Faith and Loneliness:
Kierkegaard and Fackenheim on
Abrahamic Faith in Genesis 22

by

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Abstract

The strength of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous Fear & Trembling lay in its portrayal of faith, specifically Abraham’s faithful obedience in Genesis 22, the binding of Isaac. However, Jewish philosopher and theologian Emil Fackenheim raises a problem with this portrayal of faith, namely the radical solitude it entails. Using the midrashic interpretation of Genesis 22 Fackenheim shows that faith is not and cannot be isolated, but must involve a three-term relation between God, one human, and all fellow humanity. Yet within Kierkegaard’s acknowledged (i.e., not pseudonymous) authorship, specifically Works of Love, the same three-term relation is also evident in Kierkegaard’s own writing. Engaging Works of Love, and in conversation with Genesis 22, this thesis argues that Kierkegaard’s own conception of faith, while sharing the virtues of Fear & Trembling, is more fully understood as akin to love, as both are necessarily manifest in obedience and in a three-term relation of human—God—human.
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Introduction

The subject of this thesis is Abrahamic faith in Søren Kierkegaard’s writings, with a focus on the Abrahamic faith of Fear & Trembling (FT), Emil Fackenheim’s challenge thereof, and a demonstration of how Kierkegaard can meet this challenge in his later writing in Works of Love (WL). The discussion will also broadly locate Kierkegaard’s portrayal of Abrahamic faith in FT within the Christian and Jewish traditions. FT upholds fundamental elements to understanding Abrahamic faith; but, as pointed out by Fackenheim, it is a portrayal of an incomplete faith, lacking an understanding of Abraham’s relation to others in his obedience to God, which is crucial for both Judaism and Christianity. My thesis is that Kierkegaard’s Abraham can be wrenched from his radical loneliness in FT, evident through Fackenheim’s incisive critique, by Kierkegaard’s WL while still retaining his distinctive faith, which can then be seen as a highly commendable understanding of Abrahamic faith in the Christian and Jewish communities.

For Kierkegaard, Abraham’s faith is the simultaneous act of obedience to God’s command and trust in his promise, even as God’s command contradicts his promise. Abraham obediently went to Moriah to sacrifice Isaac, all the while having faith that God would fulfill his promise that Abraham would become the father of many nations through Isaac. Abraham’s faith, which is faithful obedience in the face of contradiction, is upheld in Fear & Trembling as being that to which a Christian must orient her life, that which is the goal of the Christian life.

In the process of extrapolating Abrahamic faith in FT, Kierkegaard seems to make
some compromises that threaten to destroy the fullness of his understanding of Abrahamic faith. Emil Fackenheim clearly identifies these compromises. Primary among these is the necessarily solitary existence ascribed to Abraham—“who can understand Abraham?” Abraham cannot be understood by anyone with whom he comes into contact: not Isaac, not Sarah, not Eliezer. This is because the faith required in obeying this command of God is such that it defies all known categories of moral behaviour (the ethical). Had Abraham attempted to explain himself to his son or his wife they could at most have heard his words, never comprehended them. Abraham as a particular human had transcended the ethical (the universal)—which is the location of mutuality between particular beings—and now stood in absolute relation to the Absolute (God). In this relation there can only be God and the person. No other is permitted in this relation.

The lonely nature of Kierkegaard’s Abraham is problematic for both Christian and Jewish religious life. Fackenheim develops this in his chapter “Abraham and the Kantians,”¹ arguing that for Judaism God’s command, the Torah, is always faithfully lived as a three-term relation between God, the human, and fellow-humanity. Kierkegaard is establishing a two-term relation that undercuts Abraham’s significance for Jewish faith. The trial of Genesis 22 is that whereby Abraham would become known throughout the world as one who fears God, which contrasts with Kierkegaard’s notion that Abraham cannot be understood. Further, while Fackenheim points to midrashic accounts of the Akedah to make his point, there is also biblical warrant for concern in Genesis 22. In the phrase, “Here am I,” Abraham not only makes himself available to God, but also to Isaac. The three-term relationship is crucial to maintain in faithful

obedience to God in Jewish and Christian religious life, and Kierkegaard seems to
disregard that in his account of the father of faith.²

I will argue that this weakness in *FT* is not Kierkegaard’s full picture of
faith/faithful obedience, a picture that, when fully developed, also displays a three-term
relation in the fulfilling the law and thus accords well with Fackenheim’s argument. In
*WL* Kierkegaard’s chapter, “Love is the Fulfilling of the Law” explicitly discusses the
three-term relation (“a person—God—a person”)³ involved faithful obedience to God’s
command to love. God is the middle term in the true human-human relation. Further,
Kierkegaard implicitly repudiates a Kantian notion of rationally constructed morality
(Fackenheim had called Kierkegaard an anti-Kantian Kantian) by arguing that the duty to
love one’s neighbour, the command to love, is not rationally discernible. Thus in *WL*
Kierkegaard, in a sense, answers all of Fackenheim’s critiques. Additionally, the refrain
of “who can understand Abraham?” in *FT* may be an implicit critique on rational
morality, an indication that according to a Kantian framework of morality there can be no
understanding true Abraham.

One remaining task is to apply the categories of *WL* to *FT*, in conversation with
Gen. 22, so as not to leave Abraham misunderstood, inaccessible, and alone. His faithful
obedience must be that which all can emulate if they are to follow him in faith as children

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² Though to the side of the present inquiry, it is worth noting a further critique made by
Fackenheim. Kierkegaard’s Knight of Faith is not only solitary but also always open to a
teleological suspension of the ethical (TSE) – Fackenheim cannot abide a TSE, for he sees it as
allowing permission to commit atrocities like the Holocaust for some greater purpose
communicated to one person by God. *FT* raises two essential questions, I think: the one
regarding the morality of Abraham’s action, the other his faith in the face of paradox. The latter
will be my focus in this essay.

³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Kierkegaard’s
of faith. I will argue that faith, and the fear of the Lord that Abraham embodies, are counterparts of love by virtue of the fact that they are each manifest in the lives of believers in the same manner: obedience. Through the work of Kierkegaard, clarified by the critique of Fackenheim, we understand more clearly what it means for Abraham to be the father of faith because we see how the faithful are in a necessary three-term relation with God and neighbour.

Scope and Limitations

Here at the outset I must mention briefly that there is a limit in how far one can extend the reference “children of Abraham.” Many assume it to be a trait held in common by the three so-called “Abrahamic” faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. But just who qualifies for this distinction, and according to what parameters? Is it even reasonable to consider that Abraham is the same figure for each faith? More directly, to what extent can Fackenheim and Kierkegaard be considered to be talking about the same person when they speak of Abraham?

Karl-Josef Kuschel is one who views Abraham as the common link between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and extends the import of that link to the point where Abraham is the very figure who can save these religions from religious infighting within the “house of Abraham.” If one is able to move beyond the variegated interpretations of Abraham, get back to the truth of the man himself, each religion must place its emphasis, its weight, on the one unifying and dependable foundation of Abraham. However, others, like Alon Goshen-Gottstein and Jon Levenson, contend that just where these

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“Abrahamic” religions appear to find their unification they actually emphasize their distinctiveness with respect to Abraham. “Abrahamic” is hardly the link that many hold it to be. Goshen-Gottstein sees the power of the term “Abrahamic” in its “eirenic suggestiveness” that upholds “a particular interreligious ideology,” which is concerned with a sense of religious unity above all. The weakness of using Abraham as a linking figure is that Abraham for each religion is understood with the bias of each religion, not bringing any real theological unity even though the same figure is under discussion. Simply put, if religious unity is the goal there are better places to look than Abraham. Levenson pushes further than Goshen-Gottstein, claiming that there are really three different Abrahams—one for each tradition—that have been shaped through processes such as historical textual formation, religious traditions and doctrines, and the history of interpretation through various contexts within each religion.

The limit, then, of my thesis is the extent to which Abrahamic faith in this context can be claimed as anything more than “Christian” Abrahamic faith with respect to Kierkegaard’s interpretation, or “Jewish” Abrahamic faith with respect to Fackenheim’s interpretation. Surely it would be possible based on my thesis to develop an argument that Christians and Jews can be unified over the figure of Abraham; but the success of that argument would be dubious given the work of Goshen-Gottstein and Levenson and I have no intent of making it. My thesis is much more specific in its concern with the

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5 Ibid., 217.
6 Goshen-Gottstein suggests Moses, Jesus, or Mohammed; Moberly suggests a more specific feature of Abraham, such as hospitality.
interpretation of Abraham, focusing on Fackenheim’s corrective to Kierkegaard’s *FT.*

Most precisely its heart is the three-term relation emphasized by Fackenheim that can be applied to a Kierkegaardian (and also Christian) understanding of Abrahamic faith.
One

Abrahamic Faith in *Fear & Trembling*: an Exposition and a Location

ABRAHAM’S FAITH IN *FEAR & TREMBLING*

*Fear and Trembling*, published first in 1843, is comprised of three introductions, or prefaces, following which is the discussion of three main “problemata,” though the section dedicated to the problemata also has its own introduction, entitled either “Preamble from the Heart” or “Preliminary Expectoration.” A single epilogue then completes the little volume in much the same fashion as the first preface, with no direct reference to Abraham. The three prefaces serve three quite different purposes. In the first, which is simply called the “Preface,” the purpose is to situate the book for Kierkegaard’s Danish readers, especially those inclined toward “the system”—a reference to the strong Hegelian influence in the Danish academy—and who “are

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8 On October 16, 1843 Kierkegaard published three works simultaneously: *Repetition*, *FT*, and *Three Upbuilding Discourses*. *Repetition* is commonly published today in English in one volume with *FT*, both of which are pseudonymous works, however the present concern is specifically with *FT*. There are similarities between the two works, though these do not bear heavily on our present discussion regarding faith and will thus be, for the most part, left to the side.

