

---

# DESPAIR AS ETERNAL DAMNATION OF THE SELF

## A BIBLICAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN OUTLINE

Igor Tavilla\*

*University of Parma, Dipartimento A.L.E.F., Via M. D'Azeglio 85, Parma, Italy*

(Received 10 February 2017, revised 6 March 2017)

---

### Abstract

The Bible had deeply influenced Kierkegaard's anthropological view. In 'The Concept of Anxiety' (1844) and in 'The Sickness unto Death' (1849), he developed an original 'psychology of faith', focusing on anxiety and despair, as strictly related to the dogmatic concepts of sin and atonement. The aim of this paper is to investigate the biblical framework of Kierkegaard's anthropology, in order to enhance the grasp of the concept of despair. From its definition as 'sickness unto death', despair comes to indicate the eternal damnation, as the perpetual dying of the self, caused by sin. According to anti-Climacus despair consists in fact in the misrelation between the self and the Power that established it. Also Vigilius Haufninesis incidentally refers to despair as he talks about 'the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord' (2 Thessalonians 1.9). Lexical evidences and biblical quotations clarify the close connection both between despair (Fortvivlelse) and doubt (Tvivl) and between doubt and offense (Forargelse). Finally, it is possible to recognize in 'despair as weakness' and in 'despair as defiance' two different types of 'pertinax dubitatio'.

*Keywords:* despair, damnation, doubt, offense, Bible

---

### 1. Introduction

Biblical references play a fundamental role in Kierkegaard's anthropological view. As a good example of psychological reflection attaching itself to the Bible, Vigilius Haufniensis refers to Usteri's explanation of the fall. In this regard the pseudonym observes that nevertheless "the Bible has often had a harmful effect", in the sense that "in beginning a deliberation, a person has certain classical passages fixed in his mind, and now his explanation and knowledge consist in an arrangement of these passages" [1]. These lines sound as a declaration of intent by Kierkegaard himself. His anthropology is not simply an arrangement of biblical passages, "even if he is willing with all deference to refer the explanation to the verdict of the Bible" [1]. Kierkegaard does not want to use the Scripture 'as a shield'. In his opinion *Principium auctoritatis* cannot replace argumentative strength, even though the Bible has the final word on the appropriateness of the analysis.

---

\*E-mail: igortavi@libero.it

Save for a few exceptions (Croxall [2], Polk [3], Rocca [4], and, to some extent, also Miles [5]) the secondary literature has interpreted Kierkegaard's concept of despair without explicitly referring to the Bible, as if the influence of the Scripture on Kierkegaard's philosophy was so taken for granted, that any further research about this subject was unnecessary. This could partly depend on the double status, theological and philosophical, of Kierkegaard's work, as Robert Lee Perkins has remarked: "theologians have not exploited the massive contributions Kierkegaard makes to the doctrine of sin and the issue of relation of revelation and reason (among many other topics) in *The Sickness unto Death*. Remarkably, Kierkegaard is more thought about in academic philosophy than in academic theology. Yet in the philosophic community he is usually treated as if his credentials left something to be desired, and for this very reason he should be received with more enthusiasm by the theologians." [6]

Still, it can be said what Paul Minear and Paul Morimoto have stated: "It is amazing how many scholars, intent upon reconstructing his mental history, have ignored the Biblical sources of his ideas. It is in fact customary to search for the genesis of his insights among European philosophers and theologians, to chart the tangled affiliations between his mind and contemporary thinkers. One looks in vain amid the voluminous and erudite tomes on Kierkegaard for penetrating studies of his relation to the Bible, although there are essays galore on his relation to Hegel, Hamann, or Mozart. Why this disparity? Why so few studies of the Biblical source and the structure of his thinking?" [7]

The purpose of this article is to investigate the biblical influence on Kierkegaard's concept of despair. In order to clarify the connection between despair and doubt, I will start from the definition of despair as 'sickness unto death', which suggests considering despair as the perpetual punishment of the sinful self. I will therefore take into account Anti-Climacus' *The Sickness unto Death* (1849) and *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844) by Vigilius Haufniensis. Anxiety and despair are in fact strictly related and their phenomenology is quite similar, since both of them revolve around sin. Anxiety is considered at the same time as the presupposition of hereditary sin and as a consequence of it. Despair is defined as sin itself, regarded as self's non-acceptance of its constitutive relation to God. Finally, both anxiety and despair find their solution in faith, because only through faith "self rests transparently in the Power that established it" [8].

