between the understanding and the paradox because the understanding seeks its own downfall in its paradoxical passion and the paradox wills this same downfall (PF 47, 59). However, the land of ‘offense’ must be traversed before arriving at this mutual agreement, and this land is precisely where speculative thinking and objectivity reside. As a result, in the same way that the Corinthian view of wisdom views Jesus Christ crucified as an offense and foolishness because it inverts their epistemic values, so does speculative thinking and objectivity regard the incarnation as an offense. The absolute paradox declares that the understanding cannot understand it—the absolute paradox is *otherwise* than rational.

This offense occurs when the encounter between the absolute paradox and the understanding results in a nonreciprocal agreement about willing the downfall of the understanding (PF 49). Thus, offense is essentially ‘a misunderstanding of the moment,’ of the paradoxical incarnated God (PF 51). The paradox claims that the understanding is ‘the absurd’ because the understanding can only approach the paradox but not understand and overcome it. Therefore, the understanding echoes back and expresses the offense by calling the moment or paradox foolishness (PF 51-52). The learner with his understanding engaged to raise objections to, study, observe and understand the paradox suffers offense and ‘remains outside the paradox’ (PF 52). He does not enter into a relationship with the paradox.

Climacus gives three reasons why the offended understanding remains outside the paradox: (1) the paradox is the paradox because it is the absurd or that which the understanding

cannot master; (2) the offended understanding ‘retains probability’ (i.e. a function of the understanding), but the paradox is ‘the most improbable;’⁴⁰ (3) the paradox is ‘the wonder,’ which suggests it is beautiful, unfamiliar, and inexplicable, yet the understanding attempts to explain it (PF 52). Thus, God’s thing, the moment as the absolute paradox, and our thing, understanding paradoxes, are incompatible because the learner with the understanding engaged cannot come into a relationship with the absolute paradox. The relation, however, is the crucial point for a human being. Only in this relation is the truth, the condition, and eternal happiness given by the God-human. Thus, the understanding in the offense is unable to recognize that the teacher, a *who*, is its proper object because the understanding attempts to cognitively master the teacher as if the teacher is some cognitive content, a *what*. In doing so, the understanding misses the significance of the moment. The moment displaces the import of human understanding and its quest for knowledge, a *what*, with a person to whom it must come into relation. In the *Postscript*, objectivity makes this mistake.

Objectivity focuses on ‘the truth of Christianity,’ that is, its ‘historical truth’ and ‘philosophical truth,’ in order to obtain the objective truth through a purported yet illusionary perspective *sub specie aeterni* (1.15, 21). For example, objectivity attempts to remove the paradox, the person of Jesus, by explaining that *sub specie aeterni* ‘there is no paradox’ (cf. 1.218-219). This God’s-eye-view is fantastical for a human being because this perspective requires stripping away the existence of the person. Humans are in their essence *existing* beings, a synthesis of the eternal and temporal, which means that they cannot forgo their existence for the fantastical, objective *sub specie aeterni* that ‘wants to be exclusively eternal within time’ (1.56; cf. 1.93, 192-193). In trying to grasp the paradox in such a way, objectivity remains

outside of it (1.47). Thus, objectivity focuses on thinking truth as an object irrespective of the existing subject who is doing the thinking, that is, irrespective of the fact that an existing person pursues truth because he ‘wants to exist in it’ (1.191, 192). A speculative thinker is ‘not infinitely, personally, impassionedly interested’ in appropriating the truth of Christianity, relating himself to it, and allowing it to transform his life (1.21). His only interest is as an observer and an inquiring subject. He is a ‘pagan’ because ‘Christianity is precisely a matter of spirit and of subjectivity and of inwardness’ (1.43).

Consequently, the question of truth for objectivity becomes ‘*what I believe*’⁴¹ (cf. 1.202). Instead of treating the object of faith as a who, objectivity investigates this object as a what or an object to be mastered by speculative thinking. Such speculative mastering, however, omits the central question for essential truth: how can an existing human *qua* existing relate herself to the truth (1.192-193; cf. 1.15-17). This objectivity or even ‘wanting to become objective *is* untruth’ (1.203, emphasis added). For this reason, objectivity’s approach to treating the God-human as a what that can be observed, studied, and mastered by the understanding leads to ‘offense.’ The more this observer becomes objective and situates himself in offense ‘the less he builds an eternal happiness’ because by turning toward objectivity ‘his task consists in going away from himself’ (1.32, 56; cf. 1.55, 116). This implies that being a Christian means to know yourself as an existing human being who must exist in the truth of Christianity, not remain outside it from the stance of objectivity and offense. However, objectivity forgoes its humanness. It does not allow the issue—can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge—to arise (1.57). Nonetheless, this objective approach to Christianity is overcome by faith and subjectivity. Like Paul’s understanding of faith, faith and subjectivity for Climacus focus on the who at the

center of a Christocentric epistemology and begin wondering how an existing human can have a relationship with this person.

