

# KING'S THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

Volume II Number 2

Autumn 1979

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## KING'S THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

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# KING'S THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

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' "THEOLOGY IS ABOUT GOD." DISCUSS. <sup>1</sup>

John Austin Baker

There is certainly plenty of theology around. Theology of race, theology of sex, theology of hope, theology of joy, theology of work, theology of unemployment, theology of power, theology of prayer, of worship, of mission, black theology, liberation theology, political theology, feminist theology, Marxist theology. The word 'theology', too, has passed into current jargon, though not in a flattering sense. It means, roughly, "an aprioristic, doctrinaire system of thought"; and a 'theological' answer to a question, say, in politics, is one derived from such a system of thought without regard either to the facts of the situation or the practicalities of dealing with them.

So, as I said, one way and another there is a good deal of theology about, of one sort or another. But the sort there is not a good deal of is the theology of God. "Oh, come", you may say, "all theology is about God. That is what the word means. What it says about God may be said indirectly, by back reflection from analysis of the world, but it is said." I do not deny this for a moment. My complaint is that theologies of this or that do indeed say a great deal about God; but because there is little proper 'theology of God' today, no attempt is made to check whether what is said is coherent or believable. Some theological writing makes *en passant* a great number of seeming statements about God; but if we collect them together, there is no way in which they can be fitted to one another. Such a work is *A Theology of Human Hope* by Rubem Alves. The word 'God' appears, if not on every page, yet with moderate frequency; but I do not see how, at the end of the book, it is

possible to glean from these references any concept of God in himself, even a negative concept. 'God' is grammatically a substantive in the author's use; but God's function in the author's world-view is purely adjectival. God-statements are, in the end, poetic ways of referring to the quality of transcendence without which human freedom is, on Alves' scheme, impossible. In other words, liberation theology is the only theology because freedom is the *sine qua non* of human life, and therefore it is legitimate to describe the political and psychological attitudes that favour freedom as 'God's politics', 'God's purposes', 'God's salvation', because 'God' is our word *par excellence* for what is supremely important or significant—a use not at all unlike the adjectival use of *elohim* in the Hebrew of the Old Testament. But if you ask who or what is this 'God' who apparently has 'politics' and 'purposes', an answer is systematically excluded, because that would be to encourage Man in his fatal tendency to rest in an absolute, the ultimate enemy of freedom. It would, certainly, be possible to argue that this God is known here and now only in the world experienced in a certain way, but that beyond this world the God we have known thus indirectly will be revealed to us. But to Alves any such idea is anathema. "Transcendence triumphs," he writes, "when all absolutes disappear and when man has to live in the 'holy insecurity' of a totally secular world." Only such a world is one that Man can "accept

<sup>1</sup>A lecture given to the King's College Theological Society at King's College, London, on Friday, November 3rd, 1978.

... as his home". "The language of faith, as a language determined by and for history, does not speak about a meta-historical, meta-worldly realm in which hopes are fulfilled and sufferings are brought to an end... it is within [the] historical and earthly context and content that it speaks about the reality and possibility of human liberation, about the reality and possibility of freedom for life." For faith, then, this world is the only one in which God can be known, and we must therefore be content to know him only as a poetic epithet, a word from the past the content of which can equally well be expressed in other terms. We may well agree that to use a word that appears, at any rate, to denote something in this way, is probably the highest achievement of which faith is capable; for it is, in effect, to say, "This word seems to have absolutely no independent meaning whatever, but whatever it is that it does refer to I believe in." Needless to say, this basic standpoint yields some pretty achievements in the art of demythologising. Thus Alves quotes with approval some words of Norman O. Brown: "The question confronting mankind is the abolition of repression—in the traditional Christian language, the resurrection of the body. The resurrection of the body is a social project facing mankind as a whole, and it will become a practical political problem when the statesmen of the world are called upon to deliver happiness instead of power." Alves criticises Brown only for thinking that this project can be achieved by "psychiatry or any other process of individual liberation." "What is necessary... is a praxis that liberates society from the structures of repression."

It may be hard to see why the word 'Theology' appears in the title of Alves' book at all. It is not hard in the least to see why it is used by that great prophet of the political theology movement, Jürgen Moltmann. Moltmann wrestles constantly with the idea of God. He is also, by any criteria, I believe, a very great writer. Yet it is my firm conviction, which I recently tried to express in a review of *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, that Moltmann's doctrine of God suffers from an inner inconsistency and confusion which make his picture of God ultimately unbelievable, and so vitiate the whole gospel of hope which he is concerned to proclaim. The essential incoherence

of his doctrine of God is seen most easily in its moral aspect, the question of the sufferings of the Son and their relation to the Father's love. But this moral inadequacy is, I suspect, partly the result of Moltmann's having no metaphysical concept of what God might be and how he might function. Since he works continually with the Trinitarian conception of God this lack of a metaphysic is disastrous. There is no attempt to give any meaning in terms of the Godhead to a term, for example, absolutely crucial to Moltmann's whole scheme, namely 'Godforsakenness'; but the problem of what this can mean in a Trinitarian faith is surely central, and will never be answered unless the possible metaphysical implications are at least discussed, even if only to discount them.

It is no part of my intention to resume this evening the *Myth of God Incarnate* controversy. We are all, I suspect, glad of a respite from that for the moment. It is, however, worth pointing out in view of our present subject that the lack of a clear or positive doctrine of God was a major underlying embarrassment to that book. On the one hand, it was assumed by the contributors that the metaphysical difficulties of classic incarnation doctrine made that no longer tenable. On the other, various positive proposals were put forward, such as Maurice Wiles's "union of the divine and the human in the depths of the human soul", and Dennis Nineham's future "scenario about God," together with various references to God's activity. But both the negative critique of and the positive replacement for classic incarnation doctrine depend ultimately on a coherent doctrine of God to justify them. God must be such that the old scenario won't work but the new one will. There is, of course, the further issue that the weaknesses of the speculative thinking behind the Chalcedonian definition can be argued to lie basically in its doctrine of God; that is, that the puzzle of how God becomes incarnate is dictated not so much by the difficulty of working the Two Natures—One Person sum in Christ as by the fact that the relation of Nature to Person in God already contained unresolved logical problems. It is, therefore, at least reasonable to ask whether, if we think, as Frances Young obviously does, that at the moral level classic incarnationalism expresses a very profound insight, we might not make progress toward a

more satisfactory theological statement of this by looking again at the way we want to talk about God in himself.

Many theologians, of course, feel that to talk like this is to cry not for the moon (since that we can now have if we want it) but, let us say, for travel beyond the speed of light. This is partly, especially in this country, a surrender to what is still the majority philosophical view that metaphysics is impossible. But it is also something far less elevated, namely, an acceptance of the popular mentality, which says that there are only two kinds of existence. things, which with Dr Johnson you can kick, and thoughts, which exist when there are people to have them, and perish when there are not. Anything else is childish imagination, on the same level as belief in ghosts and fairies. The limitations of theology today are as much as anything a sheer failure of imagination, a foreclosing of possibilities which is in striking contrast, for instance, to the ever more fantastic outreach of imagination in scientific hypotheses. The particular importance, I would suggest, of interest in such matters as 'out-of-body states' is precisely that they awaken the imagination to possibilities that seemed to have been ruled out for good by advancing knowledge. Or, to take another example, some current cosmological theories, which envisage the possibility of an endless series of universes, as each in turn expands outwards and then collapses back into an all-devouring 'black hole', only to explode again and re-start the cycle, provide a very adequate setting for the visions of Origen, and his dizzying series of cosmic years during which the loving purposes of God are finally and ineluctably worked out.

But there is another contributory factor to the present neglect of thought about God, and that is the study of theology today in our universities and colleges. Theology is not studied in order to find answers for ourselves to the questions, 'Is there a God?' and 'What is he like?' Theology is studied in order to find out what other people have thought about these questions; and, where a professional interest does intrude, as with the ordinand, to take over what bits and pieces from these past speculations seem still to be viable. There is a profound but subtle difference here which it is not easy to explain. Perhaps we may try to pinpoint it by

asking, "How many theological students expect on their course to learn about God, as opposed to learning what other people say about God?" The answer, I suspect, is very few indeed. And let me sharpen the point by saying that to come to the study of Theology to learn what Christianity says about God, because I am a Christian, and that is what I need to know, is still not authentically learning about God but only learning what others think about him. Of course, the thoughts of the wise of all ages are very important. We need to study them with all the scholarly rigour urged upon us years ago, and so signally exemplified in our tutors. But *why* do we study them? To learn what they thought, because it was historically a stepping-stone on the way to what we think? To learn what they thought because we are required to think the same? Or to learn what they thought in order that it may help us to arrive at the truth? Let me put it in concrete form. If someone says to himself, "If God is real, then surely he must make some difference to life; what might that be?"—then he has a genuine motive for trying to understand what the prophets, the sages, the apocalyptists, Jesus himself, and many other people, not only Christians, have said. But if all he thinks to himself is: "These people are all in the Bible, I had better find out what they had to say"—then his motive is not genuine, at any rate not genuinely religious. One must be interested in the questions that are asked if there is to be any seriousness in one's relation to the answers, nay more, one must think of these writers as seriously potential givers of answers, or pointers toward possible answers, even if those answers are no more than "There is no answer", or, "You must live with the question because it is better to do that than to dismiss it as a non-question." So, I would say, all theological syllabuses start at the wrong end. We ought to start students off with questions like, "Is there a God?" or "Why do people suffer?"—or rather, if they do not wish to ask such questions, transfer them to English Literature or Civil Engineering, for if they do not want to find answers to such questions they have no business reading Theology—and then, when they are stuck at this point or that send them off to an Old Testament scholar to learn about the Psalms and Job and Daniel, or to a New Testament scholar to study the Passion narratives and St Paul, to a doctrinal

theologian, to an expert on Buddhism; and then come back to pool what they have learned, and say how it now seems. Always it ought to be the ultimate questions which send them off and motivate them to learn from others; the task of tutors and lecturers is to guide them to the relevant wisdom and explain its background and meaning. The tools too that will be needed fall into place, but into unusual places, and sometimes they will be unusual tools. For one thing I have argued for years; and still do not understand how anyone can be expected to do serious theology without a grounding in logic. Nor do I think anyone could seriously probe very far into the question of God as Creator without demanding to know something basic about the scientific study of the universe. The same would apply to any serious engagement with ethics. How many there are who hold forth with apparent absolute certainty about God's law in the race situation, who could not put two coherent sentences together explaining what racial distinctions are! In short, it is not so much the content of theological study which is wrong, though there are mistakes here, but the end from which it is approached. The result is that many never get round to asking the big questions at all, or, if they do, never connect what they have learned with any possible answers. The tradition feeds them nothing. They give their own superficial and vapid reflections, taking for granted that what other generations have said is of purely academic interest. Some, it is true, regard the legacy of the past in a different light. For them, the words in the sacred text have all the answers. But the tragedy here is that they go on believing this, even when their innermost soul protests with tears that this or that answer is inadequate, or even wrong. They are not authentically interested in truth, because the veridical quality of an answer is determined not by what it says but by where it occurs. They go to the sources not to be made wise in their personal answers, but to be well informed in their official answers. The terrifying result is then so often that the questions cease to be human; they no longer feel them as agonizing or urgent. Only those can feel the questions as humanly important who know that all answers are fundamentally deficient.

And so it is with the great central question of God himself, for to an essential Yes or No to this question all our ultimate enquiries return. If a man or woman has a burning enough zeal to

find the answer to the question of God, then that man or woman is qualified to study theology and can study it with benefit, and no one else either is or can. I can say that in this building and to this company, because of recent years Kings has been uniquely blest among Theological Departments and Colleges in having had scholars who believed in the primacy of the subject of God, and who were prepared to try to say something about him when all around others were abandoning the attempt, men who have cared about the truth of God, and have bent all their varied cares and studies that way.

It may be thought that I am harsh and sweeping in my strictures on the contemporary theological scene. Before, then, I go on to be even more so, let me state clearly and emphatically that in the anxiety I am now about to express I include myself. Perhaps indeed I am the only guilty one; you must judge. If I am, my next remarks will obviously be a great waste of time, however, so I apologize in advance, and promise to keep them brief. What worries me deeply about the current Christian scene in this country is, once again, that we have two depressing choices. On the one hand, though God may often be mentioned, his role is described in terms which make him wholly superfluous. To be quite blunt about it, he does absolutely nothing—or rather, the things he is said to do are No-things. He does not, for instance, 'answer' prayer. William Temple started the rot here, with his endlessly quoted maxim about prayer being not to bend God's will to ours but to conform our will to his. There probably never was a time when Christians did more intercession than they do today; but ironically, there also never was a time when they were more dubious in their heart of hearts about its value. All those cycles of prayer, those carefully worked out petitions at the Eucharist, what do they effect? Are they a sophisticated form of telepathy? Why are their results so random? If we say that this is because God answers sometimes Yes, sometimes No, on what basis can we distinguish those answers from what would have happened anyway? These are old questions, but they have considerable staying power. Consequently, the feeling spreads that prayer is basically a way of getting us to do something, perhaps *God's* way of getting us to do something, but not one that requires any action on his part. A similar development can be detected in the area of ideas

about grace. Grace is felt more and more to be something that is given through our own attitudes and behaviour to one another. The acid test here is the increasing emphasis on the Christian community as the indispensable factor. We have to do for each other what God used to do directly in his dialogue with the soul. Extended in a missionary direction this becomes the so-called 'Social Gospel'—the belief that God's love is revealed and effective only through human caring. Without disputing the necessity for human caring—what disciple of Jesus could properly do that?—one may still ask: if the power to care comes from the care we ourselves receive, where does God come into it? Is he, so to say, just the moral *primum mobile*? If so, could not a better case be made for Jesus as this *primum mobile*? And is that not precisely what for many theologians Jesus is anyway, the One who, by words and actions no longer significantly recoverable set in train an enterprise which has developed far beyond his vision, and now has its own constantly maturing character and momentum? One may, if one wishes to be orthodox, ascribe this to God the Holy Spirit, or with Teilhard to the entelechy of a cosmic Christ; but the changes tally so closely to changes in the values and programmes of human society that many cannot help wondering if they are not superfluous hypotheses. Is God not now a strictly constitutional sovereign, who may still announce bravely that 'My Government' will do this or that, but the speech is written by a human Cabinet, and any Bills they can get through God will automatically sign? By virtue of long experience God may know that these measures are disastrous, but there can be no question of blocking them. The built-in consequences of folly and wickedness you may, if you wish, describe as "divine judgment", and there is Scriptural precedent for so doing; but once again we are left with the question, "What difference does God make? Is he a real factor?" The same question-mark stands against the recent revival of language about 'God's purposes in history', or "opening our eyes to what God is doing today." Is it anything more than mere rhetoric, designed to sanctify a variety of political programmes and even violent revolution? Or to bolster up religion by crediting God with the achievements of humankind's better side?

