Meeting God
in History, Relativity,
and Pluralism

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Edward Hobbs formulated the ideas without which I would have been helpless to frame this thesis, as the reader can easily see; rather than simply express my debt through the frequency of citation in the body of the work, I would like here to add my warm and cordial thanks. Edward provided the confidence and support and guidance without which I would never have learned much theology. Shunji Nishi quietly insisted that the word "God" means something that we can hope to understand, even if we approach the problem from a purely phenomenological starting point. Two years ago, Shaun Sullivan consented to go through Peter Berger's work with me, providing one chief foundation of this project, the understanding of relativity in human religion. Not only was that reading pivotal in this work, we had a lot of fun in doing it. In my home parish, Shirley Woods shared my sense of the urgency of this project, and her support was critical in carrying it through. By a confidence that the understanding of human religion does not threaten religious faith, these my teachers have both made possible the study of theology at all, and also enabled theology to engage life directly. Their gift, and not theirs alone, is that it is possible for God to come to us in the terms of our own time, and still be God.

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Any writing project imposes on the writer a burden of isolation from the people around him, in order to concentrate on writing, and a corresponding burden on the people around him. My thanks accordingly go to Larry West, Bruce Wilson, Peter Hagelstein, and Mike Roberts, for their forbearance and patience. Carol Mills, Sally Bystroff, and David Ottesen helped in the proofreading; any errors that remain are of course my own. I also thank my committee members, Edward Hobbs, Shunji Nishi, and Shaun Sullivan for their quite considerable help in reading and correcting and sharpening this thesis.

I would like to acknowledge another debt. When I was fourteen, my father told me about "JEDP," the Documentary Hypothesis, and in

so doing, he gave me the confidence that God is still God even if He comes to us in the same real world as the one we live in today. This thesis is in many ways a working out of that story.

Preface to the Second Edition

This was originally a Master's thesis, and not a great deal has been changed beyond correction of a few typos and the addition of this preface. It was "Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Theological Studies, Church Divinity School of the Pacific, 1980." My committee thought it would have made a weak doctoral dissertation — i. e., it was a great deal more than the Master's thesis it was supposed to be. Nevertheless, the operative word is probably "weak": it is uneven in its depth of coverage, varying from decent in a few places to hasty and superficial in others. It is a youth's work: more enthusiasm than mastery. That notwithstanding, it became, as another reader predicted, the beginning of more things, and it is of interest as basically my first statement of the ideas that produced what has followed.

The genesis of the thesis was an idea that struck me when I was sitting in Edward Hobbs's Mark class. I was tipped back against a side wall, taking my ease. Students learn early about the problems of critical history for theology. Cognitive relativity and religious pluralism were fairly instinctive just in the culture around us. It hit me that history, relativity, and pluralism are respectively species of exposure, limitation, and need. And so the responses of faith in meeting the former could be applied in particular to the latter.

The precursor for this thesis was a 120-page term paper about analogies between Noam Chomsky's linguistics and theology; easily the biggest typing job I ever did. A lot of backspacing and whiteout. This was 1979, and the first "personal computers" were available, but most of them were kits that you had to put together yourself. I

didn't trust myself with a soldering iron, for good reason. Seeing the even greater typing task of the MTS thesis ahead of me, I got a Vector Graphic S-100 CP/M computer. It had a text-only monitor with a built-in keyboard and 48 kilobytes of memory (kilo, not mega!). I eventually expanded it to 56, and lengthened the flat-cable to the keyboard enough to drag the keyboard outside of the monitor case. In those days, terminals with detached keyboards were an innovation. (Remember RS-232 serial terminals?) The text editor was Word Master, the first cut of what later became Word Star. As shipped, if you hit the escape key, it would exit and NOT save your work. After several losses of work, I called the authors, who were in Marin County, and got a patch dictated to me over the phone to disable that "feature." Otherwise, I loved it. Armed with a computer, there was no practical limit to my writing except time, and a thesis that was supposed to be 80 pages came in at 300. (Converted to LaTeX here, it formats at 200+ pages.) Shunji Nishi, who was one of the readers on my MTS thesis committee, would see me rolling toward his office in the second floor of Shires Hall, and turn and run in mock terror; too many pages, he said.

This thesis was the first statement of an argument. The GTU PhD dissertation on providence in H. Richard Niebuhr[1] was the second, and *Elementary Monotheism* was the third.[2] The Niebuhr thesis was analytic, Elmo constructive. Both were much more careful than the MTS thesis was. *Unwelcome Good News* was a more accessible and popular explanation of the ideas in this series of books.[3] I have made as few changes as possible in the main text of the book, adding qualifications in footnotes or here in the Preface. It is accordingly the first version of an argument, and a rough one at that. Better statements are in the books written later.

Some things ought to go without saying, but in today's academic climate they do not go without saying. The presupposition of the

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[1] Andrew P. Porter, "H. Richard Niebuhr's Doctrine of Providence in the Light of Martin Heidegger's Philosophy." PhD. Diss., Berkeley, GTU, 1991.

[2] *Elementary Monotheism: I Exposure, Limitation and Need*, and *II: Action and Language in Historical Religion*, Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 2001.

[3] Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2004.

argument here is that the idea of the Trinity was shaped, in part, by the Indo-European tripartite ideology. The tripartition hypothesis was the work of Georges Dumézil, in the middle of the twentieth century. In the present friendly atmosphere of academia, such a hypothesis inevitably attracts charges of racism, even when racism is repudiated and condemned in advance, as it is here. That seemed to me to be so obvious as to go without saying when I wrote this thesis. The task of the thesis was to articulate harder things, and the obvious was left aside. I have learned to my sorrow that the most meticulous reviewers can look for racism even when it is explicitly repudiated.[4] Several things should be spelled out.

(1) Dumézil detested racism, and didn't much like the Indo-Europeans, though for him the term meant the more ideologically pure of the ancient Indo-Europeans, not their modern descendants. When I wrote this thesis, I don't think I had run across Dumézil's own remarks on the issue. They bear repeating here.

Any inquiry into ethnically correlated conceptual systems runs the risk that its results will be put to other than scientific uses, to promote the glory or turpitude of one or another ethnic group. Dumézil already attracted suspicions of such motives, of which, so far as I am aware, he was innocent. When he was asked whether he *liked* the Indo-European system that he had labored so long to document, his sentiments were quite surprising. An interview in *Le Nouvel Observateur* records this reply:

> Qu'est-ce que c'est l'"âme" d'une peuple ... et l'"âme indo-européenne"? Tout ce que je peux vous dire, c'est que ce que j'entrevois du monde indo-européen m'aurait fait horreur. Je n'aurais pas aimé vivre dans une société où il y avait un *Männerbund* ... ou des druides. Autant qu'on peut les imaginer à travers leurs héritiers, les Indo-

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[4] Fritz Heinrich, review of *Elementary Monotheism*, *Marburg Journal of Religion* 8 no. 1 (2003/09); online. http:// www.uni-marburg.de/ religionswissenschaft/ journal/ mjr/ rev3_9_03.html. Professor Heinrich was careful enough to note that there really is no racism in *Elementary Monotheism*, but he raised the possibility nonetheless.

Européens ne devaient pas être drôles a fréquenter. Vivre dans un système trifonctionnel me donnerait l'impression d'une prison. J'étudie donc les trois fonctions, j'explore cette prison, mais je n'aurais pas voulu y vivre. Si j'allais chez les anthropophages, je tâcherais d'en savoir le plus possible sur eux mais je resterais loin de la marmite.[5]

He liked the Greeks, because they were patient enough to listen and see phenomena that did not exactly fit the Indo-European scheme. Ethnic questions are often an occasion for a scholarly stoning, and the only question is which culture is going to be stoned. Every new piece of evidence is treated like goods from the street vendor selling stones in Monty Python's *The Life of Brian*. Scholars shopping for new evidence can then become like the tourists on the way to the stoning, who say, "I'll take two rounds, two flats, and a packet of gravel."

(2) Religion in any culture will inevitable take on aspects of that culture, whether Indo-European or not. That biblical religion should do so when moving from a Hebrew and Aramaic speaking to a Greek and Latin speaking culture is to be expected. It would be surprising if such did *not* happen.

(3) The more important part of Edward Hobbs's reconstruction of the Trinity is not the tripartite ideology but the monotheistic inversion of the values received from the religions of the surrounding Canaanite culture.

(4) It might turn out after more research that either the tripartition hypothesis fails to characterize any aspects of I-E culture, or that the connection with the Trinity fails to survive criticism. That in no way undermines the central claims of this research program: The central

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[5]Georges Dumézil, interview with Maurice Olender. *Le Nouvel Observateur* 1983/01/14, pp. 50–54; p. 53. "What would the 'soul' of a people be? ... 'The Indo-European soul'? All I can tell you is that what I found of the Indo-European world gave me horror. I would not have liked to live in a society where there was a *Männerbund* ... or Druids. Insofar as one can imagine them from their heirs, the Indo-Europeans would not have been droll to visit. To live in a tri-functional system gives me the impression of a prison. I study the three functions, I explore that prison, but I wouldn't want to live there. If I were to visit cannibals, I would take good notes, but would stay out of the kitchen."

claim is not that Christianity is a kind of Indo-European religion, much less that it is Indo-Europeanism, but that the disappointments of life, of which exposure, limitation, and need are representative, bear blessings. That claim is explained at length in the book that follows. The claim that exposure, limitation, and need form a typical Indo-European triad is incidental and not necessary. Inasmuch as they *do* (at present) appear to be such a triad, it would be disingenuous to omit notice of that fact. To do that would be open to even more serious charges of racism (because the implicit claim would be covert) than to peddle the Trinity as a form of Indo-Europeanism. Regardless of the roots of the series exposure, limitation, and need, they are all facts of life, and radical monotheism embraces them all as bearing blessings rather than as being barren disappointments.

(5) There are ways to make sense of life other than via the tripartite ideology, and some of them were mentioned in the Trinity paper of 1999.[6] Radical monotheism does not need the tripartition hypothesis, whether as a claim in the history of religions or as a claim about social and cosmic reality. There is life after tripartition. One of the more refreshing aspects of Joseph Soloveitchik's *Halakhic Man* is his freedom from tripartition, and I have taught his book with that in mind.[7] To recognize the tripartite ideology is both to understand much of Western culture and also to be able to broaden one's conceptual horizons beyond the tripartite ideology. Dumézil loved the Greeks, he said, because they broke the rules of the tripartite ideology, and looked at the world as it was, not as the ideology constrained it to be.

(6) Racism would be antithetical to the thesis and values of this book: radical monotheism, on the arguments to be presented here, is always open to other cultures and other peoples. To interpret any form of biblical religion as either the property of or the proponent of Indo-European culture would contradict that openness.

It is tedious and humorless to say these things, but apparently it is necessary, much as product labels tell the consumer not to mix

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[6] Andrew P. Porter, and Edward C. Hobbs, "The Trinity and the Indo-European Tripartite Worldview," *Budhi* (Manila) Vol. 3, nos. 2 and 3 (1999) 1–28. Available on-line at http:// www.jedp.com/ trinity.html.

[7] Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983.

ammonia and bleach, or not to use an electric hair-dryer while taking one's ease in a bathtub, and so on.

Another objection seems to come easily to not very careful readers: Sabellianism.[8] The idea that we are dealing with one God acting in three roles at once, all on-stage at the same time,[9] appeared to the reviewer to be modalism, despite the fact that "role" is a perfectly good translation of *prosopon* and of the pre-Boethian meaning of *persona*. The problem arose, no doubt, because Dumézil used the French word *fonction*, whose connotations I am unsure of, but which sounds close enough to mode, hence modalism. There are three functions in the tripartite worldview, but ultimately the deity appears in three roles, not functions or modes. In the original I-E world, each function had its own gods — which would invite tritheism, not modalism. Which dismissal is chosen by objectors tells more about the objectors' theology than about these books, for there is no doctrine of God as he is in himself here at all, merely as he appears to us, and that only in a certain cultural tradition and history.

In the later treatments of the influence of tripartition on the doctrine of the Trinity, I included what I called "appropriation" matrices, which distinctly make it clear that each Person gets some share of more than one "fonction," something impossible in modalism.[10]

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[8] B. Joseph Francis, review of *Unwelcome Good News*, *Indian Theological Studies* xlii (2005/06) 222–224.

[9] Andrew P. Porter, *Unwelcome Good News: Providence in Human Life*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2004. See section 2.3.

[10] The Trinity paper, pp. 20–22. *Elementary Monotheism*, chapter 3, pp. 43–45.

Abstract

The preliminary lemma of this thesis is that we meet God in circumstances of exposure, limitation, and need.

Richard Niebuhr's conception of radical monotheism is that the causes for which we live (our "gods") all die, and that radical monotheism is to embrace this situation rather than to reject it. Thus all of life is good, and not only some of it. The "bad," that which we would prefer not to experience, we can learn in radical monotheism to accept as good. That "bad" may be conceptualized under three heads, as exposure, limitation, and need. Exposure is of the human self, as he is, to himself and others, for all to see. Limitation, or contingency, is simply that set of givens within which we live, whether laws of nature or circumstances of other people. Need, one's own or another's, is the lack of material or spiritual wherewithal for life. Response to each of these is with the cognitive, active, and emotive aspects of the self. Radical faith meets exposure with confession, repentance, remorse, and joy. Faith meets limitation with innovation, initiative, grief and gratitude. Need is met by opening eyes, hands, and heart to one's neighbor, ending in celebration and fellowship. In each case, what was initially seen as "bad," unwelcome, is turned into something welcome, the source of new life. Because such an attitude is never as thorough-going as its proclamations, confessing it is a confession of sin as well as a confession of faith. Sin is thus to persist in rejecting some part of, or event in, life as "bad," and to act accordingly. This analysis of radical faith is instantiated in the doctrine of the Trinity, and the NT teaching of Jesus.

The central thesis is that critical history, cognitive relativity, and

religious pluralism are respectively species of exposure, limitation, and need.

Critical history, the critical study of Christian biblical origins, has undermined the story which Christianity told of its origins. It did this first of all by rejection of miracle, and then by its reconstruction of the human origins of Christianity as of any other human religion, thus rejecting the claims that Christian origins are grounded in acts of God in history. History was at first rejected by the church, and is unwelcome in many circles still, as it was seen as undermining all legitimacy Christianity might hope to possess. Critical history is today generally ignored or at best left to scholars.

Cognitive relativity is the state in which the world we live in not only is a construct of the human mind, but is known to be such. Obviously, it exists in itself independently of our conception of it, but (tautologously), we know it only as we conceive it. This is true not only of the natural world but also of the moral world, and of human institutions and roles within them. Recognition of cognitive relativity is an event of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in sociology of knowledge, as far as theory goes, but at a widespread general and popular level also. It grows out of critical history in its realization that human religion is an artifact, both of human free creation, and of the givens of human nature. Relativity has been greeted with dismay, being seen as relativism, a state in which "nothing matters."

Religious pluralism is a state in which people of different persuasions mix on a culturally intimate basis, and is thus also an event of the modern world. Pluralism manifests the needs of peoples as well as individuals to participate in a common shared world in which the contributions of all are welcome and the needs of all are met. In the past, contact with other religious traditions has elicited reactions of apologetic, polemic, and triumphalism. Pluralism, receiving today the same reactions, also has been rejected.

To embrace critical history is to look to history not for confirmation of the traditional legitimations of Christianity, but, surrendering all quest for legitimations, to become open in history to finding instances of radical faith which as examples, may judge, guide, and inspire

us. Primary among these examples are the Yahwist and the Priestly redactors of the Old Testament. In the process of embracing history, we regain a story of Christian origins which is a story of human beings acting in the same world as the one we live in today, though our forefathers themselves interpreted it in different terms. We are thus enabled for ourselves to make the commitments of radical faith which they made, and we can understand their language through critical history in a way we cannot with a mythological world view which we know poorly as a "second language," but do not use in the conduct of our own lives.

To embrace relativity, and to become open to the human origins of our religion, is to find opportunity in the responsible freedom to arrange our religious and moral lives as we think best.