3. FAITH AS THE RELATION TO CHRIST

3.1. *Jesus Christ, The Holy Spirit, and Faith in 1 Corinthians*

In the previous section, we have learned that for ‘those who are perishing,’ Jesus Christ crucified is foolishness. However, we have yet to cover *directly* what Jesus Christ crucified is to ‘us who are being saved’ (1:18). These two ways differ in so far as the former views the cross as a series of propositions about an historical event to be studied, argued against, and presented in a rhetorically pleasing and convincing manner. In Climacean terms, this is the stance of objectivity. In contrast, those ‘who are being saved’ recognize that an individual must relate to Jesus Christ. These two groups constitute an ‘epistemological division’ because they see the world in diametrically opposed ways.⁴² ‘Those who are perishing’ adhere to the Corinthian, anthropocentric model of epistemology. The word ‘perishing’ (*apollumi*) suggests that these people are suffering a kind of death, a spiritual death, in which they are lost or not in relation with God who is the source of life and salvation. In so far as these two sides of the epistemological division are the only options for ways to comport oneself toward God, then the approach of ‘us who are being saved’ is the only way to advance toward the gospel message. Only in this manner does a person have a *relationship* with Jesus Christ as the wisdom and power of God and the object of their faith. In short, over against the Corinthians’ strictly epistemic approach this relational approach is faith.

Paul writes, ‘[I]n the wisdom of God ... God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save *those who believe*’ (1:21, emphasis added). This means that God has

decided for Jesus to be the conduit through which people are saved, but only under the condition that these people ‘believe.’ Such ‘believe’ which can be more literally translated from its participial form used in this verse as ‘are believing’ or ‘are having faith.’⁴³ The use of the present participle here, and in 1:18 with reference to ‘us who are being saved,’ suggests that such faith and salvation through faith is a process or task that Paul and the Corinthians have begun but have yet to accomplish, if it is ever to be accomplished.⁴⁴ Thus, faith is a task, and those on its path are a work in progress.

Only through faith is the salvation offered by God in Jesus available to a person. This salvation, which is the Christological and salvific redefinition of wisdom, is made available to those who have begun the task of faith. Such people are being transformed by the Spirit to recognize that the crucified Christ is the true power and wisdom of God. Paul writes, ‘[T]hese things God has revealed to us through the Spirit’ (2:10). As a result of Paul characterizing he and the Corinthian Christians as ‘*us* who are being saved,’ the ‘us’ in 2:10 means that those who are being saved are put into relation with Jesus through the Spirit. The Spirit reveals these things to those who have begun the task of faith. In the same way that humans know human things through the human spirit within them, so also humans would have to learn these things from God through the Spirit of God (2:11). This occurs only if they have the Spirit in them putting them in relation to the power and wisdom of God who is Jesus Christ. They, in fact, have received this Spirit (2:12). As a result of having faith and receiving the Spirit they now have ‘the mind of Christ’ (2:16), which not only unites them ‘in the same mind’ (1:10), but allows them to recognize Jesus as God’s wisdom who is salvation for them.

Therefore, no human capacity can lead someone to this recognition because *only God reveals* Christ's significance to humans and places them in relation to Christ through the Spirit. This means God's wisdom is not contained within philosophical bounds. God's wisdom is revelatory and not dependent on 'human capacities of knowing.'⁴⁵ In fact, Paul guards against the Corinthians' tendency to rely on their own understanding to approach the gospel when he tells them that those who are wise according to the world must become fools in the eyes of their age so that they may gain this true wisdom (3:18). In other words, a Christian wanting to be in a relationship with Jesus, with God's wisdom, must traverse the land ruled by the wisdom of the world that calls such wisdom an offense and foolishness. Thus, the Corinthians must allow their own tendencies to rely on an anthropocentric epistemology to step aside so that they can relate through faith to Christ who is God's wisdom and knowledge that leads to salvation. When they do this kind of stepping aside they become 'wise in Christ' (4:10). Such wisdom is essential for life because any 'true knowledge of everything there is to know about God, ourselves, and the world' depends on it.⁴⁶ Recall that Paul begins his letter reminding the Corinthians that they have been enriched in 'knowledge of every kind' as a result of their relation with and grace given by God to them through Christ (1:4-5). So God's work through the Spirit in revealing God's wisdom, Christ crucified, as the way to salvation allows the believer to put her self and the world into perspective by placing both in relationship to Christ.