## 2. Despair as perpetual dying of the self

Despair does not come to man from outside, as an accidental disease, but "despairing lies in man himself" [8, p. 16]. However, only through revelation man becomes conscious of his despair. "To be aware of this sickness is the Christian's superiority over the natural man; to be cured of this sickness is the Christian's blessedness". [8, p. 15]

In his introduction to the Italian translation of Kierkegaard's work, Ettore Rocca remarks that the evangelical expression 'Sygdommen til Døden' (John 11.4) does not mean a deadly sickness (a sickness which brings to death), but

rather the sickness whose final goal is death. “Lazarus’ sickness was ‘deadly’, but not ‘unto death’. It caused Lazarus’ death. Nevertheless, its goal was not death, but God’s glory.” [4, p. IX] In the Christian view, biological death is ‘unto life’, in the sense that it is a passage towards eternal life. As Thomas Henry Croxall has written: “It is clear from Christ’s word about Lazarus: ‘this sickness is not unto death’, that the death of the body is not regarded as real death” [2, p. 99]. In this respect Kyle A. Roberts has remarked that: “In the Christian understanding, physical death is not the end. Rather, it is a ‘minor event’ which must be interpreted in the light of a greater perspective afforded by eternity. In this sense, ‘there is infinitely much more hope in death than there is in life’, because death marks the final transition to eternity.” [9]

In fact, after Lazarus’ resurrection, a sickness will come which causes his death. So the miracle cannot consist in having prolonged Lazarus’ life. Rather Christ’s existence ensures that Lazarus’ sickness, as any other sickness, is not ‘unto death’. There is a different kind of death though, known to Christianity, which provokes the destruction of life and spirit. But the self is the eternal, which means that, as such, it cannot die. In despair the self self-destructs itself, without being able to die. “Despair is veritably a self-consuming, but an impotent self-consuming that cannot do what it wants to do” [8, p. 18]. Anti-Climacus explains this self-consumption with a biblical metaphor: “The person in despair cannot die; ‘no more than the dagger can slaughter thoughts’ can despair consume the eternal, the self at the root of despair, whose worm does not die and whose fire is not quenched.” [8, p. 18]

Let us quote at length the biblical passages to which the pseudonym refers: “‘I will make new heavens and the new earth, which will last forever’, says the Lord. ‘In the same way, your names and your children will always be with me. All people will come to worship me every Sabbath and every New Moon’, says the Lord. ‘They will go out and see the dead bodies of the people who sinned against me. *The worms that eat them will never die, and the fires that burn them will never stop* [emphasis added], and everyone will hate to see those bodies (Isaiah 66.22-24).” According to Isaiah’s eschatological prophecy, ‘worms’ and ‘fires’ represent the punishment to which the sinners are condemned.

Furthermore, Isaiah is quoted three times within the same chapter of the Gospel of Mark: “‘If one of these little children believes in me, and someone causes that child to sin, it would be better for that person to have a large stone tied around his neck and be drowned in the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to lose part of your body and live forever than to have two hands and go to hell, where the fire never goes out. [In hell the worm does not die; the fire is never put out.] If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to lose part of your body and to live forever than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. [In hell the worm does not die; the fire is never put out.] If your eye causes you to sin, take it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell. In hell the worm does not die; the fire is never put out. Every person will be salted with fire’ (Mark 9.42-44).” (Some Greek copies do not contain the bracketed text).

On the basis of these biblical references, it seems that in Kierkegaard's view despair indicates the eternal damnation, as perpetual dying of the self, which is caused by sin. In this regard, it is also worth recalling Anti-Climacus' quotation of the evangelical admonition against the conduct of one who gains all earthly advantages and loses himself (Mathew 16.26). The pseudonym refers to it, in order to illustrate despair 'as lack of infinitude'. Then, when Anti-Climacus deals with despair 'as lack of possibility', he purposely focuses on the possibility of salvation. "Salvation is, humanly speaking, utterly impossible; but for God everything is possible." [8, p. 38] (Mathew 19.26; Mark 10.27, 14.36; Luke 1.37-38). Therefore, according to Kierkegaard, it is not just self's realization but its salvation that is at stake.