To embrace pluralism is to open ourselves to other traditions, and to recover a catholicity like that which the early church enjoyed.

If we embrace critical history, we embrace its presuppositions, including the principle that "God" is not an *explanation* for any phenomenon in this world. And if we want to meet God in that world in which we make scientific explanations, which is metaphysically substantially the same as our "everyday" world, then we need to learn to think of God in new terms, terms which are not altogether apparent as yet. Thus we do not speak of God with language of efficient causation; and language of final causation, or of purpose, refers demonstrably to human purposes. "God"-language reflects human faith, that is, human commitment. This is not to say that human beings act on their unaided own; the substance of radical faith is the commitment to accept the help and the good that comes in the circumstances of exposure, limitation, and need. In these situations, we meet God, though that in no way implies that there is an efficaciously causal activity of God behind those meetings.

If we propose to embrace history, relativity, and pluralism, some obvious initial actions follow, without which the claim of embracing history, relativity, and pluralism becomes hypocritical. First, we teach and learn critical history at a popular and popularized level. Second, we can no longer attribute to God the origin of human institutions.

Third, we must begin to get to know our religious neighbors.

Introduction

When I finished graduate work in engineering and nevertheless continued on in school, but in a seminary, there was understandably some surprise. People ask me what I have been doing in school, and often enough I think my questioners were hoping for an intelligible word that life is good, that faith is possible, or something along those lines. And so I attempted to give an account of the faith in whatever terms seemed to address the question at hand. Here I collect in one place all those explanations, trying in so doing to give an acount of the faith that is in us.

We would like to have explanations that explain in straightforward and univocal language. It is not very reassuring always to have only oblique answers to important questions, and it does not really help if the language we use to talk about these things presents more complications than the realities themselves. Part of our problem arises from answers which upon analysis have the form, "We do not know the answer to that question; but here you must choose, what you will put your trust in. It is a matter of faith." Nevertheless, it would seem better, simply and candidly to say, "This is a matter of faith," than to give an answer which does not on its surface seem to say that at all.

In so doing, we shall better be able to locate precisely just which are our commitments of faith, and which are commitments derivative from them. We always start not with explanations but with life, something to be lived and celebrated before it is explained. It is the life of faith that we have to explain in theology; we do not usually generate faith from theology. If we look into the nature of our faith, we may indeed change the explanations we use. Sometimes we say, "What we *really*

meant when we did that was ...," and continue in the same life of faith, but with a new sense of confidence in our commitments. Sometimes we shall say, "No, what we really intended to do was something else; ...," and so inquiry may lead us to change our lives. Inquiry always risks finding out that our faith was misguided; and we must live with that risk. Nothing is served by covering up the risk. At the same time, knowledge of the risk does not necessarily have to dilute the strength of the commitment of faith.

A good place to begin is to say that in our faith we find all of life good, not just some of it. Even what we would call "bad" is good. That humans call some experiences "good" and others "bad" does not mean that those human distinctions reflect distinctions in reality. In fact, all our human recipes for telling the "good" from the "bad" fail in the end. Following Richard Niebuhr, we may say that "the causes for which we live all die."[11] Yet, with the Yahwhist, and biblical writers after him, we call life a free gift, and all of it good. If this commitment is to mean anything, and be rescued from being a vacuous platitude or sheer self-deception, its crucial tests will come in those experiences we would otherwise call "bad." For we will use these experiences, of the "bad" in life, in a crucial way to describe our encounter with God, as we see how *even* out of this "bad" God brings good. Following Edward Hobbs, it is possible to sort the "bad" into three categories, which we may call exposure, limitation, and need.[12] He describes the response of faith:

> (1) In the face of the situation which *exposed or revealed the discrepancy* between one's pretensions and one's actual life-as-lived, one responded with acknowledgement of the true situation and a "change of understanding" (Greek: *metanoia*, poorly translated "repentance");
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> (2) in the face of the situation which confronted one with

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[11] See *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*, especially the essay, "Faith in Gods and in God," p. 122 and passim.

[12] See Hobbs, "An Alternate Model from a Theological Perspective," in *The Family in Search of a Future, Alternate Models for Moderns*, ed. Herbert A. Otto (New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), p. 32.

contingency or limitation of his existence, one responded with creative thankfulness for the new—albeit in many cases unwanted and limited—possibilities presented by the limiting situation itself;

(3) in the face of the *encounter with others in their need for help*, one responded with action directed to the benefit or good of those others.

The reasons for this particular organization are cultural, and grow out of Georges Dumézil's work in the anthropology and thought patterns of Indo-European speaking peoples.[13]

In the main thesis of the work, I shall consider the human activity of building the mental and social world that we live in, especially in its religious aspects, sometimes called the "social construction of reality."[14] It is my thesis that in our world-building we meet God as exposure when we do honest history, as limitation when we face cognitive relativity, and as need when we meet other people who build their religion differently, that is to say, when we find ourselves in a situation of religious pluralism. If we meet God and good in history, relativity, and pluralism, then we should embrace history, relativity, and pluralism, rather than treating them as threats, nuisances, or as irrelevant.

In history we uncover our own religious past, how we came to have the faith we do. History, like personal exposure, can be unflattering. It has frequently given rise to charges of fraud against the church, and it has also uncovered faith of proportions we never suspected. In relativity, we face the fact that we cannot logically compel another, not even ourselves, of the truth of our religious commitments. Relativity brings with it also freedom, for we are not bound for ever to the religous rubrics of another age. Pluralism means that we cannot administer religious reality as a monopoly. On the other hand, it brings with it the blessings of cultural richness.

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[13] See the review of Dumézil's work by C. Scott Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1973).

[14] See the book by Berger and Luckmann of that title.

In chapters 1 and 2, I shall discuss the notion of "God" insofar as it tells us how we meet God. This is sufficient to motivate the thesis that we meet god in history, relativity, and pluralism. In chapters 3, 4, and 5, I shall examine history, relativity, and pluralism in turn, looking at what each is and at how it has been received by the church. In chapter 6, I shall look at some ways in which the embracing of history, relativity, and pluralism can be expected to bring blessings to the church. In chapter 7, I shall look at some of the implications of the foregoing investigation of our conception of God. While I cannot treat the notion of "God" in an exhaustive way, it will be clear that some changes are in order. The chief of these is that we cannot speak *literally* of God as cause of anything or any event in the world. In chapter 8, I shall look at some of the things we can easily do if we say we embrace history, relativity, and pluralism. If we pretend to be a historical religion, we tell history honestly, even to our children. And we cannot use religious explanations to get off the hook, saying that God told us to do things which we clearly took upon ourselves. If we value pluralism, we must get to know some of our religious neighbors. Spiritual life at the day to day level may be a little different, too; some of the first changes can be guessed at. If there should be changes, I would yet contend that we should try to salvage as much as possible of what we inherit from our religious past.

Peter Berger once quotes an often expressed sentiment, to the effect that "We can no longer believe such-and-such," answering, "Speak for yourself, Buddy."[15] I do not presume to speak for everybody, but neither do I believe that I am alone in the sentiments that I voice here. The "We" can be located sociologically quite precisely. That is, I speak as one who is both a member of the Church and also of the professional scientific subculture, and I speak out of the tensions engendered in that situation. I cannot speak for every subculture, but it is fair to speak to my neighbors. Others can watch and draw conclusions for their own situations. I am simply trying to explore within the terms of the world I live in how it might be possible to talk about the faith we have

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[15] Peter Berger, "Secular Theology and the Rejection of the Supernatural: Reflections on Recent Trends," *Theological Studies* 38 (1977) 39.

received and pass on in our turn. It is said that God comes to us in the terms of our own time, and that this is a good way of saying that Christianity is an incarnational religion. If, then, we are to meet God as he comes to us, we need to recognize him in the terms of our own time, for sequestering him within the terms of another time will simply prove a way of evading him.

Chapter 1

How we meet God in life

1.1 "gods": Meaning, Action, Emotion

1.1.1 What is a "god"?

The thrust of my argument hangs not originally on a sense for the term
"God," but rather on a sense of how we meet God in life. Needless to
say, this presupposes a sense for "God." I shall nevertheless postpone
fuller remarks on this problem until chapter 7. Even there, I cannot
deal with the full scope of the problem of "God," but can only indicate a
partial solution. I do not know that a full solution is presently possible,
and in any case, it would be beyond the intentions of this thesis. For
the present, we do need a sense of the term "god," with a little "g," and
from that sense a partial sense for the term "God." A solution to this
much of the problem is tractable, and it will enable us to get on with
my central contentions.

While we may have difficulties saying what "God" means, at least
in a colloquial and everyday sense, we have no such difficulties with
"gods." Joseph Kraft, writing in a syndicated column, can speak of a
certain class of people, whom he calls "Big America," and of whom
he says, "Economic growth is their god, consumerism is their faith."[1]
While Kraft's argument is of no interest here, it is interesting that the

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[1] San Francisco *Chronicle*, Monday, July 16, 1979.

most economical way he can identify the people he is talking about is
to name their god. "god"-language survives nicely outside of church,
profanity, and theology. It is from this colloquial use of "god" that we
can get enough of a sense of "God" to proceed.

There are many everyday definitions of "god," and it is useful to
collect in one place some examples. We speak of gods in terms of the
human activity of faith, not to imply that gods are solely a function of
that faith, but only that they are intelligible and accessible through that
activity of faith. We say someone's god is

> criterion of meaning
> object of loyalty and fidelity
> inspiration of confidence
> deciding factor
> basis for decisions
> that for the sake of which all is done,
>   in terms of which all has meaning,
>   toward which we aim
> object of trust
> that to which one commits one's future
> that which he entrusts himself to or counts upon
> that which the heart clings to and relies upon.[2]

Niebuhr summarizes:

> We note that these centers of value, the objects of adora-
> tion, have many different forms of existence. Some are
> visible and tangible of whose reality our senses can give us
> assurance. Some are essences, ideas, concepts, or images
> which are accessible only to abstract thought, but which
> exercise a certain compulsion over the mind. Some are
> movements known only by a kind of empathy or by an
> intuition that outruns sense; some have the peculiar and

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[2] These come from various sources, most not written; but see especially, Richard
Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*, (New York, Harper and Row,
1970), pp. 116–119.

> hard-to-define reality of selves or persons. But in some
> sense they all exist.[3]

I suggest as a general summary for these senses of "god" the notion that they all are heuristics for finding satisfaction, and so include of course a definition of "satisfaction." This is a phenomenological approach, and one which starts with the notion of "faith" rather than the notion of "god." Hopefully, "faith" is sufficiently unproblematic to do what we need to do. I claim that insofar as we know, act, and feel at all, we do so by faith. This claim needs a little illustration, or else it will seem not to capture much of human activity.

Of the many ideas of god noted above, three may serve in a mutually complementary way to indicate "gods" functioning in three aspects of life; and with this categorization we may aquire a much richer idea of what a god is. These are god as criterion for meaning, basis for decisions, and inspiration of confidence and affections. They respectively act in those areas of life we designate as cognitive, active, and emotive.

The elements which all these notions of "god" have in common are ideas of choice, preference, or purpose. Even meaning can be subsumed in this scheme, for what is meaningful is what is relevant, and what is relevant is so only by the knowing subject's choice. Now not all preferences are of an equal importance. Some are dependent on others, as subordinate purposes are the means to effect dominant purposes. Thus, we say, "I want A instead of B, because A gets me to C, which I want instead of D." Relationships of preferences may be more subtle than this, but they have at least this structure. When a person is asked, "Why do you want such-and-such," he may answer along these lines for a while, indicating a hierarchy of dominant preferences. At some point he will answer "Why do you want such-and-such" with something like "Because that's where it's at, man!" He is tired of answering such questions, and anyway, the questioner is now asking for a justification of something that can have no justification. If he cannot see that it is worthwhile in and of itself, and not as a means to some other end, then he may be pitied, but not helped. The questioner

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[3] Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism*, p. 120.

has at this point reached a preference in terms of which all the other preferences are chosen. It is this quality about a preference that puts it in the status of a god. Such preferences are quite strongly held. In fact, it is usually only when such a preference is held tenaciously in the face of circumstances indicating the advisability of at least relativizing it, and perhaps suspending it, that we colloquially call that preference a "god."

1.1.2   Meaning

I spoke of preferences organizing human life in three areas, cognition, action, and affection. Consider first human cognition. I would contend that there is no meaning or sensation given directly to man, but only with respect to some criteria. In some respects, this is a commonplace; length is measured only relative to a ruler. The special theory of relativity has uncovered the essential role of that ruler, and the notoriety of that theory has lent the word "relativity" to use far beyond physics. In physics, the relativity is in external and objective reality. We are interested in relativity of human access to reality, something more like relativity in sociology than in physics.

Human beings enjoy a broad diversity of cognitive faculties. We may say that some faculties are provided for in human neurophysiology, such as recognition of faces or perception of depth in perspective. Others, such as comprehension of abstract thought, or of jokes and slang, or the appreciation of music, are not nearly so simple. For present purposes, we may imagine a spectrum of cognitive faculties, from the simple to the complex. I take two, one from each end of the spectrum, as exemplary of the thesis that there are no percepts fixed and given by the objective character of the external things perceived. From the "low" end of the spectrum, we shall look at vision, and from the "high" end, the construction of scientific theories. There is a considerable literature and much detailed reflection on each of these cognitive faculties.

I shall argue that human knowledge is dependent on the processes inside the human brain that "knows," but I do not for a minute contem-

plate the solipsist position, that external reality itself is illusory or a function of human imagination. I only assert that human access to that reality is contingent and occurs through cognitive faculties that shape perceptions as thoroughly as do the perceived objects themselves. In effect, you "see" what you ”measure.” A little reflection on neurophysiology of human sensation will show that in every case, what humans sense at all is sensed by virtue of receptors which detect the presence or absence of quite specific features in the environment. Thus we can see in the visual spectrum, but not ultra-violet or infra-red, and so on. Similarly, in interpreting a visual field, and in higher kinds of knowledge, we know entirely by virtue of the information we keep as relevant, while we discard the great mass of information that our senses offer us. The story of the six blind Indians feeling their way over an elephant is not really to the point, because in it one man *could* feel his way over the whole elephant. The problem which arises is of another character. There is simply too much information to process; some of it must be discarded. The selection of what to save constitutes the choices underlying human perception and knowledge.

1.1.3   Human Vision

Human vision is probably the cognitive faculty most accessible to the posing of experimentally testable questions. Many aspects of vision are known to depend on the condition of the seeing subject. On these lines, optical illusions have motivated much research in psychology; yet normal vision is at least as intriguing as vision of illusions. R. L. Gregory has described for popular audiences some of this research.[4] In his description, Zulus, who live in a world without straight lines or sharp edges, without clues to perspective, are not affected by the illusions such as reversing stairways and other figures familiar from the graphic work of M. C. Escher. Peoples who live entirely in forests, when taken out into a plain with distant visibility, perceive distant

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[4] See his *Eye and Brain, the Psychology of Seeing*, (New York, 3rd ed., McGraw-Hill, 1978), and *The Intelligent Eye*, (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1970).

objects not as distant, but as small.[5]

Vision research has amply demonstrated that the same external reality can be perceived in more than one way, and that misinterpreted clues can lead to the perception of something different from what is really there. Recently, workers have been able to construct hypotheses of to how the visual field is interpreted by the brain. Alan Gilchrist notes that edges are pivotal in the deciphering of visual fields.[6] Edges are of two kinds, those created by light and shadow, and those created by corners of solid objects. The eye and brain are able to tell real black from white, as opposed to shadow and light, and to tell that apparently different shades of gray are the same paint under different illumination. These distinctions are possible only when enough of a field of view is presented so that relationships may be attributed to constituents of that field of view. What is seen is parsed by imposing on it a tree-like organization, reminiscent in some respects of the tree structures used in linguistics for the parsing of sentences. Just as a sentence is composed of component phrases, according to rules of sentence generation, so the visual field is assumed to be composed of solid objects, which in turn have surfaces and edges. The visual field has structure at several levels, from the purely two-dimensional array of gray-levels, pixels in computer simulations, to the conceived ensemble of solid objects in three dimensions which generates the array of gray levels on the retinae of the eyes. The analogy with language can be drawn in some detail. The two-dimensional field is like the surface structure, and the supposed three-dimensional array of objects giving rise to the two-dimensional array on the retina is like the deep structure in Chomskyan lingistics.[7] Illusion occurs when there is ambiguity in the deep structure, that is, when the same surface structure could have

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[5] Gregory, *Eye and Brain*, p. 161.