These are well-worn issues, but only because

little has been said to resolve them. One brief and, I consider, very helpful discussion of the problem of divine action in the world—for all these separate questions reduce eventually to that—is the lecture which Maurice Wiles gave some years ago in the University of Manchester, and which is now available in his Explorations volume from S.P.C.K. It was called "Religious Authority and Divine Action", and faced squarely the question, "How can we go on using biblical language about God acting in the world?" Maurice's answer was that God's action, seen as such, is never simply a bare event, unilaterally caused, but a complex of event and response. What makes anything a divine act is the fact that it is responded to as divine, and only so becomes visible for what it is, namely when its divine character is revealed precisely by someone's ability to respond to it as divine. Thus, we may say, the escape from Egypt is revealed as divine act by Moses' acceptance and use of it as such, perils, disasters and all. Supremely, in the Cross of Christ, we see Jesus take failure, defeat and death, and respond to them as God's act, thus not, and it is vital to stress this, not making them God's act by acceptance and use, but revealing the reality of divine action hidden in them and in himself, and thus enabling us to say of them and him as one unity, "This hath God done." Jesus on the Cross thus becomes the (or a) supreme instance of divine action. Wiles is here developing thoughts which he quotes from Peter Baelz, *Prayer and Providence*, and from Schubert Ogden; but the basic approach is, of course, much older. It is present, for instance, in a famous passage of William Law: "Would you know who is the greatest saint in the world? It is not he who prays most or fasts most, it is not he who gives most alms, or is most eminent for temperance, chastity or justice; but it is he who is always thankful to God, who wills everything that God willeth, who receives everything as an instance of God's goodness, and has a heart always ready to praise God for it."

Obviously there are differences between Law's picture and that of the theologians I have mentioned. Law sees all events as determined by God for the best; they are, we may say, particular Providences. The saint is the one who sees this and responds to it worthily; to others it may often be veiled. The view of Baelz is rather that in the response of the saint, and supremely of

Jesus, to the God-given situation there occurs a creative act which makes the event into a divine act, realizes its potential: "Creator and creature are here at one. The divine love has conquered. God remains eternally the same God; but in and through the obedient response of Jesus his activity is more fully discerned because more fully expressed." Ogden's view is slightly different again. Wiles gives the famous words from Ogden's essay on Bultmann: "The New Testament claim 'only in Jesus Christ' must be interpreted to mean not that God acts to redeem only in the event of Jesus and in no other event, but that the only God who acts to redeem any event—*although in fact he redeems every event*—is the God whose redemptive action is decisively revealed in the Word which Jesus speaks and is."

I myself find it hard to attach much meaning to Ogden's words here. The whole sentence is a tangle of confusions. What is meant by God redeeming every event? We have slipped carelessly from God acting *in* the event of Jesus to redeem to God redeeming all events, presumably including the event of Jesus. The argument to be coherent ought to have run from God acting to redeem *in* the Jesus-event to God acting to redeem in all events, but being decisively revealed as doing so in Jesus. Jesus reveals that God is always and everywhere active to redeem. But how? How does an event become redemptive if there is no Jesus to complete it? Were all the other Roman crosses God active to redeem? Hardly so. Perhaps that is why Ogden slipped unconsciously into saying that God acts to redeem every event—simply because so many events seem to need redeeming. But by what possible line of argument can we move from Jesus as a redeeming event to everything as a redeeming event? Is it not much more logical to see Jesus, the particular fact of Jesus, as the *differentia* which makes this event one of divine redemption, distinct from other events? Baelz feels this, but is also aware of another trap opening up. If Jesus' response to his God-given predicament is what makes the event a special act of God, then why call it an act of *God* at all? So he writes: "(God's) activity meets with the creaturely response which it seeks and towards which it is directed. It is fulfilled in the response which it evokes. It penetrates and enables the relatively independent activity of the creature." Once more we watch the anxious

wrigglings of Semi-Pelagianism. In what sense did God's activity evoke Jesus's response? What was God's activity in the case of the Cross? How did it 'enable' Jesus to make his response? And what response? Baelz makes it easy for himself by quoting John's *tetelestai*, "It is finished." Would the argument have run so well, if he had quoted "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me"? All these attempts to explain God's activity in terms of human response, Wiles's as well, eventually collapse, because they simply will not take seriously the reality of *evil*. "All events are divine; but when one includes a human response of love it becomes a special divine act, revelatory and redemptive"—that is what they seem to be saying. "All events also seek to evoke and enable such a response"—that too is explicitly stated. One can ask only, What world are they living in? What century? What earthly paradise?

A long way back I used the words, "On the one hand," to introduce this investigation into those Christians today who seem to be talking about God as real but are not. I have not forgotten that there ought to be an, "On the other hand", which must be briefer. The opposite pole in contemporary Christianity is, of course, that which finds God's activity plentifully: guidance is given which is amazingly vindicated by the results; prayers are answered specifically and speedily; the sick are healed, miraculous gifts of tongues, the literal speaking of other languages, unknown to the speaker, are vouchsafed. These experiences confirm belief in the biblical testimony, and in the traditional interpretation of Jesus and his work. God is very real for such people, and the anomalies and difficulties—why are some prayers answered, not others? what about guidance which leads to human disasters? what about similar phenomena among people of other religions or no religion at all?—are never seriously considered. But it is not hard to see why this wing of the Church grows and advances. It does have something to offer—it has a God. The other approach is one of practical atheism. Can we say anything to stir its adherents from the creeping paralysis that has almost extinguished religious belief in them?

The first point to which we might draw their attention is that the evidence they are prepared to take seriously is carefully limited. It is highly significant that they will not accept, as in any



sense an objective reality, that event without which there would have been no Christian faith at all: the Resurrection of Jesus. That there are many profound problems attaching to this story no one will deny. But only on *a priori* grounds can we rule out the view that the resurrection faith of the disciples was the proper interpretation of phenomena which they experienced, and which were of such a kind as to have existed even if there had been no one to experience them. And if their interpretation was correct then this was an event which within the terms of the universe as we know them is impossible, and therefore, unless we are prepared to suspend judgment indefinitely, calls for explanation in a frame of reference beyond that of the universe we observe.

Those who exclude the Resurrection of Jesus make life easy in one way: a Deist absentee landlord with a soft heart imposes no strain on the mind. He could as easily be true as not. He can be taken out of the cupboard like a Teddy Bear for comfort at times of stress or bereavement. But in the end he is not worth bothering about. He makes no difference. He is certainly not needed to complete our understanding of Jesus, for he bears no resemblance to any God that Jesus ever talked about. Anything worthwhile about Jesus is much more convincingly explained in purely human terms. It has never been in any way clear to me why anyone should see Jesus's death on the Cross as a triumph of love and goodness. All right: let us say that he did die forgiving his enemies. That may have been a triumph over himself and his natural impulses to bitterness and hatred. But it was in no sense a triumph of love and goodness in the world or in the lives of others. There is nothing whatever to suggest that the people he forgave were ever prompted by that to ask themselves whether they needed forgiveness, much less to be changed by it. There is nothing to suggest that his own friends saw it as a victory of any sort, or that their presuppositions could have left them free to do so. By all moral, human standards of judgment the Cross was a disaster and a defeat. It may have been a victory on Jesus's part to accept such defeat rather than bend or desert his convictions—but how do we know that that has anything to do with God? To talk about Jesus as revealing God's love on the Cross is mere self-delusion. There was no way, no way at all in which anyone could at the time have seen in the

Crucified Jesus anything remotely approaching a revelation of God. Nor do I believe that at any period of history would anyone have seen him as such. It is a matter of simple historical fact that we have learned to see him as such only because of the primitive Church's belief in the Resurrection. That is what connects Jesus with God, that and that alone.

But if we accept this resurrection faith then we are, I believe, accepting that bogey of all right-minded philosophically trained theologians, an interventionist God. And once accept that, and where do you stop? In a book which has had an incalculable influence on me, *The Pillar of Fire* by Karl Stern, there is a passage which is relevant to our point. Stern was a Jew who eventually became a Roman Catholic, after fleeing from Germany as a refugee from the Nazis. At one point in his life he went to see Martin Buber: "I told him that I had been studying the Epistle of St John, and that I found there the spirit of Judaism expressed with such purity and in such overwhelming intensity that I could not understand why we did not accept the New Testament . . . To this he replied that he could well understand my enthusiasm. 'However', he said, 'if you want to accept Christ and the New Testament . . . you must also believe in the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection of Christ from the dead.' . . . He began to talk of the giving of the Law on Sinai, and whether God really pronounced the ten commandments himself in his own Voice . . . 'Perhaps there was only one word said.' . . . In retrospect it is interesting that I could not at all understand why the Voice of Sinai as a true physical phenomenon . . . presented a problem to Buber. He was much more logical than I. Because if that Voice was possible, then the Incarnation was possible too." And to a Christian one may say, Accept the Resurrection, and the whole world is open and vulnerable to the activity of God, not in the general sense of creation and sustaining, but at particular historical points. God can and will act within history, not totally submerged in ordinary realities, but between these realities, in unique and discontinuous ways. And what sort of a God is that? How are we to think of him? Theology is about God. Christian Theology ought to be about the God implied by the foundation beliefs of the Christian community.

One more point. Why should God act in that way? I think I have already said enough to hint

why, as I see it, he might have done. The fact of evil—or, if you prefer it, evil facts. The co-existence of evil and good in the universe is proof enough that God's generalised, providential activity is not sufficient to overcome evil. And if divine victory depends on our response to his prompting in creation, then God might as well give up, for the human race at large is not so nice as British or American theologians. If the response of any rational creatures, here or in other worlds, has any essential part to play, then it will not be evoked except by the two-fold assurance that God is with us, in our predicament, that God will not forsake us for all our evil, and that God will win—through the grave and gate of suffering and death no doubt—but win in the end. That is the source of faith and hope and commitment to love; and that is what faith in the Resurrection offers us. The Resurrection suggests indeed a great many things

which I cannot go into now: to mention but one, it suggests to me that evil was spiritual in origin and that the universe was made to be the place and means whereby evil should be defeated. But, speculation apart, I am passionately convinced that there is a divine programme to destroy evil; that we are privileged to play a small part in it by taking up the Cross and following Christ; that God has opened our eyes and inspired our hearts to this by his interventionist act in raising Jesus from the dead; and that to jettison faith in that act as superfluous is to do one's damndest for the victory of evil against God. If our doctrine of God does not allow for the Resurrection of Jesus then Theology's first task must be to find a doctrine of God that does allow for it, for that alone will be the truth. And if there is anything more important than finding for our lost and bewildered race the truth about God I do not know what it may be.

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## CHANGING PATTERNS OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDY

Richard Coggins

It was approximately a century ago that the historical-critical method of studying the Old Testament came to its first flowering. As with most new developments in biblical study it was in Germany that the great pioneering work was done, and the one man above all others with whom this work has come to be associated is Julius Wellhausen whose history of Israel first appeared in 1878. It is not surprising, therefore, that one feature of recent Old Testament study has been the look back over the road that has been travelled during the last century. This has been done most effectively by R.E. Clements, whose *A Century of Old Testament Study*\* provides fascinating sketches of the giants in the field, and with remarkable economy of space outlines the characteristic emphases in all the major areas of Old Testament study.

It is characteristic of the celebration of centenaries and such-like occasions to refer to even greater progress in the future; what has been done so far as only the beginning of yet more remarkable achievements that may be anticipated; and so on. (Here at King's, as we complete our 150th anniversary celebrations, the genre quickly becomes familiar.) Can anything of this kind be said of the historical-critical method of Old Testament study? Ironically, there appears to be an increasing number of Old Testament scholars who would wish to express doubts on this score. They would say that much of its achievement is now substantially complete, and that for further progress we must look to other ways of approaching the Old Testament.

Broadly speaking, there are two main reasons for this view, and, since both can easily be misunderstood, it is important in a survey of this kind to examine them a little more fully. The first is a familiar enough phenomenon in virtually all areas of scholarly activity. It is quite simply the fact of increasing specialisation, and the fragmentation which is its inevitable concomitant. Until quite recently, for example, it was accepted that it was possible to write a history of Israel into which might be interwoven the religious viewpoints expressed by, for example, the pre-exilic prophets. The standard works of Bright and B.W. Anderson, both recently re-issued in revised form, have made of the Old

Testament a 'living world', to borrow a phrase from the title of one of them. Yet their basically historical presentation of the Old Testament material poses problems: in what sense is the frequently made claim to a unique sense of history on the part of Israel a justified one? When can a historical approach properly begin? Is it legitimate to introduce religious value-judgments into a historical account? In general terms it may be said that the optimism with regard to historical reconstruction which was characteristic of the 1950s and 1960s is no longer present. An exhaustive study of the evidence which allegedly linked the Hebrew patriarchs with other peoples and movements in the ancient Near East led T.L. Thompson to basically negative results in his detailed analysis, while the most recent large-scale survey of the problems of Israel's history has done more to show how much remains uncertain, and how specialised the study is, than to solve the various problems raised. The work in question is entitled *Israelite and Judaeon History*, but it is not a history in the traditional sense. Rather, a team of authors, all specialists in the problems of particular periods or areas, set out the nature of the evidence, the extent to which detailed reconstruction is possible, and the main outstanding problems, in a way which is fascinating as a piece of historical analysis, but far removed from the study of the Old Testament as a religious text. (The religious neutrality of the work is perhaps most vividly illustrated by the use of BCE and CE rather than BC and AD as indicators of dates—a forceful reminder of how the very name 'Old Testament' implies a Christian standpoint.) Alongside this, it is an interesting but vain speculation how far the late Pere de Vaux would have been able to carry through his project of a three-volume history of Israel in the Old Testament period planned on more traditional lines; his death means that only the first and part of the intended second volume were completed.

\*The works referred to in the text are listed in detail at the end of the article.

This increasing specialisation has the effect of making scholars increasingly reluctant to be described as 'biblical historians', just as the term 'biblical archaeologist' is now the kiss of death for anyone who wishes to be recognised by his fellow-archaeologists. Those whose expertise is as historians are concerned with the reconstruction of the history of their chosen period, or with its various social and economic aspects; they will use the evidence of the Old Testament as one tool among others in their reconstruction and of course if that reconstruction helps to shed some light on the biblical material, well and good. But to shed such light is not their primary intention. Clearly, for the student whose main concern is with the biblical material, the result is liable to be a divorce—or at least a separation—of the exegete from the historian, traditionally regarded as allies. Indeed, many would now say that as far as texts relating to the pre-settlement period are concerned, only the exegete has the right to speak: such texts, it is argued, cannot be the matter for the historian's study.