### 3. Despair as 'pertinax dubitatio'

In *Repetition* (1843) Constantin Constantius congratulates "the Danish language on a philosophical term" [10], showing to prefer the Danish word 'repetition' to the foreign word 'mediation'. I quote this passage because it points out the necessity to pay attention to Kierkegaard's vocabulary, which he chooses very carefully.

The word *Fortvivlelse* is usually translated as 'despair'. As Robert Marasco has remarked: "the etymology of the English term 'despair' is Latinate: from *desperare*, it means literally to be without hope. Kierkegaard was aware of this Latin term and its signification in Christian thought, but writing in Danish, he used a term with a somewhat different set of implications. Kierkegaard's *Fortvivlelse* – like Hegel's *Verzweiflung* – suggests an augmentation or intensification of doubt, but also, as Alastair Hannay has suggested, 'bears 'two' (*tvi*) on its face, so the suggestion of complexity is conveyed here even more directly than in the case of 'despair' and its cognates." [11]

The *Ordbog over det danske Sprog* gives the following synonyms of *Fortvivlelse*: *Modløshed* (discouragement), *Haabløshed* (hopelessness), *Sorg* (grief) and *Desperation* (despair) [12]. Among all these lexical options, Kierkegaard chose 'Fortvivlelse'. A biographical interpretation of this choice could read it as an accidental reference to the 'quiet despair', by which Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard addressed his son [13]. But in Anti-Climacus' work there are significant evidences – both linguistic and biblical – of the fact that despair is much more connected with doubting than with losing hope. The lexical choice opted by Kierkegaard could therefore be a result of his fidelity to the deep meaning stored within the word.

In addition to the aforementioned fact, that the word *Fortvivlelse* itself is made up of the word doubt (*Tvivl*), we have to observe that, in the common language, terms such as 'consumption', 'warm', 'fire' are often used referring to doubt. For instance, it is said about a person who sinks into doubt, that he/she 'is consumed by doubt' (*forbruges af Tvivl*). Frequent expressions are also: 'to be gnawed by doubt' (*at være gnavet af Tvivl*), 'the worm of doubt' (*Tvivlens Orm*) and 'doubt's fire', 'the fire of doubt' (*Tvivlens Ild*), or 'doubt's flame' (*Tvivlens*

*Flamme*).

As Roman Králik has stated: “with Kierkegaard the all-important relationship to be considered is the relationship of the individual to himself” [14]. The self who is ‘sick unto death’ self-consumes, persisting in doubt about itself as well as about the relation between itself and the Power which established it.

According to Anti-Climacus’ definition of sin – “sin is: before God in despair not to will to be oneself, or before God in despair to will to be oneself” [8, p. 76] – there are two main types of despair: despair in weakness (*Svaghed*) and despair in defiance (*Trods*). Dealing with the first type, Anti-Climacus adds: “to call this form despair in weakness already casts a reflection on the second form, in despair to will to be oneself. Thus the opposites are only relative. No despair is entirely free of defiance; indeed, the very phrase ‘not to will to be’ implies defiance. On the other hand, even despair’s most extreme defiance is never really free of some weakness. So the distinction is only relative.” [8, p. 49]

Anti-Climacus suggests thus that despair implies both weakness and defiance at once. Paraphrasing Vigilus Haufniensis, who has defined anxiety as “a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy” [1, p. 42], despair could be defined similarly as a ‘weak defiance’ or, alternatively, as a ‘defiant weakness’. This brings us back to the etymology of *Fortvivlelse*. As William McDonald has pointed out: “It is worth nothing that the Danish word contains the word for ‘doubt’, namely *Tvivl*, which comes from the Germanic *twi-fla*, meaning double. One meaning of the Danish prefix *for* is that the action of the verb to which it is appended is intensified to a ruinous extreme. In this case, *fortvivle* would be a ruinous doubting, or double-mindedness.” [15]