[6] Alan Gilchrist, "The Perception of Surface Blacks and Whites," *Scientific American*, March 1979, p. 112.

[7] I draw analogy to Chomsky's linguistics in full knowledge that among linguists there is no general consensus on the shape of linguistic theory, nor is there hope of consensus soon. Accordingly, I do not put great weight on the analogy. I think that similar analogies with other linguistic theories could as easily be drawn, and indeed with theories of cognitive capacity in other areas. It may be that "surface" and "deep" structure are more pertinent to vision than to language.

been originated by two different deep structures, or when the surface structure is interpreted to have originated in a deep structure other than the one in fact underlying it.

Recently, some workers in Artificial Intelligence trying to simulate visual processes have used a strategy which, with some joking, has taken as its model ideas from hermeneutics. It has been a commonplace for some decades in hermeneutics that one cannot understand the whole of an ancient text until the parts of it are clear, but interpretation of the parts requires a sense of what the whole is. The solution to this problem, the so-called "hermeneutical circle," is to adduce a pre-understanding, by which the whole is guessed. The parts are then interpreted, and then perhaps the understanding of the whole may be revised. The process may continue for several iterations.

Visual processing must convert the two-dimensional image that the eyes receive into an internal representation of the three-dimensional array that produces the two-dimensional image. The two-dimensional image is converted easily into an array of gray levels. Processing from there on is not so straightforward. As in many AI problems, there is an impractically large number of possibilities that must be investigated in order to find a workable solution. Here, one must sort through possible three-dimensional fields, of which there are very many. The number is greatly reduced by assuming that such mini-worlds are composed of solid, non-interpenetrating objects, bounded by closed surfaces, moving continuously through a transparent fluid. David Marr and his coworkers at the MIT AI Lab further assume that such solid objects may be approximated for initial purposes by bodies whose segments are generalized cones, which for our purposes may be described simply as cylinders.[8] A cylinder need be described only by its axis of rotation and by its radius. What result when bodies are reduced to collections of generalized cones are stick figures. It is surprising how much can be recognized of an animal by a stick figure diagram. It turns out that this

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[8] Gunther Stent, private communication, Berkeley, 1980, and David Marr, *Vision*, in press. More precisely, a generalized cone is a volume swept out by a surface, moving, and possibly changing in area as it moves, along a continuous curve which is always perpendicular to the surface as it moves. Cylinders and cones are special cases; boxes, prisms, even pretzels are also generalized cones.

is a very economical way to represent the most important imformation about a solid body. There are obviously many things which Marr's programs cannot yet do. But it seems to be a promising start.

What I wish to note is the extent to which successful "perception" depends on choices made prior to the activity of perception itself. The organism—here a computer—has decided ahead of time that reality is composable of certain kinds of things, and not others. If confronted with input it is not prepared for, this program wil produce answers only slowly, and they will be answers which are of questionable usefulness at best, simply incorrect at worst. And everything it "perceives" is relative to the assumptions it makes in processing its input. It is notoriously difficult, not to say controversial, to extrapolate from computers to human brains; but when the programming strategies were taken from reflection on the thought patterns of human beings, it seems safe to venture some cautious analogies.

An even more striking example is described by Bruner and Postman.[9] They asked subjects to identify common playing cards on short and controlled exposure. Now not all of the cards were "normal": there were red spades, and black hearts, for example. Most subjects identify all the cards even on very short exposures; but the anomalous cards were incorrectly identified as normal cards. A red spade would be seen as a normal black spade, or as a normal red heart. With increasing exposure, subjects hesitate and become aware of anomaly, until (usually suddenly) they "catch on," and identify the anomalous cards correctly. Some subjects never caught on. This I think is a clear example of how humans perceive by preconceiving what the world is made up of.

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[9] J. S. Bruner and Leo Postman, "On the Perception of Incongruity: A Paradigm," *Journal of Personality*, XVIII (1949), 206–23; Thomas S. Kuhn's citation, in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, second ed., (University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 63.

1.1.4   Scientific Theories

What we observe at the low end of the scale of human cognitive faculties may be as easily seen at the high end, in the construction and validation of scientific theories. Thomas Kuhn argues that human knowledge is relative to presuppositions which he calls "paradigms."[10] Science in some community or discipline will pose all its questions in terms of some notion of what the world is like, whether that notion is a theory, or a set of categories in terms of which to construct theories, or even an experimental apparatus which yields data when no other apparatus seems practicable. A "revolution" occurs when that community exhausts a paradigm, or discovers anomalies in the results derived from it, leading it to search for a new paradigm.[11] The most notorious paradigm shift occurred in the seventeenth century when physics gave up the Aristotelian model in which moving bodies move in some sense because it is their nature or their purpose to move as they do.[12] Instead were substituted the notions of instantaneous position, velocity, acceleration, mass, momentum, and energy. In retrospect, it seems that physics was impossible under the constraints imposed by the Aristotelian paradigm; yet an old paradigm always has this aspect in hindsight. Different paradigms do not suggest different interpretations placed on the same data; they suggest measuring different data.

Upon examining the history of all the sciences, it seems that life consists of paradigm shifts and of "normal" science between shifts. Normal science consists of solving puzzles which are posed by the paradigm which the community has adopted. The notion of what is a chemical element underwent profound changes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the time to which chemistry looks back as its founding, the time of finding its first real paradigms. Recently,

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[10] T. S. Kuhn, op. cit.

[11] "Revolution" was perhaps an ill-chosen word. As an analogy, it can be pressed too far almost without any pressing at all. Nevertheless, it is the term used, and was chosen perhaps because of its general circulation before Kuhn appropriated it. In Kuhn's usage, the word has become quite technical compared to the colloquial (political) meaning.

[12] Kuhn, op. cit., pp. 118–120.

Wegener's hypothesis of continental drift has been adopted in geo-physics, making sense of much hitherto unintelligible data. Examples multiply easily.

Kuhn's work has aroused controversy that can hardly be settled here. It seems to me a better description of life in science than any other I have seen, and I am confident that with whatever modifications it merits, it will survive in its essentials.[13] At first, before a science is fairly on its feet, all observations and facts are on an equal footing. No some of them explain the others. Among competing schools as to which "facts" should be used to explain the others, one wins out, and a community and its literature are born. Puzzle-solving, or "normal" science follows, until a period of deepening dis-ease, when more and more anomalies demand attention. A new paradigm will emerge from the crisis, and while the world is the same before and after the settle-ment, afterwards, scientists work in a different "world." Contrary to the older descriptions of how scientists decide between competing hy-potheses, in which, theoretically, a single counter-example is sufficient to require the abandonment of the hypothesis, for a while choice is dif-ficult, but there comes a time when it is easy. The community accepts one theory over the other because it explains the "facts" better and with greater precision, because it predicts unsuspected phenomena, because of its elegance, but not because of its greater problem-solving ability. Some old "solved" problems become unsolved; e. g., phlogiston ex-plained metalicity, Lavoisier did not. Chemistry today can do so once again. In the end, while scientists know more and more, there is no convergent evolution to "The Truth" in science.

Kuhn's ideas seemed to some to undermine the possibility of doing science at all, for he apparently has given up the notion of objectivity in science. I do not think he has. Nowhere has he questioned the objectivity of the real world "out there," but only of man's guaranteed or easy access to that reality. The objectivity of reality itself does not extend to human knowledge of that reality. Kuhn is only working out in thorough detail the implications of the idea that one only "sees"

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[13] This debate was carried on in part in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, (Cambridge University Press, 1970).

what one measures. If by common agreement, a community only measures certain things and not others, then it will never see the others. Why this lemming-like behavior? With total anarchy, there could be no meaningful conversation or cooperation, and without these, no progress. That is just a guess, and an intuitive one at that. It is not to suggest that anarchy is all bad; such anarchy as there is, is generally very fruitful.

The uneasiness in discussion of Kuhn's theories is felt most acutely over the matter of paradigm shifts. There are no grounds for prefering one paradigm over another that are not themselves taken from within one of the competing paradigms; thus any choice between paradigms appears circular. In the end, the only standard is human; for in the selection of a paradigm, "there is no standard higher than the assent of the relevant community."[14] The unease is felt at living with cognitive relativity. Scientists, like ordinary people, would like to believe that their knowledge is guaranteed absolutely. That it is only for a time, and relative to human and changeable presuppositions, is profoundly unsettling.

In Kuhn's argument, the life of the community shapes the life of its individual members. W. G. Pollard gives a description how the process of becoming a scientist is one of entrusting oneself to the discipline of a scientific community.[15] That community must of course provide not only criteria for knowledge, but also guidance in decision, and it must inspire the student's confidence. Meaning, decisions, and confidence are interrelated, as I shall argue below.

Kuhn suggests that we have inherited an epistemological paradigm from Descartes, albeit one which has served science well, but one which is now in trouble. Anomalous data are appearing in philosophy, psychology, linguistics, and even art history.[16] History of science especially fits increasingly poorly within the old paradigm. Had he been able, Kuhn might have added sociology of knowledge to his list, as in it workers are suggesting a cognitive relativity applicable to all

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[14] Kuhn, op. cit., p. 94.

[15] William G. Pollard, *Physicist and Christian*, (New York, Seabury Press, 1961), chapters I and II.

[16] Kuhn, op. cit., p. 121.

areas of life, "everyday" life as well as life in technical research. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966) presented an outline of a general theory of institutions, roles, and knowledge.[17] The knowledge that circulates does so for a variety of reasons, usually a compromise between availability, encounter with reality, and what one wants to believe. This is hardly new in sociology, but it has acquired a new cast by its thoroughness. All knowledge has come to seem very relative. Here again, we know what we know only in virtue of choices, and only relative to those choices.

We entered this tour of human cognition with the notion of "god" in mind. It was my purpose to show that all human life is colored by choices, and that those choices are ordered relative to one another, and that out of that web of choices naturally comes the notion of "god." My interest in cognitive activity was to deal with the major possible exception that could be taken, for it has often seemed that "facts" are facts, independent of what anyone might want or prefer. Especially has this been held of science. Yet in every case, if inquiry is pressed, underlying the "facts" are choices, which may or may not corrupt with circularity the argument those facts are adduced to decide.

Preferences can be ultimate or subordinate. and people can hold them more or less tenaciously. Bruner and Postman's experiment on subjects asked to identify anomalous playing cards in a deck of normal cards illustrates that sometimes people have great difficulty surrenduring a faulty presupposition. Clearly, the ideal in science is one who is at first reluctant to give credence to anomalous data, but not reluctant for very long. There is here an openness in which no presupposition is made ultimate, a notion which to which we shall return more than once.

1.1.5   Action and Emotion

I divided the operation of gods into three areas, action and emotion as well as cognition. Rather than present an argument for action similar

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[17] Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, (New York, Doubleday, 1966).

to the one for cognition, which would probably surprise no-one, it may be instructive to consider an illustration that choices in action are not as simple as we may have thought. There is a vast literature in psychology and other disciplines on why people do the things they do, and I cannot survey it here. Some of this literature goes by the name of "Values Clarification." One small book, *Deciding*, lists twelve strategies for making decisions.[18] They may be sorted according to the ways one considers the desirability of the choice made, its probability of success, and the rationality of factors used to weigh the choices. Less approved strategies in the list either avoid making a decision at all or evade spelling out the real reasons for the decision.

My own reflection is that life is more complicated than this. When in high-school I had to choose between taking Greek and German (a choice forced by my prior choice not to continue Latin, which I thought was "too hard"!), there seemed to me to be several considerations, (i) possible usefulness, (ii) whom to associate with (I knew who else was taking each class), (iii) difficulty, (iv) fun, and (v) whether to explore one of my grandfather's interests. In the end, the last, following my grandfather, colored my handling of the first four considerations. This was not simply to say that one was more important than the others, although obviously, it was that at least. It was in terms of this choice that I could answer the questions which language would be more useful, more fun, harder or easier, and whom I prefered to spend my time with. This example can be generalized to give a recipe people use much of the time. We ask ourselves, "in terms of the choice at hand, whom do I want to be like?" This does not require conscious deliberation, and it can be done by persons of any intelligence; we all do it all the time. It seems to be reliable inasmuch as it does actually make decisions, and makes them in a way satisfactory to the person deciding, but it doesn't do much to spell out the reasons–if there are any others–for the decision made. This method is apparently also what we use when we must decide what cause or which party to support, be it nation, race, movement, class, clique, labor union, or guild. The

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[18] H. B. Gelatt, Barbara Varenhorst, and Richard Carey, *Deciding*, (New York, College Entrance Examination Board, 1972), pp. 41–44.

chosen group is seen as the group which affords life more abundantly. To adhere to such a grup is a strategy for finding satisfaction in life.

There is not to my knowledge a general theory of how people decide, or of how preferences are related to one another. Such a theory would need to give substance to the intuitive estimate that preferences relate to one another as relative means and ends. It also seems intuitive that in action we depend on our underlying choices if we are to act at all. This act of willing dependence is called faith. Richard Niebuhr has somewhere said that insofar as men live at all, they live by faith. We are dependent first on innate structures for shaping our knowledge, actions, and emotions, and secondarily on relatively free preferences for shaping our lives in detail.

Man is not just knowing and doing, he is feeling as well. Confidence and affection are feelings, and what we rely on for guidance in knowledge and action, we come to love, and vice versa. Niebuhr in *Radical Monotheism* suggested loyalty and confidence as the two marks of faith.[19] To these I have added, and put in first place, cognitive dependency, credence, if you will. Niebuhr probably did not intend loyalty and fidelity to refer paradigmatically to action, or confidence to emotions, leaving out cognition, for he develops no such tripartite analysis. His remarks in other places certainly include cognition as well. He simply described the few words that come to mind as explaining "faith" as "chosen-dependency-upon." Loyalty, fidelity, and confidence make faith tangible without being systematic. The reasons for a tripartite analysis will be made clear in the next chapter.

The case of dependency in affection is even less clear than that for purpose and action. We do not reflect on our feelings much, we usually just feel them. But examples do come to mind indicating that affections are structured just as are other preferences. A man may say not only, "I love her," but also, "I love everything about her." Affections are interrelated, and I suspect that the interrelationships will be explained perspicuously by schemes of subordination best diagrammed in tree-structures. And it is strongly suggestive that affections are dependent on both innate givenness and on relatively free choices.

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[19] Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism*, pp. 16–23.

1.2   Preferences in the Sense of "God"

1.2.1   Intention and Action

The key to making sense of gods is seeing them in terms of preferences and choices. Certainly all people make choices, all the time; everything we do is based on preferences. Of human action, we say, "I *understand* what you intended to do, if you are able to *explain* to me why you did such-and-such an action."[20] Here we recognize that we all make sense of preferences with language. We understand when we can explain, in words, and conversely. In the same way, experience only becomes more than raw sensation by means of the language that interprets that sensation and objectifies it. If an event is described and interpreted differently, it is a different experience. This is true even when we do not say the words that interpret experience; for if we do not, it is because they are obvious and do not need saying.

Not only do we interpret action with language, we interpret action in much the same way as we interpret language. Paul Ricoeur has drawn an extensive parallel between action and language. Interpretation of language is a two-part affair, of understanding and explaining. We cannot appropriate another's subjectivity, i. e., understand, until we can put in words his feelings, i. e., explain; yet we cannot find words to explain until we can understand. This tension is another manifestation of "hermeneutical circularity."