9 Initially this title was translated as “Preliminary Expectoration” by Walter Lowrie. Though this title is now most commonly translated as “Speech from the Heart,” typically because “expectoration” is associated with illness, I am partial to Lowrie’s translation. It does conjure up certain graphic and striking images; but my preference for this translation lies in another image it brings to mind: the sense in which writing this was almost an involuntary action on the part of the author—as if he could not help but get this thought out of him.
unwilling to stop with faith but [go] further.”¹⁰ The second preface, or “Attunement” or “Exordium,” is a series of four brief speculations on what Abraham may have been thinking in the events of Genesis 22, commonly referred to as the “binding of Isaac,” each of which take the story in very different directions than the biblical text, and in which Abraham is invariably “lost” as a significant figure for faith through doubt and disobedience. The final preface entitled, “Speech in Praise of Abraham,” or “Eulogy on Abraham” is the lengthiest of the group and is the first to address the topic of faith in any depth. Most notable in this section is the discussion of Abraham’s faith, including its lonely nature and the paradoxical relation of command and promise.

Each of the problemata, which comprise the majority of the book, are phrased as questions to which the answer is affirmative. The first, and likely most well known, problema asks, “Is there a teleological suspension of the ethical?” The teleological suspension of the ethical (TSE) is the means by which one can understand Abraham’s intention and actions in sacrificing Isaac as faithful and honourable, and without which he may regarded simply as a murderer. He was above the universal, ethical realm standing in a direct relationship with God. God, who is above the universal as the Absolute, provided for Abraham a telos higher than the ethical itself, thus justifying Abraham’s transgression of the ethical. The second problema asks, “Is there an Absolute Duty to God?” The absolute duty to God comes as one stands above the ethical by and in relation with God, relating oneself “as the single individual absolutely to the absolute.”¹¹ The duty to God is “absolute” in a sense that ethical duty is not precisely because in relation


¹¹ Ibid., 70.
to the Absolute the ethical itself is relativized. The third problema asks, “Was it ethically
defensible for Abraham to conceal his undertaking from Sarah, from Eliezer, and from
Isaac?” Because the ethical is the universal, the very thing that can be understood by all
people and by which people understand one another, anyone standing above the ethical
will not be understood. Therefore, whether Abraham concealed or spoke openly of his
undertaking he would be incomprehensible to all around him. In all three of these
problemata the paradox of faith is highlighted and shown from differing angles.

There are many themes that run through FT, though they are all aimed toward its
central theme: faith, specifically that of Abraham. I will presently essay a focused
exposition of FT developed around the theme of faith. Kierkegaard\textsuperscript{12} portrays a stunning
picture of faith in FT with many significant characteristics as drawn from Abraham in the
Akedah. Faith, he emphasizes, is never a starting point which one must move beyond to
achieve another higher goal; faith is \textit{never superseded} but is the goal to which one orients
one’s life. This is clear right from the outset when in the Preface it is announced that,
“everyone is unwilling to stop with faith but goes further.”\textsuperscript{13} Through the course of the
text Abraham, who endured his greatest trial in old age—the trial that comes to epitomize
faith in general—becomes the most thorough evidence that faith is never superseded, for
“in one hundred thirty years [he] got no further than faith.”\textsuperscript{14}

This faith, understood by its exemplar Abraham, is \textit{paradoxical} in nature. Just
prior to beginning his discussion of the problemata Kierkegaard is forthright about his

\textsuperscript{12} Further below I will discuss the significance of Kierkegaard’s use of pseudonyms in
general and his use of Johannes de Silenti in \textit{FT}. For now, however, I will simply speak of
Kierkegaard as the author while I summarize Abrahamic faith in \textit{FT}.

\textsuperscript{13} Kierkegaard, \textit{Fear and Trembling}, 7.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 23.
purpose in working through the problemata, which is, “...to perceive the prodigious paradox of faith...”\textsuperscript{15} The paradox of faith, philosophically speaking, has already been discussed as the single individual being higher than the universal. At a more existential level, the paradox of Abraham’s faith is felt as God’s command that Abraham sacrifice Isaac stands in contradiction to God’s promise that through Isaac Abraham will be the father of many nations. If Abraham obeys God’s command and kills Isaac he undermines the promise of God. If Abraham holds only to the promise and disobeys the command he would no longer have offspring of faith, thereby again undermining the promise even while holding to it. The anguish is multiplied as Abraham cannot communicate this anyone. Yet through this Abraham’s course of action is to trust the promise while obeying the command. Abraham trusts that God will fulfill his promise in some unforeseen way even while Abraham follows through with the command. Thus the crucial test of faith for Abraham involves this paradox, requiring both obedience and trust in God. Faith requires response from the individual who is standing in relation with God.\textsuperscript{16}

Faith is the \textit{highest passion} one can live, or have.\textsuperscript{17} Though he does not explicitly define passion in \textit{FT}, for Kierkegaard passions are virtues embodied in the actions of

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 53.


\textsuperscript{17} For much of the Christian tradition passions have been understood along the lines of Paul, who in Galatians 5:24 says, “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Passions most often have a negative association with carnal desire. Passion is used in common parlance today in a much more positive sense; for instance one might say, “He has a passion for teaching children.” This understanding amounts to a sort of inborn
those who hold them, or, said differently, they are enacted virtues. Virtues must be *lived*, not simply thought or rationalized. In her recent commentary on *FT*,^{18} Clare Carlisle suggests that Kierkegaard is using the term in a sense more tied with Plato’s understanding of *eros*,^{19} where “the pre-eminent form of *eros* is desire for truth, rather than for pleasure.”^{20} The significant insight here is that passion, for Kierkegaard, is not directed at pleasure but something higher, namely God. The virtues one has must be put to use, be lived, be a movement directed toward God rather than the self. Further, it must be faith for *this life* rather than some future existence. It is not enough for Abraham to expect the promise to be fulfilled in a next life, for the promise was his for this life.

As one makes this movement of faith in one’s life^{21} a significant step is *infinite resignation*, where one is able to renounce the very thing one loves, and renounce it desire that usually manifests itself in great ability for the task one is passionate about. Kierkegaard means neither of these. Though for Kierkegaard passions (in general) are a commonality shared by all humanity, he does not hold that they are of the ‘flesh,’ that is, they are not born from nor do they lead to sin. Further, compared with how the term is used commonly today Kierkegaard’s use of the term is much less flippant.

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^{19} The link to Plato does not come from mere speculation, as Kierkegaard read Plato in great depth, and there is evidence that this work has influenced *FT*. As an example, in a discussion of the passions of humour and irony Kierkegaard laments that there are many who would speak of them and try to explain them but few who ever practice them. These are passions, he says, with which “I am not completely unfamiliar…” (*FT*, 51). He then adds, “I know a little more about them than is found in German and German-Danish compendiums.” This is a likely reference to Kierkegaard’s doctoral dissertation, *The Concept of Irony*, which discussed both irony and humour in depth, with special attention given to Socrates.

^{20} *Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling*, 117.

^{21} I do not intend to suggest that this movement can be made only on one’s own, without God’s work in the heart of an individual. Kierkegaard is clear that, “If someone deludes himself into thinking he may be moved to have faith by pondering the outcome of [the Gen. 22] story, he cheats himself and cheats God out of the first movement of faith…” *Fear and Trembling*, 37.
Infinitely. In Abraham’s case, this means Isaac. It is a common mistake to equate infinite resignation with faith, for the two are different. Infinite resignation is only the preliminary movement; faith requires an additional step. The final movement of faith is not only to give up Isaac but also then to expect him back. This is a crucial difference: one does not have faith because one is willing to simply give up something or someone, but because one then expects that very thing back. The movement of faith is thus a paradoxical double movement involving both infinite resignation and trust in the promise of God.

Finally, and related to faith’s proclivity toward paradox, is the perception of faith. As much as faith is the highest passion, the telos of one’s life with God, it very often seems an unfortunate passion to possess. Kierkegaard asks in varying ways throughout the text if it would be a better thing not to be God’s chosen one as Abraham was. He was denied children in the strength of his youth and given trial upon trial instead. After thirty year waiting period Abraham finally receives the promised son Isaac and is then required not only to give Isaac up to be sacrificed, but to sacrifice Isaac by his own hand. Kierkegaard likens this to dastardly taking an old man’s cane and, rather than cruelly breaking it before his eyes, forcing the old man to break it himself. Yet all of this seeming disaster is mitigated through the faith that allows Abraham to remain forever youthful in the hopeful expectation that only youth knows, which is what allows him to receive Isaac back with joy after having given him up. Faith is not easy—it always

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22 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 52. One succinct definition of infinite resignation in FT reads thus: “Infinite resignation is the last stage before faith, so that anyone who has not made this movement does not have faith; for only in infinite resignation does my eternal validity become transparent to me, and only then can there be talk of grasping existence on the strength of faith.”
involves anguish and solitude—yet it is the highest passion one can live and aim one’s life toward. Abrahamic faith for Kierkegaard is lived, faithful obedience to God.

**FAITH IN CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH TRADITIONS: LOCATING KIERKEGAARD**

Through this section I will discuss Kierkegaard’s interpretation of Abraham’s faith with respect to Christian and Jewish traditions. Given that the episode of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22, known in the Jewish tradition as the Akedah,\(^\text{23}\) has garnered such intense and prolonged interpretive interest in each tradition it will not be possible to go into great detail, as that would move the present discourse aside from its intent. Still, some attempt must be made to situate Kierkegaard’s interpretation, at least with respect to those who bear the greatest influence on him or highlight his distinctiveness, and those most related to Fackenheim, either positively or negatively. Thus, as Kierkegaard was a Lutheran, Luther ought to be addressed as a significant predecessor; following Kierkegaard I will address the twentieth and twenty-first century interpreter in Walter Moberly, who has written a great deal on Abraham, sometimes also with reference to Kierkegaard. I will then discuss the Rabbinic Judaism\(^\text{24}\) that Fackenheim champions and the Hasidic tradition, which differs in its emphasis from Rabbinic Judaism and comes nearer to Kierkegaard’s presentation. In all of this, Kierkegaard’s sometimes common and sometimes unique understanding of Abraham will be made clearer.

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\(^{23}\) Literally, “the binding.”