3.2. The Condition, Faith, and Subjectivity

Through a contrast between 'reason and revelation,' Climacus recontextualizes the Pauline contrast between those who are perishing and those who are being saved. In *Fragments*, 'reason is represented by the Platonic doctrine of recollection'⁴⁷; in the *Postscript* reason is

represented by ‘the Hegelian version of this speculative project.’⁴⁸ However, in both texts the response of faith and the subjective approach to Christianity represent revelation. In the same way that Paul’s distinction represents an epistemological division, so does Climacus’s distinction. As indicated above, speculative thought incorrectly approaches Christianity through its objectivity and resides outside of Christianity. Faith and subjectivity, in contrast, relate to Christianity. By remaining outside of Christianity as a result of its own objectivity, speculative thinking and objectivity remain cut off from the eternal happiness that only Christianity can offer through its connection with Jesus. Consequently, similar to the ‘those who are perishing’ the speculative thinkers are also suffering a kind of death because they are separated from the eternal happiness that is available only through relating as an existing person to Christ. Though for Paul this is more overtly a spiritual death, for Climacus this death is more an existential death. In being cut off from the eternal, essential truth, speculative thinkers are cut off from the truth that allows them to be fully actualized selves living a fulfilled human existence.

In contrast to this objective approach is the response of faith and subjectivity. This response recognizes that existing humans receive their eternal happiness through their relation with Christ who is the source of eternal, essential truth and, accordingly, the source of eternal happiness. Climacus remarks, ‘[A]n eternal happiness is decided here in time by a *relation* to something historical’ (CUP 1.380, emphasis added). The importance of faith and subjectivity reintroduces the God as teacher and savior who gives the learner the truth and the condition.

The learner is untruth, which means that she ‘is not merely outside the truth but is polemical against the truth’ and ‘going away from it’ (PF 13, 15). Thus, the learner is not only untruth and concomitantly unfree to be a fully actualized self, but cannot know this on her own.

Thus, the God-human gives the learner both the truth, which exculpates her of sin and guilt and gives her freedom to be a self, and the condition for understanding this truth. Without also receiving the condition from the God-human, the truth would mean nothing to the learner because she would not understand it. She is polemical against the truth. Therefore, understanding what Climacus means by the condition is crucial for understanding Climacus's account of faith because 'the condition for the truth is an essential condition' (PF 15).

Understanding what he means by the condition is difficult because his portrayal of it is abstruse. He seems to suggest at moments that it is a person's consciousness of her sin (PF 14-19, 46-47) while at other moments equating the condition with faith (PF 59, 65). We can eliminate this difficulty by recognizing that the condition is faith, but faith is accompanied by the believer's consciousness of her sin. To illustrate, Climacus maintains, 'Now, if the learner is to obtain the truth, the teacher must bring it to him, but not only that. Along with it, he must provide him with the condition for understanding it' (PF 14). After Climacus has described the offensive encounter between the understanding and the absolute paradox, he indicates that the learner comes to recognize the significance of the absolute paradox through the happy passion he calls faith. Then he writes, 'This passion, then, must be that above mentioned condition that the paradox provides' (PF 59). This is Climacus's most direct identification of the condition, and for this reason faith is the proper identification of the condition. However, faith is naturally accompanied by the individual's consciousness of her sin as she moves toward the truth.

For example, immediately before stating that the God-human must give the truth and the condition to the learner, Climacus says that the teacher 'whoever he may be, even if he is a god' is 'only an occasion' for the learner 'recollecting ... that he is untruth.' By 'occasion' Climacus

means that God is not necessary but sufficient for the learner to recollect his untruth. Even God can be the occasion for the learner's 'act of consciousness' because 'I can discover my own untruth only by myself, because only when I discover it is it discovered' (PF 14).⁴⁹ Therefore, in the learner's inward turn to herself or self-reflection on her own state of sin, Climacus characterizes God's role as one who 'prompts the learner to be reminded that he is untruth and is that through his own fault' (PF 15). Having this consciousness of sin is indispensable for the learner because her conversion, that is, her movement from departing from the truth to moving toward the truth, only occurs if her state of untruth is 'assimilated into her consciousness.' With this consciousness she leaves her untruth (PF 18-19).

Moreover, as indicated above, the learner cannot become conscious of the absolute difference between herself and God because of her own state of untruth. Thus, Climacus says, 'Only the god could teach it—if he wanted to be teacher' (PF 47). This passage seems to contradict the other passages where God acts only as an occasion who prompts the learner to become self-reflective and recognize her sinfulness because this passage seems to say that only God could teach the learner her sinfulness. However, the operative phrase in this sentence is 'if he wanted to be teacher.' Climacus has shown that God indeed wants to be such a teacher because out of love God revealed God-self in the incarnation (PF 31-32). Only God could teach the learner about her sin if God wanted to be such a teacher, and God indeed has become such a teacher. This is consistent with the other passages. It only requires that God want to be a teacher or prompter. Remember that any teacher 'whoever he may be, *even if he is a god*' is 'only an occasion' or prompter for the learner to learn about her sin because she learns this on her own through self-reflection (PF 14, emphasis added). Therefore, God gives the truth and the

condition, which is faith, but in the learner's conversion she must self-consciously assimilate her own sinfulness for which she alone is responsible, and this last element can either be prompted by another human teacher or by God.