1.2.2   Preference and Language

The centrality of language and of preference in action is reflected in the structure of language itself. Some features of language seem to be common to all languages and language families. Sentences are made of components which, at least at the gross level, are universal, a noun

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[20] Paul Ricoeur, "The Model of Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text," *Social Research*, 38:3 (Autumn 1971), reprinted in Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan, eds., *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979).

phrase and a verb phrase, with provision always for a node labeled "AUX" (a term generalized from "Auxiliary"), which includes the tense, mood, indication whether the verb is to be perfect, or progressive, and perhaps other such markings.[21] The noun phrase and verb phrase function as subject and predicate. The AUX node, whether placed under the Verb Phrase or in parallel to it, indicates the modality of the sentence as well as its aspect. The auxiliary, "can," "ought," "should," a marker for the imperative, or for a question, indicates not the syntactic mood of the verb, but its semantic and pragmatic mood.

The semantic mood of a sentence is that aspect of the sentence which indicates the speaker's preferences in regard to the content of the sentence. For purposes of pragmatics, Kasher and others have defined the sentence's mood and radical.[22] Consider

> (1) Do you live here?
> (2) It is obligatory for you to live here.
> (3) You live here.
> (4) It is necessary that you live here.
> (5) Please live here.

We may represent the radical of these sentences by the relative clause,

> (6) that you live here.

To obtain the sentences (1)–(5), we would supply preference relations involving the radical (6) and other necessary information. Thus, for the direct statement, (3), the speaker must prefer that the hearer know (if he does not already) that he lives here, or at least that the hearer

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[21] For descriptions of English syntax in Chomskian linguistics, see Mark Lester, *Introductory Transformational Grammar of English*, second ed., (New York, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1976), or Noam Chomsky, *Studies in Semantics and Generative Grammar* (The Hague, Mouton, 1972), or, for an estimate from a theological perspective, Irene Lawrence, *Theology and Linguistics: The Significance of Noam Chomsky for Theological Construction*, PhD dissertation (Berkeley, Graduate Theological Union, 1979). Lester discusses the AUX node on pp. 47–83.

[22] Asa Kasher, "Mood Inplicatures: A Logical Way of Doing Generative Pragmatics," *Theoretical Linguistics*, 1 (1974) 6.

consider as germane to the discussion the fact that he lives here. We see here that the context in which the discussion is held is critical in determining the meaning of its sentences. It is also true that the context of the matter discussed (not necessarily the same as the context of the discussion itself) contributes equally to the meaning of the discussion. In the case of (1), the direct question, the speaker prefers that he know whether the hearer lives here, and also that the hearer know that he wants to know; other preferences may be deduced from these. Kasher has codified some of the preference relations and the implicatures between them for the case of the pragmatic imperative mood, and suggested that a similar treatment could be supplied for the other moods. These are of course only a few of the very many preferences which the speaker can express with regard to the idea "that you live here." These possible pragmatic moods are not in the least limited by the number of syntactic moods the verb displays in its inflections. Indeed, many sentences indicate the speaker's preferences without any modal auxiliary words present in the surface structure at all. Syntactically indicative sentences, in particular, reflect at least the preference (assuming the speaker is candid) that the hearer also know or consider the ideas conveyed in the sentence. Indicatives must reflect at least this preference, for there must have been some point to speaking at all instead of keeping silent.

Thus, not only are all actions motivated by preferences, and those preferences are intelligible only with language, but language itself has built-in features for expressing preference.

1.3   Henotheisms and Polytheism

1.3.1   Examples from Everyday Life

As we have noted, preferences may be related to one another by subordination in which the subordinate preference is a means to the dominant preference viewed as end. The attitudes with which increasing more dominant preferences are held reveal the extent to which those preferences take on the color of "gods." Richard Niebuhr uses the term

"henotheism" to denote worship of one god among the many, meaning by the one "god" some one strategy for finding satisfaction.[23] Etymologically, "henotheism" means almost the same thing as "monotheism," since *mono-* means "only" and *heno-* means "one," from Latin and Greek respectively. Though the meanings are close, the difference is significant. Since Niebuhr intended to speak of monotheism in a sense different from the cardinality of the pantheon, he uses the less familiar term. A henotheist has a god, and only one, but it is a god of a particular sort. The God of monotheism is not really a god at all, as we shall see shortly. Simply put, henotheism is the elevation of some finite good to the status of an ultimate good.

One could have many gods, each in a different circumstance or in a different department of life, with no coherence or unity or consistency organizing those gods. This state of affairs is polytheism. The appearance of total disorganization of gods is usually not too convincing, as underlying it will usually be some deciding factor such as expediency, something which is not called a god simply because we do not conventionally give it a name.

Examples of henotheisms abound easily. Nation, race, job, clan, family, self, pleasure, power, sex, money, and so on, are the obvious generic sorts of gods at a personal level. Popular usage testifies to the religious nature of this devotion when it uses "worship" alomg the lines of, "He doesn't just *like* X, he *worships* X." One who speaks this way probably does not worship the X in question; he may in fact like it himself, but "worship" as used in this context is usually perjorative, if quite accurate.

Henotheisms can be found in many places where they do not advertize themselves. Worship of scripture as inerrant truth, worship of the church as an institution, of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, or of the new Prayer Book, or of the creeds, are examples from the life of the church. For one example, one comes to suspect that for opponents of the ordination of women who have seceded from the Episcopal Church, life has meaning if and only if women cannot be ordained. And for some of those advocating women's ordination, it

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[23] Niebuhr, op. cit., pp. 24–25.

seems life has meaning if and only if women *can* be ordained. That this henotheistic god organizes purposes and affections is transparent; that it organizes cognition is apparent if one reflects on the way the opposing parties read the pertinent history.

Politics also is rich with henotheisms. There are nationalisms, party loyalties, Aryan-Nordic civilization, "Democracy," the voice of the people as the voice of god, and so on. Nations can demand loyalty absolutely, or they can demand only relative loyalty, if they are in turn loyal to causes beyond themselves. The same could be said of churches.

In science, positivism is an example of henotheism. In scientific henotheisms, some theory or way of constructing theories is erected into an absolute criterion of truth. In this example, for a concept to acquire the rights of cognitive citizenship, its referent must take on the status of the material. Consider the aether controversy in the nineteenth century, in which the aether was at first presumed to have material status, and then only grudgingly admitted to discourse when electromagnetic theory demanded an aether, but both theory and experiment ruled out any possibility of its being material.

Knowledge must be obtained objectively, where "objectively" means not just equally accessible to all competent observers, but conceals an agenda which denies the possibility of access to another's subjectivity.

Positivism further requires that all explanations be causal, that is, that the concept of purpose be reduced to efficient causation.

And Positivism admits no individuals to cognitive status, but only universals and instances of universals.

These rubrics may seem innocuous enough in classical mechanics, but the consequences of trying to write a positivist history were disastrous, as R. G. Collingwood amply argued.[24] Positivism seems to have its roots in the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.[25] The Ecole Polytechnique was founded at the time of the Revolution,

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[24] R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford University Press, 1946); see especially Part IV.

[25] Such is F. A. Hayek's thesis; see his *The Counter-Revolution of Science* (Glencoe, Ill., The Free Press, 1952).

and here positivism found its home. The best men of French pure and applied science were gathered to teach here; it was the first engineering school attempting real breadth of scope. But out of it in the nineteenth century came a movement to remake all the human and social sciences on the model of the engineering sciences. Henri de Saint-Simon was self-appointed apostle and evangelist, with Newton elevated to the position of Prophet. All this would be only strange comedy, if it were not that the values carried in these ideas survive into the present. In circles where science has made rapid strides recently, it is possible for men to make the claim unopposed that science has destroyed the religious basis for morality, and that science should accordingly provide a new and rational basis for human behaviour, "a code of ethics concerned with man's needs on earth, not his rewards in heaven."[26]

There have also been henotheisms in which science is to be harnessed to some other vision of the good, as in the New Biology of Trofim D. Lysenko, or Aryan Science under the Nazis.

Science, when it is true to itself, is loyal not *to* itself, but beyond itself, to a truth of a universal sort, against all closed truth systems. There is no absolute significance for any finite being or theory of being, or for man as standard of meaning, or for machine as standard.[27] Everything is potentially meaningful and worthy of attention; science is always concerned for "orphaned" facts. It is willing to surrender its theories, if always reluctant to do so. This is science beyond henotheism.

As societies develop, henotheism is usually earliest, with a social polytheism growing out of it. Maturity of society brings sophistication and contact with outsiders, and both relativize all gods. Yet rather than giving up all the gods, society usually fragments religiously, with some people following one god, others another.

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[26] The article is by B. M. Oliver, a Hewlett-Packard engineer, "Toward a New Morality," *IEEE Spectrum*, January 1972, p. 52.

[27] Cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism*, chapter 6.

1.3.2   Making Life "Work"

Henotheisms are designed to make life "work," to bring satisfaction and avoid or evade situations in which life doesn't work. These situations can be variously described as being confounded and confused, facing meaninglessness, defeat and frustration, being lonely, with dried-up affections, or even no food or wherewithal. Henotheism defines "good" and "bad," as distinct from right and wrong. The right/wrong distinction applies to human actions, as they are approved or not. It is situations, states of affairs, that are called good or bad. Obviously, some events can be considered both as human actions and simply as circumstances, depending on the point of view.

We might remember that in the beginning, so the story goes, God not only created the world, he pronounced it good, all of it, not once but seven times. Adam discovers that he has to do some work to live, and in his own words,

> And then the old snake-in-the-grass slips up to me and whispers, Who told you this was good? Because he was kidding you! You going to let some old grey-beard tell you what's good and what's not? Why don't you wise up, and decide on the difference between good and bad for yourself? Why don't you make the decision? And you know how to make it—why, whatever is nice and comfortable and fits in with your plans, that's good; and what isn't, is bad. What's tasty and attractive, and adds to your knowledge and power, that's *good*; what's unattractive, and leaves you in the dark, and is bitter to the taste, that's *bad!* Don't let anyone tell you that *everything* can work for your good! That's for the birds, and the beasts, but not for you.[28]

An example of how we define good and bad is in our common use of the words "grievous" and "tragic." We hardly ever say something

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[28] Edward C. Hobbs, "The Two Tests, and the Two Adams," *CDSP Crossings*, Spring 1979.

is grievous, but frequently that it is tragic.[29]   A dissabling injury is described as tragic. We get out our long faces and solemnly shake our heads. The great airline disaster of 1977 or 1978, in which two Boeing-747's collided and burned on a runway in the Azores, killing more than five hundred people, was universally called tragic. Yet in the old days, and still, in English literature courses, tragedy is brought upon oneself; there is a sense of complicity in it, a sense of material sin. Now there may have been human error involved in the crash, but it was not described as tragic with special reference to the pilots; they are forgotten, and outside of the National Transportation Safety Board, nobody cares much whether there was pilot error. I suggest a proper word for such disasters is not "tragic" but "grievous." An accident may be acutely and intensely and overwhelmingly grievous, but that does not make it tragic. No sin, no tragedy.

The common usage reflects a world-view in which what doesn't fit in with my plans is precisely tragic. It is *morally* lamented; "God" has failed, and that is what "tragic" means.

> So we do just what the snake-in-the-grass suggests–we decide to be like gods ourselves, deciding what is good and what is not. What we like, is *good*; what we don't like, is *bad*, and we won't be grateful for that, nor try to bring forth any good that might be in it, since we know there isn't any.[30]

1.3.3   Failure of the gods

If we have many strategies to make life work, it is still the case that no one of them works universally. These strategies are centers of value, the objects of our faith. In the end, every one breaks down.

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[29] See Reinhold Niebuhr's usage of "tragic" and "pathetic" in *The Irony of American History* (New York, Scribners, 1952), p. vii–ix. Where he uses "pathetic," I am using "grievous." The difference is only in seeing the events from the outside ("pathetic") or from the inside, whether directly or by empathy ("grievous").

[30] Hobbs, "The Two Tests, and the Two Adams."

> Yet this is true—and this constitutes the tragedy of our
> religious life—that none of these values or centers of value
> exists universally, or can be the object of a universal faith.
> None of them can guarantee meaning to our life in the
> world save for a time. They are all finite in time as in
> space and make finite claims upon us. Hence we become
> aware of two characteristics of our faith and its gods:
> that we are divided within ourselves and socially by our
> religion, and that our gods are unable to save us from the
> ultimate frustration of meaningless existence.[31]

For every way to make life work, there are circumstances in which it
leaves us confused, frustrated, and lonely. "The causes for which we
live all die."[32] Colloquial language captures this in the phrase "death
and taxes." We speak of givens and gifts ("bad" and "good"), what we
cannot change, and what we like.

A man once decided to become a millionaire. All his life was
subordinated to this goal. Since spending money did not help, he lived
in a small and cheap apartment, wore old clothes, took no vacations.
His goal was a symbolic one, apparently; it was precisely accomplished
when his bank account reached one million and one dollars. He married
a woman who shared the same goal. They each made their million, and
discovering that life now had no purpose, both died shortly thereafter.
The fact that each of us can trivially cite goals which would not have
been so vulnerable as this man's does not matter. Our examples would
all have failed in the end also. The point is not to find a goal that lasts
longer and fails later and gives "more" satisfaction, but instead to face
up to the inevitable failure in the first place.

This state of affairs, when the causes for which we live all die,
is not properly speaking attributable to a nameable thing. It could
be called the nature of things, reality, a big void, or chaos beyond
the scope of our cognitive capacity. There certainly is no common
cause operating behind all the givens and the gifts; they just happen.
They have causes, each one, but no common cause. If a unity is to be

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[31] Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 120.
[32] Ibid., p. 122.

attributed to them for conceptual purposes, that is done by the human knower, precisely to put a cognitive handle on a body of experience. It should be done in such a way as not to hide the fact that all the failures have individual and disparate causes. There is no efficient purpose behind them, not even a single efficient cause. The ignominy of human life is that not only are all our preferences disappointed in the end, but we are unable to know why. It *is* possible to know *that* in the end we face givenness, in both gifts and givens, and to talk about it, to dislike it (or not), to conspire to control or evade it. We may learn why particular preferences are disappointed, and even do something about it. But we cannot know one reason why all our gods in the end die. The attempt to do this, to attain security in the face of reality, is precisely the purpose of the henotheisms, of the 'gods.'

1.4   Transformation of Preferences

1.4.1   Embracing Disappointment

We may dislike our disappointedness in life, we may complain, we may struggle. We may even decide not to talk about it, on the policy of talking only about things we can understand. We may continue to suppose that purpose and meaning and happiness are to be found only in eventual victory. But there is another course open. Niebuhr calls it Radical Monotheism:

> Now a strange thing has happened in our history and in our personal life; our faith has been attached to that great void, to that enemy of all our causes, to that opponent of all our gods. The strange thing has happened that we have been enabled to say of this reality, this last power in which we live and move and have our being, "Though it slay us, yet will we trust it." We have been allowed to attach our confidence to it, and to put our reliance in it which is the one reality beyond all the many, which is the last power, the infinite source of all particular beings as well as their

end. And insofar as our faith, our reliance for meaning
and worth, has been attached to this source and enemy of
all our gods, we have been enabled to call this reality God.
. . .

Another way of describing this faith is one which I have
learned from Professor Whitehead's little book on reli-
gion. Religion, he says, "is the transition from God the
void to God the enemy, and from God the enemy to God
the companion." When we say that we conceive faith in
the great void and the great enemy, we mean that we have
learned to count on it as friend. We have learned to rely on
it as a cause to which we may devote all our lives, as that
which will make all our lives and the lives of all things
valuable even though it bring them to death.[33]

This faith is the "end of the road," and it is received as a gift. It
becomes the basis of knowledge and action and emotion. Nothing is
too holy or too dangerous to investigate. No policy is too absolute
to abandon. Polytheistic gods at war, each claiming absoluteness,
are made relative and less-than-gods. All that is, is good, though its
goodness may be hidden, and though it last only for a time. Faith in
this god involves us in permanent revolution of the mind and heart.

Others have seen Niebuhr's point. Edward Sapir writes, "Reli-
gion means the haunting realization of ultimate powerlessness in an
inscrutable world . . .   it is the pursuit, conscious or unconscious, of
ultimate serenity following total and necessary defeat that constitutes
the core of religion."[34] Sapir does not work out this insight, but others
have.