\(^{24}\) I will do so only briefly in this section, though, as “Fackenheim’s Critique of Fear & Trembling” (below) will elaborate the rabbinic understanding in more detail.
After highlighting Kierkegaard’s understanding of Abrahamic faith, the similarities between him and Luther will be readily apparent. Luther’s discussion of Gen. 22 in his Lectures on Genesis\(^\text{25}\) ranges over a variety of topics, many of which are similar to Kierkegaard’s. For instance, Luther emphasizes the contradiction between command and promise, the anguish-inducing nature of the trial (*Anfechtung*), faith as both lived obedience and as trust, and Abraham’s inability to express his task to those around him. Though Kierkegaard seems to have picked up some of the concerns of Luther, each thinker traces these themes out differently.\(^\text{26}\)

Where Luther differs is most notable in his direct application of Gen. 22 to the life of the Christian. Though it seems counterintuitive, as the reader and hearer of the text see Abraham faced with the contradiction of God’s command and promise the outcome is to effect greater trust in God’s promises. This is because, in a sense, God has put Himself up to be tested: if God does not follow through on his promise to Abraham then God is not to be trusted—God would have falsified himself out of existence, so to speak. This is why, when Abraham has passed his own trial, God gives Himself as a pledge for his own promises, saying to Abraham, “By myself I have sworn.” Luther also gives more

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attention than Kierkegaard to Isaac, who, as a grown man,\(^27\) must have been a willing participant in the binding, which has the effect of shifting the discussion to the side of the ethical question of child sacrifice.

Between Luther and Kierkegaard were two centuries of interpretation that, according to the well-documented essay by David Pailin, developed in a wide variety of ways and to various ends,\(^28\) and it is no different in the century and a half that followed Kierkegaard. One more recent interpretation put forward by Walter Moberly finds its emphasis on the fusion of fear of the Lord and faith. As Abraham’s knife is raised above Isaac the Angel of the Lord stops him, abruptly saying, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God…” (Gen. 22:12). Thus the trial of Abraham’s faith finds it purpose in discerning whether Abraham fears God. Moberly’s study is very helpful in his development of a broader biblical understanding of the fear of the Lord, which is to be tied directly to faithful, “Torah-shaped” obedience to God.\(^29\)

In his emphasis on Abraham’s obedience Moberly is similar to Kierkegaard, though in equally significant ways Moberly is at odds with Kierkegaard, even to the point of dismissiveness of Kierkegaard’s concern for the morality of child sacrifice in the

\(^{27}\) The Midrashic account has Isaac as a man of thirty-seven years (see Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews. Vol. 1, Bible Times and Characters from the Creation to Jacob*, ed. Henrietta Szold (Champaign, IL: Project Gutenberg, 2003), 229. However, regardless of his specific age, the biblical text is clear enough that Isaac was strong enough bear the wood for the burnt offering. He was also likely strong enough, then, to resist his father, who was over 100 years old!


\(^{29}\) R. W. L Moberly, *Genesis 12-50* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992). The category of fear is quite helpful to the present discussion and will be detailed below in section Three.
Akedah passage. Kierkegaard and Kant, Moberly suggests, are bringing anachronistic concerns into a patriarchal historical context in which children and wives were simply the property of the father. This view leads Moberly, I suggest, to an inconsistency in his own view: he argues that current moral categories are anachronistically applied to the text, yet shows the Akedah story in Genesis to have developed at a date later than that of the Torah, even into the period of the monarchy, by which point child sacrifice of any sort was abhorrent to the Israelites. If this is the case there is a striking contradiction where Abraham is called by God to that which is, by this later historical time, morally repugnant to Israel, and yet the moral question is not supposed to enter into the interpretive discussion. The interpretive effect of excising the ethical tension in the story, at least in Moberly’s case, seems to be that the contradiction of command and promise is given less emphasis: the command becomes merely unfortunate, but it does not make one’s stomach turn in the same way as when the command is unthinkable.

If Isaac is understood simply as Abraham’s possession, then Abraham’s obedience culminated in his willingness to sacrifice his greatest possession, the very best he had. He knew that in this possession, his only son, his whole future resided. While Moberly rightly develops Isaac’s significance to his father Abraham, he leaves Abrahamic faith at the stage of offering up one’s best, even one’s life and future. Yet in Kierkegaard’s terms this is only the movement of infinite resignation, not the double

30 It is not so clear that child sacrifice was finished by this point, even in Israel. Cf. Jon Douglas Levenson, The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), especially chs. 1-2.

31 While I do believe that Moberly excises much of the necessary anguish brought on Abraham by God’s command, it should be noted that his reading of the outcome of the Akedah event is much richer: he sees it as the event that witnesses that God has allowed humans by their obedience and disobedience to be involved in his purposes for the future of the world!
movement of faith, which then expects to receive back that very thing it has given up. It is clear, then, that Kierkegaard’s reading of Gen. 22 makes a unique contribution just at the point where it refuses to call infinite resignation faith, instead recognizing it is a courageous but still preliminary step toward faith.

**Kierkegaard & Judaism**

Louis Jacobs surveys the landscape of Jewish interpretations of the Akedah, especially with a focus on questions revolving around child sacrifice, and finds three general attitudes to be evident through the tradition. There are those who stress the “happy ending” of the story, those who emphasize God’s first command to slay Isaac, and those who focus on the tension created by God’s articulation of a command to offer human sacrifice and Abraham’s willingness to follow through with it. Jacobs follows the different trajectories of each focus with two intentions: countering the popular notions that there is (1) no possible Jewish warrant for a teleological suspension of the ethical (TSE), and (2), that there is a single “Jewish” perspective on the Akedah, which is the Hebrew term used to refer to the Abraham and Isaac episode in Gen. 22, and its significance.

Aside from Fackenheim, whose critique of Kierkegaard will be elaborated in section II below, there are many who hold that Judaism cannot abide Kierkegaard’s interpretation of the Akedah for its acceptance of a TSE. Milton Steinberg claims that “From the Jewish viewpoint – and this is one of its highest dignities – the ethical is never

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suspended, not under any circumstances, not even for God.”33 This is because God in his very being is, on this view, the grounds for all that is ethical; to overstep the ethical would be to deny God’s existence, or at least the necessity of it. However, as Jacobs makes evident through his study there are many Jewish interpretations throughout the tradition—Philo, the Talmud, Maimonides, and many Hasidim—who have read the Akedah in such a way as to suppose something like a TSE. The main point Jacobs makes with respect to Judaism can also be made with respect to Christianity: there is no single interpretation that can be called the Christian interpretation. Each tradition is simply too varied.34

In more recent Jewish tradition the Hasidic masters are of particular interest, for in many ways they are quite similar to Kierkegaard.35 While Jacobs has a focus on the TSE most specifically, which is not our primary concern, Gellman highlights the commonality between Kierkegaard and Judaism that, through the coming discussion of Fackenheim, is much closer to our concern: the significance of the inward movement of faith in an individual believer. However, despite the similar move to ‘inwardness’ in Kierkegaard and the Hasidim, each focused on that movement in different ways, which is


34 Levenson, The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son demonstrates in much greater detail and with a broader focus the historical development of the interpretation of Gen. 22. See especially his chapter entitled, “The Rewritten Aqedah of Jewish Tradition.”

evident in their interpretations of Gen. 22.\textsuperscript{36} While for Kierkegaard Abraham’s feelings of anguish over Isaac and his love for Isaac occupy a significant element to the test, for the Hasidim, had Abraham felt sorrow or anguish in any way over Isaac it would have minimized Abraham’s love for God. Abraham would have been holding back part of his heart from God in his obedience. Thus, as Gellman puts it, “For the early Hasidim, had Abraham felt love or pity for Isaac at the Akedah, Abraham would have failed the test, even had he sacrificed Isaac!”\textsuperscript{37} For the Hasidim, then, Abraham’s obedience to God cuts him off from a loving relationship with his own son, Isaac.

This severing of the relationship between Abraham and Isaac, even Abraham and his fellow humanity, is another point of commonality between the Hasidim and Kierkegaard that develops differently in each. Faith understood as a properly oriented inward relation to God alone was by and large a new interpretation within the Jewish tradition, one that, according to Fackenheim, does not accord with Rabbinic Judaism. Though Fackenheim does not address the Hasidim directly, his engagement with Kierkegaard makes his disapproval clear enough. The significance of Gen. 22, as Fackenheim portrays it in Rabbinic Judaism, is Abraham’s faithful obedience as necessarily enmeshed with his relation not only to God, but also all of his fellow Jews, and even humanity at large. It is on the merit of Abraham’s faith in God in the binding of Isaac that the Torah later comes to Israel. It is through Abraham’s faith that humanity is given and able to understand its intrinsic value as human: humans are not to be sacrificed

\textsuperscript{36} There is little or no evidence that Kierkegaard or the Hasidim had ever read each other’s works or interacted in any way. How this movement toward the inward appropriation of faith arose in different geographical locations and religious contexts is an interesting question in its own right, though a different topic altogether.

\textsuperscript{37} Gellman, Abraham! Abraham!, 3.
for they are precious to God. It is through Abraham’s faith that even Isaac himself, to whom Abraham related the command of God, was able to offer himself up to God with praise and adoration.

Jacobs’s evidence regarding variety within the Jewish tradition does not discount Fackenheim’s final claims about the main trajectories of interpretation regarding the significance of Abraham’s faith because Jacobs is primarily concerned with showing evidence for a TSE within Jewish tradition. While Fackenheim does not see room for that within the tradition Jacobs makes clear that it is present. Yet regarding Abraham’s faith and obedience I will demonstrate below that Fackenheim’s understanding of it is correct within the Rabbinic tradition by its recourse to Midrashic teachings and Scripture. The significance for this project begins to take shape as Fackenheim’s argument points out the deficiencies of Kierkegaard’s interpretation. In this more specific context of Jewish tradition Kierkegaard’s relation to it can be summarized as having some commonality with both Rabbinic and Hasidic traditions, though the differences run deep enough to suggest that they are only related on a surface level.