This increasing specialisation has been illustrated by reference to the study of history. Other areas could produce parallels, but the historical point is a particularly important one, in view of the overwhelmingly important part played by historical concerns in traditional Old Testament study. Much attention has been devoted to spelling out the historical setting of the different prophets, so that their original words, appropriate to that situation, could be established, and others dismissed as of secondary importance. Far more time has been spent in arguing about the historicity of Moses or the entry into Canaan than in assessing the theological significance of these stories. It may well be that the specialisation which is producing a gap between the historian and the biblical student may to some extent prove to be a blessing in disguise, since it may militate against too great a concern for historicity at the expense of all else. Even biblical theology has not escaped this overwhelming historical anxiety, since the work of the late Gerhard von Rad, with its stress on salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*, to use one of the few German words which has become part of every theological student's vocabulary), remains extremely influential, despite many criticisms which have been levelled against it.

But the feeling that the traditional methods

of historical-criticism may be due for reappraisal is not purely a negative one, arising from a kind of law of diminishing returns. It is caused also by the development of new methods of study: the second of the two reasons already alluded to for uncertainty about the historical-critical method. Some of these new methods of study are far removed from the traditional pattern. Thus, for example, the methods of structuralist linguistics, modelled on the work of C. Levi-Strauss in particular, have been applied on an increasing scale to a variety of Old Testament texts. Some have hailed this innovative work as a great break-through in understanding; others have been more sceptical, at times even cynical, alleging that the structures are simply in the mind of the beholder, and finding it intolerable that they are not subject to any external principle of establishment or refutation. In reply, some adherents of structuralism claim this as a positive virtue; the Bible is literature, and it is impossible to set out testable hypotheses to establish that one kind of literature is 'better' than another. Literary study is bound to be subjective, and, as one of its leading exponents has himself said, "Structuralism is certainly not a science nor even a discipline". And so the debate goes on, owing at least part of its liveliness to sharp differences of opinion among the structuralists themselves. But these differences should not be seized upon as a stick with which to attempt to discredit the whole method of approach, any more than differences of opinion among historical critics discredit their method.

Other new emphases in Old Testament study are less far removed from the traditional forms of that study. One such emphasis concerns the importance of the canon as a datum, a starting-point which defines for us what the Old Testament actually is. An influential book by Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, drew attention to the way in which the 'biblical theology' movement of the last quarter-century seemed to have lost its momentum, and noted as one relevant point the way in which that movement often seemed to use a 'canon within the canon', selecting certain books or parts of books, and rejecting or ignoring others, as the real nucleus which could be usefully put to service in the interests of a biblical theology. As part of his discussion of possible ways out of this situation, Childs suggested that we need to take much

more seriously the canon of Scripture, as providing the appropriate context within which the theological study of the Bible should be undertaken. There are clearly problems here: if, for example, the unit with which we are to work is "the basic Christian confession, shared by all branches of historic Christianity, that the Old and New Testaments together constitute Sacred Scripture for the Christian church" then clearly the relation of the Christian Old Testament to the Hebrew Bible as the Jewish Scripture becomes problematic. Childs' forthcoming volume, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, will be awaited with more than usual interest for its contribution to this question.

Despite—perhaps because of—this and similar problems, the view adumbrated by Childs and others has proved a fruitful topic of debate. Not precisely identifiable with that view, but arising from broadly similar concerns, is what might be termed the 'synchronic/diachronic tension'. The overwhelming emphasis of critical biblical study has been diachronic; to trace back a particular book, or section of a book, or a particular oracle, or even the meaning of a single word, to its origins; and having done that, to regard the result thus attained as in some way 'better' than the larger unit with which our bibles confront us. The New English Bible provides a characteristic end-result of such a process, with its many footnotes to the effect that 'Hebrew adds . . .', as if the words and phrases so dismissed were not part of the 'bible' which the volume sets out to be. To take a familiar example, the headings of the Psalms are ignored entirely, since they are taken as not having been part of the 'original' psalm. Such a series of value-judgments was, of course, typical of many older commentaries, and is still not extinct, but another emphasis in recent years has been the recognition of the propriety of a synchronic approach; to deal with the text in its final form, and to consider how it functions at that stage in its development, which will, after all, be the most familiar one for a majority of readers.

Two books of very different kinds may be noted as exemplifying this tendency. Childs put into practice the principles he had set out in a massive commentary on *Exodus*, which gave full weight to the final form of the text as well as to the various stages by which modern scholarly hypotheses have attempted to trace its previous

development. To an extent almost unparalleled in modern scholarly commentaries, he is able to take seriously and comment sympathetically upon the way in which the book of Exodus has been handled by Jewish and Christian commentators of 'pre-critical' days, as—with unconscious arrogance—works of more than a century ago tend to be described. The result is a remarkable achievement by any standards, though it is questionable how far it is practicable to do justice to all the different ways of approaching a book like Exodus in one volume; Childs' commentary runs to 659 pages, and is inevitably selective in its handling of the material.

The second example is a much slighter work, which in fact owed its genesis to lectures to non-specialist audiences. J.F.A. Sawyer ends his introduction to *From Moses to Patmos* with the reminder that "There is very much more to Old Testament studies than the history and archaeology of ancient Israel", and his concern throughout the book is to give full weight to the history of traditions, drawing out the significance even of those traditions which at one level are clearly not true, such as the characterisation of the Pentateuch as the five 'books of Moses', or the ascription of the whole book of Isaiah to the eighth-century prophet of that name. Just as the psychologist is often more interested in why statements are made in the form that they are than in their precise accuracy as statements, so should it be at one level in the study of ancient traditions, including those of the Old Testament. The historical and critical analysis is an entirely proper study and is not to be neglected; but it is not the whole story, and if it is treated as such, our engagement with the Old Testament becomes seriously deficient.

One further characteristic of recent scholarship which has given a new dimension to some familiar problems may properly be considered at this point, for it is closely allied with, though distinct from, the concern for a synchronic rather than a purely diachronic approach which has already been noted. It is an increasing awareness of the importance of the redactional process through which the various literary units which make up our Bible have gone. Time was when the word 'redactor' was essentially a dismissive term, to be applied to those who cobbled together the ideas and expressions of others which were inherently superior by virtue of their

originality. In part, too, this was related to disputes about authorship. Issues of that kind are not dead, but even strongly conservative scholars now accept that the Pentateuch reflects an extended period of growth, or that Isaiah 40-55 cannot originate in its present form from the eighth-century prophet.

The Book of Isaiah, indeed, provides an excellent example both of the limitations of the older historical-critical method and of the increased interest in the redaction process. The *Good News Bible*, with a nice irony, provides an example of the acceptance of the results of one particular critical approach just at the point when that approach was being called into question. The introduction to the Book of Isaiah states that it "may be divided into three sections: Chapters 1-39 come from a time when Judah was threatened by a powerful neighbour, Assyria. . . . Chapters 40-55 come from a time when many of the people of Judah were in exile in Babylon. . . . Chapters 56-66 are for the most part addressed to people who were back in Jerusalem." It is, of course, very difficult to summarise in a short space the process by which a book like Isaiah may have reached its final form, but such an outline statement would be widely criticised today on two grounds in particular. First, it makes no allowance for the extremely complex redaction history underlying each part of the book. To imply that chapters 1-39 can be dated from the eighth century is especially misleading. Some sections, such as the apocalyptic-like chapters, 24-27, have long been recognised as later, but even those sections which may contain oracles going back to Isaiah himself have also been reworked, remodelled and differently understood by being placed in a fresh context to such an extent as to render questionable the propriety of seeking to establish which individual sections should be regarded as 'genuinely Isaianic'. The theological tendency and the historical background of this redaction process have been much studied in recent years, notably in a very detailed examination by J. Vermeulen, *Du Prophète Isâie à l'Apocalyptique*, which both builds on and moves away from the older traditions of critical scholarship.

Secondly, the note in the *Good News Bible* gives no place to the sense in which the whole book of Isaiah is properly to be understood as a unity. We might be back in the days of some of

the critical introductions which supposed that chapters 40-66 were added purely fortuitously to the earlier chapters. Recent study has drawn out the unity of the book of Isaiah in two related, but slightly different senses. First, there is what may be called a 'compositional unity', that is to say, the redaction process through which the different elements of the whole passed, however complicated in detail, was nevertheless *one* process. Some would speak of an Isaianic school, keeping alive the traditions stemming ultimately from Isaiah of Jerusalem, adding to them and up-dating them in the light of changing circumstances; others would acknowledge a greater degree of uncertainty as to the details of the composition of the book. But in either case, the unity of the book of Isaiah is being asserted, though in a sense markedly different from that of the fundamentalist apologetic of an earlier generation. Secondly, there is what may be called a 'perceived unity', that is to say, the sense in which Isaiah 1-66 is *there*, a fact to be reckoned with. In all probability either the Isaiah scrolls from Qumran or Ecclus 48: 22-25 provide our earlier example of this reflection upon the whole book of Isaiah as a unity; it is clearly assumed in the New Testament, and has been determinative for Jewish and Christian tradition ever since. The limited horizons of the historical-critical method are well illustrated by the fact that Eissfeldt's exhaustive *Introduction*, almost certainly the fullest such treatment of the literary and critical problems of the Old Testament, nowhere gives any consideration to the phenomenon of the book of Isaiah. For him, as for many others before and since, the differing historical backgrounds simply mean that "the two main sections, or more properly the three, must be treated separately".

Shifts of emphasis with regard to Isaiah have been examined in slightly greater detail as an example of a widespread process. The other great prophetic collections have been re-examined in the same way. In regard to Jeremiah, for example, a penetrating study by E.W. Nicholson has shown how the message of the prophet took on a new significance when edited in a Deuteronomistic milieu and used as the basis for *Preaching to the Exiles*. More speculative for the moment is the suggestion that the redaction process underlying the 'Book of the 12'—the Minor Prophets—should also be

regarded as a unified one.

Here again, it is possible to see an important shift of emphasis away from the over-riding concern with an historical approach and critical problems. Conventionally the present order of the 'Book of the Twelve' has been of little concern; rather, the 'Book' has been divided up into its constituent elements, and detailed attention given to Amos, Hosea and the rest, placing each prophet in his historical circumstances, debating how much may be known of the prophet as an individual, dismissing certain parts of each book as secondary, and so on. The process is a familiar one to virtually everyone who has undertaken Old Testament study at almost any level, since the eighth-century prophets in particular have been regarded as an ideal subject of study from 'O'-level onwards.

Yet, as with Isaiah, questions arise. Is the recognition of twelve distinct and separate collections the only proper way to study the minor prophets? What has prompted the present arrangement of the collection as a whole, which reflects only in the most general terms a historical development? What is the role of the book of Jonah, which is formally quite unlike the other books, but has its counterpart in the stories about the prophet to be found in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel? These, and related questions, have led scholars to explore the redaction process of the minor prophets not in terms of a series of separate collections accidentally grouped together at the very last stage, but as a unified process. The point has been well illustrated by R.E. Clements with regard to the hopeful elements to be found in each of the individual books, but widely regarded as secondary by the older generation of critical scholars. Clements argues that this hopeful element is an integral and important part of the redactional process of the prophets. "No hesitation and compunction has been felt in applying this message of hope to each of the books. Such a hope belonged to the prophetic 'message', even though, from a strictly literary viewpoint, it did not derive from each individual prophet."

The quotation is from Clements' *Old Testament Theology*, and in these days when, as we have seen, questions of literary structure are much discussed in Old Testament study, it may seem appropriate to end this article (which has perforce said nothing about many areas of Old Testament study where much new work has

been done) by means of an *inclusio*, that is to say, the return at the conclusion of a passage to the idea or person referred to at the outset. We began by commending Clements' *Century of Old Testament Study* as a valuable guide to the great names and developments of the past hundred years; we can as appropriately end by commending his *Old Testament Theology* as a penetrating and perceptive guide to some of the outstanding issues that are likely to exercise scholars in years to come. Not the least of its merits is to force Old Testament scholars and theologians whose prime concern is with other parts of the total discipline to ask what their relation to one another should be. In a period which, as we have seen, is marked by increasing specialisation, it becomes all the more important to see the place of Old Testament study as part of a larger enterprise.

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(Mention should also be made of the forthcoming volume by the Society for Old Testament Study: G.W. Anderson (ed.): *Tradition and Interpretation*, OUP,

which will continue the series of survey volumes of which the last was H.H. Rowley, *The Old Testament and Modern Study* (1951). Publication has been delayed, but is expected during 1979.)

## SOME REFLECTIONS ON INDIAN SPIRITUALITY

Friedhelm Hardy

### INTRODUCTION

'The dominant character of the Indian mind which has coloured all its culture and moulded all its thoughts is the spiritual tendency. Spiritual experience is the foundation of India's rich cultural history. It is mysticism, not in the sense of involving the exercise of any mysterious power, but only as insisting on a discipline of human nature, leading to a realisation of the spiritual. While the sacred scriptures of the Hebrews and the Christians are more religious and ethical, those of the Hindus are more spiritual and contemplative.'<sup>1</sup>

This quotation from one of the great myth-makers about India, which I selected almost at random from his voluminous writings, could be discussed in a number of different ways. It could be criticized for the facile stylistic transition from 'Indian' to 'Hindu' and the thereby insinuated identification of the two. One could ponder over the somewhat odd contrast between 'religious/ethical' and 'spiritual/contemplative', or explore what is meant here by 'spiritual' which occurs four times in this brief passage. But for our purposes it is sufficient to say that a very specific hierarchy of values is assumed here, from the material, via the 'religious/ethical', to the 'spiritual', and that the drive towards the last-mentioned is regarded as the quintessence of 'India's rich cultural history'. Thus it seems that Radhakrishnan is proposing here the ultimate abstract or formula which can summarize the intellectual history of a large country over a period of three and a half millenia, with all its social ramifications. It is this kind of generaliza-

tion which is widely made by exponents of the Indian religious traditions and which is, for the most part unconsciously, accepted by Western seekers of 'Eastern forms of wisdom', people who are dissatisfied with religion whilst they search for the 'spiritual' or 'mystical' (notice how also Radhakrishnan contrasts these notions),—it is this generalization that there exists a teleological drive towards the spirit, away from ordinary reality, as the defining factor of Indian culture, which has stimulated the present reflections.