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[33] Niebuhr, op. cit., pp. 122–124; his citation is of Albert North Whitehead, *Reli-
gion in the Making* (1926), p. 16 f.

[34] Edward Sapir, *Culture, Language, and Personality, Selected Essays*, ed. David
G. Mandelbaum (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1966), p. 122–123.

1.4.2 Prayer as an Example

The thesis presented here is sharply debated by Ernest Gellner and Peter Winch. The problem of interest for them is how to understand primitive religion, and Winch suggests that there are parallels to modern religion. The society in question is that of the Azande in Africa. Azande technology is to insure the success of their crops. Magic is not a further and misguided step to the same end, but an attempt to come to terms with the importance of freeing oneself from dependence upon one's crops. Whatever a Zande does, technology and his crops may let him down. Gellner quotes Winch:

> In Judaeo-Christian cultures, the concept of "if it be thy will," as developed in the story of Job, is clearly central ... Because this conception is central to Christian prayers of supplication, they may be regarded from one point of view as freeing the believer from dependence on what he is supplicating for. Prayers cannot play this role if they are regarded as a means of influencing the outcome, for in that case the one who prays is still dependent on the outcome.[35]

Gellner replies:

> Just go and tell any European peasant (presumably a member of a Judaeo-Christian culture), that he does not really consider prayer to be "a means of influencing the outcome," for that would be in conflict with the view of prayer as freeing the supplicator from dependence, to which he is committed in virtue of the Book of Job. Or perhaps

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[35] Ernest Gellner, *Legitimation of Belief* (Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 144. Gellner is quoting from Peter Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1 (1964). The essay is reprinted in B. Wilson, ed., *Rationality* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1970), and in Peter Winch, *Ethics and Action* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972). This is the edition from which I quote page numbers; the present quotation is from p. 39. Peter Winch credits D. Z. Phillips for discussion of these ideas, *The Concept of Prayer* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965).

> those Catholic goal-keepers who cross themselves before facing a penalty shot, do it in this spirit . . . ?
>
> Take a less aprioristic and more accurate account: "Prayer is a form of bargaining."[36]

Winch continues where Gellner stopped quoting:

> He frees himself from this by acknowledging his complete dependence on God; and this is totally unlike any dependence on the outcome precisely because God is eternal and the outcome contingent.
>
> I do not say that the Zande magical rites are at all like Christian prayers of supplication in the positive attitude to the contingencies which they express. What I do suggest is that they are alike in that they do, or may, express an attitude to contingencies; one, that is, which involves recognition that one's life is subject to contingencies, rather than an attempt to control these.[37]

It is a nice summary, even to the recognition that the Jewish and Christian attitude toward contingency is a positive one.

One may try to substitute sociology for theology, as Gellner does. No doubt success in freeing oneself from dependence on the thing prayed for is always only partial, and one is never wholly free of idolatry and henotheism. But the attempt at radical monotheism *is* made, and the frequency of the attempt is quite immaterial. It can be attempted by anyone. If a man not believe, let him try radical monotheism. All who do try, honestly, find life, and life more abundantly, precisely in the contingencies of life, not in defeating them. This is the same rejoinder which must be made in the end by scientists facing sceptics who do not believe the world is orderly or lawful: "Go and see for yourself. Any competent observer can verify what we have seen."

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[36] Gellner, op. cit., p. 144. He quotes from Lawrence Durrell, *Prospero's Cell* (London, 1945), p. 32.

[37] Winch, op. cit., pp. 39–40.

1.4.3   Scientific Method as an Example

A major question is raised by the sort of behavior and commitment Niebuhr and Winch (and others, not to speak of Biblical writers) describe. It seems to embody a contradiction, as I shall argue presently. We pray, both, "Give me what I want," and "Don't give me what I want," or, "I know I shall be disappointed in the end, but give what I want." An example may be worked out in detail. Radical monotheism demands continual revolution, in Niebuhr's phrase, in which no commitment is allowed to become absolute, no desired thing to acquire the color of a god. It might be objected that this is atheism, not monotheism. The objection is in a sense correct, but it confuses monotheism and henotheism. It is said that in the ancient world, Christians were accused precisely of being atheists.[38] If a man vow to have no gods, that commitment is still religious, even though it differs in character from all the henotheisms and polytheisms. In history, "monotheism" has meant precisely this commitment, not any of the henotheisms, and I am content to continue the usage of history. I am also in warm sympathy with the so-called Death-of-God "Christian Atheism" of Altizer and others. It would have been a happy outcome if their theoretical explorations could have born more fruit. "Atheism" can refer to what is in practice but not in name radical monotheism, or it can simply be a cover for some henotheism together with a denial of Christianity.

We know that the sort of behavior described as radical monotheism occurs, for it is a commonplace in the natural sciences. No commitment is absolute or forever. While revolution is not literally permanent (it alternates with periods of normal or puzzle-solving science, as Kuhn shows), there is at all times a commitment to being open to and prepared for revolution. It is this commitment and readiness which embodies radical monotheism in science. Further, a scientist must believe in the intelligibility of the universe, and entrust himself to some particular scientific discipline or community. In schematic form,

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[38] There is apparently much evidence for this; see for example, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, IX.2; Polycarp is offered acquital by the magistrate if he will only say "Away with the Atheists!"

(7) A scientist is open to the failure of his personal theoretical commitments and to the good that can come from such failure.

(8) A scientist believes
(i)   That the universe is intelligible,
(ii) That man can understand the universe,
(iii) That such knowledge is a good thing,
(iv) Even though any human access to such knowledge is only for a time, and sooner or later subject to correction.

(9) A Scientist entrusts himself to discipline in the "scientific method" as it is received in some professional community.

All three of (7)–(9) reflect a policy of looking for the good not only *even*, but *especially* where there is perceived "bad." The case of having one's own scientific work disproven or overthrown is obvious; its attendant disappointment is clear.

(8) reflects that fact that knowledge is contingent, as was argued above in the discussion of vision research and Kuhn's work on scientific progress. We would all like direct and absolute access to reality as it "really" is via our senses, as some have in the past claimed we do have, but in fact we are dependent in all our knowing on presuppositions, whether they are innate and built in or relatively free and acquired. We usually do not know fully what those presuppositions are, and it is a corollary of radical monotheism that no estimate of them is absolute. We hope that the future will redeem the contingency of present knowledge, just as special relativity "redeems" Newtonian mechanics. The older theory is explained by the newer one. This hope entails a willingness to acknowledge one's debt to all the past, and not to write off what one doesn't like as "unscientific."

(9) implies that one looks for good even in one's own poverty of ideas, and finds that good in the ideas of one's elders and peers. One builds on others' work, for good or for ill. It is seldom possible to tell if one is building on sound ideas or on mistakes. Out of a state of intellectual need, for support from, of criticism by, and of excitement of other scientists, comes community. Scientific method

always exists only as it is received in a community, never as a thing one could define or possess outside of a community. It is not the same as, nor it is possessed by, the community (more likely, *it* possesses the community), for if the community were to die off or abandon it, scientific method could be reinvented or rediscovered.

1.4.4 Reversal of Preferences

The attitude of the prayer noted above,

> (10) "Give me such-and-such — I'm not sure I want it,"

is embodied in all of (7)–(9), whether one asks for exposure or immunity to exposure, as in the commitment of (7), or acknowledges contingency of knowledge, as in (8), or asks for the help of others, as in (9). Now (10) is effectively the same as a sentence which troubled Kasher. He proposed to make preference the basis for pragmatic interpretation of all utterances, a proposal I am entirely in sympathy with. He limited his treatment to "ideal" speakers, who always mean what they say, are never disingenuous, and so on. These people do not say such things as

> (11) I don't want you to give me the file marked confidential. Give me the file marked confidential.

Kasher says that (11) is inappropriate in any context, much as some sentences are ungrammatical. Kasher assumes that preferences underlying utterances are consistent, else there is questionable point to using preferences to explain pragmatics of speech. But sentences such as (10) and (11) contain the key to the great change of mind entailed in embracing radical monotheism. Hobbs paraphrases a much older version of this kind of sentence,

> (12) Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. But let it be as you, not I, would have it. (Mark 14.36, Jerusalem Bible)

as

> (13) (i) I don't want this death to happen to me. Please prevent it from happening.

> (ii) Please disregard (i).[39]

We are so used to (12) that we lean to construing it as not unpragmatical at all, imputing to it a sense which it does not have, that Jesus was of one untroubled mind. I do not think that (7)–(13) are simply like ungrammatical sentences which nevertheless have clear meaning. They express our feelings and preferences, as well as our sense that we have changed our preferences, looking for good in what at first we prefered not to see happen.

It is Hobbs' contention that these sentences represent the end product in pragmatics of something very like what we know in syntax as transformations.[40] These sentences all reflect more than one level of preference. A scientist does not *want* to see his theory disproven, but if he really is a scientist, he does, at a deeper level. Apparent "bad" is really good.

One could argue that only surface structure is involved, that a scientist either prefers to see his theory fail, or he doesn't. I think such a claim is wrong for two reasons. First, it is wildly contrary to intuition and experience. A man can *come* to want to see his theory fail; he doesn't start that way. This alone is compelling argument for a transformational pragmatics, certainly in applications in theology. But more subtlely, taking (10) and turning its implied transformation into a generative rule (which Chomsky notes can usually be done with syntactic transformations and generative rules) is a way of trying to seize control over a process in which one is essentially contingent. (7)–(9) all reflect human contingency, honest grief in that contingency, and determination to find good in it. To say,

> (14) Please give me what I don't want—the sooner, the better; preferably yesterday,

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[39] Hobbs, "The Two Adams."

[40] E. C. Hobbs, "The 'Syntax' of Christian Theology" (Berkeley, California, private instructional materials, 1975).

is to try to possess radical monotheism, to turn it into a formula for finding satisfaction; it then becomes yet another henotheism.

It would certainly be possible to choose biblical examples of faith in action rather than the example illustrated in (7)–(9), but this example has the merit of being generally accessible in modern life. The basis in the biblical tradition may be discovered after the phenomenon of radical monotheism is established in modern life. This way we will not be so vulnerable to misunderstandings we might bring to the biblical texts; it is easy to miss the content as attitude-toward-life present in the bible, or to regard as essential to it conceptualities peculiar to the peoples and cultures in which the documents originated.[41] To start with biblical examples would invite the disbelief which cites Catholic goalies and prayer-as-bargaining.

1.5   Language and gods

1.5.1   Preference, Language, and Symbols

Kasher contends that preferences are the key to understanding the pragmatics of language, and he identifies basic clusters of preferences as *pragmemes*, the elements of which purposive discourse is built. He asks, "why do not natural languages reflect them perspicuously in the surface structures of sentences?"[42] Part of the problem is to find out how (just as morphemes are combined to form words and sentences) elementary preferences are joined to one another in a person's more general goals and plans. With more study, it may be that language is not as opaque as we take it to be.

Other cultures were able to use "faith" and its synonyms (e. g., *pistis*, *pisteuo*, in Greek) not only in limited and particular senses, but also with comprehensive breadth, as in

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[41] See for example, E. C. Hobbs, "Recognition of Conceptuality as a Hermeneutical Tool," *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, Band 88, ed. F. L. Cross (Akademie-Verlag, Berlin, 1964), pp. 464–477.

[42] Kasher, op. cit., p. 37.

> *This* is the key to all my preferences,
> in knowing, doing, feeling,
> in personal life,
> in the social roles and institutions I participate in,
> in my style, my singing, my celebrations, my laments.

This of course, is my "god." The ancient world had language with which to speak of preferences in general and as giving coherence to all of life.

In the modern world, though god-language is still viable, its survival is tenuous. It works well for a community in which the notion of "gods" *is* primitive and need not be defined. But when "god" has no common meaning across cultural boundaries, talk of "gods" serves to insulate cultures and subcultures from outsiders. If such contact is considered risky or threatening, isolation may be welcomed. Today the "gods" of many subcultures are not called "gods." The god-symbols, whatever they are, have been made to appear logically incommensurable across cultural boundaries. Yet these symbols participate in ideological systems which give their users comfort and a sense of place in the universe.

Now what people do is not governed by their symbol systems so much as by their preference structures. Symbol systems may or may not reflect preferences transparently. If it is desired to change action, one's own or another's, and therefore to change preference structures, and if symbol systems are very resistant to change, then it seems expedient to sever the close connection between symbol systems and preferences. When "religious" language no longer reflects preferences, it is possible to change preferences although it is difficult to change "religious" language.

One might acquiesce in the divorce of one's religious language from one's preferences, if that religious language has become an object of affection for its own sake, and not valued solely insofar as it reflects real preference commitments. Preferences that are not spelled out and made explicit in language are free to be held or abandoned at one's convenience, without the necessity of explaining to oneself or answering to anyone else. If, however, one still feels that religious

language ought to reflect commitments and engage life, a curious fact presents itself. 'Gods' come in the terms of one's own age. If they were personified and seen as efficient causes in the ancient world, they are not so seen now. For example, if one's order of preferences were governed by the goal of secure power and physical prowess, in the ancient world, one would say, "I worship Mars." Today, power-preference is not reflected directly in language by any such open confession. It appears indirectly, often as respect for and deference to power, and derision of any order of preference which might denigrate the ultimacy of power.

A more typical example arises from the many names for gods which all bestow more or less the same good things, names which were different in each culture in the ancient world. The Baals and Dagons may all offer good things, but each only to his *own* people. Different peoples have different gods of power and fertility; their names do not properly translate. Dagon is the god of success *for the Philistines*, and Baal the god of success only *for the Canaanites*. Religion thus serves effectively to insulate peoples from one another. This insulation is reinforced by the tenaciousness with which religious symbolism is usually held. Here lay a serious problem for the Roman managers of the Empire, inasmuch as successful subjugation requires some change in the subject people's order of preferences, to obtain, if not strong loyalty to Roman rule, at least acquiescence in it. Hobbs makes the observation that the concept "religion" as distinct from piety, worship, and so on, acquired an original meaning in Roman usage.[43] Imperial policy was that each people could enjoy their own *religio*, provided only that their loyalty be first to the Empire, with a perfunctory ritual expression honoring the Emperor. But loyalty is precisely order of preferences, or religion; the policy was utterly cynical. Of all the subject peoples, only the Jews resisted, and made an attempt to maintain a link between language, cult, and life.

The modern situation is in many respects like the ancient one. If

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[43] Edward Hobbs, private communication. His reasoning is that before usage in Latin, there is no word in any ancient language for religion as an area of life set apart; though there are words for piety, cult, and so on; it was assumed, without saying, that religious loyalty is coherent through all of life, and is not localized in cultic activity.

anything, we are more fooled than the ancients. The terms of our time have changed, and resorting naively to ancient models for engaging life with religious language is a highly questionable strategy. We have no generally understood language for talking about order of preferences. Nonetheless, we inherit most of our language and conceptuality from roots in the ancient world, and if we are to maintain ties at all with history (which I look on as a good thing), we must make sense of the ancient conceptuality, while at the same time working out our own.

1.5.2   God in Western Culture

What I propose to do from here is to investigate some of the ancient roots of religious language and conceptuality. Indo-European culture gives rise to a tripartite ideology which is useful for organizing the understanding of faith. Out of this will grow a sense of where our religious commitments ought to lie. The main conclusions, as advertized above, will follow in a positive attitude toward history, relativity, and pluralism. History is two things. It is the exposure of our real roots as a people, even if that exposure is uncomfortable; and it is discovery of the potential for what we might become, as promised in the events that have already happened in the past. Recognition of relativity brings with it an obligation to take the responsibility for our own religious life, rather than attributing responsibility to God, and it brings a new freedom in arranging our religious life. Accordingly, it will be helpful to look at just what religious relativity is. Pluralism is the realization of the state asserted possible by relativity, the state in which different cultures and even subcultures make their religious arrangements differently. We shall then look at some of the opportunities which open up for us if we do embrace history, relativity, and pluralism. Then I shall return to the long postponed problem of the sense of "God," for we shall then have enough evidence to look at both the conception of God we have inherited and the one we seem to be operating with. Lastly, I shall speculate on some of the concrete implications for action of our religious commitments.