Furthermore, she grasps the truth given by God through 'that happy passion'—faith (PF 59). In the offense between the understanding and the absolute paradox, the agreement between them is nonreciprocal. They do not agree to will the downfall of the understanding. However, in faith the understanding and the paradox have this mutual agreement. The offense continues to be the boundary between the existing human and the eternal, essential truth, which means the paradox is only explainable by recognizing it as the paradox (cf. CUP 1.220). Faith is a passion *in which* the understanding recognizes 'that this is the paradox' as that which it cannot explain and understand. This position is qualitatively different from the objective, speculative response that attempts to explain away the paradox. In faith, the paradox is simply recognized as the paradox. Consequently, the paradox remains the absurd to the understanding—after all the paradox being the absurd is what makes the paradox the paradox (cf. PF 52)—but the person with faith now relates herself to this paradox. In this regard, the realm for the absurd that is *otherwise* than rational is faith because *only* in faith is it recognized and appropriated.

Therefore, when the paradox is recognized as the paradox, the understanding 'steps aside and the paradox gives itself' (PF 59).⁵⁰ This recognition, the stepping aside, and the giving of the paradox occurs in the passion of faith, in the condition given by God through Jesus. Thus, similar to Paul who says only God can lead a person to recognize Christ's significance as God's wisdom and power, so does Climacus maintain that only God through Jesus can give the condition in which Jesus' significance as the giver of eternal, essential truth can be recognized. So Climacus

agrees with Paul that a human being cannot rely on the understanding itself to recognize the truth that God gives through Jesus. This truth is only recognized and given in faith *and* in the concomitant relationship with its object of faith, Jesus. God's truth is revelatory and something a person relates herself to through faith and subjectivity instead of cognitively mastering it.

In the *Postscript*, the core of Christianity revolves around a person coming into a true relationship to God, and this core inherently includes faith and subjectivity. In fact, Climacus describes faith as essentially grounded in an existing human's relationship with the absolute paradox. Climacus writes, 'Behold, faith is indeed the highest passion of subjectivity [F]aith is indeed rooted in subjectivity' (1.132-133). So a person's 'infinite, personal, impassioned interestedness' in her eternal happiness, an interest that occurs only through subjectivity, is 'the condition of faith' as that 'in which faith can come into existence' (1.29, 53). This 'condition of faith' highlights a distinctive element of Climacus's view of faith and epistemology that is absent in 1 Corinthians. Paul and Climacus agree that only God can provide the means for someone to recognize Jesus as the center of epistemology who salvifically defines wisdom and truth as that which transforms a person's life. However, Climacus adds an element that entails the responsibility of the person doing something and not simply waiting and hoping God does everything. The truth and the condition are given by the God-human, but *the condition of faith* is the person's own infinite, personal, impassioned interest in her eternal happiness. This condition of faith is the learner's responsibility and role in her own eternal happiness.⁵¹

With an impassioned interest for her own eternal happiness, the truth, and the condition, the subjective thinker differs from the objective, speculative thinker. Objectivity attempts to answer the question of truth by investigating *what* he or she believes, but subjectivity is

concerned with the *who*—the teaching *is* the teacher—and *how* an existing person relates to this teacher (1.203). Climacus explains in his introduction to the *Postscript* that objectivity focuses on ‘the truth of Christianity,’ but subjectivity focuses on ‘the individual’s relation to Christianity’ in so far as it explores and seeks to answer how the individual can take part in the ‘eternal happiness’ promised by Christianity (1.15, 17). The subjective thinker partakes of this eternal happiness through her own impassioned interest to become a fully actualized self and through recognizing in faith that the God-human is the center of epistemology and the source of the eternal, essential truth who provides her with her eternal happiness.

In this regard, instead of being concerned with the historical and philosophical truths of Christianity, subjectivity is concerned with the truth of ‘making (something) one’s own.’⁵² It is concerned with the individual’s inward turn toward the relation of her self with the truth or how an existing human appropriates the truth and allows it to transform her (1.21; cf. 192).⁵³ Thus, subjective truth is the most important truth because it is the way for becoming an existing human or a self and for having a God-relationship.