However, my aim here is not to 'test' in an empirical manner the validity of Radhakrishnan's interpretation. The knowledge which we in the West have accumulated of the Indian traditions, through the research of scholars, the expositions of Indian *gurus*, the practice of religious or 'alternative' communities and the imagination of novelists<sup>2</sup>, is still far too limited to allow for a complete survey of these traditions. What I shall attempt here is to trace some of these 'tendencies' of 'India's rich cultural history', which Radhakrishnan so easily reduces to a drive towards the 'spiritual', in their development, social position, and mutual interaction. The trends selected here for scrutiny, along with the examples adduced to illustrate them, are not to be understood as 'most typical' or representative of the variegated traditions of India, but as a few signposts scattered over a vast landscape. My usage of the word 'spirituality' is intended to draw attention to the fact that the 'landscape' mentioned in the metaphor constitutes a realm which the more systematic disciplines of philosophy, theology and psychology reflect upon. In other words, an only partly reflex interpretation of reality and man's role in it, the functions of



the spirit in the organization of, and in relating itself to, the full range of the existing. This kind of approach has the advantage that it avoids the limitations of a more conventional compartmentalization, viz. that we can bring together a variety of -isms which are becoming increasingly disjointed in the Western awareness (Buddhism, Hinduism, Vedanta, Tantrism, etc). Moreover, such an abstract realm of 'Indian spirituality' allows itself to be compared to other such 'spiritualities' far more easily than school-specific dogmas, cults and meditation techniques.

*I When all has been achieved...*

'With this sense of freedom came the realisation that... the great journey which he had pursued through so many existences had reached its end, and all that was to be done had been done.'<sup>3</sup>

This description of the Buddha's enlightenment employs expressions for which many parallels can be found in later Indian writings. Thus for instance the medieval Hindu theologian Vedantadeshika (13th/14th century) says that 'there is nothing more to be done here' and that the man who has surrendered himself to Vishnu 'has done what had to be done'<sup>4</sup>. In spite of the chronological and ideological distance between the Buddha and this Hindu theologian, a similar experience of complete freedom, achievement, and happiness is suggested by both. They imply the same claim that there exists a realm or centre of human reality which provides a profound meaning to it, stimulates a feeling that things now are all right and consists of the awareness that nothing now can detract from this fulness. When we compare the paths that are said to lead to this central realization, we notice further similarities. In both cases an inner reorientation takes place: the elimination of selfish desires and narrow concepts of what I am and what is mine, and the surrender of oneself to some transcendental state. Finally, underlying both conceptions is the common assumption that ordinary human existence is unsatisfactory and contingent, and that 'something must be done' to overcome these painful limitations.

The apparent vagueness of this description is intentional, and in fact unavoidable, for it attempts to abstract from the concrete, and as

we shall see presently very different, expressions of early Buddhism and late medieval Vishnu religion a common structural pattern. But it is not an arbitrary abstraction, because in both cases we are dealing with the same technical term (in Sanskrit *krta-krtya*), 'who has done what has to be done'. We have here a good illustration of how certain key-terms, belonging to an Indian spiritual heritage, are employed by different schools quite differently, while preserving at the same time their fundamental significance. Not to draw this vital distinction of two levels, a structural pan-Indian function and concrete, school-specific connotations added to this, accounts for a not infrequent confusion in both Indian and Western writings on the Indian spiritual traditions.<sup>5</sup>

When we turn now to this second level, the concrete significance of the term *krta-krtya*, or, in other words, its meaning within the general framework of the branches of spirituality concerned, important differences emerge. Thus for most forms of Buddhism, 'what must be done' consists i.a. in lengthy and complex meditational exercises (coupled in most cases with stringent ethical observances), while the final state of achievement is consistently left undescribed, since—understood as transcending all human limitations—human language is felt to be incapable of grasping it. Vedantadeshika, as mentioned above, happens to be one of the representatives of theistic Hinduism, a devotee of god Vishnu (who, already for the sake of differentiating him from other god figures known to the Hindu traditions, like Shiva, requires specific mythical and iconographic attributes). According to this theologian, 'what must be done' is reduced to a minimal human effort, which is basically to hand oneself over in total faith to Vishnu's grace. The state of him 'who has done what must be done' is the being sheltered and safe in an inseparable union (with a minimum of individuality left) with Vishnu. The contrast seems now almost total, that between an 'atheistic'<sup>6</sup> spirituality and a mythologically inspired theistic religion, and the structural similarities suggested above now seem feeble and external indeed. But things are never that simple in India; like a thrifty old lady, she never seems to lose anything in her spiritual history. Since Vedantadeshika conceives of Vishnu as a god of grace, he is interested in reducing the human contribution towards salvation to a minimum—the (well-

defined and ritually performed) act of surrender is regarded as sufficient. But it is a step taken on trust alone. For various reasons Vedantadeshika nevertheless allows also for the possibility of a fully conscious realization of what this act of surrender constitutes, viz. through the meditational exercises of yoga.<sup>7</sup> Although we are still far away from a scientific understanding of Indian meditational techniques, at least it can be said that the contrast which had emerged between Buddhism and Hindu theism is now once again considerably softened, because Vedantadeshika also participates in the general tradition of Indian meditational exercises.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, as a philosopher the same theologian is quite capable of employing (again deriving it from a common Indian heritage) a far more abstract and hesitant language when speaking of the absolute Vishnu, as 'from whom all words return, not having encompassed him'<sup>9</sup>. In fact, the complex fusion of the concrete and abstract characterizes medieval Hindu theism as much as it constitutes one of the key topics of its metaphysical discussion.

We shall now move a step further back from this curious blend of contrasts and similarities which distinguish and interconnect two different schools of Indian spirituality, and turn to a more general exploration of the term *krta-kṛtya*. It presupposes a definite two-tier structure of reality: ordinary human existence, which is envisaged as lacking in essential qualities, and a second tier on which these limitations are transcended or cancelled. In addition, it assumes that something must and can be done about moving from the first to the second tier (whether through ethical observances, rituals, meditation, or faith). When put like this, it appears of such a general and almost commonplace character that it could serve as a definition for most religions and ideologies. Additional features now render this two-tier conception specifically Indian. These features can be described with terms that are also becoming well-known in the West: *samsara* which denotes a theoretically endless round of births, deaths, and rebirths (transmigration); *karma* which refers to the quality of one's actions in one life as the determining factor of the kind of life in a subsequent rebirth; and *moksha* as the (state of) liberation from the painful cycle of rebirths. The man 'who has done what must be done' is he who has escaped from *samsara* through the performance

of the right method, has obtained *moksha* and rendered all his *karma*, both positive and negative, inoperative. *Moksha* as the opposite to *samsara* cannot be conceived of as characterized by space, time and matter, and consequently we notice a certain hesitation to describe it.

After the previous warnings about the complex significance of Indian technical terms, we ought to be prepared for the fact that this pattern established for the terms *samsara-karma-moksha* also possesses a second, vastly variegated, concrete level of applications by the different schools. It is on this level that we approach also something like a partial rationale for the differentiation of various popularly used -isms. Thus it is typical of Jainism to regard *karma* as a fine-material entity which is taken in by the soul through all its activities; of Hinduism to connect it with a strange mixture of ethical factors and customary social conventions; of Buddhism, to interpret it in purely ethical terms. The Buddhists may conceive of *samsara* as a sequence of momentary events, and Hindus and Jains as the roaming of souls (really, or only phenomenally, individual) through the dominions of heaven, hell, and earth in successive births. The reasons that are given for human existence in *samsara* in the first place cut again across the borders of the different -isms, and the fact that in most traditions more than one are mentioned shows that we are dealing here with one of the unsolved mystery areas of Indian spirituality. Ethically oriented explanations regard 'desire' as the reason; where the emphasis lies on meditation, as 'ignorance', as a wrong understanding of one's self-identity and as fatal individuation; theistic systems may regard it as punishment for some prior act of self-will; but there is always also the tendency to let all such rational explanations dissolve in the notion of *leela*, the cosmic play which cannot be grasped by human notions of reason and purpose. Similar differentiations take place in the concrete application of the terms *moksha* and the means to achieve it in the different schools and traditions.

Great prominence is given to two other terms, *atman* and *brahman*, in the literature on Indian thought. These terms derive from the ancient Upanishads and thus have remained restricted to Hinduism. The first term denotes an empirically individuated 'self' or 'soul' which transcendently merges—in some form—with *brahman*, the self and origin of the cosmos and the *locus* of

*moksha*. But it seems preferable to me not to use these terms in our present discussion, firstly because they are not shared (even conceptually, not just terminologically) by Jains, Buddhists and certain marginal, non-Upanishadic schools of Hinduism, and secondly because even in the majority of Hindu schools that do use the concepts, their concrete level of significance is confusingly differentiated. Thus for example Vedantadeshika identifies *brahman* with Vishnu, other Hindus may regard it as a state of pure, quality-less experience, etc.

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This curious interaction of a structural pattern and a great variety of concrete expressions, an interaction marked by the two levels of significance of inherited technical terms, can be understood more clearly when its historical and social dynamism are taken into account. It can then be perceived as a process of discussions, modifications, redefinitions and changing attitudes which was motivated by the encounter of basically different spiritualities, one of which acquired a kind of normative prestige in society. The extant sources allow us to specify at least in their general outlines the crucial events which stimulated the later complex and variegated developments. This takes us back, very roughly speaking, to 800 B.C. This is the period when the documents for the first time begin to refer to the *samsara: moksha* dichotomy (directly in the earliest Upanishads, and indirectly also in a reconstructed 'proto-Jainism'). On the other hand, the oldest documents of Indian religions as such, the hymns of the Vedas, are traced as far back as c. 1500 B.C. In addition to these approximately seven centuries of an earlier religious literature, many later sources also contain religious material which is unaffected by the *samsara: moksha* dichotomy. This suggests that the two-tier interpretation of reality was formulated only at a certain point in the Indian spiritual history, and that only in a certain milieu. While the first assumption suffers from the general shortcomings of an *argumentum ex silencio* (and is rejected by advocates of a monolinear continuity of the Indian religious tradition—a view not shared by the present writer), it is easier to support the second inference. The early sources reveal quite prominently as the expounders of this particular conception communities of people who have

renounced all worldly ties (with family, possessions, etc.) and are wandering through the country begging for their livelihood. These are early Buddhist and Jain scriptures; the case of the Upanishads is somewhat more complex.<sup>10</sup> We can assume that it was primarily the spiritual influence of these wandering ascetics upon the rest of society which accounts for the gradual, and ultimately all-pervasive acceptance of the *samsara: moksha* doctrine, in some form, as the structural backbone of spirituality. At least for the early period, a man 'who has done what must be done' inevitably is somebody who has renounced all ties with normal life and society and become a homeless wanderer or monk. In its origins we are thus dealing with a form of spirituality which both in its content (*samsara: moksha*) and in the life-style adopted by its adherents, totally rejects the ordinary connections of man with his environment and the society in which he lives.

This rejection shows a number of corollaries, some of which may be illustrated here. These examples show that in a variety of ways, emotionally and intellectually, the fact of the unsatisfactoriness of *samsara* is driven home, and that the motivation for abandoning it draws both on ordinary life experiences and more metaphysically oriented elements. Thus we find haunting, sometimes almost grotesque, poetic dissections of the human body as 'the storehouse of phlegm, bile, pus, faeces. . .' etc. These aim at the realisation that all cravings and desires—for personal welfare, possessions, ornamentation, and above all, physical love—are misplaced and essentially lacking in an appropriate object. Experiences of ordinary life, like love, affection and happiness, are shown to be transient and therefore not really positive. Thus even the greatest moment of bliss, by being but a moment, is from a higher level of observation nothing but suffering. The whole edifice of what we regard as the 'person', including our self-awareness, is broken up into various components, and only a 'self' or 'soul' may be left as non-contingent, in some cases (Buddhist), even this last centre of personal identity is rejected. The world of our ordinary awareness is presented as lacking in any essence, meaning or reality, and is frequently compared to a dream or a conjuror's trick. On the whole this side of Indian spirituality is pessimistic and indeed world-negating.

Unfortunately, any critical investigation into

the background of the appearance and rapid expansion of this spirituality soon runs into the darkness of pre-history. We are naturally inclined to ask what sort of circumstances and experiences gave rise in a society which had shown itself in the earlier—and some subsequent—sources to be enthusiastically this-worldly and earthy, to its theoretical and practical negation. Yet our sources do not allow us to answer such questions. One might argue from a purely logical point of view that the experiential content of *moksha* presupposes the re-evaluation of *samsara*: that in the light of such meditatively induced 'altered states of consciousness' ordinary reality manifests itself with all its limitations and sufferings. But the extant documents on the whole present the reverse sequence (certainly biographically the only logical one): an initial dissatisfaction with, and then insight into, the contingent nature of *samsara*, and a quest for, and eventual achievement of, *moksha*. Moreover, meditation in the earliest sources is not the only means of achieving liberation; the ancient Jain works make no reference to meditational techniques, but to very severe forms of self-mortification.

However this may be, the fact remains that in the following centuries and millennia the conception of *samsara:moksha* increasingly dominated the structure of Indian spirituality. The details of this expansion are complex and go beyond the scope of the present observations. But one aspect of this expansion may be singled out for a brief mention. One of the effects of the growing prestige of this new conception of the world and the desire to escape from it was the erosion of highly developed nature-philosophical and quasi-scientific schools of thought.<sup>11</sup> A number of such disciplines concentrated on a systematic analysis of facets of reality (like the Sanskrit language, logical thought, art, and cosmology) in terms of a limited number of sets of basic factors and the laws governing their interaction. Sometimes one gets the impression that the intention behind this approach was in fact mechanistic, anti-transcendentalist. Precisely because they concentrated on the empirical world, viz. *samsara*, they were increasingly felt to be taking it too seriously and wanting in positive references to the other tier of reality, *moksha*. Although they made attempts to adapt themselves to the changing

times and new demands of society, other schools of a directly 'mystical' concern soon pushed them into a background position of increasing sterility and non-experimental dogmatism. Doubtlessly the advocates of a contemporary 'youthquake' will see in this a comforting parallel with changing attitudes towards the sciences in the West. . .