**THE STRENGTH OF FEAR & TREMBLING**

Kierkegaard’s interpretation of Gen. 22 has many aspects that are compatible with Christian and Jewish traditions, and conversely each tradition has a sizeable community unwilling to accept his interpretation. Kierkegaard’s unique contribution is not, I believe, his well known TSE, but his emphasis on faith as a double movement, as that which gives up all for God and then paradoxically expects it back.\(^{38}\) This double movement takes

\[^{38}\text{Merigala Gabriel, } Subjectivity and Religious Truth in the Philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010), 171, says, “The greatest characteristic}
seriously the paradoxical relation between God’s command and God’s promise by allowing Abraham to participate in both sides of this paradox. Abraham is faithful in his obedience and he is faithful in his trust that God will fulfill God’s promise. If understood as a movement one step beyond infinite resignation, Abrahamic faith cannot be characterized by the willingness to offer up one’s best to God, difficult as this may be. Kierkegaard does not allow one to rely on the overly simple interpretation that Abraham’s “greatness was that he so loved God that he was willing to offer him the best he had. That is very true, but ‘best’ is a vague expression.” Kierkegaard draws an apt comparison to demonstrate this:

> If that rich young man whom Jesus met along the way had sold all his possessions and given the money to the poor, we would praise him as we praise every great deed, even if we could not understand him without working, but he still would not become an Abraham, even though he sacrificed the best. What is omitted from Abraham's story is the anxiety, because to money I have no ethical obligation, but to the son the father has the highest and holiest [obligation]. We forget [the anxiety] and yet want to talk about Abraham. So we talk and in the process of talking the interchange two terms, Isaac and the best, and everything goes fine.

Equally significant as the double movement required of Abrahamic faith, though not unique, is the focus on faith as lived obedience to and trust in God, and the emphasis that faith is the telos of religious life rather than a starting point from which one “goes further.” Kierkegaard states this in his usual strong manner: “So let us either forget all about Abraham or learn how to be horrified at the monstrous paradox which is the

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40 Ibid.
significance of his life, so that we can understand that our time like any other can be glad if it has faith.\textsuperscript{41}

Regardless of the variety in traditional interpretation and the evident space for Kierkegaard’s work to be included among these, it remains necessary to respond to challenges posed to his interpretation by others within these traditions if one desires, as I do, to uphold his unique contribution to interpreting Abrahamic faith in the binding of Isaac. A significant challenge, I suggest, comes from the twentieth century Jewish philosopher Emil Fackenheim, who calls into question the whole framework on which Kierkegaard has worked to exonerate and elevate Abraham, and suggests that Kierkegaard’s image of Abraham as a radically isolated individual of faith is an inappropriate picture of the father of faith in both Judaism and Christianity, which maintain a necessary link not only between an individual and God, but that individual and his or her neighbour as well.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 60.
Two

Fackenheim’s Critique of Fear & Trembling

Although Emil Fackenheim’s engagement with Kierkegaard is very positive in general, one particularly strong area of disagreement between the two thinkers arises at just our point of discussion: Abrahamic faith. In *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy* Fackenheim engages Kierkegaard’s portrayal of Abraham and the Akedah in detail throughout his chapter, “Abraham and the Kantians.” Kierkegaard’s presentation of Abraham in *FT*, according to Fackenheim, has put him in the same company as Kant, or at least suggests that they are operating within the same universal, rational framework of ethics. This leads to what Fackenheim sees as the major flaw of

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42 E.g., Emil L. Fackenheim, “In Praise of Abraham, Our Father,” in *Quest for Past and Future: Essays in Jewish Theology* (Bloomington, Indiana: University Press, 1968), 64. Here Fackenheim describes his indebtedness to Kierkegaard for opening his eyes again to the significance of Abraham. He also praises the strength of what seems a Kierkegaardian Abraham, who “lived the human paradox to the extreme and yet had faith that it was not fatal.” However, as will be shown, there is still disagreement even regarding Abraham.

43 Fackenheim foregoes reference to the pseudonym de Silentio, preferring instead to discuss Kierkegaard himself. In this section, while describing Fackenheim’s argument, I will continue to do likewise.

44 In *FT* Kant is not mentioned; instead the main philosophical interlocutor is Hegel. Fackenheim recognizes this, yet, likely for the specifically ethical concern, sees the operational system of ethics in *FT* to be Kantian. Most scholars do not look past Hegel as the target of Kierkegaard’s critique, yet there are those who see Kant as at least another target in *FT*. E.g., John J. Davenport, “Faith as Eschatological Trust in Fear and Trembling,” in *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard: Philosophical Engagements*, ed. Edward F. Mooney (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 196–223; Ronald Michael. Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).
each thinker’s understanding of Abraham: each allows for the fulfillment of only two of three necessary conditions of faithful obedience to God.

These three conditions, or terms, are as follows: God—human—fellow-human. Kant emphasizes the human and fellow-human relation to the neglect of the third term, God in this case. Conversely, Kierkegaard emphasizes the God and human relation to such a degree that he eliminates the possibility of the third term, fellow-human. Though Kant and Kierkegaard differ on which relationship is in focus, they are each concerned with only two of the three necessary terms for human life with God and with others. Thus, while Kierkegaard disagrees with Kant, he is, as Fackenheim calls him, an “anti-Kantian Kantian.”

Fackenheim interprets Kierkegaard and Kant, who appear as two sides of a dilemma posed to Judaism, through the midrashic understanding of Abraham, which he sees as allowing a middle way that comes into focus in the Akedah. The Midrash praises Abraham's faithful obedience in the Akedah; Kant does away with the significance of Abraham's faith in the Akedah by reasoning that God could never have commanded such

45 There is some objection to this point. See, Robert L. Perkins, “For Sanity’s Sake: Kant, Kierkegaard, and Father Abraham,” in Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling: Critical Appraisals (University: University of Alabama Press, 1981), 43–61; Sam Ajzenstat, “Judaism and the Tragic Vision: Emil Fackenheim and the Problem of Dirty Hands,” in Emil L. Fackenheim: Philosopher, Theologian, Jew, ed. Sharon Portnoff, Supplements to the Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy v. 5 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 179–210. Ajzenstat and Perkins argue, with and without reference to Fackenheim, respectively, that for Kant there is indeed the third term, namely God. While for Kant a God does exist, God only does so as an abstraction, or a reference point for philosophical inquiry. God could just as well be called “Natural Laws of the Universe,” for this God cannot manifest in divine commanding Presence, as Fackenheim would say. Kant’s conception of God has no inkling of relation to the living God of Abraham, who acts in unexpected ways, and with whom one can stand in an absolute relation.
a thing, therefore Abraham’s intention was morally corrupt;\textsuperscript{46} Kierkegaard gives Abraham such singular significance that the merits of his obedience are rendered inaccessible for the community of faith, which is always open to being torn by a TSE. The three-term relation, Fackenheim’s “middle way,” embodied in faithful obedience is crucial to Jewish existence and understanding of ethical life with God and with fellow humanity, both of which are simultaneously necessary.

So how does Fackenheim establish this middle way, his understanding of the three-term relation inherent in the Torah? In direct response to Kant and Kierkegaard, and with recourse to historical Jewish sources, Fackenheim philosophically demonstrates what he takes to be the summary of God’s revealed commandments to Israel in Micah 6:8, which requires just and merciful actions performed in humility before God. Kant argued that one must regard one’s moral duties \textit{as though} they were divine commands; this was his definition of religion.\textsuperscript{47} However, this does not entail that Kant dismisses the notion of revealed morality from the start; instead, he allows that one only need to \textit{will} a moral law for oneself, not \textit{create} one. As one wills this moral law for oneself, one must appropriate it in such a way that it is as though one did create it. Kierkegaard is on the same path as Kant in this respect, and it is particularly clear in Problema II when he says, “The duty becomes duty by being traced back to God, but in the duty itself I do not enter

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{46}{Fackenheim, \textit{Judaism and Modern Philosophy}, 40–43. Additionally, Fackenheim points out that if one is related only to one’s neighbour in the fulfilling of the law (and not God) then God’s law is given as a one-time event, after which God becomes irrelevant.}

\footnotetext{47}{Fackenheim does not bother to cite this sentiment in Kant, which is Kant’s definition of religion itself. This is because the definition appears so often throughout Kant’s work that there is not one place to point. Still, I will offer one anyway: see Immanuel Kant, \textit{The Critique of Practical Reason}, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, Penn State Electronic Classics Series (The Pennsylvania State University, 2010), 133, http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/kant/critique-practical-reason.pdf.}
\end{footnotes}
into relation to God. For example, it is a duty to love one’s neighbor. …but in the duty I enter into relation not to God but to the neighbor I love."⁴⁸ Kant and Kierkegaard espouse what Fackenheim calls moral theology (or autonomous morality), wherein the God-givenness of moral laws becomes irrelevant. Moral theology is often countered by another school of thought Fackenheim calls theological morality (or heteronomous morality), where laws are moral simply “because they are the will of God.”⁴⁹ In theological morality one cannot impose laws on oneself, only obey them. Fackenheim takes neither of these paths as he explicated the revealed three-term morality of Judaism; but he walks between them, for there is an “essential togetherness of these two elements.”⁵⁰

In more religious terms, the path that Fackenheim walks is between an emphasis on the sheer Divine otherness and the free human response to the Divine. Fackenheim speaks of God, who makes his Divine otherness manifest in the world, as the divine commanding Presence. This is the Presence that accosted Abraham,⁵¹ calling him to a new land and making a covenant with him, and the prophets, calling them to be divine messengers even before a message was given. The instant of encounter with the divine commanding Presence is one that would seem to shatter any notion of free human

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⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 68. This is true for Kierkegaard only for those who have not yet made the movement of faith, those who are not single individuals standing above the universal in an absolute relation to the Absolute. That is to say, except in instances of faith, the realm of ethics is determined in the same manner as Kant, allowing for only human-human relations for which God fades into the background.

⁴⁹ Fackenheim, *Judaism and Modern Philosophy*, 42.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 44. He then adds, “Yet the source and life of the revealed morality of Judaism lies precisely in the togetherness of a divine commanding Presence that never dissipates itself into irrelevance, and a human response that freely appropriates what it receives.”