Indeed, becoming a self and coming into a relationship with God are intricately linked and entail one another in Climacus’s thought. As argued in *Fragments*, if a person’s relationship with God through Jesus is the way in which this person learns about what it means to be an existing, human self (i.e. that Jesus is the source of eternal, essential truth), then a person’s self-knowledge is predicated on her God-relationship. In the *Postscript*, Climacus maintains that subjectivity ‘is inward deepening’ and ‘at its maximum [is] an infinite, personally interested passion for one’s eternal happiness,’ which means subjectivity is knowing the self through self-conscious reflection on the self as an existing human being (1.52, 33; cf. 1.73, 116). This

inwardness is truth in the sense that it must be appropriated or made one's own. The main point of this truth, however, is 'the God-relationship of the individual human being' (1.77). Therefore, when Climacus claims, '[S]ubjectivity is truth' (1.203), he means that truth is the double movement of coming into a relationship with God through Jesus-the-paradox, which is the main movement that predicates the second movement of knowing the self as an existing human being in relation with God. These two movements are inseparable for Climacus and are in direct proportion to one another: as a person becomes more aware of her relation with God her awareness of her self increases and vice versa.

Moreover, Climacus maintains that understanding the self is 'an absolute condition for all understanding' (CUP 1. 311). Consequently, Jesus as the God-human who is the source of eternal, essential truth for knowing or understanding oneself is also the source for all other understanding, which is the same point Paul makes.⁵⁴

Faith's task, in this regard, is discovering the paradox and 'holding it fast [with the passion of the inwardness of faith] at every moment' (CUP 1.233). This means, as with Paul, that faith and the believer's relation to God through subjectivity are always a task and never an accomplishment for an existing human because the person can always stop holding fast with faith (cf. 1.203, 255). She must as a human, existing self continually relate herself to the paradox, that is, to Jesus. This implies that Christianity is not *simply* a 'sum of tenets' or adherence to orthodox beliefs, which is the default view in objective, speculative thinking. Christianity is inwardness; it focuses on the how of truth—how to come into a true God-relation—and, accordingly, it is concerned about putting believers 'decisively ... between time and eternity in time ... in the time of salvation' (1.215; cf. 1.201).

Someone may object that by displacing a *what* or some cognitive content as the center of epistemology with a *who*, Jesus the God-human, as the source of any true knowledge of God and the self, Climacus and Paul attempt to sever a person's doxastic beliefs, her 'belief(s)-that,' from her 'belief-in.' After all, a person's belief-in Jesus as the God-human who is eternal, essential truth and the source of such truth for eternal happiness inherently brings with it cognitive elements.⁵⁵ These cognitive elements involve beliefs about Jesus, knowledge about Jesus based on the testimony of Scripture and Church tradition, and being able to speak about Jesus. Attempting to separate belief-in from these beliefs-that is problematic because the doxastic beliefs are evident formally in the language through the copula 'is.' If Jesus *is* eternal, essential truth, then belief-in Jesus implies the belief-that he is eternal, essential truth.

However, Climacus and Paul are not attempting to sever belief-in from belief(s)-that. Maintaining that their epistemologies are not *ultimately* cognitive indicates that these beliefs-that are an integral part of the life of faith. However, their accounts do not end with these beliefs-that or cognitive elements. Instead, they are attempting to show that the most important element for any true knowledge of God and of self is first and foremost a person's relation to God and to the self, both of which occur through faith. Paul and Climacus maintain that the object of faith is not a set of doctrinal beliefs, but a person to whom others must be related in order to participate in the transformative wisdom and truth that Jesus provides. The concern, then, is not what the person believes, but how the person believes. In other words, the question for which the person ought to seek an answer is not 'what do I believe?' but 'am I in relation to Jesus through faith' or more succinctly 'how do I believe' (cf. CUP 1.202).⁵⁶ The relation through faith takes priority over the doxastic beliefs, but the priority of the relation does not ignore or preclude these

doxastic beliefs because they naturally come with the territory of faith. Climacus says that ‘faith is not a knowledge’ because the person ‘is in faith related to that teacher [the God-human] in such a way that he is eternally occupied with his historical existence,’ that is with how he lives in light of this relationship (PF 62). This does not preclude knowledge from accompanying faith, but it means that knowledge is inessential and does not lead to faith. The relation takes priority.

If Christianity is not simply adherence to orthodox beliefs, as Climacus maintains, then Christianity should concern itself with inwardness, subjectivity, and self-consciousness (cf. CUP 1.43). These concerns focus on coming into a true God-relation and knowing the self through passionate interest. Consequently, Christianity is ultimately concerned with a person’s eternal happiness that comes through her relation to the source of eternal, essential truth—Jesus the God-human—who is the center of Paul and Climacus’s Christocentric epistemology.