Immediately, Christian conceptuality was heavily shaped both by

its Jewish roots and also by the language of the Indo-European world it moved into when the church was hellenized early in its life in the first century. From Judaism, and sharing with Judaism, Christianity has a history of radical monotheism. From hellenistic culture, Christianity inherits a tripartite way of looking at the world. It seems that this is peculiar to Indo-European cultures. I would like in my discussion to leave open the question whether this tripartite conceptuality is only culturally accidental, or whether Indo-European cultures have fortuitously stumbled upon a conceptuality that is "better" than others. My guess is that this tripartite thinking is purely accidental.

That Indo-European cultures see the world in categories of thought, action, and emotion or sustenance will help us to understand much of Christian theology. We will be able to see just what were the commitments in life and preference of the people who lived and wrote about the Christian life. It is ultimately these preferences and their expression in life that we are interested in, for we would like them to be our preferences and commitments insofar as we intend to continue in the Christian faith.

Chapter 2

Radical Monotheism in Indo-European Cultures

2.1 The Work of Georges Dumezil

We inquire into some of the cultural factors that shaped Christian thinking for two reasons, to try to understand how we came to think the way we do, and to put some details in our theory of radical monotheism, without which the theory would not be able to engage life. Understanding how we came to think as we do will tell us how some parts of our thinking are culturally relative; while this does not thereby make them false or wrong, it does make absolute claims impossible for these ideas. When absolute claims need not be defended, it can become possible for the first time actually to enjoy the fruits of the ideas we inherit, even though they are culturally relative. And if we find out how some of our ideas are relative, and see how other cultures think through the same issues, we may come to appreciate better both what is a relative expression of an absolute commitment and that absolute commitment itself.

Specifically, Christian thinking has always had a tripartite character, which recent research is showing to be peculiar to cultures speaking Indo-European languages. It is the doctrine of the Trinity that is the most prominent manifestation of this tripartite thinking. The idea of

the Trinity was worked out only in Patristic times, when Christianity moved out into the hellenistic and Indo-European speaking world. There are certainly roots of the Trinity in the Old Testament, but not the idea itself. Indeed, the idea itself is barely to be found in the New Testament, or so it appears on the surface. It is significant that the Trinity was never generally claimed to be the chief or essential part of the New Testament revelation; rather, it was claimed that God was truly met in Jesus of Nazareth. I think this is a fair statement even though the Trinity was to become a locus of contention between Jews and Christians; the Trinity was contended as an indirect means of deciding the more important issue of the significance of Jesus.

The Indo-European way of thinking seems to be that all human and divine society is divided in three parts. Indeed, anything interesting at all (not only Gaul), is divided in three parts. But in the habitual partition, the first part has to do with thinking, theory, or legitimacy. The second has to so with doing, action, or power. The third has to do with feeling, sustenance, or community; sustenance and community are related because the one is provided by the other.

This thesis, put forth by Georges Dumezil, is based on very extensive evidence assembled over many years, almost wholly from ancient sources, for the most part mythological and sociological. The tripartite ideology survives in the modern world, though we do not think of our personal or social lives as reflecting it prominently. When we can recognize it, it can be seen permeating much of modern life.

I shall first review Dumezil's work on tripartite thinking, then apply it to the thesis of chapter 1, that radical monotheism consists in the embracing of the failure of all one's gods. Next, I shall attempt to unravel the process by which the Trinity grew out of the interaction of Jewish ideas and hellenistic tripartite thinking. The Trinity has roots in both cultures, and reflects paradigmatic tripartite thinking only imperfectly. Upon examination, the New Testament reflects the tripartite thinking of its hellenistic authors as the means of expressing the (presumed) non-tripartite thinking of its Jewish Lord. Jesus' teaching as presented in the Gospels lends itself in a particularly transparent way to a tripartite organization. It will then be instructive to work out some of these

ideas for the stories of the resurrection and its place in the gospel. We
shall then have come a long way towards a conception of revelation
taken from Richard Niebuhr, and it is appropriate to summarize that
thesis from his *The Meaning of Revelation*.

It is an open question to what extent the connection between tri-
partite thinking and Indo-European language is accidental or intrinsic
to the structures of the Indo-European languages. Some have argued
that language shapes a culture's entire world, as in the Sapir-Whorf
hypothesis. I think Dumezil does not, contenting himself with the
prior task of substantiating the claim that tripartite ideology is in fact
to be found peculiarly in the ancient Indo-European cultures in a sig-
nificant way. This claim alone has been surprising enough to receive
the critical attention of workers in the field for quite a number of years.
If the tripartition hypothesis is accepted, it seems to me that further
work is necessary in linguistics and allied disciplines before we can
hope to explain *why* the tripartite ideology is carried with and only with
Indo-European languages. Allied disciplines would include linguistic
pragmatics, psychology, and probably something between linguistics
and sociology of knowledge. The subject is hardly well defined even
in terms of *what* is the phenomenon to be explained. Even the location
of proto-Indo-European culture is debated; Scott Littleton, following
Dumezil, places it in the Kazakh-Kirghiz steppe east of the Caspian
Sea; Thieme places it west of the line joining the Baltic and the Black
seas.[1]

I need only a weaker claim than Dumezil makes, even though I
think his claim will receive consensus support, and stronger claims
will eventually be made. I simply use the tripartition concept to spell
out the ideas introduced in chapter 1; and for this it does not matter
whether tripartite thinking originated in the ancient world or as a
modern theory. If the tripartition hypothesis were to be revised or
significantly modified, it would weaken or modify my arguments, but
I think not disastrously so.

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[1] Paul Thieme, "The Indo-European Language," *Scientific American*, October,
1958, p. 63. My primary access to Dumezil is through C. Scott Littleton, *The New
Comparative Mythology: an Anthropological Assessment of the Theories of Georges
Dumezil*, second ed. (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1973).

2.2   Dumezil's Conception of Tripartition

2.2.1   The Three Functions

Scott Littleton's *New Comparative Mythology* (1966) first made Dumezil's ideas generally available to the English speaking world, and as it is comprehensive and historical, I shall follow his treatment. Some of Dumezil's major works are now available in translation.[2]

   Society is divided in three parts or *functions*. Littleton names them sovereignty, force, and nourishment. For reasons that will be clearer shortly, I shall speak not of sovereignty in the first function but of legitimacy and legitimation, in the sense delimited by Berger and Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality*. "Function" refers not so much to social strata or to a class of divinities (but these are the clearest surface manifestations of functionality) as to the principles operating in this scheme of analysis. Littleton speaks of function as being analogous to the mathematical sense of the word, but the analogy is never made patent, and I shall not intend such a sense. It is true, nonetheless, that the three functions together analyse what is an underlying unity, whether it is the life of an individual, of society, of the pantheon, or life in some other context of interest. The sense of what the three functions are will emerge best from the tables in this chapter, which will provide many examples of ideas analysed into the three functions. While no single three words capture the ideas of the three functions, "cognition," "action," and "emotion" serve reasonably well at the level of individual life, and so may be used as general terms.

   The first function, cognition, has generally received a disproportionate share of theoretical attention. Epistemology is very much a concern among philosophers, more than political or economic theory or ethics or aesthetics, all domains proper to philosophy. Clergy, lawyers, and scientists are first function occupational groups. In different ways, they all handle information and legitimacy. The second function concerns action and the human will. Political administration, the police, and the army serve in the second function. Theory and

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[2] Littleton, op. cit.; for Dumezil, see the bibliography.

legitimacy are not their business, nor is the wherewithal of life, its sustenance. Even if second function personnel handle information in their work, their work is not in a primary way directed to information handling. Such details may be captured at a second level of analysis, of a first function within a primary second function group. The third function comprises the economic sector, farmers, craftsmen, laborers, merchants, business at all levels. The sustenance with which the third function is concerned is both material and emotional. Society (as different from culture) seems to be a function of sharing food. As material sustenance is provided for in the sharing of food, so emotional and spiritual sustenance are provided for in the presence and support of other people. The third function thus takes on a character not only of sustenance, whether material or spiritual, but of plurality: community and fellowship are third function categories.

These functions are reflected in the early Roman pantheon, where each of the functions is headed by one or two gods, and there is a sense of distinctness of the functions. The later Roman mythology obscures some aspects of this. Jupiter and Dius Fidius head the first function. Dius Fidius was not prominent in later Roman mythology. Together, they are the gods of mystery, or the numinous, and contract, or the honoring of promise, both very much first function ideas. Mars is the god of war and physical prowess. The third function is headed by Quirinus and Ops. From Ops we get the word "opulent," and the stem of Quirinus supplies also the verb *curo*, *curare*, care for, pay attention to, trouble about.

It is possible to apply the tripartite analysis repeatedly. Thus, the law courts are a first function institution, but within the larger first function sense, the judge and clerks perform a first function role, counsel for the plaintiff and defendant are in the second function, as the bailiff certainly is, and the jury plays a third function role. Large corporations can be analyzed into functional parts, while as a whole, thay play a third function role in society. There are cases of one function serving another, as in medicine, where the first function serves the third. A knowledge of human biology is a first function activity, and it serves a third function purpose, health and well being.

The clergy fill a similar role in their pastoral capacity, while preaching in a prophetic sense is a first function activity.

2.2.2   Sovereignty or Legitimacy?

The reasons for speaking not of sovereignty but of legitimacy in the first function are not complex. Sovereignty can vest in any or all of the social strata representing the three functions. There is a sense in the European medieval tradition in which the king presides over all three functions, although that in practise often meant a tendency to sovereignty in the second function. The different patterns of sovereignty have some notable characteristics. The long-term stable pattern requires that if sovereignty does not actually vest in the first function, at least that function of arbitrating legitimacy not be corrupted by second or third function interests. Cases in which the second function is "on top" are generally unstable quickly, as e. g., Cromwell in England, or Hitler or Napoleon in Europe. To have the first function on top does not mean that the society is just, merely that it is stable; one thinks of the Czars. Even in the case of Russia, however, legitimacy was provided by the Orthodox Church, and the system is seen *from the inside* to be legitimate, or at least it was until the century before the Revolution. It is of course possible to have the third function on top. This occurs when economic interests (of business or the masses) dominate the processes of government. In the end, it is unstable because the first function is allowed to atrophy. A policy of bread and circuses is an example of this kind of pathology. Ironically, with the third function on top, the system is stable (at least in the medium term), but it lacks inspiration, a third function category.

2.2.3   Origins and India

Dumezil's thesis evolved only gradually out of the ideas of early twentieth century anthropology and sociology. Littleton cites many names as influences; it is not surprising that Durkheim was prominent among them. The structuralist conception sought common ideology in myth,

religion, and social organization. The idea of tripartite ideology was arrived at only after rejecting several other possibilities, and at first only in a limited eastern portion of the Indo-European world. The extension to the whole was later.

Linguists realized in the early nineteenth century that there was more than an accidental relationship between languages in a group extending from Europe to India. The initial supposition was a genetic relationship to a common ancestor, a hypothetical proto-Indo-European language. Some have advocated diffusion rather than inheritance as an explanation of the similarities, but this alternative has never commanded significant assent from linguists.

The location of proto-Indo-European culture and the reasons for its diaspora are subject to much debate and little consensus. Scott Littleton argues for a central Asian origin in the Kazakh-Kirghiz steppe. The nature of the evidence adduced indicates the kind of thinking involved. Words which are common in all Indo-European languages can be attributed to a proto-Indo-European language. Words which are not cognates are new in each region, borrowed from languages of the areas into which the I-E (Indo-European) peoples migrated. Thus one can ask what metals the proto-I-E culture knew. If any metal name is common in all I-E languages, that metal was probably known to the earliest I-E speakers. As it happens, at least one metal was known, but it was probably rare and not locally produced. Similar arguments from common word study of terms for flora and fauna provide clues to the climate. Fox, lynx, bear, beaver, hare, fir, beach, and birch were known. No word for "sea" can be reconstructed, but the presence of rivers is attested. Hot rainy summers and cold snowy winters seem to have been the rule. "A continental region traversed by rivers, sufficiently wooded to afford shelter to bears and beavers but open enough to nourish hares and swift horses and to permit the unimpeded progress of vehicles" seems to be implicated.[3] Two regions are the most likely possibilities, eastern Europe from the Baltic to the Black Seas, and the region east of the Caspian Sea. The latter steppe region is preferred on linguistic

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[3] Littleton, op. cit., p. 128; he attributes this theory to V. Gordon Childe, *The Aryans* (London, Kegan Paul, 1926).

evidence and the combined testimony of linguistic and archaeological evidence of burial customs. The breakup of proto-I-E society and the first migrations are variously dated in the third and fourth millenia BCE.

The tripartite social organization is manifested in a system of three social strata, of priests, warriors, and herders and cultivators. The king belongs to the second stratum. A thoroughly secular monarchy is a uniquely Indo-European institution. There are no parallels in the ancient Near East, the Nile civilizations, China or India, before I-E migrations into those areas. For example, the Hebrew monarchy appears only after contact with I-E culture. It is secular, not combining sacerdotal and administrative functions. The I-E gods of the first function regulate magico-religious and juridical or legal legitimacy and order. These gods are sovereign in the system. Generally the numinous and legal aspects are supervised by different gods, as in the Roman case. The second function gods endow physical prowess, and those of the third function provide sustenance, well-being, and fertility.

The Indian case was worked out first and provided the basis for generalization to neighboring Iranian and later other I-E mythological systems. There are four social classes, Brahmans, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras. The last serve the first three, and were probably a conquered indigenous people, surviving as outcastes in the later caste system. Brahmans are the priest class, Ksatriyas the warrior class, and Vaisyas the economic class. The first three classes are Arya, a word root originally meaning simply "people." The tripartite ideology appears in the Rig Veda, the oldest literature of the civilization. The first function gods are Mitra and Varuna. Mitra presides over rational and legal aspects of sovereignty, and is in effect contract personified. Varuna is magico-religious, awesome and terrible, presiding over the numenous. Indra presides over the second function gods, e. g., the Maruts. He fights monsters and so represents power and prowess. The third function in India as elsewhere is represented by several gods, here the Asvins and Sarasvati; the last is female. Fertility, harvests, comfort, health, well-being, are all bestowed by these gods.

2.2.4   Tripartite Ideology Outside India

One of the oldest written witnesses outside India is a Mittanian-Hittite treaty text.[4] The gods invoked are Mitra-Varuna, Indara, and Nasatyas. In another example, Herodotus tells the Scythian origin myth, in which a cup, an ax, and a yoke and plow fall from the sky.[5] The cup signifies sacred beverages: mead, soma, and cognates. The ax and plow represent second and third function clearly enough. Three brothers, Lipoxais, Harpoxais, and Kolaxais, attempt to recover the artifacts; Kolaxais, the youngest, succeeds, and assumes first function sovereignty over the other two, and each gives rise to one functional stratum of Scythian society. The first function is not divided, as it was in India. The association of sacred beverages with the first function is typically Indo-European.

The Zoroastrian reform of Iranian polytheism in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE speaks of Ahura Mazdah, the Good Principle, and its consorts, the Amesa Spentas, or Immortal Beneficences. Of these, Asa and Vohu Manah represent Order and Good Thought, cf. Varuna and Mitra; Xsathra represents physical force, cf. Indra (and the Ksatriyas); the trio Haurvatat, Ameretat, and Armaiti represent health, immortality, and pious thought, cf. the Asvins and Sarasvati. Mithra is pre-Zoroastrian and combines both first and second function attributes.

Rome historicized its origin myths. Of the early kings, Romulus and Numa correspond to Varuna and Mitra, Tullus Hostilius to Indra. The third function is not clear, though Dumezil feels that the Sabine War represents I-E myth in which the classes of the first and second function defeat and integrate the third function. As mentioned above, the pre-Capitoline triad of Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus preside over the gods; Dius Fidius and Ops are added in the first and third functions.