⁵¹ Known at the time of his calling only as Abram.
response because of the Divine otherness. Two things prevent this from being the case.

First, the divine Presence is present before the command, rendering the encounter one
between a human and the divine Other. This pristine encounter, as Fackenheim calls it,
forces a choice not for or against specific commands, but for or against the Presence.
That is, one is free to reject God in the encounter with God. The second point is that, in
God’s love, God is present as the divine commanding Presence, for the fact that God
commands humans at all entails that God has allowed humanity to appropriate the Divine
will as its own will. Fackenheim says it this way:

Man can appropriate divine commandments if they are handed over for human
appropriation. He can live by the Torah in the love and for the sake of God, if the
Torah itself is a gift of divine love, making such a life a human possibility. He can
participate in a three-term relationship that involved God Himself if God, who in
His power does not need man, in His love nevertheless chooses to need him.

Thus is Divine love manifest in the Divine commandments. Divine love enables genuine
human appropriation of the Divine will, uniting the wills of God and humanity.

Micah 6:8, which calls the faithful to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to
walk humbly with [their] God,” provides the summary statement of Judaism’s three-term
morality, the three-term relation of God, the human, and one’s fellow humanity. This is

52 Emphasizing and clarifying this initial moment of encounter, Fackenheim says this: “In
the pristine moment, the divine commanding Presence does not communicate a finite content that
the human recipient might appraise and appropriate in the light of familiar standards. On the
contrary, it calls into question all familiar content, and, indeed, all standards. Whatever may be
true of subsequent history, there can be no mistaking this initial voice for one already familiar,
such as conscience, reason or ‘spiritual creativity,’” Judaism and Modern Philosophy, 45.
Fackenheim sees this played out in Jewish history as the prophets, who “having first shrunk from
the divine commanding Presence, ...[end] up accepting it because [they have experienced] the
divine love that makes acceptance possible.” In the present day this is seen in “a daily prayer
[that] renders thanks for the divine love in which God has given the commandments.”

53 Though ‘man’ and ‘he’ no longer function inclusively in academic discourse, writing in
1973 Fackenheim is using ‘man’ and ‘he’ to refer to all of humanity, inclusively.

54 Fackenheim, Judaism and Modern Philosophy, 51.
more than a simple list of virtuous action, according to Fackenheim, “For there is no humble walking before God unless it manifests itself in justice and mercy to the human neighbor. And there can be only fragmentary justice and mercy unless they culminate in humility before God.” The movement of obedience to God’s command involves a step in love toward God and neighbor, and this is nowhere more evident than in the Akedah itself, which is the ground, so to speak, of the Torah.

**FAKENHEIM ON FEAR & TREMBLING AND THE JEWISH SOURCES**

After speaking broadly about the relation of Kierkegaard to Kant in the eyes of Fackenheim, and demonstrating the foundation of Judaism’s three-term morality, I must move to a closer look at Fackenheim’s critique of *FT* in order to re-engage more directly with the event of Genesis 22. Fackenheim’s major criticism, at least as it pertains to the present discussion, is this: Abraham is presented in *FT* as a radically lonely figure, necessarily isolated from all others by his faith in God. This is especially evident in problema III of *FT*, in which Kierkegaard asks, “Was it ethically defensible for Abraham to conceal his undertaking from Sarah, from Eliezer, and from Isaac?” Kierkegaard’s answer is that Abraham had no choice; even had he tried to express his purpose no one would have been capable of understanding his action because he was above the universal ethical realm in his obedience to God—as the refrain so often rings out in *FT*, “Who can understand Abraham?” Fackenheim is concerned to contrast Kierkegaard’s lonely image

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55 Ibid., 49.

56 The other major and overlapping criticism regards the TSE, for which Fackenheim sees no room in Judaism.
of faith with a fuller three-term relation, especially as evident in the Midrashic account of the Akedah.

Unlike Kierkegaard’s contention that Abraham did not and could not speak of his purpose to Isaac, the Midrash is clear that Abraham did tell Isaac of his purpose at the time when, in the Genesis 22 text, Isaac queries Abraham about the object of sacrifice: “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where then is the lamb for a burnt offering before the Lord?” Abraham was able to communicate the Lord’s command to Isaac and do so in such a way that Isaac understood it to be from the Lord. Abraham tells Isaac, “The Lord hath chosen thee, my son, for a perfect burnt offering, instead of the lamb,” and Isaac responds immediately in a baffling manner: “I will do all that the Lord hath spoken to thee with joy and cheerfulness of heart…. Blessed is the Lord who has this day chosen me to be a burnt offering before Him.” The faith of Abraham is not inaccessible to others in the Midrashic account, is not an isolating movement, for it is entered into by the one to whom Abraham speaks. Abraham and Isaac are thus united in their purpose before God—are together in an absolute relation to the Absolute, to use Kierkegaard’s phrase. Further, on seeing that “the hearts of the two were the same,” God is pleased that in their obedience Abraham and Isaac have proclaimed “the unity of My Name in the

57 This quotation is from Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews. Vol. 1, Bible Times and Characters from the Creation to Jacob, 228.

58 Baffling for readers following the enlightenment, anyway, whose first question seems inevitably to regard the injustice (or justice) of Abraham’s act/intention of child sacrifice. The Midrashic interpretation is a welcome sight in the post-enlightenment interpretive context, then, as its effect is to alter the event from an instance of child sacrifice to one of martyrdom. Martyrdom becomes a significant category for Fackenheim, as he understands the Akedah to be a present reality in the form of martyrdom (see especially, Judaism and Modern Philosophy, 70-77).

59 Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews. Vol. 1, Bible Times and Characters from the Creation to Jacob, 228.
world.\textsuperscript{60} The obedience is mutual, not singular, and is just so a witness to the whole world.

Even with his solitary understanding of Abraham, Kierkegaard still maintains that Abraham is the father of faith for all those who would follow him. On this account, then, all who followed in faith are disconnected and cut off from one another, existing only in a singular relationship with God and unable to understand one another. So as one performs a duty to one’s neighbour, that is, as one is obedient to God in faith, one does not come into any true relation to one’s neighbour. Yet, as Fackenheim points out, the Torah clearly relates humanity not only to God, but one to another—and this very gift, the Torah, was given because of Abraham’s obedience in the Akedah incident.

Fackenheim upholds Abraham as the father of all those in the covenant that his faithful obedience helped establish. He shows that Abraham’s merit during the trial is twofold: first, during the trial Abraham exercised “self-restraint toward God;” second, following the trial Abraham’s concern is immediately for the nations and the future generations of covenant children.\textsuperscript{61} The former self-restraint and the latter outward concern are demonstrated in the Midrash through a dialogue between Abraham and God that followed the trial on Mount Moriah. Abraham says the following to God,

\begin{quote}
I might have reproached Thee, and said, O Lord of the world, yesterday Thou didst tell me, In Isaac shall Thy seed be called, and now Thou sayest, Take thy son, thine only son, even Isaac, and offer him for a burnt offering. But I refrained myself, and I said nothing. Thus mayest Thou, when the children of Isaac commit trespasses…be mindful of the offering of their father Isaac, and forgive their sins and deliver them from their suffering.\textsuperscript{62}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 229.

\textsuperscript{61} Fackenheim, Judaism and Modern Philosophy, 66.

\textsuperscript{62} Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews. Vol. 1, Bible Times and Characters from the Creation to Jacob, 231. This interpretation flies in the face of those who would criticize
To which God replies,

    Thy children will sin before me in time to come.... If they desire that I should grant them pardon, they shall blow the ram’s horn on [the day of atonement], and I, mindful of the ram that was substituted for Isaac as a sacrifice, will forgive them for their sins.

The blessing of the Torah comes to the people because of Abraham’s faithful obedience, in which he sought the blessing of the world in line with God’s own will that the world know of Abraham and through Abraham know the unity of His Name.63

    Since the Torah, given on Abraham’s merit, is the very thing that guides human relations with one another and directs them toward God, faith cannot isolate one person from another, or the faith that was the foundation of God’s Torah blessing would be inconsistent with the Torah. In the Torah, Fackenheim contends, God “confronts man with the demand to turn to his human neighbour, and in doing so, turn back to God Himself.”64 Further, Abraham was put to the test for the sake of the world in two ways. First, all of the benefits of the promises of God for the world were riding on Abraham’s faithful obedience; second, Abraham’s fear of the Lord, demonstrated through his obedience and trust, was to become known through all the world in this test—not concealed into a private affair, the content of which his own offspring of faith can only guess. No, Fackenheim insists, the Torah requires a three-term relationality between

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63 When Abraham asked God the purpose of the test, God replied, “It was My wish that the world should become acquainted with thee, and should know that it is not without good reason that I have chosen thee from all the nations. Now it hath been witnessed unto men that thou fearest God.” ibid., 230.

64 Fackenheim, Judaism and Modern Philosophy, 49.
God, humanity, and fellow humanity so that in fulfilling the law one is related not only to God but also to neighbour. This is the constructive presentation of Abrahamic faith in Gen. 22 offered by Fackenheim.

To strengthen Fackenheim’s point I add only one point that fell outside his focus, that is that in Gen. 22 itself we see Abraham making himself equally available to God as to Isaac with the thrice repeated refrain, “Here I am.” When God first calls Abraham, then when Isaac inquires about the sacrifice, and later still when Abraham is bid not to harm Isaac Abraham makes himself available to the one who has addressed him. There is no textual difference in Gen. 22 that distinguishes Abraham’s availability, accessibility, or openness toward God or toward Isaac. It may thus be textually inappropriate to suggest, as Kierkegaard does, that Abraham is concealing any part of himself, including his purpose to sacrifice Isaac, from Isaac. After all, the only words Abraham spoke to Isaac in Gen. 22 are those same words he spoke to God, before whom he was perfectly open and with whom he was in an absolute relation. Abraham’s faith in God seems to include space for Isaac as well, indicating that it is not well understood as a lonely movement.