This example illustrates, nevertheless, only one direction of the line of developments. The very fact that the Indian traditions produced such a rich variety of concrete interpretations of the *samsara:moksha* pattern suggests also an opposite direction, viz. an impact, often subversive and concealed, of other areas of Indian spirituality upon the above-mentioned pattern, thereby bringing about certain transformations and modifications. The enormous prestige of this structure of thought allowed other facets of spirituality to survive by adopting its terminology and the abstract connotation of the terms, and to have an effect on the pan-Indian context. Thus extensive resources remained available to feed and keep alive the *samsara:moksha* structure. On the abstract level, the dichotomy was kept intact, and the *krtya*, 'what must be done', continued to denote a move away from ordinary reality to the glorious state of *moksha*. In *this* sense Radhakrishnan simply paraphrases the situation when speaking of a 'spiritual tendency' in Indian thought and culture. In *this* sense the Western image of India as the country of world-renouncers and supramundane wisdom is adequate. Yet there is far more to Indian spirituality than this. What has been discussed here so far could only be described as the 'essence' of the Indian tradition, if the abstract 'normative' is taken for the whole living, concrete organism of spiritual history. Such a living whole presupposes the interaction of different components, which are localised in specific social and regional *milieux*, and nothing is gained by ignoring these—grantedly complicating—factors. The following section of these reflections will explore a few of these additional facets. As we shall see, even when 'all has been achieved which had to be done', when the Indian mystic and ascetic has totally left the world of ordinary events behind, and when in the splendour of *moksha:samsara* has been consumed, the inner road of Indian spirituality has not yet come to an end. What about

other people, and what about my earthly existence? Why are they there in the first place? These questions could not be suppressed.

#### NOTES

1. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. I, London, 1923<sup>1</sup>, 1929<sup>2</sup>, etc., pp. 41f.
2. To my mind come for instance the somewhat heavy-handed explorations of Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), Huxley's *Eyeless in Giza* (1936), Canetti's *Die Blendung* (1935), English: *Auto da fe*, (1946), also in Penguin modern classics, and the far more humorous play with Indian ideas of Alther's *Kinflicks* and Hasek's *Good Soldier Svejk*.
3. Quoted from M. Pye, *The Buddha*, London, 1979, p. 31.
4. *Rahasyatrayasaram*, ed. Narasimmacharya, Madras, 1920, pp. 457, 459.
5. Indian exponents will tend to present the significance of these culturally inherited notions restrictively in terms of their own school tradition or spiritual background. Western interpreters often lack familiarity with the varieties of concrete contexts, and manipulate the terms in a far too abstract or limited manner, sometimes within a totally different system of spirituality.
6. A label of Buddhism that was fashionable with previous generations of students. Von Glasenapp's *Der Buddhismus—eine atheistische Religion* (1954<sup>1</sup>, 1966<sup>2</sup>) was translated into English as *Buddhism—a non-theistic religion* (London, 1970).

7. Through *yoga* Vishnu becomes not only potentially an object of direct human experience, but this experience also serves as a complementary source of human knowledge of him. Moreover, Vedantadeshika belonged to the school of Ramanuja, which looks back upon the twelve Alvars, yoga-practising saints, with veneration. Finally, unlike some of his theological opponents who held an extreme faith-only position, he was not prepared to abandon altogether the other facets of the inherited religious tradition which included yoga.

8. There are direct links between the 'classical' yoga of Patanjali and Buddhist meditation (compare e.g. E. Frauwallner, *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*, vol. I, Salzburg, 1953, pp. 163-73 (there exists an Indian English translation of this important work, Delhi-Benares 1970); between these and the *Bhagavad-gita* (see e.g. chapter VI, verses 11-17) from where Ramanuja and his school take their theistic yoga (calling it *bhakti*).

9. He derives this phrase from *Taittiriya-Upanishad* II, 4, 1; 9, 1; and the *Bhagavad-gita* IX, 3.

10. On the one hand, Hinduism, like Jainism and Buddhism, has its version of the 'renouncer', the *sannyasi*. After he has pursued other aims in his life, like founding a family, a man is encouraged to 'renounce' in the final stage of his life. Clearly this arrangement is meant to overcome the 'anti-social' drive in the renouncer movement. In a manner which is not quite clear, Hinduism connects the Upanishads with the *sannyasi* as the sacred scriptures relevant to him. But in the *earliest* Upanishads such a connection between *sannyasi* and the pursuit of *moksha* is not fully established. We hear there, e.g. about kings teaching about it, and about married priests happy to take home with them cattle they have won in a debating competition about such topics.

11. Details about these schools can be found in vol. II (Salzburg, 1956, English: Delhi-Benares, 1970) of Frauwallner's work.

Part II: *Return to the World* and a further article will be printed in future editions of the *Review*.

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## HEGEL, BARTH, AND THE RATIONALITY OF THE TRINITY

Lisabeth During

### *I The problem of Objectivity in Theology*

It would seem nothing short of suicidal for a theology, especially that theology which is part and parcel of a revealed religion, to entertain serious doubts about whether the object of its science can be known at all. The very least a revealed religion could say for itself is that in it God has given Himself to be known objectively. For it to assert the opposite would be to say that it is the religion in which God is *not* revealed. Yet the belief in, and even the desire for, the objectivity of God-as-God in His revelation has not always been as axiomatic as it might sound. It is a contention more honoured in the breach than in the observance; and never was it more studiously betrayed than in the theological generations immediately preceding Hegel and Barth, against which they both rebelled. The single, perhaps greatest, cause of their discontent was the loss of the notion of the objectivity of God, the knowability of God. Of course, the ways in which Hegel and Barth try to reclaim that knowability are incommensurable: Barth places it in the context in which God speaks about Himself through act, event, and statement: Hegel grounds it in the relatedness of human and divine through the Trinitarian dialectic, and posits man's consciousness of God as a moment in the Notion of God Himself. But their common reaction against this immediate inheritance in theology, on surprisingly similar grounds, is as good a place as any to begin a comparison of Hegel and Barth.

We know a fair amount about the orthodoxy taught at the Tübingen Seminary during the time of Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling. It was a combination of Kantian rationalism with the face-saving "Vernunfttheologie" of G.B. Storr. Biblical interpretation and exegesis, when not merely philological, were made to conform to the "universal laws of reason", and morality, specifically bourgeois-German morality. Following Kant, Storr denied the possibility of knowing God objectively, as Being or Person. God affects our life only because He is posited as the ground and justification of moral activity. Hence, God can only be known indirectly, because any possi-

bility of a transcendental apprehension of a non-phenomenal object is discounted. God can be asserted as no more than the ground for our implicit faith in man, for our pious expectation of the coincidence of happiness and virtue, for all that is promised by the rather banal doctrine of eudaemonism. It is the moral law within, not the glory of God without, that properly excites our awe. But we, unlike Napoleon's astronomer, need the hypothesis of God. Without the "ideas" of God and immortality, the moral law would hold no force or promise. This, roughly speaking, was the accommodation of Christianity in Kant's *Religion within the limits of Reason Alone*.

Storr was the head of the Tübingen "Stift" (seminary), and, as such, a public official, responsible both for the conservative politics of the prince and the conservative Lutheranism of the state. He was not satisfied with the few watered-down principles that Kant could permit Christianity. Storr wanted to save the over-riding authority of revelation, as a principle against which even the self-determining human reason could not legislate. In Storr's orthodoxy, stigmatised by his students Hegel and Schelling as that old "Sauerteig" (leaven), the authority of revelation, and with it the infallibility of tradition, had to be accepted as the determining ground of man's moral judgments. To reconcile those truths knowable only on the basis of authority with those intuitively accepted from within, Storr had to pay a price. The Biblical books and doctrines which could not be assimilated to reason had to be discarded as uncanonical. Incompatible with the principles of reason were the doctrines of satisfaction and the very Trinity itself, as well as such Biblical texts as the Book of Revelation (a notorious stumbling block to rationalist Christians, which, as we might recall, Whitehead suggested replacing with Pericles' Funeral Oration!). Storr's orthodoxy was form without emotion; the skeleton of Enlightenment without the energy, without the indomitable faith in freedom. His kowtowing to the repressive prince, and his compromising of the principles of Kant's autonomy, drew upon Storr the contempt of his brilliant pupils, a

contempt that ensures him an immortality he would otherwise have no hope of earning.

The second, and more powerful, threat to the objectivity of possible knowledge of God, was a religious sensibility always deeply rooted in Swabia. The influence of Pietism continued unabated till the end of the nineteenth century, engendering on its way the strange spectacle of the Christ of Nietzsche. Nor had it diminished one iota of its attraction at the time of Heidegger and Barth. Indeed, a wildly disproportionate number of German geniuses have sprung from Pietist backgrounds. Besides the obvious examples of Hoelderlin, Schleiermacher, and the backlash of Herder, even a realist like Goethe flirted with Pietism as a young man. Yet the Romantic and introspective asceticism of the Pietist communities held no appeal for Hegel, who caricatured them in his early descriptions of the reality-shy "Liebesgemeinde" (Love-brotherhood), and further deflated their ambivalent spirituality in his polemic *Glauben und Wissen* (Faith and Knowledge), and in the Unhappy Consciousness section of the *Phenomenology*. Part and parcel with Pietism, at least in Hegel's opinion, was the religious subjectivism of Jacobi, and the "Gefühlstheologie" of Schleiermacher. What Pietism has in common with these various genres of religious subjectivism is a belief in the Being and Knowing of God as pre-eminently negative, indirect, mystical, and emotional. God is wholly non-objective, wholly ineffable. An interior experience of passivity, surrender, and non-conceptuality is the mind's only road to God. Schelling appropriated these Pietist doctrines to his own notion of the transcendental intuition—a medium of awareness peculiar to nature and art—and, partly through his influence, Kierkegaard redefined faith as inwardness.

For Kierkegaard, as for the more radical of the religious subjectivists, it is an offence to the mystery and paradoxicality to conceive Him as having an objective, particular presence. For this would imply, first, that God is as accessible to the common consciousness of ordinary humanity as He is to the contemplative, or aesthetic, or suffering, individual. Secondly, an objectively present and apprehensible God implies to the anti-Hegelian Kierkegaard a yet-unreconciled opposition, an "Entgegenstehung", of God and the individual. This opposition is the definition

of sin, of the finite's resistance to the infinite. Kierkegaard grants that this moment of realization, recognising that one is in a state of sin and opposition, is necessary for the individual to come to consciousness of his dependence on God's saving grace. In this "alienated" state, God can appear as objective, as a specific presence of an Other, over-against the individual.

The trouble with Kierkegaard's allowance for the objectivity of God is that it is limited to this appearance to the sinful individual prior to faith. The objectively present God designates and exposes an unreconciled religious relationship. Such a God is not the Christian God of love and forgiveness. He is the Judge, who is to be feared rather than loved, who discovers and testifies to the guilty. Kierkegaard's objective Judge is intended as a slur on Hegel's call for "objectivity" in religious knowledge. But, on the other hand, this objective God has forgotten that Law has become Gospel, and that Christ is already present as Mediator, as the incarnate guarantor of God's Election of man and his mercy. The objectively present God, for Kierkegaard, cannot represent the promise of Christ. In Kierkegaard's philosophy, the divine and human natures cannot appear in the objective manifestation of God as a trinitarian unity of act and being. Their unity is reserved, as is the unity of the human individual in faith, for a state of inwardness, in which the contemplative individual is detached from the world of activity. In a state of "objectivity", and in the objective appearance of God, the juxtaposition of the two natures can only be, as it were, external to each other. The "God-man" is an unreconciled and grotesque paradox, towards which our intellect should not make any attempt to mitigate the incompatibility.

The telling flaw in Kierkegaard's doctrine of subjectivity, (which we consider an ultimately non-Trinitarian resolution of the "Problem" of Christianity, or, as Kierkegaard expressed it, the problem of "being a christian"), is that he must deny the appearance of God in, to, and with the community. From this light we can understand why Barth had to reject Kierkegaard as a mentor. When Barth freed his early concept of eternity from the "Babylonian captivity of timelessness", he also recognized that for Christian theology to make sense, it must be *Church Dogmatics*. For Kierkegaard Christianity can never produce a *Church Dogmatics* just as it can never produce



the dreaded "system", because it is, before and above all, subjectivity. Any allowance to the "objectivity" of God will always threaten to become the objectification of a "god", and therefore the property of a culture. Kierkegaard wrongly distinguishes the difference between Christendom and Christianity as the difference between an objectifiable God and a non-objective one.

Yet there is a certain justice to Kierkegaard's fear, at least insofar as it is a response to Hegel. For Hegel's complicated triumph over the distinction between the objective and the subjective depends as much on his equation of Christianity with the social community as it does on his reconciliation of the infinite and economic Trinities. If Christianity is to be a sophisticated and universally triumphant religion of the people, of statesmen and philosophers as well as lonely knights of faith, then the unholy notion of the "bourgeois-Christian world", (that is, early 19th century Protestant Europe) is not far behind, and, as Kierkegaard complains, it requires no more than possession of a passport and a daily reading of the papers to make one a Christian. (The source for this jibe, though I am not sure whether the anecdote was still circulating at the university in Kierkegaard's time, was an epigram from Hegel's unpublished Berlin notes where he writes that prayer has been replaced by reading the papers as our morning benediction.)

## *II Barth and the Dogmatic response to Subjectivism*

But if Hegel's identification of Christianity and society must firmly be rejected, if on no other grounds than that it may waver towards an apology for "German Christianity", Kierkegaard's subjectivism, and with it the non-dogmatic, non-positive theology of Schleiermacher, must be rejected with equal firmness. Undoubtedly Barth did learn from Kierkegaard, as he believed all theologians must. He saw Kierkegaard as an antidote both to liberalism and the threat of anthropological inversion in theology, as a bulwark against complacency; and as a reminder that the theologian is never wholly at home in the world, even if he *must* be, a bit more than Kierkegaard, at home in the Church. Yet if the task of theology is to continue, indeed

to exist at all, it must discard Kierkegaard's stubborn paradoxicality. Barth realized this when he laid aside the dialectics of the divine meteor, the "existentialist" dialectics of *Romans*. For these left only one possibility for theology, that of silence, or, as Jenson suspected, that of agnosticism. As Hegel also realized, for God to be known as Spirit, "He must do more than thunder". The *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. II, part 1, explains the repudiation of subjectivity, and the conviction of God's dialectical incomprehensibility, by the doctrine of God's freedom to make Himself objectively knowable. This noetic and positive freedom is referred to its foundation, its terminus a quo, in God's self-objectification in the Trinity.

What is wrong, above all, with the theology of Kierkegaard, Schleiermacher, and the entire 19th century tradition that Barth inherited, is that it lost by the wayside the doctrine of God. Wilfully detached from all positively-given dogma, and isolated, at least in Kierkegaard's case, from the life and collective legislation of the community, the 19th century's definition of God collapsed into a self-analysis of the pious individual. Feuerbach only exposed what the theologians had long been sure of: that God was the hypostatisation of the consciousness of the religious individual, and the divine attributes were the estranged possessions of a self-impooverished humanity.