As a proper definition of despair, I suggest to adopt the expression *pertinax dubitatio*, used in the *Codex Iuri Canonici* in order to describe heresy [*Codex juris Canonici*, I-VII, Rome, January 25 1983, III, can. 751]. Despair comes therefore to mean ‘the condition of persisting in doubt’. As ‘a persisting’, it implies obstinacy and defiance, which evokes the Israelites’ stubbornness (Exodus 32.9, 33.3, 33.5, 34.9). Dealing with despair as defiance of the will to be oneself, as an example Anti-Climacus brings the obstinate attitude of one who claims to create himself anew *ex nihilo*, refusing God’s plan on him. As ‘a doubting’, instead, despair stands for wavering, which denotes vulnerability, as Kierkegaard could read in James 1.6: “anyone who doubts is like a wave in the sea, blown up and down by the wind”.

#### **4. The weakness of disobedience**

Kierkegaard’s anthropological view, both in *The Concept of Anxiety* and in *The Sickness unto Death*, is grounded in the New Testament narration and culminates in Christ’s atonement. The pseudonyms deliberately recalls the passion’s story, opposing the ‘road to destruction’ (Mathew 7.13), represented by sin and despair, to the ‘Golgotha path’, which brings to redemption through faith. In addition, one of the pseudonyms’ name is ‘Vigilius’, which reminds us about Christ’s admonition to the disciples in Gethsemane: “Vigilate et orate, ut non

intretis in tentationem” (Mathew 26.41).

Christian paradox calls for faith, because God reveals himself *sub contraria specie*, as a lowly servant (Philippians 2.7) who suffers and dies on a cross for our sins. The God-man is “this simple, insignificant man, poor, forsaken, surrendered to man’s violence” [8, p. 128] who stands on the cross (Mark 14.41). This makes it impossible for us to grasp the divine revelation through human understanding. Without faith man gets offence and falls into despair. Thus the crucial question, through which each man should examine himself (1 Corinthians 11.28), is the following: “What do you think of Christ?” [8, p. 131] (Mathew 22.42). Along with answering this question the judgment upon the self comes, since the measure of one’s faith is the measure of one’s own existence. “As you believe, so you are or believe is to be” (Mathew 8.13). According to Kierkegaard, therefore, faith is not just a ‘taking as truth’, but rather the fundamental and primary condition of self’s existence.

In the second part of *The Sickness unto Death* despair is expressly qualified as sin, finding its fullness of meaning. In this respect, I do share the opinion of Ettore Rocca, who notices that the second half of the book is not simply an appendix of the first one, however shorter and less articulated: “Instead the work runs, almost, rushes into the second part, and there it finds its historical background, its theoretical foundation and its phenomenology’s fulfilment.” [4, p. XX]

Anti-Climacus points out that despair affects every human being, but Christianity increases the conscience of despair, first through the revelation of sin and subsequently through the revelation of redemption. In this sense, Anti-Climacus can state that: “in any case, no human being ever lived and no one lives outside of Christendom who has not despaired, and no one in Christendom if he is not a true Christian, and insofar as he is not wholly that, he still is to some extent in despair” [8, p. 22]. This is also valid in relation to Kierkegaard’s spheres of existence, as Martina Pavlíková has observed: “Kierkegaard raises some interesting questions about the nature of human despair: ‘everyone who lives esthetically is in despair, whether he knows it or not. But when one knows this, and you certainly do know it, then a higher form of existence is an imperative requirement.’” [16]

Anti-Climacus notices that in the Scripture sin is always defined as disobedience (*Ulydighed*). He remarks also that what precisely lacks in the Socratic definition of sin are ‘will’ and ‘defiance’ (*Trods*). Similarly, Vigilius Haufniensis reminds that “all of us, because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, are hated by God” [1, p. 27]. So, if sin is disobedience and despair is sin, despair itself is disobedience.

In a Journal entry dated 1847 Kierkegaard makes it clear that disobedience is somehow related to thinking and to doubt: “Christianity is related neither to thinking nor to doubt but to will and to obedience: thou shalt believe. This wanting to include thinking is disobedience, regardless of whether it says Yes or Not.” [13, entry 3049] Thinking or doubting – in a Cartesian sense – are regarded as opposite to Christian faith, which requires will and obedience instead. Here, we

run into what Michael Valčo has defined as the “typical Kierkegaardian emphases on the situation of the individual before God (as an individual subject) and his simple obedience without a systematizing self-justification” [17].