It is not only Judaism that Kierkegaard’s understanding of Abraham’s faithful obedience violates, but Christianity too. Fackenheim indicates as much, though only in passing. It is difficult to believe that someone of Kierkegaard’s intellectual stature has forgotten that each individual Christian comprises a whole community, the Church, or the body of Christ. There are a variety of possible explanations for this, to which we can now turn our attention. Can Kierkegaard answer Fackenheim’s critique?
Three

Kierkegaard on Faith: Uniting *Works of Love* and Fear & Trembling

In a sense, an anachronistic one of course, Kierkegaard’s *WL*—which is considered by many to be the most mature statement of his thought, incorporating elements from every aspect of his prolific career—can be seen as a response to Fackenheim’s challenge. In this section I will briefly discuss the nature of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous authorship, his relation to Kant in *WL*, and demonstrate how *WL* can meet Fackenheim’s concern over the loneliness required of faith in *FT*. Through this my purpose is to carve out space for a robust three-term understanding of faith in Kierkegaard’s thought, even while *FT* itself falls victim to Fackenheim’s critique. However, because Fackenheim’s critique is, I will argue, misdirected at Kierkegaard, another possible interpretation of *FT* opens, one Fackenheim would appreciate. I will end this section with the suggestion that, given Kierkegaard’s fuller understanding of faith and his use of pseudonyms, one can read *FT* as Kierkegaard’s attempt to show the incomprehensibility of Abraham on the Kantian system; thus Kierkegaard is using his pseudonym Johannes de Silentio as a means to simultaneously inspire faith in his readers and critique the Kantian understanding of rationally determined, universal ethics.

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65 E.g., George Pattison, who claims that the most notable feature of *WL* is that “it is the one book in which all…aspects of Kierkegaard’s authorship flow together into a single work.” *WL* includes the themes of the pseudonymous writings; is written as a “specifically Christian work” in the same vein as his *Upbuilding Discourses*; and contains the early signs of the *Attack Upon Christendom*. Pattison discusses this in his introduction to the Harper Perennial edition of *Works of Love* (especially pp. vii-xi).
THE PSEUDONYMOUS AUTHORE66

There has been much debate over how to interpret these pseudonymous works, whether Kierkegaard wrote them as he would have written any other work and simply affixed a clever pseudonym prior to publishing, or if he wrote from the perspectives of various created characters holding worldviews distinct from his own. Though the lines are sometimes blurred between Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms, the consensus falls generally to the latter option.67 Much of Kierkegaard’s purpose in using pseudonyms is tied up in his regular didactic use of indirect communication. Kierkegaard seems to have used his pseudonyms as characters that portrayed various worldviews, 68 or were living in different ‘stages’ of existence according to the theory he develops in Concluding Unscientific Postscript.69 Readers would thus be exposed to the virtue or vice of the different stages and would then be prompted, and hopefully enabled, to make choices regarding their own lives.

66 With a few notable exceptions in his later writings (i.e., The Sickness unto Death and Practice in Christianity, both attributed to Anti-Climacus), Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous authorship is a phase in his writing career that began with Either/Or in 1843 and ended with Concluding Unscientific Postscript in 1846. Through this time he still published under his own name, but always upbuilding or edifying discourses of an explicitly Christian more than philosophical nature. The pseudonyms dealt largely with overtly philosophical matters.


I do not wish to dwell overlong on the issue of pseudonymity in Kierkegaard. My intention in raising the topic of pseudonymous authorship is to shake the foundation of Fackenheim’s critique, which was levelled directly at Kierkegaard rather than Silentio. Yet as the pseudonymous authorship requires an extra step of interpretive work, it also provides the occasion to examine *FT* in a more careful manner, with the possible benefit of a richer interpretation of Abrahamic faith in *FT*.

There is no doubt that Kierkegaard’s views are expressed in *FT*: it is simply a matter of determining to what extent and with some degree of probability. For his own purposes in “Abraham and the Kantians” it is entirely understandable that Fackenheim did not labour over the details of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous writings. His argument would have moved forward in the same manner, with all of the critiques aimed at Silentio rather than Kierkegaard, and all to the same end: that the vision of Abrahamic faith in *FT* is too isolating to be a vision of Jewish nor Christian faith. It is certainly more stable, not to mention interesting, to have a critique of a real author than of said author’s pseudonym, which likely influenced Fackenheim’s aversion from discussing Silentio.  

Yet, as will become plain, shunning the discussion of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous authorship has resulted in a misdirected criticism, the correction of which helps strengthen Kierkegaard’s contribution to understanding faith.

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70 By way of further explanation for Fackenheim’s preference for addressing Kierkegaard rather than Silentio, the date of Fackenheim’s writing ought to be taken into account. In 1973 Kierkegaard scholarship was very young, especially in North America where it really only began in the mid 1940s. So the young discipline has now, forty years after Fackenheim’s writing, more than doubled in age and stature. Kierkegaard studies have been a burgeoning field for the last three decades especially, as the students of the pioneers are now leading the field in their own right. Much has changed over this period, and the topic of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous authorship has been explored in exponentially greater detail. All of this is to simply suggest that, while Fackenheim erroneously equates Kierkegaard with de Silentio, the date of his writing and his particular focus, left him little alternative given that he was not pursuing Kierkegaard studies in their own right.
I intend to move forward with this argument by comparing \textit{WL} with \textit{FT}, which will allow us to determine the more appropriate way to take Fackenheim’s critique seriously, while also determining how present Kierkegaard’s own views may be in \textit{FT}. Following this I develop what I see as a more appropriate understanding of Kierkegaard’s notion of faith by an exploration of \textit{WL}. In short, I will argue that Abrahamic faith is \textit{lived, faithful obedience}.

\textbf{WORKS OF LOVE, FEAR & TREMBLING, AND KANT}

Though, as I have said, my conclusion is that Johannes de Silentio does not speak unambiguously for Kierkegaard, I will speak throughout this comparative section of Kierkegaard primarily, so as to arrive at the conclusion without begging the question. In \textit{FT} it is clear that the larger argument operates on the framework of Kantian rational morality, maintaining its terms (i.e., duty, the ethical, etc.) and structure even while introducing nuances and twists within it. For both Kant and Kierkegaard the ethical is the universal because it is that which is accessible to all people through reason. On Kant’s view Abraham has transgressed the ethical by attempting to sacrifice his son. On Kierkegaard’s view Abraham’s actions are moral because the ethical has been teleologically suspended by God’s command, which only Abraham can know because he is standing above the ethical in an absolute relation to the Absolute (i.e., God). Thus, as Fackenheim has made clear, though Kierkegaard is opposing Kant’s conclusion about Abraham’s significance, he does so precisely by using Kant’s framework of rationally determined ethics.

In \textit{WL}, however, there is a distinctly different tone, even though some of the terminology is still reminiscent of Kant, the most noteworthy being ‘imperative’ and
‘duty’. Like faith, Christian love "contains this apparent contradiction: to love is a duty." The command that one shall love one’s neighbour makes Christian love a duty. The duty to love is distinct to Christians, not rationally constructed. Kierkegaard goes on:

You shall love—this, then, is the word of the royal law. And truly, my listener, if you are capable of forming a conception of the state of the world before this word was spoken, or if you are trying to understand yourself and are paying attention to the lives and minds of those who, although they call themselves Christians, actually live with pagan concepts, then in relation to this Christian imperative, as in relation to everything Christian, you will humbly confess with the wonder of faith that such a thing did not arise in any human being’s heart. So, for Kierkegaard, the imperative is not categorically applied to all people, but is an explicitly Christian imperative, a “word of the royal law” rather than a rational law. Further, Kierkegaard’s reference to “pagan concepts” in the same paragraph with such terms as duty and imperative may suggest that Kierkegaard has Kantian Christians squarely in his sights. Examples such as this one may indicate why Fackenheim did not hesitate to name Kant as a target implicated by Kierkegaard in FT, though Hegel rather than Kant is directly named. Regardless, it is evident that Kierkegaard leaves behind Kantian rational morality right from the outset in WL, allowing for a command from God that genuinely establishes a relation to another person. Love is duty because of God’s command to love; but for love to be a duty cannot be rationally deduced, and is thus outside of Kant’s rational ethic.

That said, looking back to FT it is clear that the operative ethical framework is Kantian, so it may be objected that the command to love, like the command to Abraham

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72 Ibid.
73 The “royal law” is a reference to James 2:8, which reads: “You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’.”
in Gen. 22, is simply another instance of the TSE. However, as will be evident in the following section, this understanding is incoherent because unlike a TSE, which Kierkegaard rarely discussed outside *FT* itself, the command to love truly brings the lover in relation both to God and fellow humanity rather than leaving one in the isolation required of a TSE. The emphases in *FT* and *WL* are distinct from one another, the former seeming to favour a Kantian rational ethic, the latter not. So, is it then safe to conclude that, in *FT*, Kierkegaard is allowing Johannes de Silentio to express himself (so to speak) rather than Kierkegaard speaking as himself through his pseudonym? The door of possibility is now open for this conclusion, though at this point it cannot yet be confidently asserted. Thus far we only see two distinct views between Kierkegaard and his pseudonym, but cannot yet see an intention underlying the disparity.

One difficulty with such a hasty conclusion is evident through further reading in *WL*, and not much further. Only three pages later as Kierkegaard begins to discuss faith, he says, “But the essence of faith is to be a secret, to be for the single individual; if it is not preserved as a secret by each individual, even when he professes it, he believes not at all.” This sounds as though it could be a sentence straight from *FT*. For now, then, Fackenheim’s critique of *Kierkegaard* still stands—and even applies beyond *FT* to *WL*.