The recognition of the dangers of anthropological inversion and subjectivism in religious knowledge (e.g., if man creates God, seeing in the depths only his own idealised face, why can he not create a more utilisable "man-God"?) left only one option for dogmatic theology: the return of God to the centre. For Barth, the restoration of objectivity to the knowledge of God is Christological, like everything else. The double structure of the transcendent and revealed Trinities is unified by its common pivot, the Incarnate Christ. Christ has been present from eternity in the innertrinitarian life, so that there never was a point when the Election of the Son of God, and in him, mankind, was rejected or doubtful. This is the point Kierkegaard seems to have neglected in his dialectic of despair and the leap of faith. As Barth says, there never is anything like a leap to be spoken of between Adam and Christ, between man-in-sin and man-with-God, or, if there is anything like a

leap, it is entirely taken from God's side, never ours. There are no acrobatics of faith.

Yet the seeming effortless, the self-evidence of faith, is inconceivable, even in Barth's terms, without the objectivity of the revelation of Christ. At the same time as he is revealed to us as man, as finite creature, Christ is the eternal Alter-Ego of God. He is the other-side of the Father; God's partner in His incomprehensible and hidden discourse with Himself. Because *Christ* reveals God to us, what *we* know and apprehend as God is God, not a mere shell or disguise of Himself. This is the security, the veracity, that God's bond with us guarantees. God promises not to deceive us, to the everlasting discomfiture of Anselm's Fool, and Doctor Johnson's foot—(which, together with a stone, thought to prove the existence of the material world; proving in the process only the indisputable reality of pain.) Barth's apparently unobjectionable formulation of God's truthful self-disclosure contains a radical reorientation of what is traditionally pointed to as God's freedom, God's transcendence. For what God's freedom implies is not his ability to seal Himself off from the comprehension and curiosity of man, to remain unmoved and unmoving in the face of man's concerns. God's freedom is the power to make Himself apprehended by man, to overcome man's lack of comprehension—for there are no barriers to God's effectual freedom, not even the stupidity of man. His freedom is the ability to enter into fellowship with man; His freedom is to turn the absolutely unlike to absolutely alike, and to appear to us as a creature. His freedom is never passive, never separable from its potentiation and realisation.

Hence, what God's freedom *means* is *said* in the Incarnation, and what the Incarnation testifies to and promises is God's love, which is equivalent to His freedom. God's transcendence does not imply His impassibility, His repose, as it were, in some spatial-nonspatial realm beyond the finite. Nor does it imply His aloofness from any and all determinations of activity, becoming, and change. It implies precisely the opposite. His transcendence means that He is able to remain Himself and with Himself while taking on any and all of an infinite variety of determinations, while becoming immanent in these determinations, and determined in any and all of these forms of immanence, without departing from

Himself, from His infinity, His mystery, or His divinity.

“The Biblical witness to God sees His transcendence of all that is distinct from Himself, not only in the distinction as such, which is supremely and decisively characterised as His freedom from all conditioning by that which is distinct from Himself, but furthermore and supremely in the fact that without sacrificing His distinction and freedom, but in the exercise of them, He enters into and faithfully maintains communion with this reality other than Himself as Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer. . . The thought of the divine transcendence, if intruded as a substitute (i.e. for *aseitas*) can denote the being of God only when it is remembered that it cannot be exhaustively defined as God's opposition to the reality distinct from Himself, that it can also signify God's positive fellowship with this reality and therefore His immanence within it, that in this connexion, because it has in fact pleased God to establish and maintain this fellowship, it can have “immanence” as its primary connotation, and only within this framework and as an explanation of its method denote what the the idea immediately and intrinsically suggests, so that it truly describes the being of God only when it describes Him in His own characteristic freedom which He enjoys beyond and above His opposition to the reality distinct from Himself.” (CD, II/1, p.303)

### *III The Objective History of the Trinity*

The Biblical narrative of the events and experiences constituting God's history with man is, therefore, a “historical” account of this Transcendence-in-Immanence, culminating, of course, in the focus of all these determinations of the divine immanence: the Biblical witness to Christ resurrected. The formula “transcendence-in-immanence” is only an analysis, an interpretation or conceptual account of these divine occurrences. Like all theological explanations, it can be employed as long as it is useful or illuminating, and as easily discarded. The content and veracity of God's freedom is not explained by any formula, but by the activity of Christ. In Christ God shows that He can be eternal and

unlimited not only in infinitude, but within our own finitude. This is His freedom in immanence, the positive aspect of His freedom which at the same time includes and is safeguarded by the negative aspect of that same freedom. His negative freedom is His hiddenness from His creation. He is not at the world's disposal, nor conceivable within its categories.

This, the purely transcendent aspect of His freedom, is expressed in His innertrinitarian life before and apart from Creation. Yet even here, the divine and inaccessible freedom that is forever closed to us as the mystery of God's knowledge of Himself yet includes the possibility and the precondition for our knowledge of God. Even in pure, vertical transcendence, so to speak, the structure of immanence already exists in the form of God's immanence to Himself. The pre-worldly Trinity establishes God's self-identification, His declaration as Subject. God's primary subjectivity is already relational: it exists in three distinct modes of self-reference and self-reflection. The actuality of His worldly and historical determination, His worldly, historical, and creaturely fellowship, is pre-posed in the Trinity, thus from all eternity. The possibility and precondition of His relationship to the other, the creature distinct from Himself, is posited in the Trinity in His relationship to the Other who is *not* distinct from Himself, from His own activity and being.

God is He who establishes the primary analogy from which all further relations, including those of knowledge, generation, and discourse, are derived. The "truths" or "self-definitions" of Creation, if such things can be spoken of at all, are thus always analogous and derivative. Creation itself can never provide the basis for any over-arching analogies, nor for the interpretation of analogies and signs, but must always allow itself to be interpreted through something else. Otherwise, the "truth" evoked, the truth we refer to by "the wisdom of the world", is simply tautological—sufficient for the experiential and experimental definitions of art and science, but unable to provide a primary rationale of being and history.

The truth of the objectivity of God's Revelation in His work for us and in His Word given to us has its foundation in the a priori revealing of God to Himself. Barth calls the "secondary objectivity" that in which God elects

some determinate medium of "sacramental reality" through which He reveals Himself. This secondary objectivity is made possible because God has first been objective in a primary way to Himself. And these two objective forms of God's Being correspond to each other. Furthermore, any other supposed knowledge of God, or route to the knowledge of God, is excluded as well as rendered unnecessary. The Being and self-knowing, or self-interpreting, of God in His own object (the Son) is the precedent for His making Himself an object of our knowing. Because revelation is first the self-interpretation of God, it can be our true knowledge of God. Revelation is objective in two fashions, two directions: it is God as objective to Himself, and it is God as objective to us. Indeed, the originality of the dogmatic theology that reasons *from* revelation, rather than *around* it, or making vaguely hopeful gestures *towards* it, is this confident subscription to the given object, i.e. the content of revelation. And it is the belief in God's making Himself objective and knowing Himself objectively that licenses this trusting submission. It allows us to assume that what we see in the *Gestalt* of Revelation is not our projection, nor a further definition of our subjectivity, but part of the statement and declaration of God.

Not only has God in His Word given us a knowledge of Himself that is truthful, real, and unapproximate, He has precluded even the seeking for any further clues in the approximations represented by the reasoning from analogy. Barth must stand by the assertion of the objective knowability of God, if for no other reason, as a limit on the agnosticism to which his own early dialectic theology could lead. The dissociating paradoxes of dialectic theology had undermined any human possibility of knowledge. In the face of God, that intolerable abyss, nothing could be stated directly. Every human No was a Yes and every human Yes a No. But... placing the origin of God's objectivity in the pre-creation Trinity converts the *human* impossibility, still unacknowledged, into an *actuality* already posited into being by a prevenient God. Barth's dogmatic doctrine of the Trinity can be seen as a successful replacement for the suspended dialectics of *Romans*. No less than their thundering prohibitions, it is a defence against any metaphysical or mythological speculation about God. The trinitarian locus of

the objectivity of God is a wedge against all analogia entis, past and future.

In the prohibition of all ideas of God reached by analogy from the world and from human consciousness must be included the Kierkegaardian and Schleiermacherian locating of God in inwardness. For this identification involves an analogy between the subjective experience of religious consciousness and the mind of God. The unbridgeable dialectic or *diastasis*, common both to Kierkegaard and *Romans*, between our ignorance and God's aloofness from all human categories, has been resolved by Barth in the answer of the Doctrine of the Trinity. The Trinity is the truth, the manifestation of God's knowledge of Himself and self-relation, and therefore the standard, the norm, and the limitation against which every created determination and all theological language must be measured. The divine Trinity, that we do not experience or perceive directly, that does not "appear" to our experience or inhere in the form of a moral imperative, is still the guarantor that the objectivity we do encounter (in the figures and signs of revelation) is the statement and description of the true subject. In other words, the Trinity is the reality, never detectable in philosophy, that underlines and forms the truth of the propositions of experience, the propositions of discourse and approximation. Equally, the Trinity is the universal logical or structural form, the "eidos", that permits the propositions "God shows Himself", "Deus dixit", to make sense. It is the objective referent and the formal ground of possibility, the primordial axiom.

The Trinity is the grammar of revelation as well as its meaning, while its content is the revelation itself, that is, Christ. The Trinity is the absolute unity in which the propositional identity of the subject and the predicate is grounded. It is also the history, the descriptive movement, which echoes in the modalities of becoming, dynamism, and change, that which happens in the proposition. The ontology of the Trinity, long sought in metaphysical formulae, is for Barth an event: a complex, or community, of happening and act. The unity of its "modes" and appropriations resembles the unity composed of the acting subject, the specific action, and the final complex event. The Trinity is an interdependent totality which is nonetheless a single and objective "act", a "happening".

The Trinity stands for the absolute identity and the mutual recognition, beyond all possibility of severance, of the Subject and the Object in action. In other words, the doctrine of the Trinity is the analysis, grammatical, contextual, and programmatic, of the proposition, "God reveals Himself." And what He reveals is Himself.

#### *IV Hegel vs. Kant: The self-objectifying Absolute?*

The two sides of Barth's impressive and closely reasoned defence of objectivity in theology are what we have described as the definition of "transcendence in immanence", and the self-analytic formulation of the Trinity. Whether Hegel as successfully defends his contention for the necessity of objectivity through his trinitarian doctrine, and whether he can go on doing so without tottering on the edge of what Barth calls the "vulgar belief" in panentheism, remains to be seen. But the pressing nature of some such defence seems equally apparent to both. To return to the historical context for a moment, what Barth reacted against was the subjectivism of the old Pietist and Quietist tradition, combined with the liberal Protestantism engendered by Hegel and his heirs. But the same sort of subjectivism was already challenged by Hegel in 1803: in the essay "Faith and Knowledge", he launched a full-fledged assault on the subjectivist camp in epistemology and religion, in which he included Kant, Fichte, Jacobi, and Schleiermacher. Nor had Hegel forgotten the issue in 1830, when he took time out in his brief and highly compressed Encyclopedia paragraphs to satirise his old foes:

"The old conception of Nemesis, which made the divinity and its action in the world only a levelling power, dashing to pieces everything high and great, was confronted by Plato and Aristotle with the doctrine that God is not *envious*. These assertions (and more than assertions they are not) are the more illogical, because made within a religion which is expressly called the revealed; for according to them it would rather be the religion in which nothing of God was revealed, in which he had not revealed himself, and those belonging to it would be the heathen 'who know not God.' If the word 'God' is taken in earnest in religion at all, it is from Him, the theme and centre of religion, that the method of divine knowledge

(i.e. theology) may and must begin: and if self-revelation is refused Him, then the only thing left to constitute His nature would be to ascribe envy to Him. But clearly if the word 'Mind' or Spirit is to have a meaning, it implies the revelation of Him. . . It may almost cause surprise that so many, and especially theologians whose vocation it is to deal with these Ideas (of the divine Mind), have tried to get off their task by gladly accepting anything offered them for this behoof. And nothing serves better to shirk it than to adopt the conclusion that man knows nothing of God." (*Philosophy of Mind*, para. 564)

The two philosophic fictions Hegel sets himself to expose with his doctrine of objectivity were, (1) The fiction of an unknowable and abstract substratum underlying all appearances. This was a fiction Spinoza—and the materialists—inherited from the Greeks, and (2) The Kantian fiction of the "ghostly thing-in-itself".

The existence of an unknowable thing-in-itself is impossible and self-contradictory, as Hegel proves by reference to the Platonic-Aristotelian dictum that knowledge implies existence. Existence means being a possible object for consciousness. If we know only that something exists, we have at least one concept that applies to it, i.e. existence. It is incorrect, thinks Hegel, to say that there can be any object that is unknowable as such. It may be, and may remain unknown, like the actual nature of the units of light, but it cannot be as such unknowable. The hypothesis of the unknowable object is self-contradictory because it assumes that existence is possible independently of mind and consciousness. The consequence of this rejection of the "thing-in-itself" is a complex rejection of the Platonic opposition of reality versus appearances. Plato's theory was that the appearances which constitute the world of consciousness are in themselves illusory and inessential. They must be referred always to a "true" ground or invisible, non-appearing Essence which is not identical with these appearances. The categorical rejection of the unknowable, whether it be of the thing-in-itself, the noumenal realm, or the essence hidden behind the appearance (a rejection which in an Anselm and a Barth leads to the self-producing argument for God's necessary existence), leads in Hegel to the doctrine of the dual action of Essence and Reflection. The doctrine of Essence

and Reflection is the centre and core of Hegel's Logic, and the heading under which his doctrine of the Trinity must be considered.

Hegel's Trinity starts with what he calls the moment of universality. This is the moment of God the Father before the activity of creation. God is here alone with Himself in an indeterminate realm of abstraction. He is pure thought that cannot even think itself, because it is not able to conceive itself as an object. To think itself as an object, "being" in its state of pure and empty universality must become determined and objectified, if only to itself and in itself. It must become an other to itself. Hegel's description of the inherent instability and negativity of such a moment of pure abstraction, a moment which is in fact the Platonic "pure being" or the scholastic *impassibilitas*, discovers in this moment the fatal flaw of indeterminism. For Hegel it is the nature of being to become determined. Being that remains removed from the world of phenomenal determinations and the phenomenal flux is inert, unreal abstraction. It is the first principle of Hegel's Trinity, and the first impulse of its life and movement, that God does not remain aloof and alone with Himself. That God is trinitarian means and necessitates that He is a historical God, a God who becomes. He must determine Himself and become knowable to Himself (and incidentally, knowable by human consciousness). The characteristic of God as Spirit is self-manifestation. He manifests and thus knows Himself in the Other, in His Other, who is His Son and is the same as Himself. But this movement of self-manifestation remains so far subjective. The relation between self or subject (God) and other or object (God's alter ego) remains incomplete and undeveloped. The relation and thus the knowledge is inadequate, as it is not a true relation of an I to a Thou. The other at this stage is only a determination or emanation of the original subject's identity, and does not possess real "otherness", independence, opposition.