As a proof of the biblically rooted opposition between faith and doubt, it can be quoted Romans 14.23: “Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin”. In *The Sickness unto Death* Anti-Climacus expressly refers to this passage twice. But what is noteworthy, is the fact that in the previous line of the Epistle, where it is disputed over clean and unclean food, it has been written: “whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith”. This clearly confirms that, in New Testament terms, the opposite of faith is doubt.

As a further confirmation of this, it can be mentioned the upbuilding discourse upon the Epistle of James, in which Kierkegaard stresses the opposition between faith and doubt with regard to the biblical statement that *every good Gift and every perfect Gift is from above*. Timothy Houston Polk has remarked that: “while God gives generously to all, the doubting (*diakrinómenos*), double-minded person (*dipsuxos*) who does not ‘ask in faith’ will not receive. It is not that God does not give, but that the doubter is unreceptive. Faith is linked to receptivity as doublemindedness is linked to doubt.” [3, p. 123] For both James and Kierkegaard “the doublemindedness that is doubt means a lack of confidence”, since doubt is “the confident heart’s antithesis” [3, p. 124].

Nevertheless, it has to be noticed that in Kierkegaard’s view, doubt and despair are not simply reducible one to the other. Dealing with Cartesian-Hegelian heritage in Kierkegaard’s work, Anders Moe Rasmussen has pointed out that the Danish philosopher “totally transforms the content of the concept of doubt and despair concerning two different spheres, that is, the sphere of thought and reason and the sphere of life, will and personhood. So, Kierkegaard claims: ‘Doubt and despair, therefore, belong to completely different spheres: different sides of the soul are set in motion. But I am not at all satisfied with this, because then doubt and despair would become coordinate, and that is not the case. Despair is precisely a much deeper and more complete expression; its movement is much more encompassing than that of doubt. Despair is an expression of the total personality, doubt only of thought.’” [18] Rasmussen continues: “His new definitions of doubt and despair follow: doubt is a purely theoretical operation following the inner laws of thought, and as such, an expression of necessity, while despair is a passionate act or choice and as such an expression of will and freedom” [18].

According to assessor Wilhelm, despair requires an act of will, which doubt lacks. This does not exclude that doubt could lie at the root of despair and lead to it, in so far doubt becomes a completely absorbing dimension of the person, which also involves a deliberation of persisting in it.

## **5. Descent into Kierkegaard’s Netherworld**

In his phenomenological description of different forms of despair, Anti-Climacus depicts an earthly Netherworld of selves who live as shadows

condemned to the eternal consumption. Despair resounds here with its common meaning of 'losing hope', recalling Dante's admonishment on the Hell's door: "Lasciate ogne speranza voi ch'intrate" ("Abandon all hope, ye who enter here") [Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, III, 9].

As in a sort of "modern Divine Comedy", to quote Thomas Miles, despair has different circles and gets progressively worse the closer it relates to Christian paradox. Thus, as in Dante's *limbo* those who were not sinful in life lie, since they didn't know Christ, similarly, the lightest form of despair affects the pagans, for their absence of spirit. Thomas Miles himself has pointed out that: "just as Dante reserves a place for the virtuous pagans in the first and most benign level of hell, Kierkegaard's pseudonym Anti-Climacus reserves the first and most benign level of despair for what he calls the 'spiritless' of paganism" [5, p. 231-232].

However, it has to be noticed that, according to Kierkegaard, the most dangerous and subtle form of despair is the one whose existence is ignored. In this respect, Anti-Climacus remarks that spiritless in paganism differs from spiritless in Christianity, since "the former is qualified *toward* spirit and the latter *away* from the spirit". Some Christians are so much spiritless that they cannot even be called sinners. They embody a total indifference towards spirit, which makes them "worthy only, as Scripture says, of being 'spewed out'" (Revelation 3.16). Judas kiss (Luke 22.48) comes thus to symbolize the betrayal of Lutheran pastors, who officially profess Christianity, but at once they take part in this sordid world, where they are honoured and well considered [8, p. 87]. In this respect, it is interesting to recall Karol Nandrásky's opinion: "It is the priests who should be called to responsibility, as Kierkegaard argued with passion, because they 'were not fulfilling their apostolic mission'. Everything were just empty words and the only goal seems to be for them to become 'fat'." [19]

When a self before Christ despairs of the remission of sins, then despair becomes offense. Anti-Climacus distinguishes three different types of offenses: "the lowest form of offense, the most innocent form, humanly speaking, is to leave the whole issue of Christ undecided, concluding as follows: I am not going to make any decision about it; I do not believe, but I am not going to decide anything." [8, p. 129] This form of offence recalls both the sceptical 'suspending belief' and the free thinker's will not to wager at all in Pascal's wager about God.