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74 In their “Historical Introduction” to *Fear and Trembling*, xxxi, Hong and Hong emphasize that the TSE, among other themes of *FT*, appears elsewhere only in the pseudonymous authorship. I am aware of only one other reference to the TSE, which occurs in *Stages on Life’s Way*, Part III, by the pseudonym Frater Taciturnus. It occurs as a brief aside and is mentioned only the once.
LOVE AS THE FULFILLING OF THE LAW: THREE-TERM RELATIONS IN KIERKEGAARD

In Kierkegaard’s chapter, “Love is the Fulfilling of the Law,” some of this now muddled picture can be given some much needed clarity. Kierkegaard offers an image of the faithful Christian, the one characterized by Abrahamic faith in FT and by love in WL, in terms shockingly similar to those of Fackenheim himself: “Worldly wisdom thinks that love is a relationship between man and man. Christianity teaches that love is a relationship between: man – God – man, that is that God is the middle term.” Here it is plain that Kierkegaard is concerned about three terms of relation in faithful obedience to God, specifically obedience to the command to love. He continues: “For to love God is to love oneself in truth; to help another human being to love God is to love another man; to be helped by another human being to love God is to be loved.” One must love oneself rightly, through God’s love, in order to love another rightly, also through God. To love another is always to help the other love God, and God is the constitution, the middle term, in the relationship of one human to another. In a phrase that summarizes this trio of relations, Kierkegaard says, “The love-relationship is a triangular relationship of the lover, the beloved, love—but love is God.” Thus love (God) establishes a necessary three-term relation, the same one Fackenheim insists on. The only difference is the emphasis that God is explicitly the middle term, and it is God’s love that establishes inter-human relations through divine-human relations.


76 Ibid., 113.

77 Ibid., 124.
Mark Stapp, in his recent dissertation, draws attention to two conclusions regarding Kierkegaard’s emphasis of God as the middle term. “First, any work of love must be a work directed primarily at God. Second, this formulation of love implies that to demonstrate love toward any human being is also to demonstrate love for God—an implication that Kierkegaard works through during the whole of his text.” Though he removed it from the final text, Kierkegaard had included Matthew 25:40 in a draft of WL: “And the King will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’” Stapp holds that Kierkegaard extends this point to its furthest reaches throughout the whole text of WL. Similar refrains abound throughout the text; for instance: “For, Christianly understood, to love human beings is to love God and to love God is to love human beings; what you do unto [people] you do unto God…”

Insofar as one can view WL as a response to Fackenheim’s worries, it can be seen in this way: first, Fackenheim’s concern over the necessary solitude of faith in FT can be understood as shared by Kierkegaard in WL; second, Fackenheim’s emphasis that Torah, the commandment of God, is the very thing relating humanity one to another and to God is mirrored in WL, where Kierkegaard sees the command to love God and neighbour—the command on which all the Torah is founded (at least in the Christian view)—as fulfilling the same three-term function.

As mentioned above the solitude of FT seems at points to have been carried into WL, which might suggest that Kierkegaard may be rightly understood as the writer not

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78 Mark Stapp, “Kierkegaard’s Work of Love” (Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2009), 62.

only in *WL* but also in *FT*, as Fackenheim’s critique assumes. However, while it is true to say that for Kierkegaard, whether in *FT, WL*, or in nearly every other work he wrote, there can be no escaping the priority of the individual, this priority ought to be understood as distinct from the loneliness represented in *FT*. In *WL* Kierkegaard emphasizes that one must be rightly related to God *prior* to being truly related to another. This is a good thing, though, and not lonely because it not only allows that one person can truly be related to another, but means that true or full relation to another is always predicated on one’s relation to God. The significance of one’s individual relation to God is still present for Kierkegaard, then, but ought to be understood in this qualified sense. One’s heart, mind, and soul must *first* be on God, and only then can one love one’s neighbour. Kierkegaard’s priority of the individual, then, can more appropriately be understood as his priority of God. This also aligns with his emphasis that God is specifically the “middle-term” in whom and by whom all true love is possible. Love is never solitary, then; but it has priorities.

As regards Fackenheim’s contention that the Torah is that which binds humanity together with one another and God, Kierkegaard upholds a very similar understanding in *WL*. Both thinkers explicitly endorse a three-term relation in the fulfilling of the law. This three-term morality, again on both counts, is anti-Kantian. Fackenheim’s critique of

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80 Kierkegaard’s priority of the individual was encouraged by his cultural and historical environment in nineteenth century Denmark, where he saw no single person take responsibility for their own faith, their own relationship to God. For more on Kierkegaard’s cultural and historical context, see Bruce Kirmmse’s detailed volume, *Kierkegaard in Golden-age Denmark* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990).

81 Kierkegaard highlights Christianity’s primary concern to ensure that “each individual” in what would be considered a love-relationship “is first related to God and [only] then whether the relationship of love is related to God,” *Works of Love*, 1995, 108. The second and more mutual concern, though subordinate, is always present.
FT and its anti-Kantian Kantianism does not apply, then, to WL. FT assumes the Kantian framework while criticizing it; but WL shuns the framework altogether, as is evident in that the most basic duty of the Christian life is a contradiction to the system. To re-emphasize, the command to love is not a TSE because requisite in a TSE is the loneliness that is nowhere evident in WL, where the command to love is that which binds together humanity with each other and God. Thus the two works appear to be of different minds altogether. This large-scale disagreement between FT and WL, coupled with Kierkegaard’s use of pseudonyms as a means of indirect communication, suggests that one ought to view Silentio primarily as the writer of FT, allowing, of course, as previously mentioned, that the line between Kierkegaard and his pseudonym blur at times. This is one place, though, where they do not blur. The picture is clear.

A PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION
To conclude, then, Fackenheim’s twofold criticism of Kierkegaard—that he is an anti-Kantian Kantian, who, as a result, understood Abrahamic faith to be a radically lonely and isolating experience—applies more to Johannes de Silentio than to Kierkegaard himself. Kierkegaard does not operate within the ethical framework of Kant; instead, he holds to God’s given laws, which constitute the “Christian imperative.” Further, Kierkegaard’s picture of faith, even as it is always primarily an individual, secret passion, always bears its fruit in the obedience to God which necessarily relates human to human. Abraham can, on Kierkegaard’s own terms (and Fackenheim’s also), be brought back from the isolation in which Silentio left him in FT, and be recovered as the father of faith. As the weakness of FT’s understanding of Abrahamic faith is exposed, not only by Fackenheim but also by WL, it becomes clear that Silentio’s views can be seen as serving
a particular role for Kierkegaard while not being his whole view. Yet the strengths of
*FT*—the fact that faith is never superseded, is paradoxical, is the highest passion, and
requires a double movement—these things are not swept away by Fackenheim’s critique
or by *WL*. *WL*, which gathers all of Kierkegaard’s authorial concerns, gives us great
clues as to the views that Kierkegaard himself holds in differentiation from his
pseudonyms.

A final suggestion I will make in this section concerns Kierkegaard’s intention
with *FT*. If Johannes de Silentio is used by Kierkegaard to put forward a view that
Kierkegaard himself does not agree with, one ought to ask “why?” I believe that
Fackenheim’s criticism points to that reason: it is precisely because he is an anti-Kantian
Kantian that Johannes de Silentio cannot truly understand Abraham. (“Who can
understand Abraham?”) He points in many ways to Abraham’s greatness, but he can
only hint at what this might entail. If the readers are in a similar situation to that of
Silentio, they may come to realize that they too cannot understand Abraham, even while
claiming Abraham is the father of their faith. This can function to allow readers who are
also caught in these Kantian and Hegelian philosophical frameworks to catch a glimpse
of something else, something that begs for attention outside of that framework, namely
Abraham, the father of their faith, who stood outside their philosophical system and in an
absolute relation to the Absolute. I suggest, then, that Kierkegaard may be using Silentio
and *FT* to indirectly entice his readers to step outside the philosophically prescribed
system (Kantian or Hegelian), to make the double movement of faith, and to stand in an
absolute relation to the Absolute for themselves.
The task now, after having differentiated Silentio and Kierkegaard’s thought while still upholding most of *FT* as in line with Kierkegaard’s overall thought, is to show that many of the characteristics of faith described in *FT* are compatible with the three-term relationality brought on by obedience to God’s command in *WL*. In this way Abraham can be rescued, so to speak, from the loneliness of *FT* without dismissing *FT* as a whole.

**FEAR, LOVE & FAITH AS OBEDIENCE TO GOD**

Thus, in this final section I will argue that the fear of the Lord, love for God and neighbour, and faith are each synonymous in the sense that they speak to the same three-term relation involving God and one’s neighbour. They are each *lived* in the same way, that is, through obedience to God. In Gen. 26 God makes the blessings of Abraham known to Isaac, and these blessings are given precisely “because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (v. 5). According to Gen. 22 Abraham’s trial is given to determine if he fears God. These two passages do not stand in opposition to one another, but rather Gen. 26 makes clear that underlying the fear of the Lord is the broader category of obedience. Because Abraham fears God, he obeys God. The same can be said, though, for love and faith: because he loves God he obeys; because he has faith in God he obeys. To be obedient to God is to fear, love, and have faith in God. I will discuss each of these *passions*, as Kierkegaard would use the term, in order to show that each of them play out in the lives of believers through obedience. Establishing this common foundation in obedience it is then possible to see that faith is, in just the same way as love, a relation to God that also includes one’s neighbour.
Fear

I introduce fear of the Lord into the discussion for two main reasons: first, because it is a significant aspect of the text of Gen. 22 and thus important for understanding the nature of Abraham’s faith; and second, because understanding the fear of the Lord in the OT provides a textual clue that points to the obedience that lay at the heart of Abraham’s trial.

In Gen. 22:12 Abraham’s trial is said to be a test of Abraham's fears of the Lord. When Abraham has passed through the trial and the angel of the Lord had stayed his hand, the angel of the Lord said, “…now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” Testing and fear of the Lord appear together in one other place in the Old Testament, according to Moberly, Exodus 20:20.82 One implication of the link between Abraham’s fear of the Lord (which was known through his obedience) and the giving of the Torah (which is the content of Ex. 20) is that it highlights obedience to the command of God. Moberly adds that, “‘Fear’ is the OT’s prime term for right human response to God…[and indicates] a right attitude and obedience.”83 Through the biblical text it is apparent, then, that as a God-fearer Abraham is characterized by his obedience demonstrated in the trial on Mount Moriah. To push the point further, it is Abraham’s obedience in the trial of Gen. 22 that is the foundation upon which Israel is built, 84 for Abraham is told: “Because you have done this…I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the


83 Ibid.

84 Levenson, The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son, 174.
seashore” (vv. 16-17). The trial was to search Abraham for fear of the Lord, and that fear was properly demonstrated through obedience. The fear of the Lord manifests itself in obedience.