Among the Germans, Othinn and Tyr correspond to Varuna and Mitra (India), Jupiter and Dius Fidius (Rome); Thorr to Indra and Mars; Freyr and Njordr to the Asvins and Quirinus and Ops, Freya to Sarasvati. The Irish, Brythonic, and Gallic pantheons are not known

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[4] Littleton, op. cit., p. 9.
[5] Herodotus, *History* 4.5-6.

with enough certainty to warrant comment.

Greek culture was heavily non Indo-European, and so it reflects only broken and modified aspects of the tripartite system. Zeus enjoys both first and second function attributes, cf. Mithra in the pre-Zoroastrian Iranian mythology. On the other hand, in the story of the judgement of Paris, Paris is asked to choose between regal Hera, warlike Athene, and voluptuous Aphrodite. To his sorrow, he chooses the third function when he should have chosen the first. But even in this story, Hera offers sovereignty and wealth, Athene victory, handsomeness, and wisdom, combining two or even three of the functions.[6]

Class distinctions follow the Indian pattern. To the Brahmans, Ksatriyas, and Vaisyas correspond the Roman Flamines, Milites, and Quirites, and the Celtic Druides, Equites, and Plebes.

Questions naturally arise whether the data for Dumezil's theory are adduced selectively, whether they are interpreted correctly, and whether the tripartite system is not simply natural, rather than peculiarly Indo-European. Dumezil sought other explanations before settling on the concept of tripartition. He considerd a nineteenth century naturism, in which primitive language is assumed to have no abstract words, using concrete ones by analogy, but the attempt did not provide convincing explanations. Neither did Sir James Frazer's structure. Initially, the tripartite system was firmly substantiated in Indian and Iranian contexts and only later generalized to other areas. Dumezil has refrained from possible selective instantiation in Greek, Slavic, Baltic, or Hittite sources. The system appears more clearly around the edges of the Indo-European world than in the center, where advanced civilizations existed prior to the Indo-European immigration, with myths and conceptualities sturdy enough to survive in the resulting mixtures. Here problems, distortions, and broken symmetries surface, with confusion of functions, especially of the first and second.

The second function as a distinct conception is peculiarly Indo-European. It is not that war is peculiarly Indo-European, but that divi-

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[6] Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1955), vol. 2, p. 268.

sion of labor and specialization exclusively for war is. Corresponding
to this is the distinction of king from priest, and the secularity of the
monarchy. It was not so in Egypt, Sumer, or Akkad. The ruler was
both king and priest, and often a god, too. The Incas and the Aztecs
make a distinction between sacred and secular rulers poorly or not at
all.

The Hebrews make the distinction only after contact with the Hit-
tites. "An Amorite was your father and a Hittite your mother" (Ezekiel
16.3). The story of Samuel and Saul in I Samuel 13, where Saul (sec-
ond function, newly defined in Israel) usurps Samuel's (first or first
and third function) role of presiding at the sacrifice and pays with his
crown and his life, is typical of the Indo-European theme of conflict
of first and second functions. The earlier period, of the judges, saw
combined leadership in the first and second functions, the more typi-
cal Near Eastern pattern before Indo-European influences. Here, the
second function leadership is provided in an almost amateur sense,
part-time. The advent of the Hittite power brings with it all over the
Near East the dual innovation of secular monarchy and standing army.

I shall not go over Littleton's reasons for believing Dumezil has
fairly collected and interpreted the evidence. It does seem clear that
the tripartite system is peculiarly Indo-European and not to be found
in other cultures. To my knowledge, no one has suggested a source or
basis for this correlation within the structures of I-E languages. The
ideology extends from triads of classes, castes, orders, their collec-
tive representations, to triads of calamities, colors, talismans, cures,
celestial and geographical regions. The ideology forms the core of its
culture; "it provides the basic framework in terms of which phenomena
are categorized and thus rendered meaningful. It is in terms of its ide-
ology that a society structures its religious beliefs, validates its social
organization, and generally conceives its relation to the phenomena
around it."[7]

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[7] Littleton, op. cit., p. 227.

Table 2.1: Ancient Instances of Tripartition

Social Class

Function	1st	2nd	3rd
India	Brahmans	Ksatriyas	Vaisyas
Rome	Flamines	Milites	Quirites
Celts	Druides	Equites	Plebes

Gods

India	Varuna, Mitra	Indra Maruts	Asvins Sarasvati
Rome	Jupiter, Dius Fidius	Mars	Quirinus, Ops
Zoroastrian Iran	Asa, Vohu Manah	Xsathra	Haurvatat, Ameretat, Armaiti
Germany	Othinn, Tyr	Thorr	Freyr, Njordr, Freya

2.3   Failure of the gods in Three Functions

2.3.1   Exposure, Limitation, and Need

So far, I have argued for construing the notion of "god" in terms of preference structures, and argued further that those preference structures undergo transformations with a reversal characteristic of radical monotheism, wherein the "bad" comes to be seen as good. The basic choices defining the good for a person's thought, actions, and emotions fail, because they extended too far. Radical monotheism conceives the failure not as unredeemable disaster but as opportunity for new meaning, for good, and for new life.

The Indo-European ancient world conceived reality in a characteristically tripartite organization, and the modern world, substantially the heir of those cultures, manifests strong traces of that organization. Christian theology in particular bears its shape in the Trinity, as I shall argue. The argument will not be historical, but will instead proceed by an tripartite analysis of preference transformation. A historical survey

could clearly be carried out, and would show that the tripartite system is distorted in places owing to Jewish roots of Christian thinking.

It is clear that my analysis so far has been heavily tripartite, even before I announced or explained the idea of tripartition. The concept of god as providing criteria for meaning, guidance for loyalty, and inspiration of confidence has provided the underlying organization for this essay. The remarks at (7)-(9) will be seen to reflect the same tripartite thinking. Those statements intended to capture a scientist's creed and his commitment to finding meaning even in meaninglessness, good even in "bad." They illustrate transformation of preferences, and they are an instance of the more general tripartite understanding of preference reversal transformation in all of life that Edward Hobbs suggested in 1970.

It is necessary to remember as we generalize, that a scientist's work is entirely a first function activity, and the functionality reflected at (7)-(9) is entirely within a larger first function context. Failure in the first function was typified in (7) in the idea that a man's theory be exposed as wanting. The scientist is exposed, with no improper behavior, but simply in an unfortuitous theoretical maneuver. It is the idea of exposure which unifies the instances of first function failure. A crucial experiment happens, the data do not confirm predictions, or an alternative way of seeing the phenomena appears in a new theory, which explains both the present theory's successes and its limitations. One could respond by welcoming the new information, or by trying to suppress it. Actually, new data are usually ignored precisely until it is possible to find opportunity in the challenge they present.

In personal life, everyday life, beyond the activity of building theories about the world, exposure undoes one's "theory" of oneself, one's presentation of self to the world. New "data" are events which expose this "theory" as inaccurate, whether deliberately or innocently. The opportunity for good afforded by the exposure is simply the opportunity to change one's ways.

In considering the second function, we need to see that the difference between (7) and (8) is the difference between my theory failing, and "their" theory failing. When it is "their" theory, the failure is

simply a reflection of the general contingency of all human cognition. But all activities are subject to contingency, not only cognitive activity. One is "up against the wall," there is no course of action open offering any expectation of success. One faces defeat, humiliation, limitation, and contingency. Yet by abandoning one's "god," it may be possible to see an opportunity for action that was previously invisible, and in any case, to trust in the situation of limitation.

In the third function, the means of life fail. In cognitive activity, as at (9), that failure is met by sharing ideas. More generally, we share our food and our presence and so find material and spiritual life. Third function failure occurs in situations of need, and the good to be found is always through other people. The good is itself the community that forms as a response to need.

It is in situations of exposure, limitation, and need, that we see our preference structures disappointed. And it is in seeking good in exposure, limitation, and need, that the faith of radical monotheism is manifested.

2.3.2   Some Imaginative Examples

A parable may illustrate what exposure is like. There is a tale of an innkeeper's family in poor rural mountainous country. There are two children, a son and a daughter. The father dies, and the young son, seeing that he is contributing little while presenting another mouth to feed, leaves for the world of the big city. He matures and returns, a grown man with a beard, having made his fortune. He appears home at the inn as just another guest, is not recognized, and thinks, "What an opportunity, I will surprise Mother and Sister in the morning!" His mother and sister have been reduced by poverty to murdering any guests who appear to be rich and not likely to be missed, as single men traveling alone are not. They murder their unsuspecting guest, dump his body in the well, and return to his room. There they do indeed find gold in his bags, but they also find photographs of themselves taken

with their son and brother when he was a young lad. That is exposure.[8]

Exposure is not confession; it is not controlled self-disclosure, it is not examination of conscience. All these things are to be commended if one is to find good in exposure, but they can also be turned into yet another way of managing the information that gets out, of presenting one's chosen self-image to the world, and so in the end really evading exposure. Exposure is ultimately involuntary.

Another story may illustrate radical faith in all three functions. Suppose, with Origen, that we have a pre-existence as souls in Limbo before being born. As each soul is being given final preparations for birth, there is a briefing. Gabriel explains, "You will be allowed to see all of your life in advance; you will see the noble things you will do, and also the shabby and base and craven things you will do. You will see the opportunities given to you, and also those denied you but given to your neighbors. You will see the wealth given to you, and that denied to you, and you will see the people you will meet, with whom you may share your abundance and your poverty. And it is only for a time, not forever. You will have to give it all up in death. At the end of this briefing, you may choose whether to be born or not, but in any case, you will forget what you see here. The question we ask of you is whether you do want to be born." ([][][][] double-quote?! [][][][]) Is *all* of life redeemable?

Stanley Hauerwas reflects on the true story of Albert Speer, told in his autobiography.[9] The route to moral failure lies through a policy designed to shield oneself from true knowledge of one's self, a policy of avoidance of some areas of life. Only by spelling out what one is doing can one really see the person one has become. Speer chose to think of himself as "only" Hitler's architecht, thus blinding himself to any broader human character or responsibility. By not asking questions where he easily could have, he insulated himself from

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[8] A slightly different version of the story may be found in Albert Camus' *The Stranger* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1946, Random House, 1954), p. 99.

[9] Stanley Hauerwas, with David B. Burrell, "Self-Deception and Autobiography: Reflections on Speer's *Inside the Third Reich*," in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, Stanley Hauerwas with Richard Bondi and David B. Burrell (University of Notre Dame Press, 1977).

knowledge of the Jewish policy. If a policy of avoidance can lead to disastrous consequences, as here it did, clearly, occasions of fortuitous exposure are to be welcomed and embraced even though they are not "welcome."

2.4   The Christian Synthesis

2.4.1   Embracing Disappointment

We meet God in situations of exposure, limitation, and need. What was rejected, not preferred, said "No!" to is embraced, accepted, said "Yes!" to. It is the dynamic of this change which I wish to explore. I follow suggestions which Edward Hobbs made in "The 'Syntax' of Christian Theology," with some modifications.[10] Hobbs suggests that we respond in faith to exposure. I suggest that the response is with the intellect, the will, and the emotions, and that the last manifests itself as remorse. Response of the intellect is simply to acknowledge the true state of affairs. The acknowledgement is objectified in language, by saying "I did it." The will responds in the changing of one's ways, repentance and amendment of life. Action is intended and if possible begun. The response of the emotions is first with remorse for one's sins, then with joy when one truly has seen them as sins and has been freed from them. They are now seen as sins by the whole man, and the original preference structure is transformed. What was preferred may still be preferred, but no longer is it absolutized. The pattern and sequence of response by the three functions seems to be temporal in order as well as logical. Repentance is impossible until after confession, and the emotions seem to have a life of their own which requires that they be preceded by action.

Encounter with limitation or contingency, engages first the intellect, in innovation. One abandons presuppositions which are not working and finds a new way to deal with the situation within whatever the limitations are that one faces. Those limitations are of course

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[10] Instructional materials, 1975, private communication.

not always known precisely, and sometimes one can trade off one limitation against another. The will responds in seizing the initiative, putting into action measures conceived by innovation. Lastly, the emotions are transformed from grief to gratitude in and for the situation formerly conceived as limiting but now seen to offer opportunity.

Need can be another's or one's own; the two cases are complementary. First one opens one's eyes to the other person, and he is seen as neighbor. His need is recognized and he is acknowledged. Then one opens one's hands to the other person, and action to meet the need begins. Lastly, one opens one's heart and fellowship is begun; pity turns into celebration. Once again, it seems that the second function response must follow the first and precede the third. In the third function response, an initial negative response (remorse, grief, pity) is transformed into a positive one (joy, gratitude, celebration). It may be that first and second function responses bear the same structure, but if so, that is still to be worked out. This transformation is characteristic of radical monotheism. It is noteworthy that the initial member of the transformation (remorse, grief, pity) is already a response of faith; this is not the transformation from sin *to* faith.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is as much about receiving as giving help. Inasmuch as Samaritans were not well liked by Jews, the story asks two questions. Not only does it challenge people to help others in need, it also asks, "Are you willing to accept help from someone you despise?" It is in this sense that the response to need is complementary from both sides. Real fellowship comes only when the help is given and received in such a way that neither party seeks to dominate the other, whether by controlling the relationship through monopoly of need or monopoly of means to meet the need.

2.4.2   Sin

Encounter need not be embraced, it can be refused. A policy of refusal is a state of sin. With blindness, new "data" is ignored or suppressed; with stubborness, one refuses to bend in the face of limitation; and with hard-heartedness, one refuses to meet one's neighbor in need. These

are the characteristics coloring actual sins. The goal to which they are directed is a position of security, secure legitimacy, secure power, secure self-sufficiency. This triple desire may be said to approximate the condition of original sin. I think it is not so much legitimacy, power, and self-sufficiency themselves which are wrong, as the security in them which is sought.

If positive response is given to exposure, limitation, and need, there results a condition of redemption in which original righteousness is at least partially restored. In the first function, remorse is probably not the only emotion felt after repentance; there is also a joy in a new life of grace and freedom from the past and from sin. Then one is not bound to the past or to a version of the past; it is acknowledged for what it is, and even its sin is capable of being redeemed.

Embracing limitation, after innovation, initiative, and gratitude, man is in a state of both creativity and humility. One can work with the present. Embracing need, there results fellowship and relatedness. Rather arbitrarily, I take freedom, creativity, and relatedness to describe original righteousness, and gracefulness, humility, and fellowship, the state of redeemed man. Perhaps an argument could be made for a more careful nomenclature.

2.4.3 Salvation

In each function, there is salvation. In the first function, exposure is judgement, and judgement *is* redemption. The new knowledge itself is a means of restored freedom. In the second function, salvation comes through weakness, and creativity through contingency. What we admire in an artist is the ability to "do so much with so little," to press materials to their limits, yet respect those limits. In the third function, there is self-fulfillment through self-offering, receiving through giving.

Now it is all very well to call one's own encounter with limitation and contingency an occasion of grace and an opportunity, but it is quite another matter to declare the same on behalf of another person. Yet it happens; parents do it all the time, and their children are fortunate

(and sometimes grateful) that they do.

To promise to find good in contingency can seem very foolhardy, especially when one never knows what contingency will bring. People will say, "He doesn't know what he's talking about," and "He's just showing off, shooting his mouth off." The first is necessarily true, and the second need not be, chiefly if a man knows that he does not know what the future will bring. But another person presents a very different moral problem. For in inviting another to find good in his "bad," one is committing oneself to find the same good in that same situation perceived as "bad," and to be willing to share in it with the other person. What is for the other person limitation or need is for me exposure, for it is a test of my willingness to find good in the other person's situation. A person's radical faith is exposed for all to see in the encounter with another's limitation. It is also true for some reason that if one is to proclaim limitation as occasion of opportunity, one must for consistency abandon all pretensions of moral legitimacy.