"The next form of offense is negative but in the form of being acted upon, of suffering. It definitely feels that it cannot ignore Christ, [...] but neither can it believe; it continues to stare fixedly and exclusively at one point, at the paradox [...]" [8, p. 130-131] A person so offended lies in uncertainty.

"The last form of offense is [...] the positive form. It declares Christianity to be untrue, a lie; it denies Christ [...]. Of course, in this denial of Christ as the paradox lies, in turn, the denial of all that is essentially Christian: sin, the forgiveness of sins, etc." "This form of offense is sin against the Holy Spirit. Just as the Jews said that Christ drove out devils with the help of devils, so this offense makes Christ out to be an invention of the devil." [8, p. 131] Anti-Climacus observes that "the Jews had a perfect right to be offended by Christ because he claimed to forgive sins"(Mathew 12.31-32, Mark 3.29, Luke 12.19) [8, p. 116].

Forgiveness of sin was in fact recognized as a prerogative of God alone. Jesus Christ's claim to forgive sin was thus a claim to be God. This is the blasphemy that the high priest Caiaphas accused Jesus of before the Sanhedrin. All these forms of offense are clearly related to doubt, to uncertainty, and to that augmentation of doubt, which is unbelief.

In Kierkegaard's phenomenology of despair also demons are included, in so far the demonic is a peculiar way of rejecting God. Anti-Climacus makes it clear that sin is not "the turbulence of flesh and blood but is the spirit's consent to it" [8, p. 82]. There are sinners who do not commit any sin of flesh, but their condition is even more desperate. The pseudonym compares spiritual sin to the demonic possession, in which the unclean spirit returns to the house he left and finds the house clean, swept and tidied up (Luke 11.15, 26). The final condition of that man is even worse than the first one.

It should be remarked that there is a correspondence between demoniac despair and anxiety about good. In both cases, the spirit refuses to relate itself to God, as Vigilius observes: "a demoniac in the New Testament therefore says to Christ when he approaches: *Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί* [What have I to do with you], and he continues by suggesting that Christ has come to destroy him (anxiety about the good). Or a demoniac implores Christ to go another way." (Mark 5.6 and Mark 5.17) [1, p. 124] These Gospel words express the absolute nonrelation to God of a self who obstinately withdraws into its perpetual torment.

Furthermore, according to Vigilius Haufniensis, the fact that "God knows nothing of evil, that he neither can nor will know of it, is the absolute punishment of evil. In this sense the preposition *ἀπὸ* [away from] is used in the New Testament to signify removal from God or, if I dare put it this way, God's ignoring of evil. If one conceives of God finitely, it is indeed convenient for evil if God ignores it, but because God is the infinite, his ignoring is the living annihilation, for evil cannot dispense with God, even merely in order to be evil. Here I shall quote a passage from Scripture, II Thessalonians 1:9, where it is said of those who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel: *οἵτινες δίκην τίσουσιν ὄλεθρον αἰώνιον ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ* [they shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might]." [1, p. 111-112]

This quotation can be regarded as the first definition of despair, five years before that Anti-Climacus deals with it. When it says that "God's ignoring is the 'living annihilation'" [1, p. 112] it remarks that the self, which stays apart from God, self-destroys itself, insofar as God is the Power that established it. It emphasizes also that not to know God and not to obey the Gospel is the same. Finally, it states that the punishment for those who do not obey is the perpetual consumption. In the end it makes it clear that the misrelation between man and God condemns the spirit to the eternal damnation.