4. CONCLUSION

Kierkegaard has sought to reintroduce Christianity to Christendom, and in his Climacean texts he has found resources from Paul’s first letter to the church in Corinth that have helped him remind his readers about a fundamental concept of the Christian life. In their similar historical contexts, Paul and Kierkegaard respond to opponents who claim to possess or to have access to divine wisdom and knowledge and, in light of their divine knowledge, disparage the importance of Jesus and faith. These people, accordingly, have constructed their anthropocentric epistemology by focusing on Christianity and its claims about Jesus as a set of cognitive content that they can study, investigate, argue against, and discard.

Paul and Kierkegaard respond by developing an epistemology different in kind that displaces the import of human understanding and cognitive content with the person Jesus who

inverts their opponents' epistemic values. Wisdom and truth are no longer ultimately cognitive because Jesus redefines wisdom and knowledge as a salvific act. Accordingly, Jesus is God's wisdom and knowledge because he is the source of eternal, essential truth who transforms a person's life giving a person salvation and eternal happiness. No other wisdom or knowledge can accomplish this enterprise and is, consequently, the center of Paul and Kierkegaard's epistemology. Their opponents respond to this Christocentric epistemology by calling it offensive, foolishness, and absurd because with their understanding, to which they faithfully grasp, they cannot rationally comprehend how Jesus is the God-human, savior, source of salvation, wisdom, and truth. Yet by holding fast to their understanding, they do not come into a relationship with Jesus. They remain outside the truth of Christianity.

Paul and Kierkegaard show that only in faith is this land of offense traversed because in faith the human proclivity for an anthropocentric epistemology steps aside and, consequently, a person comes into relation with Jesus, which is the essential point for the Christian life. Faith no longer treats Jesus as a piece of cognitive content to be studied and mastered, but as a person to whom others must have a relation. By virtue of faith, true knowledge of God and the self is first made available to a person because only through faith does a person come into relation with Jesus the source of such eternal, essential truth that sets a person free.⁵⁷

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, transl. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1992). Textual citations in the paper appear as CUP 1 followed by the page number for volume one and CUP 2 with the page number for volume two.

² Merold Westphal, *Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue, 1996), p.133fn25.

³ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 48.

⁴ The presence of the Greek *me* at the beginning of this question indicates that the question anticipates a negative answer.

⁵ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary On The Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), p.134 emphasis his; p.137.

⁶ G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin and D. G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 1993), p.165.

⁷ Fee, *Corinthians*, p.49.

⁸ Richard Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1997), p.27.

⁹ James Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London: SCM, 1989), p.177, emphasis added.

¹⁰ Thiselton, *Corinthians*, pp.171-2.

¹¹ Objectivity is discussed at length in the next two sections of this paper, but is introduced here.

¹² Merold Westphal, *History and Truth in Hegel's Phenomenology* third edition (Bloomington, IN: Indiana, 1998), pp.201-2.

¹³ Ibid, pp.202, 187.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.212.

¹⁵ Climacus expresses this idea again when he asks 'Mr. Speculative Thinker,' 'The question is not whether you are *going further* but whether you are a Christian' (CUP 1.52, emphasis added).

¹⁶ Though the concepts of 'foolishness,' 'paradox,' 'absolute paradox,' and 'offense' are explained in more detail in the next section, I find it necessary to introduce them here in order to show the similarities between Paul and Kierkegaard's historical contexts.

¹⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, transl. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1985). Textual citations in the paper appear as PF followed by the page number.

¹⁸ The careful reader will notice that I have switched from ‘thinking’ to ‘understanding.’ The distinctions between these terms, as well as the related term ‘reason,’ have a long philosophical history. Specifically during the developments of German Idealism, these terms had distinct meanings and functions. Kierkegaard’s meaning and the English translation of the Danish *Forstand* (rendered commonly as either ‘reason’ or ‘understanding’) also have acquired quite a long history. Though Kierkegaard, no doubt, was aware of these philosophical distinctions, I follow David Swenson and Andrew J. Burgess’s interpretations of Kierkegaard’s use of *Forstand*. Swenson has captured the ‘classic description of Kierkegaard’s use of the concept’ by describing it as ‘the reflectively organized common sense of mankind [*sic*]’ (quoted in Andrew J. Burgess, ‘Forstand in the Swenson-Lowrie Correspondence and in the “Metaphysical Caprice,”’ in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1994), pp. 115, 117). Burgess contributes to this debate about the meaning of *Forstand* by noting that though Kierkegaard has shown in his journals and in his later writings after *Fragments* that Kierkegaard is aware of the distinction between reason and understanding, ‘he clearly avoids making the distinction himself [in *Fragments*], ... because he is using the term *Forstand* in ways that do not fit in with the philosophical tradition of his day’ (118). This reticence to maintain the tradition that distinguishes between reason and understanding also appears in *Fragments* and the *Postscript*. Climacus, says Burgess, recognizes the differences between the capacities of reason and understanding, but ‘has no immediate need to distinguish them For his purpose one term can identify them all: *Forstand*’ (122). In this regard, Climacus’s indication that the God-human is the absolute paradox that cannot be understood or thought means that all “human intellectual capacities ... are undermined by sin” (Ibid). Consequently, any interchange in this paper between the terms reason or understanding is done with the insight that Kierkegaard uses the word *Forstand* to encapsulate both reason and understanding. My thanks to Kyle D. Bennett for pushing me to clarify Kierkegaard’s use of these terms.