The desire of God to know Himself is thwarted because the relation of Father to Son in the transcendent or divine Trinity is really mere identity without otherness, a playing of love with itself. It has not gone the whole way of distinction. It fails to include the labour of knowledge, the work and the negativity of love. It is not a complete determination of God. The first person of the Trinity is only able to move

beyond His abstract universality, beyond what the Scholastics call His "ipseity", by a further act of generosity, self-giving and extension. Through His love for the Other that He has posited, in the desire that Love demands to grant independence to the Other, moved by Love's pure and voluntary necessity, God the Father gives the Son a history in which He creates a Time and Space, a context for the reality external to Himself.

Abstract universality annuls its own abstractness. It creates a dialectical or relational identity for itself, in which it sees, knows, and is reconciled with itself in an other, in a determined and limited being. God the unconditioned, and hence unapprehensible, creates His own conditions, grants them a claim to independent existence, and yet at the same time finds His own self-expression and attributes in them. Only this dialectically self-relating and complex Subjectivity has the right to be known and worshipped as a supreme being. Only a God for whom knowing and being-known are integral to His being and perfection can be, without self-contradiction, a revealed God. In the Hegelian language (mocked by Kierkegaard), "Only the Subject that relates itself to itself can be called Spirit." Accordingly, only a Trinitarian God can be called (and known) Spirit.

#### V *The Necessity of Appearance: Hegel's Doctrine of Essence*

Further, a God that remains pure universality cannot be known by man. The truth asserted by the universal category can only be recognised as such by human consciousness if it is first presented as an object, *an appearance*, to that consciousness. "Everything that exists must come to us in an external way", writes Hegel. In the second person of the Trinity, "pure thought" (indistinguishable from pure or inert "Sein", as Hegel has attacked it in the first book of the *Logic*), or God-in-Himself, the "moment" of the Trinity which corresponds to the abstract logic of Being, has determined itself in the form of a particular. This is the manifest Son, who is revealed as an object to consciousness. The "manifestation" or manifest moment corresponds to the Hegelian doctrine in the second book of the *Logic*, the logic of "Essence" or "Reflection".

In the trinitarian, or simply syllogistic, thinking of Hegel, it is necessary for pure science to go through a stage of determinate representation, called *Vorstellung*. This is the moment or mode of God as a revelation to ordinary human consciousness, the moment of the incarnate and apprehensible objectivity of God. This moment of necessary objectivity is grounded in Hegel's redefinition of Essence. Essence is not the simple and unknowable substratum underlying all appearances, stripped of all attributes. God is not "Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften". But Essence is that which must appear. Essence, or ground, is identical with what is grounded, in a mediate though not an immediate manner. In a mediated manner or relation, the noumenon is the phenomenon, because the phenomenon determines it, expresses its content, gives it actual form and quality. The essence of being is appearance. Hence the essence of God the Universal, God the Father, is to manifest Himself.

The duality of this relationship of appearance and essence corresponds to the duality or double activity of God Himself. God is hidden, secret, appearing to Himself and knowing Himself in Himself, in the pre-worldly Trinity. And God is revealed, appearing to the outside world. This is the duality of His *Ansichsein* and His *Sein-fur-Anderes* (his implicit selfhood and his social or participatory action as Creator and Saviour). In the purely formal world of logic, such self-doubling, such repetition in an other, is expressed by the ambivalence in the word "Schein" (appearance) or "Erscheinung". Hegel defines "scheiden" by an analogy from the physical theory of light-reflection. The thing that is the source of reflection, although its intent is to reflect on itself, inevitably is reflected externally, in an other. To this ambivalence or duality in physical reflection, Hegel adds a play on the word "Schein" in its common meaning as illusion, false appearance. The source of the reflection, the subject, "appears" in the guise of an other thing. This is to say, it illumines something other than itself. The other thing is at once the true object and the appearance of the true subject. The subject finds its own mirror in an other. The conceptual mistake was to consider "Schein" as "mere" Schein, to consider the theatre of Essence's own appearance a fraud.

In this rather convoluted way, the logical doctrine of Essence, or Reflection, ("Wiider-

spiegelung”), which states that “Das Wesen muss erscheinen”, (Essence must appear) explicates the polarity in the Trinitarian existence of God. God is He who remains with Himself even as He is determined or revealed in an other, even as He posits Himself as a moment partaking of the finite historical context external to Himself. God remains God even when He dies on the Cross. That God remains with Himself even when going out into the reality of the particular, means that God, at least in His Trinity, is the Notion. The Notion reconciles Being (pure Universality or Thought) with Essence (the phenomenal particular). As Barth puts it, even our finitude can be a determination of the infinitude that is His freedom, and we cannot deny it. God, for Hegel as well, is He who is both and in the same Being and Act in Himself (a se) and Revealed (pro nobis). The unification of these two moments of the one Being is performed by the Spirit. The Spirit is at the same time the presupposition of the origin, the beginning of the movement. For it is only because God is already unified in Himself, in a unity consisting of His determinate moments and His undetermined Being, that He can determine Himself in a sphere external to Himself. And it is this unity of inward Will and outward act, of manifestation, that the Trinity describes.

#### VI *The Twofold Trinity as the logic of “transcendence in immanence”*

This original synthesis of identity with its own self-differentiation is the presupposition of the positing of the difference, i.e. the movement outwards, into the external world. It is only because God is already Spirit, already the unification of Being and Essence, of Father and Son, that He can reflect Himself in this external creation and generation. The result, Spirit, is also the beginning, the presupposition. At the conclusion of the long travail of the *Phenomenology*, when the natural mind at last recognizes that it is Spirit, Hegel reveals that this result is what has been presupposed all along. Spirit, the result, is identical with Substance, the field that has been traversed. The Spirit is the end, the beginning, and the unity of the Trinity. The Spirit is the mean which shows the extremes to each other in a syllogistic copula. Spirit reveals the identity of the negation with that which

posited the negation. Spirit annuls the mediate moment, the moment of the particular, or determinate manifestation, at the same time as it preserves it.

Further, Spirit, as the Mediator between the negative external reality and the universal, is objectively present in and as the religious community. In the community, the individual is unified with the universal. His identity within the community is as a member of a universal category, as the expression of a universal will. That which grounds and performs this unification is Spirit. Man as Adam, the finite individual asserting himself as such, hence in sin, becomes, through the Mediator, man in Christ, the finite returned to the universal. Christianly expressed in the doctrine of the Atonement, this “return” is accomplished only through the mediation of the crucified Christ. It is represented in the religious iconography as Christ the head of the body, the Church, of which we are the members. Christ, as long as He remains alive, a finite creature among His friends, does not create this community. Only His death and resurrection return Him to the universal: and with and in Him—the fellowship. (For a more poignant version of this fateful necessity, and one that sees its pathos unadulterated by Hegel’s metaphysical optimism, it is interesting to compare the Ode by Hegel’s friend Hoelderlin, *Patmos*, lines 108ff.)

The identity of God’s “Ansichsein” (His implicit, or latent Being in Himself) and His “Sein-fur-Anderes” (His Being for others) is further clarified by the doctrine of the two Trinities: “the pre-worldly play eternally complete apart from the world, and the real trinitarian incursion into the world.” (E.L. Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel’s Thought*, p.153). The Trinity, that is both the definition and the Absolute Notion of God, splits into two poles. The first corresponds to the Trinitarian syllogism of the *Logic*. This is the relationship of Universal, Singular, and Particular, that exists in the mind of God, as the mind of God, before the creation of the finite Spirit. It is the universal form of all logical comparisons and identifications, expressed in the syllogism:  $p$  (the particular instance or object) is a  $s$  ( $s$  is the species). If  $s$  is  $u$  (if this species falls under the universal or general category  $u$ ), then  $p$  is a  $u$  (this particular instance is a member of this universal category, and



related to all other members of that category.) The logic of the Syllogism, as Hegel uses it, is what enables us to organise all data and reflections according to one universal, rational development. When all objective presentations and reflections are organised in this pattern of the syllogism, then reason can be said to dominate and be expressed in the real, the actual world.

The second pole is that of the revealed Trinity. This Trinity, often called the "economic Trinity" in other contexts, includes the Son of God in His worldly manifestation. The Son of God exists under two determinations, the divine and the human, the finite and the infinite. With the positing of the finite as one of the possible modes of God's existence, the option is raised for this finite mode to split itself off from its relation to the infinite, and to assert itself as mere finitude, as world. Hegel wants to make the point clear that the world is not being substituted for the Son in the second place of the Trinity (as it is for the Process theologians). This would be a false understanding, as he says. But the ontological possibility of the world pre-exists in the Son of God. What we recognise as mere finitude, divorced from the universal, is the consequence of a tension within the twofold nature of the Son. This tension remains balanced as long as both natures are recognised as posited by God. But when the finite forgets its origin (or when a false, undialectical idealism tries to coerce its loss of memory), this tension erupts into outright rebellion and alienation. The result of such an eruption is the world as we know it, and man, fallen, but potentially one with the divine Man.

The two poles of the Trinity remain two poles even while they are united. Barth would want to talk of the singleness of the Being and Act of God, and would describe the relationship between the second and the first poles as that of God corresponding to Himself. But Hegel is much quicker to talk of an identity. He relates them speculatively by the doctrine of the absolute or implicit Notion, which receives its explicit self-explication in its worldly incursion. In the worldly Trinity, the original relatedness of divine and human is posited and carried through. But religiously, they are related by divine love. Here we can see how for Hegel the deduction of the true religion as the revealed

religion is necessitated by the very Notion of God. That God reveals Himself to man and in man's sphere is part of the definition of God. But the distinction between the poles is what guarantees that this *revealed* religion is about *God*. God does and must exist separately, complete in His eternal content, complete as the implicit Notion. This is the God whose meditations constitute the *Science of Logic*. Yet for a completion of Love, or, as Barth would say, for an actualisation of the determination of His freedom, which are also the determinations of His love, God over-reaches himself and becomes also immanent.

### *VII Conclusion. A Conversation between Hegel and Barth -Is the Trinity rational? Is rationality rational?*

In order to have an argument between two people, however disparate, we must at least assume that some common language is possible. For this reason, I have tried to concentrate on the very few issues over which the dogmatic theology of Barth and the mature speculative philosophy of Hegel may be said to make some brief gestures of recognition at each other. Obviously there are many more important places in which their thinking is irreconcilably at odds. On basic suppositions, values, objectives, and expectations, their projects are only comparable on the grounds of sheer Titanism. Indeed, our task of showing where and why their paths diverge so radically has been made easy enough to justify our hasty superficialities by the fact that the best statement of their necessary incompatibility has already been made—by Barth, in his *Protestant Theology in the 19th Century*. Thus, we have neglected such more significant questions as history, faith, Christology; even the rift over the place of Creation and culture which separates Barth from Hegel as sharply as it earlier separated him from liberal Protestantism, German Christianity, and Schleiermacher. Instead, we have focussed on the minor motif of objectivity, and the perhaps more Barthian issue of the redefinition of "infinity" and transcendence.

In their own ways, Hegel and Barth have both severed the definition of transcendence from any association with ineffability, that is to say,



non-objectivity. They have reclaimed immanence, history, and time as the predicates of transcendence, and banished forever the connotations of *Jenseits* that hung about it. But has Hegel really made a convincing case for objectivity, even on his own terms? Has he suggested any epistemological guidelines, any criteria for determining the validity of interpretations and apprehensions, any cut-off points where the domain of the subject can be recognised as being at its limits, where the grasp and priority of the object itself begins? The answer, I believe, must be No. What Hegel *has* done is to *allow* for the objectivity of God and the objectifications of God as part of the definition of God. The Trinity—and the Hegelian category of the Notion—present a definition of God as at once tautological and discursive. God is both the thought of Himself, *and* the conversation about Himself which He has with an Other. This conversation becomes what we know as history. It is a conversation which man may, so to speak, overhear. Therefore, when Hegel says that the human consciousness of God is a moment in God's consciousness of God, he is referring to precisely this activity, this conversation, whereby God empowers man to share in His consciousness of Himself. This is as far as Hegel goes in accounting for the objectivity of religious knowledge. He does not make revelation the prerequisite of objectivity. We might say that he fails to draw the conclusion necessary to sustain his interest in the manifest objectivity of God. Thus he fails by leaving the door open to the recapturing of this domain of the proper object by those interested in the sovereignty of human subjectivity and the unchecked Ego of self-consciousness: the Bauers, Stirners, and Feuerbachs. Furthermore, omitting to clarify a doctrine of language and a set of guidelines for attribution, he has left his followers no way of judging and determining the validity of linguistic expressions, no way of governing the appropriation of language to its object.

On the other hand, Barth has both an implicit and an explicit epistemology. He has accounted for the veracity, objectivity, and centrality of revelation. He posits that God's self-knowing in Christ is also a self-interpretation, a presentation of the same "content" in different words. Thus even in his account of the Trinity, which stands as *Prolegomena* to his Dogmatics, Barth provides

an ontic and noetic precedent for the interpretative language of theology. Although the "language orders" of God and man are incommensurable, God has graciously and from eternity condescended to interpret Himself, and so to present Himself in the language of the world. Central to Barth's *Prolegomena to all future dogmatics* is a necessity to account for a correspondence between the interpretative possibilities of human language and the self-interpretative Act of God in the Trinity. The recognition of such a necessity can be traced to Barth's "scepticism" towards language and language's ability to conform to the truth, a scepticism alien to Hegel. The one thing we can unabashedly assert about the historical period of which Hegel is a product is that it was a time of supreme selfconfidence in rational and cultural forms, of which language is one. Let us ask ourselves: Is there in the poetry, not to speak of the life, of Goethe, any of the modern tentativeness? Is there ever any question of language's adequacy to express the true voice of feeling<sup>1</sup>, that suspicion we have heard poignantly in Hoffmannsthal's *Chandosbrief* and *Das Schwierige*, perhaps mockingly in Joyce's "silence, exile, and cunning", and obliquely in Mallarmé's uncrackable codes? Is there any intimation in Hegel that Reason, language, social and ethical institutions, might in themselves be inadequate to the task he has set out for them, that is, to realise Absolute Truth?