## 6. Conclusions

In this paper I tried to understand the concept of despair within the biblical framework adopted by Kierkegaard. First, I took into account the definition of despair as ‘sickness unto death’. This means that despair is not a deadly sickness, but rather the perpetual dying of the self caused by sin. The biblical metaphor used by Anti-Climacus (Isaiah 66.22-24, Mark 9.42-44) provides evidence of the correspondence between despair and the eternal damnation of the self.

Then I observed that the Danish term *Fortvivlelse*, usually translated as ‘despair’, is made up of the root word doubt (*Tvivl*), and I noticed that in the common language the biblical metaphors used by the pseudonym (‘consumption’, ‘warm’, ‘fire’) attach much more to doubt than to despair (e.g. ‘to be consumed by doubt’, ‘to be gnawed by doubt’, ‘the worm of doubt’, ‘doubt’s fire’, ‘the fire of doubt’, or ‘doubt’s flame’).

Taking advantages of a Journal entry dated 1847, I clarified that in Kierkegaard’s view on Christianity, the opposite of obedience is ‘doubt’. As a further proof of this, I referred to Romans 14.23, which is expressly quoted by Anti-Climacus.

Also, Vigilius Haufniness incidentally provides a confirmation of the fact that the misrelation between man and God condemns the self to the eternal consumption (2 Thessalonians 1.9). Finally, I observed that despair is strictly related to offense, so that despair can be regarded as a sort of *pertinax dubitatio* which compromises the relation between the self and the Power that established it.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Roman Králik for having allowed me access to his personal library.

## References

- [1] S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1980, 40.
- [2] T.H. Croxall, *Kierkegaard studies. With special reference to (a) the Bible (b) our own age*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1948.
- [3] T.H. Polk, *The biblical Kierkegaard. Reading by the rule of faith*, Mercer University Press, Macon (GA), 1997, 123.
- [4] E. Rocca, *Un uomo nuovo (A new man)*, in S. Kierkegaard: *La malattia per la morte*, Donzelli, Roma, 1999, VIII-XXVII.
- [5] T. Miles, *Tours of Hell: Mapping the Landscape of Sin and Despair with Dante and Kierkegaard as Poet-Guides*, in *Kierkegaard and the Roman and Medieval World Bible (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources)*, J. Stewart (ed.), vol. 4, Ashgate, Farnham/Burlington, 2008.
- [6] R.L. Perkins, *Introduction*, in *The Sickness unto Death. International Kierkegaard Commentary*, Mercer University Press, Macon (GA), 1987, 4.

- [7] P. Minear and P. Morimoto, *Kierkegaard and the Bible. An index*, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, 1953, 7.
- [8] S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1980, 14.
- [9] K.A. Roberts, *Lazarus: Kierkegaard's Use of a Destitute Beggar and a Resurrected Friend*, in *Kierkegaard and the Bible (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources)*, vol. 1, tome II, L.C. Barrett & J. Stewart (eds.), Ashgate, Farnham/Burlington 2010, 147.
- [10] S. Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1983, 129.
- [11] R. Marasco, *The Highway of Despair. Critical Theory after Hegel*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2015, 63.
- [12] V. Dahlerup, *Ordbog over det danske Sprog*, vol. 5, Society for Danish Language and Literature Gyldendal, 1919, columns 1028-1029.
- [13] S. Kierkegaard, *Journal and Papers*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1967, 346.
- [14] R. Králik and S. Jacobsen Tinley, *Communications*, **13(1)** (2017) 26.
- [15] W. McDonald, *Despair*, in *Kierkegaard's Concept (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources)*, vol. 15, tome II, S.E. Emmanuel, W. McDonald & J. Stewart (eds.), Ashgate, Farnham/Burlington, 2014, 159.
- [16] M. Pavlíková, *Eur. J. Sci. Theol.*, **13(1)** (2017) 21.
- [17] M. Valčo, *Eur. J. Sci. Theol.*, **13(1)** (2017) 52.
- [18] A.M. Rasmussen, *René Descartes: Kierkegaard's understanding of doubt and certainty*, in *Kierkegaard and the Renaissance and Modern Traditions – Philosophy (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources)*, J. Stewart (ed.), vol. 5, tome I, Ashgate, Farnham/Burlington, 2009, 14.
- [19] R. Králik, *Eur. J. Sci. Theol.*, **13(1)** (2017) 30.