¹⁹ cf. Thomas C. Anderson, ‘Kierkegaard and Approximation Knowledge,’ in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1997) who maintains that such approximation knowledge is not an ‘approximation to truth, but approximation to certitude about an eternal, finished, absolute system of knowledge’ (p. 194). Thus, approximation knowledge is directed against a system of knowledge, like Hegel’s absolute idealism, that purports to provide a complete, whole system of knowledge (Ibid, pp. 192fn8, 201). This is not to say that Climacus denies that humans can know non-approximate truths, as in Leibniz’s necessary truths of reason, such as $2 + 2 = 4$ and a triangle is a three sided figure. My thanks to Shannon Nason for helping me clarify this point.

²⁰ The differences between objectivity and subjectivity are explained in the third section of this paper.

²¹ Climacus connects *Fragments* with this task of reminding his age of what it means to exist when he writes in the *Postscript* that in *Fragments* he attempted to place ‘Christianity indirectly into relation to what it means to exist, in bringing it through an indirect form into relation to a knowing reader’ (CUP 1.274).

²² Though discussing Paul and Climacus's views on the relation between faith and reason and whether or not they are fideists would be a fruitful discussion, I am unable to cover this issue in the bounds of this paper. The best book I know of on Kierkegaard's view of the relation between faith and reason, particularly in the Climacean authorship, is C. Stephen Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason: A Kierkegaardian Account* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998). Following Evans, I regard Kierkegaard as a responsible fideist. I believe Paul fits this designation as well.

²³ Hays, *Corinthians*, p.27 (for quotation); Thiselton, *Corinthians*, pp.168-9.

²⁴ Richard Gaffin, 'Some Epistemological Reflections on 1 Cor 2:6-16,' *Westminster Theological Journal* 57 (1995), p.108 (emphasis added). This statement points to Paul's understanding of faith in Jesus Christ as being most important because through faith a person comes into relation with Christ. The next section focuses on faith.

²⁵ Thiselton maintains that *tou staurou* in Paul's phrase 'the message *about the cross*' is likely an objective genitive suggesting that the cross is the object of the *logos*, the message, and as such, it is Paul's 'definition of the gospel' (*Corinthians*, p.154).

²⁶ Fee, *Corinthians*, p.74.

²⁷ Thiselton, *Corinthians*, p.170.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p.156; cf. p.155.

²⁹ In Greek, the phrase translated 'he is the source of your life' in 1:30 is simply *ex autou*, literally meaning 'from him,' thereby indicating that Christ as wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption comes only from God who is the basis and origin of all these things (cf. *Ibid*, p.189).

³⁰ Fee, *Corinthians*, p.68.

³¹ Climacus does not appear to connect eternal happiness with the promise of an afterlife, which is the traditional view of salvation in Christianity as portrayed in the New Testament. Climacus may tacitly include this traditional view of salvation in his understanding of eternal happiness, for he uses the word 'eternal' to talk about it, but considering that Climacus writes for the ethical and ethical-religious sphere of existence, his view of eternal happiness as a salvation *for this life* fits his project.

³² I also discuss this important element of the teacher bringing the truth and the condition in the following section. Here I focus on the truth whereas in the next section I focus on the condition.

³³ Robert C. Roberts, *Faith, Reason, and History: Rethinking Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1986), p.18.

³⁴ For this reason, Climacus gives the *Postscript* the subtitle 'An Existential Contribution' (cf. CUP 1.197, 199fn).

³⁵ cf. Aristotle's first line, 980a21, of his *Metaphysics*, 'All human beings by nature stretch themselves out toward knowing' (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, transl. Joe Sachs (Santa Fe, NM: Green Lion, 2002)).