Without this understanding of the fear of the Lord, it might be quite surprising that Kierkegaard rarely mentions fear in WL, especially given his focus on 1 John 4:16-21, which says that “perfect love casts out fear” (v. 18). The reason for Kierkegaard’s silence on v. 18, however, is quite simple. Kierkegaard seems to be operating with two discrete notions of “fear,” one being the fear of the Lord and the other the fear, or terror, cast out by perfect love. The fear of 1 John 4 is a feeling of terror brought about by or in engagement with the world, as though one has not overcome the world in Christ. Yet this is just the thrust of John’s message in chapters 4-5, that in God, who is love, and through Christ, who died that we might live, one overcomes the world and any terror thereof. The fact that the Christian has overcome the world in Christ allows one to obey the command to love, which is “no new commandment, but an old commandment that [was given] at the beginning” (1 John 2:7), to love both God and neighbour without any fear of the world.

Love

Love is also manifest through obedience. Kierkegaard makes this clear in WL and it is also apparent in Scripture. Further, in Works of Love Kierkegaard captures the paradoxical tension inherent in obeying the command to love while explaining it in a manner that includes the three-term relation of human—God—human.

In the Scriptures John 14:15 ties obedience and love together most succinctly: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” The inverse is also made plain:
“Whoever does not love me does not keep my words…” (John 14:24). While love for God is not explicitly attributed to Abraham in the Scriptures, his obedience is very explicit. Abraham’s obedience in Gen. 22, however, can, in light of the necessary connection of love and obedience, be understood as a manifestation of his love for God.

In WL Kierkegaard is very insistent on the link between obedience and love, saying,

> But you shall love God in unconditional obedience, even if what he requires of you might seem to you to be to your own harm, indeed, harmful to his cause; for God’s wisdom is beyond all comparison with yours, and God’s governance has no obligation of responsibility in relation to your sagacity. All you have to do is to obey in love.

And,

> A person should love God unconditionally in obedience and love him in adoration.

Thus scripturally and according to Kierkegaard obedience to God is the manifestation of love for God.

The former quotation from WL, an early text in the book, hints at the paradoxical nature of love, a characteristic it shares with faith. Specifically the fact that the obedience of love requires of the lover to do that which may seem counterintuitive, all the while trusting God to work according to His wisdom and in His governance. To draw this into greater focus I will take as an example the chapter “Love Builds Up.” In this chapter Kierkegaard demonstrates that as love works itself out in relation to others, love always intends to build up the other. In order for one to be built up in love there must be a foundation upon which to build; this is entailed in the term “build up.” Spiritually understood, Kierkegaard says, “love is the ground, and to build up means to erect from

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86 Ibid., 19; emphasis Kierkegaard’s.
the ground up.”87 Love is the foundation that bears the weight of the building, so to speak. Love, as it works itself out in action toward others, seeks to build the other up in love by these works of love, which can include “the most insignificant word, [even] the slightest action with love or in love….”88 Love is the foundation and works of love the building blocks. Kierkegaard puts it this way: “Love is the ground, love is the building, love builds up. To build up is to build up love, and it is love that builds up.”89

This is all straightforward enough. But the difficulty comes, at least as far as observing whether or not another has been built up, or whether one’s work of love has had any real effect, in this: in order to build another up in love one must either instill love in that person’s heart upon which to build, or “it must mean that the one who loves presupposes that love is in the other person’s heart, and by this very presupposition he builds up love in him…”90 Since no human can truly know whether another really possesses a foundation of love (after all, those who appear not to have this foundation may indeed have it, or vice-versa), nor can a human instill love in a person’s heart (only God does this), it is necessary to presuppose that the other does have it. Only by presupposing a foundation of love in another person can one then build another up in love. This is the paradoxical nature of love.

87 Ibid., 216.
88 Ibid., 215.
89 Ibid., 216.
90 Ibid.
In one sense it could be objected that love is distinct from faith, and even fear, a different kind of thing. One is, after all, called to love God and neighbour, while there is no command to have faith in anyone but God alone, and it is explicitly commanded to fear none but the Lord. So, the objection might continue, while love is concerned with three terms of relation faith and fear only deal with two terms of the relation, those between an individual and God.

Here my response is twofold. First, to re-emphasize, my claim is not that faith is the same as love (or godly fear). They are not the same passion; but they are passions in that they manifest themselves as being directed toward God as their telos and are enacted through obedience in the lives of those who possess them. It is this manifestation in obedience that is essentially the same, shared between them all. So, to raise the question again, can faith really be identified as holding the same three-term relational status as love if it is not explicitly commanded to be directed to both God and neighbour? In short, yes. Precisely because obedience is a manifestation of both faith and love, faith, being necessarily tied to obedience, is also the foundation of one’s relation to God and one’s neighbour. After all, faith, if not enacted in one’s life through obedience, is “dead,”

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91 I will set aside the fear of the Lord for the moment, though the connections can be inferred. I must focus specifically now on the relation of faith and love to make my point, though the fear of the Lord will also be related to faith later in this section.

92 Levenson thinks that Abraham would be better called the “knight of observance” rather than the knight of faith in FT. Obedience for Levenson is the primary category in the Abraham and Isaac story. The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son, 141.
as the epistle of James\textsuperscript{93} makes so plain—and even does so with specific reference to Gen. 22: “You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works” (Jas. 2:22). Thus the obedience of Abraham is the manifestation of his faith, without which it would not be complete.

My second response is that faith, like love, is for the sake of others, even if it is not “directed” toward them in the same manner one might imagine that love is. This is evident in the case of Abraham, whose faith in God allowed his obedience to be manifest and bring blessings on the nations, outlined in Gen. 26. So, even though not directed at others, faith involves and is for the sake of others. Further, on Kierkegaard’s view, love is only directed at others indirectly, that is, through God who is the middle term. Love is and must be directed primarily to God. It is, then, only through loving God that one can love one’s neighbour. Therefore, without loving God there is no love of the neighbour. This brings back into focus Kierkegaard’s primacy of God even as he upholds the significance of the individual. Thus faith, insofar as it is always an act of obedience to the God who is love, involves love for both God and neighbour.

By citing the Epistle of James above, which along with Paul (Romans and Galatians) and the Epistle to the Hebrews, sees faith as primary to Abraham’s obedience, the New Testament conception of faith can also be seen as related to the Old Testament understanding of the fear of the Lord.\textsuperscript{94} The connection is also evident, though, in the Old Testament itself, which, as mentioned above, finds the significance of fearing God in

\textsuperscript{93} An epistle of which Kierkegaard was particularly fond. James’s discussion of the double-mindedness of sinners (1:8, 4:8) and his call to “purify your hearts, you double minded” (4:8), is the starting point for Kierkegaard’s reflections in Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing.

\textsuperscript{94} Moberly, The Theology of the Book of Genesis, 189–90.
the obedience that follows it. Nehemiah 9:8, part of a great liturgical text of Judaism, draws attention to Abraham’s faith as tied to the covenant God made with him: “…you found his heart faithful before you, and made with him a covenant… and you have fulfilled your promise, for you are righteous.” Thus it becomes clear again that Abrahamic faith can be consistently understood as being for the sake of others.

\footnote{This text and its significance in Jewish faith has been brought to my attention by Levenson, \textit{The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son}, 175.}
Conclusion

Through engagement with Fackenheim’s criticism, Kierkegaard's view of faith becomes clearer and can be conceived of as a passion by which one comes to be rightly related to both God and neighbour in a three-term union predicated on God. Thus Silentio’s presentation of Abraham’s loneliness is incorrect, though it need not be attributed to Kierkegaard himself, who clearly has a relational understanding of faith—even if the individual is the focus of his writings. The other unique contributions of FT’s interpretation of Abrahamic faith remain significant and are compatible with Kierkegaard’s broader understanding of faith. When FT is brought together with Kierkegaard’s view of what can be called three-term faith in WL we have a picture of faith as being that which relates one to God and to one’s neighbour. Said differently, faith is an inwardly appropriated passion directed toward God, which is paradoxically manifest in an obedience that necessarily relates one to one’s neighbour.

Emil Fackenheim’s criticism that Kierkegaard misrepresents Abraham in FT has prompted and guided this essay along its course. Though Abrahamic faith in FT has many virtues, there is a sense in which it relies too heavily on an understanding of faith that isolates Abraham from all others. Fackenheim contends that this isolation is not acceptable as a means of understanding Christian and Jewish faith. In this Fackenheim’s criticism is correct; however, I have demonstrated that Kierkegaard is not simply presenting all of his own ideas in FT. Instead he allows his pseudonym, Johannes de Silentio, to speak for himself, which results in a subtle twist on the Akedah story as de Silentio reads it through a Kantian ethical framework.
Through engagement with Emil Fackenheim: (1) a clearer picture of the divide between de Silentio and Kierkegaard comes into view, which results in a more concrete understanding of FT; (2) it becomes evident that Kierkegaard’s understanding of Abrahamic faith is compatible with Christianity and Judaism because it is not, as Fackenheim alleged, a radically lonely endeavour, despite the fact that it is personal for Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard’s Abraham can be wrenched from his radical loneliness in *FT* by Kierkegaard’s *WL*, which, along with Fackenheim, emphasizes a three-term relation between “a person—God—a person,” while still retaining his distinctive faith. Further, no faithful child of Abraham need suffer in lonely faith. To demonstrate this I have brought Kierkegaard’s work in *FT* and *WL*, two books that seemed in some sense at odds with one another, into greater focus on the issue of Abrahamic faith and what seems its correspondent passion, love. Abrahamic faith and love are both characterized by Kierkegaard’s unique emphasis on their paradoxical appearance. Faith is paradoxical in the sense that it responds in obedience to God’s command despite the contradiction with God’s own promise; love is paradoxical in that it is commanded by God and thus a duty for the Christian. In each case the love and faith are forged and strengthened on this paradox. The faith of Abraham, thus quickened in his obedience in the face of contradiction, is a foundation on which Christian and Jewish children of faith can coalesce.
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