In the generation of the utopian young Kantians, we find, part and parcel with the belief in the autonomy of reason, a faith that culture, as the product of reason, is wholly reconcilable with human interests. The Real will not resist the power of the ideal. (This of course was put to the test in the French Revolution.) Reality was already the birthplace of the ideal, the field in which the ideal could act. Such a faith in reason and the irresistibility of human knowledge could not admit of scepticism. Scepticism would be obviously irrational. It was assumed—in a way nowadays almost unimaginable—that what we call "rationality" can be

<sup>1</sup>Even in Hoelderlin's ambivalence, the possibility of there being a twin to Nature and the eternal divine Hellas in "deutscher Gesang" is not yet denied: indeed, for Herder, language is to be the magic key that will unlock the mind of the past to us.

independent of determinism and conditions. The triumphant language of the ascent of the Absolute in Hegel, if translated into more malleable terms, means that rational self-consciousness is absolute, not comparative or relative.

It was arguably not until Nietzsche that the comparative and culturally determined character of knowledge and values was recognised as a feature of philosophy. And philosophy rapidly came to terms with its new topography, replacing an absolute context by a relative one. It would seem to be a foregone conclusion of twentieth century philosophy that truth and understanding are subject to a context. The proposition replaces substance, cause, or Being as the irreducible unit of rational discourse (except in such obvious exceptions as Heidegger). Truth can only be measured in terms of what can be asserted in a proposition. The relative, factitious nature of language as a conventional set of signs means that language is no longer simply sanctioned by reason. If Hegel's background is the zenith of cultural confidence for the intellectual, then Barth's is certainly this age of recession. With the loss of the absolute context, which had tried to *embrace* human and divine, attention shifted to questions nearer home, questions of language, logic, and interpretation. Linguistic and cultural scepticism, the relativisation of rational forms, the locating of truth within the analytic proposition—all these elements can be indirectly identified in Barth's thought, even if they are not essential to his theology as such. To say that he responds to, and even foresees, the direction of the modern re-examination of language and thinking is not to make his innovations any the less novel or significant. Indeed, Barth's use of the modern categories and limitations gives theological discourse a new dignity and independence which its previous liaison with idealist metaphysics prevented.

The doctrine of the Trinity in Christian theology does not need to be referred to a structure of all mental and physical reality. Surely one can hear in Hegel's offer of such support the suspicion that theology was truly in need of charity, that it lacked any authentic and respectable discourse of its own. But isn't such an authentic discourse already present, regardless of any doctrinal debates, in the narrative language of the Bible? Barth's turn to the narrative

language of the Bible as the irreducible content of theology is certainly not fundamentalism. It is a reprivileging of narrative that, I believe, would have been inconceivable before the twentieth century. Certainly the statement of the priority and ultimacy of the Biblical language is not new: almost every form of revolutionary Protestantism asserted as much. But such phenomena as Methodism and even Puritanism in the style of Bunyan could not hide a hostility to speculative doctrine.

Barth's method is unique, and I believe, singularly twentieth century, because it establishes a necessary relation between theology's content and theology's language. From this point on it can no longer be denied that there is a necessary relation of the form as well as the content to the interpretation: of narrative to narrative analysis. The definition of God as a relational Being and event, that is as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as Creator and Mediator, this definition is an analysis of the narrative. It is not prior to it. The linear movement of the story, the Biblical history, is re-expressed in the analysis. The analysis tells us that God is event. The two orders, the linear-historical and the simultaneous-eternal, correspond in the relation between narrative (time and experience) and interpretation (the virtual or fictive time "in which all times and perspectives are present").

The doctrine of the Trinity is an interpretation. And it is also the canon for all further interpretation. Its field of activity is severed irretrievably from that of metaphysics. In Hegel, the metaphysical formulation of the Trinity was hypostatic: the moments of the Trinity were deduced from the definition of the Notion, and were necessitated by the subject-object structure of knowledge. As for Hegel God is a priori Mind, and the activity of Mind is knowing, God must posit a possible object of knowledge for Himself. Because the knowing of God is pre-eminently self-knowing, the object he posits is identical with Himself. The Subject posits itself as an Other, knows itself in that Other, and then negates the otherness of that Other, in a return to itself. The existence of the world and man is derived from this a priori relational being and knowing. The Hegelian doctrines of the Trinity and Creation are both a priori (and synthetic?).

But the originality of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity is that it is analytic. The relational Being

and knowability of God are not a priori. They are the predicates produced by the analysis of God's Subjectivity, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The unqualified success of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity is that it turns what Hegel considered the weakness and dispensability of the Biblical narrative language into strength. As an interpretation, the doctrine of the Trinity can not be divorced from the narrative content it analyses, from the history and events which it summarises.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it protects the narrative core and narrative language from possible dissolution into abstract speculation. And it preserves the necessity, the objectivity, of the historical, "happening"; context in which man encounters God's Word. Furthermore, the doctrine of the Trinity is defined as an analysis of the proposition "God reveals Himself", *Deus dixit*, a proposition whose truth can be referred to the empirical world of experience or, at least, to the preservation of the form and content of experience in the *mimesis* that is story. The

Trinity does not have the status of a conjecture about the possible nature of God. Rather, in true nominalist fashion it is an answer to the question "Who is God?" "How does God name Himself?" The answer to that question is the sum and circumference of all theological content: "God reveals Himself in history as Father, Son, and Spirit." In the revealed Trinity, God corresponds to Himself. This is the preclusion of all creaturely analogy, and the verification of our religious knowledge.

It is not only the concept of eternity that Barth has freed from the Babylonian captivity of timelessness. It is also the work of theology that has been freed from the ivory tower of subjectivism and metaphysics. And, after every last obituary had been read, it has received a new lease on life.

<sup>2</sup>"Indeed, it is as though Barth took scripture to be one vast, loosely structured non-fictional novel—at least Barth takes it to be non-fiction." (David Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*, p.48)

( Please note that the following pages are incorrectly numbered.  
For 86,87 and 88, please read 82,83 and 84. )

## BOOK REVIEWS

*TEST AND INTERPRETATION. STUDIES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT PRESENTED TO MATTHEW BLACK.* Edited by Ernest Best and R. McL. Wilson. Cambridge University Press, 1979, pp.xv-268. £15.

The greatness of Matthew Black as a New Testament scholar is well attested by the eminence in this field of the twenty contributors to this Festschrift presented to him on his seventieth birthday. All these essays are worth reading, some are important, some merely interesting.

No less than four of the papers are concerned with that most puzzling of the New Testament writings—the Fourth Gospel. M. De Jonge gives a valuable analysis of the place of the Beloved Disciple, his insight being complementary to the leadership of Peter. Assuming that the book is of composite authorship, he gives reasons for thinking that the Beloved Disciple passages were inserted at a late stage in the book's development, and argues (against J.A.T. Robinson) for a late date for the book because "the Jews" are described from outside as a separate body whom there is no hope of converting. No mention is made of Cullmann's view that the Beloved Disciple was in fact the author of most of the book. Raymond E. Brown suggests that the heretics condemned in the First Epistle knew the Gospel and had falsely concluded from it that God was not fully human in Jesus and that the Christian gospel has no ethical implications. This is no more than interesting speculation: we cannot be sure either of the nature or of the origin of the errors against which the Epistle was written. W.C. Van Unnik throws valuable light on the manner of Jesus's claim to Messiahship in John iv, and discusses why so much weight is placed on the Messiah's claim to "disclose all things" (verses 25 and 29). David Hill considers what resemblances can be found between Jesus and the various Messianic or quasi-Messianic prophets described by Josephus, and argues that if we find in those prophets a claim to perform miracles and a proclamation of the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God we ought not to be prevented by the "principle of dissimilarity" from believing that these were also true of Jesus.

Morna Hooker returns to the problem of the

Son of Man and asks if it is really insoluble. Sensibly starting from the sound basis that Jesus did call himself by this title and that there is no evidence that it was in current use to denote an expected eschatological figure, she asks how we can reconcile the Vermes view that it is merely a polite circumlocution for "I" with the more fashionable view that it was a Messianic title. Her conclusion that he chose the title because he identified himself with the heavenly personage of Daniel vii as including the people of God is no doubt a possible solution, but the arguments she gives for it are less than fully persuasive.

Naturally many of the contributions are concerned with textual criticism. The best are on particular texts. Ernest Best considers the problem created by the omission of the reference to Ephesus in the most trustworthy manuscripts of Ephesians i.1, let anyone who thinks he knows the solution to this enigma read this essay, and beware. Harald Riesenfeld justifies the retention of *hon* in Acts x.36 and makes sense of this otherwise awkward passage by understanding 36 as in apposition to 34-5. the word which God sent to Israel was none other than the message that God does not show partiality etc. He thinks it surprising that this interpretation, to be found in Bengel's *Gnomon*, for the reading *henos de estin chreia* in Luke x.42, beyond those in the U.B.S. *Textual Commentary*, and expresses surprise that the editors of the U.B.S. Greek New Testament rated its probability so low as C.

C.K. Barrett casts grave doubt on the thesis of Menoud and Epp that the Western text of Acts shows a special anti-Judaic tendency; this text merely emphasises and exaggerates tendencies already existing in Luke-Acts. K. Aland writes a trenchant criticism of Eldon Jay Epp's article on "The Twentieth Century Interlude in New Testament Textual Criticism" (*JBL* 93, 1974, 386-414). Bruce M. Metzger analyses 27 cases where Jerome discusses or mentions textual variants, from which Jerome emerges as a sagacious textual critic. He also draws attention to the rather disturbing fact that sometimes Jerome attributes a reading to "most of the ancient manuscripts" whereas it occurs in only a few of the ancient manuscripts known to us today. F.F. Bruce gives a collection of quotations

from John in Victorinus, many from memory; they are interesting as illustrating Victorinus's outlook but of no value for the textual criticism of the New Testament. N.A. Dahl gives the result of a thorough examination of a recently discovered fragment (0230) of some verses from Ephesians vi. The text appears to be of typical Egyptian fifth-century character, and the discovery does not help towards the establishment of the original text. Dahl goes into much detail on the family relationships of other bilingual manuscripts of the Epistles because he is convinced that "neither the use of computers and statistical methods nor an eclecticism based on stylistic and linguistic criteria can ever substitute for careful examination of the most important manuscripts and their prehistory." But even if we could establish the archetypes underlying the most important manuscripts, how could we adjudicate on the differences between them except by the use of stylistic and linguistic criteria? R. McL. Wilson gives an *arrabon* of his work on a collected Fayyumic version of the New Testament.

Of more general interest is Eduard Schweizer's article which ably analyses the Pauline and post-Pauline lists of vices and "house-tables". He shows that although the "house-tables" can be paralleled in Stoic literature they differ in that they apply to women, children and slaves as well as to the adult male, and deal with particular situations rather than attempt to adjust man to a cosmic moral order. He concludes with some valuable inferences from Christian ethics today. Ferdinand Hahn discusses the parable of the sower in Mark iv.3-8 and its explanation in 14-20, he does not break fresh ground, but gives a useful exposition of the present state of scholarship on these passages. He brings out the contrast between the eschatological parable, with its missionary incentive, and the explanation designed rather for the strengthening of the Church. He points out in conclusion the difficulty of distinguishing sharply between parable and allegory.

The remaining four articles are interesting but of lesser importance. Hans Dieter Betz draws a parallel and a contrast between classical Greek philosophy and the thought of Matthew vi.22-23. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, by way of background to the problem of the relation between the words *Kephas* and *Petros*, establishes that *Kephas* was in previous use as a proper name (there is evidence of this at Elephantine as far back as

416 B.C.), whereas there is no such evidence of the previous use of *Petros*. A.F.J. Klijn examines the somewhat confused patristic references to gospels written in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Syriac, and concludes that some such writings did exist, but that they did not influence the canonical gospels. Max Wilcox considers the use made of the Old Testament by the writers of the New Testament, rightly regarding the New Testament writers as handling the Scriptures from within the Haggadic tradition; somewhat inconsistently he clings to Dodd's contention that the New Testament allusions to the Old Testament should not be considered as referring just to isolated texts but should be related to the wider contexts in which those texts appear. This looks like an illegitimate transplant of modern scholarship back into the first century.

Even if some of the contributions to this important Festschrift are only of limited interest, there are many things in it which no serious student of the New Testament can afford to ignore.

J.M. Ross

*PAULINE PIECES* by Morna D. Hooker. Epworth, 1979. 95pp. £1.25.

We are not told, but this book looks like five or six lectures on Paul's theology given to a group of clergy or lay-preachers. That would explain its light touch and sometimes diffident manner. Here is a lucid distillate of Paul's theology as seen by a penetrating and independent-minded exegete. Judicious, sometimes illuminating—one could hardly ask for more within a compass that leaves no space for explicit argument with other scholars or detailed discussion of the relatively few textual references.

Perhaps one is asking for a larger and different book, but from an author so sharply aware of the tension between making Paul meaningful for to-day and preserving his historical distance, one could have wished for something more developed on both counts. Doubts about an older style of biblical theology have not led to a new conception of the discipline. The descriptive historical task might have been more effectively done if a wider range of concepts, familiar in the scientific study of religion, had been used for the analysis. These might in turn offer new possibilities for theological interpretation. But this short book is not intended to break new ground; anyone at home on the old will find it instructive both in the questions it raises and the solutions it offers.

Robert Morgan

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## IN FUTURE ISSUES

Peter Ackroyd on approaches to the Book of Isaiah

Peter Byrne on Sin, Guilt and Shame

Christine Rees on George Herbert: 'Something Understood'

## BOOKS RECEIVED

- BOERMA, C.        *Rich Man, Poor Man - and the Bible* Trans. J. Bowden  
S.C.M. £2.25p.
- COLLANGE, J-F.    *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians* Trans. A. Heathcote.  
Epworth. £5.00p.
- CUPITT, D.        *Explorations in Theology. 6.*  
S.C.M. £3.95p.
- GOULDER, M.      *Incarnation and Myth. The Debate Continued.*  
S.C.M. £3.50p.
- KOYAMA, K.        *Three Miles an Hour God.*  
S.C.M. £2.95p.
- MOLTMANN, J.     *The Future of Creation.* Trans. M. Kohl  
S.C.M. £6.95p.
- PRESTON, R.H.    *Religion and the Persistence of Capitalism.*  
S.C.M. £6.95p.
- RENMORE, C.D.    *Silicon Chips and You.*  
Sheldon Press. £2.50p.

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