³⁶ By referring to Climacus's concept of the moment as the incarnation, I am not limiting his use of this concept to one meaning. On the contrary, following Victoria S. Harrison's Hegelian reading of Climacus's use of the moment, I recognize that the moment can refer to three concepts: (1) the incarnation, (2) a person's conversion, and (3) the union or sublation of both the incarnation and a person's conversion (Victoria S. Harrison, 'Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*: A Clarification.' *Religious Studies* 33, 1997, p.458). Roberts similarly draws attention to the three meanings of the moment. He says that the moment can signify (1) the incarnation as an historical event, (2) the teacher himself, or (3) a person's conversion. He maintains that (2) is primary to which (1) is a corollary, and (3) derives its 'distinctiveness' from (1) and (2) (Robert C. Roberts, *Faith, Reason, and History*, p. 17fn2). My thanks to Shannon Nason for drawing my attention to this.

³⁷ I left the third person masculine pronouns 'he' and 'him' ambiguous because they can be read in two ways, but only through reading them in both ways can we arrive at what Climacus seems to be saying in this passage. The passage could be interpreted as saying (1) God 'wanted to be on the basis of equality with the single individual so that he [the individual] could completely understand him [God],' or (2) God 'wanted to be on the basis of equality with the single individual so that he [God] could completely understand him [the individual].' This passage must be read dialectically as meaning both because Climacus says God's love for becoming human is 'for the learner, and the goal must be to win him [the learner], for only in love is the different made equal, and only in equality or in unity is there understanding' (PF 25). Thus, only through God and the learner coming to understand one another is unity procured.

³⁸ Roger Poole, 'The Unknown Kierkegaard: Twentieth Century Receptions,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (New York: Cambridge, 1998), p.56 (emphasis added).

³⁹ James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), p.14fn26. As we will see in the last section of this paper the proper domain or register for the absurd is faith because the paradox is always the absurd to the understanding, but for faith the paradox is the source of eternal happiness.

⁴⁰ Climacus similarly writes in the *Postscript*, 'But note, the issue is not, after all, a logical issue—indeed what does logical thinking have in common with the most pathos-filled issue of all (the question of eternal happiness)' (CUP 1.362)?

⁴¹ Westphal, *Becoming a Self*, p.114 (emphasis his).

⁴² Hays, *Corinthians*, p.28; cf. Gaffin, 'Epistemological Reflections,' p.114.

⁴³ In Greek this is the present participial form of the verb *pisteo* from which the word faith (*pistis*) comes.

⁴⁴ The present participle is also used to refer to ‘those who are perishing,’ which suggests that though they are suffering a spiritual death they are not beyond the reach of God’s redemption.

⁴⁵ Hays, *Corinthians*, p.40.

⁴⁶ Gaffin, ‘Epistemological Reflections,’ p.115.

⁴⁷ cf. Climacus’s words, ‘Whereas the Greek pathos focuses on recollection, the pathos of our project focuses on the moment’ (PF 21).

⁴⁸ Merold Westphal, ‘Kierkegaard and Hegel,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (New York: Cambridge, 1998), p.111.

⁴⁹ This, says Climacus, is the only analogue between Christianity and the Socratic position.

⁵⁰ cf. CUP 1.224 where Climacus says that such recognition occurs when the understanding despairs and the ‘inwardness of faith’ grasps the paradox (cf. CUP 1.233).

⁵¹ Paul, of course, says that God has decided ‘to save those who believe’ through Jesus (1:21), but what Paul means by ‘believe’ or ‘having faith’ is not clear in 1 Corinthians. Consequently, perhaps a more accurate way of stating what I just stated in the paper is to say that Climacus fills out Paul’s view of faith by indicating the individual’s role in her own faith. Thus, the condition of faith, subjectivity, is not the ultimate cause or source of faith—after all Climacus says that only God can provide faith—but this subjectivity is the individual’s desire to be a fully actualized self. Without this interest or desire the life offered in Christ through faith is *undesired* by the individual. In this way, subjectivity is the condition of the condition or the condition of faith. My thanks to Elizabeth Murray for helping me clarify this point.

⁵² CUP 2.185 where the Hongs provide a literal translation of Climacus’s ‘truth of appropriation’ (CUP 1.21).

⁵³ This is the heart of what Climacus means by inwardness: the relation of the self with the truth or how an existing person appropriates the truth.

⁵⁴ Though both Paul and Climacus recognize this reciprocal relation between knowing God and knowing the self, Climacus does not employ a pneumatology in his epistemology as Paul does.

⁵⁵ cf. Merold Westphal, ‘The Importance of Overcoming Metaphysics for the Life of Faith.’ *Modern Theology* 23:2, 2007, p.253 where I borrowed this language of ‘belief-in’ and ‘belief(s)-that.’

⁵⁶ Westphal, *Becoming a Self*, p.114 for this last formulation of the question.

⁵⁷ I would like to thank Elizabeth Murray, Shannon Nason, Kyle D. Bennett, Adam Jackley, and an anonymous reviewer for reading drafts of this paper and helping in the clarity of my thought and language.