2.5   The Trinity

2.5.1   Three Persons, Three Functions

We meet God in the first function as redeemer, and this is the key to the correspondence of Persons and functions. For God the Son, God the second Person, is God in the first function. In the creeds we say that God the Son is begotten of God the Father. In so doing, we acknowledge that the first function, though in a position of primacy, is still dependent on the second. Language, the primary means of cognition and of the whole life of the first function, is in fact related by contingency (through neurophysiology) to the material giveness of being human, the second function limitations of humanness. When we say the Son was begotten *before all worlds*, we insist that the truth of what we say is independent of whether we say it or not. Language grants cognitive access to reality, and our human cognition is contingent upon it, but in effect, if we say the Son is begotten before all worlds, co-equal with the Father, then we are committed

unconditionally to the idea that there is a truth independent of us and of our human truth, because it is in the Son that we meet truth.

God the Father is God met in the second function. As children, in the pre-Freudian sense of "Daddy," we meet both limitation and opportunity in limitation. We call God in the second function Father or Daddy precisely because those words evoke the attitude in which we embrace limitation. It is interesting that Chomsky can assert that the scope of human cognition is tied to its limits.[11] The very conditions that define cognition make it possible. As with cognition, so with all of life.

Death is the ultimate limitation and test of one's willingness to find good in limitation. One can write off death as meaningless, or one can deny the significance of death and pretend that the human being goes on untouched by it, as an immortal soul. It seems to me the real challenge of God is to acknowledge the limitation for what it is and still look for good in it. It is a challenge especially because I don't see how to find good in death, and it is a challenge because it requires that one die in total trust. Though He slay me, yet will I trust him. One may object that I do not know what I am talking about, and that certainly is true. Death may or may not come with enough warning to give time to compose one's soul. I think that does not matter; the real preparation is in embracing limitation as it comes in life. The little deaths each day prepare for actual death.

In need we meet God in the Holy Spirit, the community creator. He brings fellowship, love, support, and so on, but pre-eminently, he brings the grace by which we *can* embrace exposure, limitation, and need, and so live a radical faith in the one God beyond all our gods. In God the Holy Spirit, in fellowship, we are enabled to respond to "The causes for which we live all die" with "Thanks be to God!"

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[11] Noam Chomsky, "Rules and Representations." Immanuel Kant Lectures, 1979. Stanford University, 8-18 January, 1979. Forthcoming, Columbia University Press.

2.5.2 Problems

The creed order is different from the Indo-European order, for it lists the second function first. This seems to me to be a Semiticism, characteristic of Jewish thinking in an Indo-European world; I do not yet know the reasons for it. It is by no means the case that Hebrew or Jewish religion is lacking or deficient in a sense of God in the first function. The concept of exposure translates *mishpat* fairly well; it appears in English bibles as "judgement," and it colors the Old Testament throughout. The more normal order of functions is found in 2 Cor. 13.14, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

Faith and reason have often been put at odds over the Trinity, and the oddness is expressed well in the Athanasian Creed. The options of tritheism, demotion of one or more Persons, or denying the distinction of Persons, are all ruled heretical. For one reason or another, they were all felt to betray radical monotheism or to undermine it by failing to make a distinction of functions which Indo-European common sense required. Most men most of the time have ignored the difficulty. I think A. P. Martinich has successfully shown that the difficulty is spurious, vindicating common sense.[12] He argues from Peter Geach's concept of relative identity. Nothing is the same as anything else absolutely; it may share some quality with another thing, but identity is always to be defined in relation to some quality. The argument requires second order predicate calculus, and perhaps for that reason, it has been offered only recently. Martinich shows how to formalize in a quite natural way the ideas "The Father is not the same Person as the Son," and "The Father is the same God as the Son."

One may object to all this talk of threeness, and it is certainly true that other cultures think and organize differently. Crow Indians reputedly think in fours.[13] Semitic cultures do not share this organization, though I think the ideas expressed in it can all be found in the Old Testament. What we know as first and second functions are frequently

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[12] A. P. Martinich, "Identity and Trinity," *Journal of Religion*, 58 (1978) 169-181.
[13] Littleton, op. cit., p. 232.

conflated. Semites in Indo-European cultures list the second function first. What is essential to radical monotheism is not the threeness, but the transformation of preferences whereby what is encountered as negative in life becomes positive and a source of good and opportunity. Other cultures could express radical monotheism in ways other than the Indo-European tripartite system. They are entitled to do so for themselves, and Indo-Europeans would probably not do it very well for them. Indeed, such non-Indo-European theology is eagerly to be sought and anticipated, and we may hope for it to reveal both weakness and richness of the Indo-European system, as well as present richness of its own. I collect the results of this section in a table.

2.6   New Testament Examples

2.6.1   Jesus' Challenge

The teaching of Jesus lends itself to an organization which is tripartite, though the evangelists almost certainly did not consciously lay much store by tripartition. His teaching can be paraphrased as

> (15) "The jig is up! Repent! The Reign of God is upon you!

> (16) Accept life in joy and gratitude, and stop making invidious comparisons between yourself and your neighbor!

> (17) Love (help) your neighbor!"

While apocalyptic and eschatological themes and teaching on Jesus' person and mission also are prominent in the concerns of the New Testament writers, I believe that these injunctions are a fair presentation of Jesus' teaching, and that they may be taken as a fair place to begin in understanding the New Testament. Insofar as New Testament writers deal with the eschatological, it can be approached under the heads implied in these injunctions.

Table 2.2: Radical Monotheism in Indo-European Thought

Function	1st	2nd	3rd
Original righteousness	freedom	creativity	relatedness
Encounter in	exposure	limitation	need
of God as	Son judge redeemer	Father creator Daddy	Holy Spirit need giver community creator
Responses			
Original sin, seeking secure	legitimacy	power	self-sufficiency
actual sins	blindness	stubbornness	hard-heartedness
faith meets	exposure	limitation	need
1st func. 2nd func. 3rd func. becoming	confession repentance remorse joy	innovation initiative grief gratitude	seeing neighbor help him hurt with him celebration
redeemed man	gracefulness my self!	humility my father!	fellowship my brother! my sister!
	salvation through judgement	salvation through weakness, creativity through contingency	self-fulfillment through self-offering, receiving through giving.

My purpose in considering the New Testament teaching must of necessity be a limited one, for it would take a tremendous effort to substantiate the strong claim that the New testament teaching can accurately and precisely and wholly be captured in a formulation such as the one I am contending for here. Such a project would amount to a whole New Testament theology; moreover, it would not be immune to the suspicion of trying to find in the New Testament a message brought to it from outside. But it is possible to argue, I think, that the New Testament is hospitable to a summary of Jesus' teaching such as the one presented above. This is a much more cautious claim than that this summary captures *all* of New Testament theology.

I follow Mark as a guide to the Synoptic gospels and as a primary sample of New Testament teaching.

Jesus' teaching opens in Mark's summary as "repent, the time is filled, the reign of God is coming, believe the good news" (paraphrase). This is not a very tripartite formula, and probably reflects the Semitic *shuv*, repent. Nevertheless, there is the urgency of good news and justice both coming, so get ready!

I pass over the cleansings, raisings, and feedings for the moment.

2.6.2   Jesus' Teaching

The question of fasting, with likeness to new and old cloth, new and old wineskins (Mk 2.18ff), seems to be commending the virtues of joy, gratitude, celebration, and above all, openness to the present moment. Find good in the present situation, with its limitations, rather than seek your own legitimacy and not see the opportunity in the present. Because the teaching involves fasting and sustenance, it may be said to show all three functionalities. Again, the I-E pattern is reflected imperfectly, and is not itself here the point.

The seed maturing slowly, the parable of the sower, (Mk 4.1) does not reflect functionality at all, but rather is simply posing the choice between God and the gods, human good and human interest, or trust in the Gospel, with its costs.

A three part series follows, on the lamp, the measure, and the seed

growing by itself. The lamp (Mk 4.21) is a manifesto proclaiming exposure: "For there is nothing hidden but it must be disclosed, nothing kept secret except to be brought to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen to this." In the measure you give shall it be given to you; to those who have, more shall be given, from those that have not, what they have shall be taken away. There is here no room for envy, for crying "No fair!" What is commended instead is generosity. This shows both second and third function elements: no invidious comparisons, help your neighbor. Like it, the parable of the seed growing by itself enjoins both trust in God and timely openness to God's opportunity. Here also, in the presence of food and nourishment, are present third function themes as well as the more prominent second function.

The mustard seed is an allusion to the mighty cedar (Ez 17, Ez 31, Dn 4).[14] The expected reign of God would bring in an age of dominance or at least of independence for God's people, with the nations acknowledging the role of the People of God; hence the image of the mighty cedar, in whose shade all might find shelter. But Jesus counters instead with the image of an overgrown weed, here for a day, gone tomorrow, and suggests that in the reign of God, people are to trust rather than seek to dominate. In other words, find the good in limitation, rather than strive to control it.

The dialogue with the Pharisees, on ritual purity, the clean and unclean, inside and on the surface, is a clear treatment of evasion of exposure, hypocrisy.

The teaching on suffering and the role of the Son of Man and his followers (Mk 8.31, 9.32, 10.30ff), poses a choice between triumphalism or service. Can there be good in suffering? In a related pericope, the disciples ask for position and honor (Mk 10.35), and are told that in the kingdom of God, there is no legitimacy of place that can be secured or controled by men.

In Mk 9.43 ff., Jesus shocks his hearers to look for the good hiding in terrible "bad"–cut off your hand, your foot, your eye, if it cause you

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[14] R. W. Funk, "The Looking Glass Tree Is for the Birds," *Interpretation*, 27 (1973) 3.

to sin. There is no compromise with the one and only God, no room for so-called gods. The saying does not reflect a functional interest.

Matthew's story of the vineyard laborers (20.1), some hired every three hours, but all paid the same, to the unhappiness of the longest working, is a pointed injunction against invidious comparisons and toward gratitude and joy.

The unjust steward (Lk 16.1) commends openness to opportunity, in a way calculated to shake up Jesus' hearers.

the teaching on divorce (Mk 10.1) enjoins love, commitment, perhaps simply finding good in the difficulties of marriage.

The little children (Mk 10.13) have the attitude Jesus likes: they regard life as "from Daddy," full of good, all of it. They trust that good will be brought forth in every situation.

The rich young man is enjoined to open himself to his neighbor in need, sell all he has, and give to the poor.

The barren fig tree (Mk 11.12) must bear fruit or be withered. It faces both exposure and opportunity, though it see neither. Timely action is called for. This pericope carries both first and second function elements. Like it, the cleansing of the Temple reflects the same interests (Mk 11.15). The wicked husbandmen, who end up killing the vineyard owner's son, furthers this theme. They are ungrateful, blind, stubborn, and hard-hearted. They fail to foresee the consequences of their wickedness. In the end, there is exposure promised for them.

Matthew, in chapter 25, has one of the most ringing endorsements of the central importance of helping one's neighbor, above any cultic or ecclesial commitments: "Inasmuch as you did it to the least of these, you did it to me."

Luke, in the story of the prodigal son, debunks the legitimacy of the older brother, commends the younger's repentance and his openness to forgiveness and opportunity. It is primarily a first-function story; tender good beyond belief is to be found in embracing exposure, by going home to the Father and telling all.

The good Samaritan is really about the man in the ditch–can you accept help from someone you despise? If we are enjoined to help our neighbor, so also do we need to accept help in love if fellowship is to

result.

The teaching on the resurrection (the woman married seven times), seems to modern ears hopefully like an injunction to view the resurrection neither as wishful (and false) thinking, nor as hope that limitations are not really going to limit us (in this case, the limitation of death), but as proclamation of the trustworthiness of God who brings limitation.

The scribes' hypocrisy and the widow's mite (Mk 12.38, 12.41) both hammer away against any quest for secure legitimacy, pride of place, and hypocrisy.

2.6.3   The Summary of the Law

Perhaps the most striking example of tripartition can be found in the summary of the Law, Mark 12.28, quoting Deuteronomy 6.4-5. You are to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength. But "mind" is an insertion, not in the LXX, to fill a perceived defficiency of the formula in its first function aspect. Are heart, soul, mind, strength to be considered third, third, first, and second function? They are Indo-Europeanized version of *lev*, *nephesh*, *me'od*. But are these really heart, soul, might? *Lev* means the inner man, and is translated variously as inner man, mind, heart, will–all three functions, not simply the third, which the heart would be, as the seat of the emotions. *Nephesh* means breath, or soul, but by extension it means life, one's whole body. *Me'od* means veryness, one's extended being. A rough translation would then be "your innerness, your wholeness, the farthest reaches of your being." The differences between the Semitic and Indo-European categories should here be apparent. Each is enriched by the presence of the other.

2.6.4   The Miracles

Jesus' actions no less than his teaching reflect radical monotheism in an Indo-European conception. He cleanses, raises, and feeds Israel. *Katharizo* and *egeiro*, for "cleanse" and "raise," are used as technical terms in the healing stories. They are used with repetition and with

great strain in places which suggests that Mark puts great store by these terms as unifying conceptual threads in his story. See for example the man with the withered hand (Mk 3.1), where the man is told to "rise to the center," strange in Greek and English, but easy in French, "leve toi au midi!" Cleansings occur for a pattern of ritual and physical ailments. For Mark, in Jesus, God brings life to Israel. He exposes and so cleanses, he brings life out of limitation of death and illness, and he feeds Israel.

2.6.5   The Temptations

Also tripartite is the conception of the temptations in Matthew and Luke. Jesus is taken to the pinnacle of the Temple, the symbol of secure legitimacy. He is shown all the kingdoms of this world, symbol of secure power. And he is invited to make bread from stones, to secure control of sustenance in the face of need. In all three cases, Jesus is invited to seek humanly defined good, rather than accept the givens of life as gifts that bring God's good already in them.

I think these examples will show two things. The delineation of radical monotheism presented here can fairly be found in the New Testament, and it there shows the marks of Indo-European tripartite thinking superimposed on Semitic non-tripartite categories.

2.7   The Passion and Resurrection

2.7.1   The Appearances

Even more central than the teaching or acts of Jesus are his death and resurrection. Accordingly, we examine Jesus' death and resurrection in the light of our formulation of the commitment of radical monotheism. I would contend that the texts on the resurrection are not plausible as reports of events, but were instead a kerygmatic claim for a way of interpreting Jesus' death. They may secondarily report encounters between Jesus' friends and people around them, events in which they

came to a new view of his death. But accounts which conceive the resurrection as a resuscitation, depicting Jesus walking out of the tomb freshly awakened (such as in the Gospel of Peter), were ruled out of the Canon by the church.

We shall find that we can see the Passion best through the resurrection. The resurrection appearances of Jesus can be separated in two groups. The first is a collection of commissions, by Jesus to his disciples, on the basis of which they went out to evangelize the world. Following the canons of interpretation set out by Norman Perrin, I would say that these are texts in which the church confidently claimed Jesus' blessing on its sense of mission.[15] The way to make such a claim in the ancient world was to put the appropriate words in the mouth of the person whose authority was being claimed. It is accordingly difficult to suppose any basis in events for this set of stories.

The second group of resurrection appearances, the remaining ones, all have in common that the disciples are exposed in their lack of faith, and gracefully and joyfully invited into faith. Jesus is never recognized at first, and there never develops a growing sense one would expect of getting used to seeing Jesus after his death. The Emmaus story is in convenient ways paradigmatic. Jesus is "recognized" only when the stranger says the blessing (Barukh attah . . . hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz), over the bread. What does Luke mean? They saw *Jesus*, or they saw Jesus *in* the stranger? The latter is at least as plausible as the former. The whole collection of resurrection appearances significantly and consistently fails to have together all the marks of reports of an actual resuscitation, and while this is still debated, I shall assume that here and in the other appearances, they do not see *Jesus*, but see Jesus *in* someone.

The stranger knows the Old Testament traditions in which the Messiah will fill his office through suffering, and explains to the disciples in Emmaus how there is good to be found where they had seen only bad and confusion. Peter also has seen Jesus and now sees good where

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[15] Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York, Harper and Row, 1976), see e. g., in ch. I the remarks on the criterion of dissimilarity.

there was only bad before. Peter is important, for in his case, the evangelists explain in detail how Jesus' death exposes him in his unfaith and cowardice. In this sense, Jesus' death is like the returning son's in the tale told of the innkeeper's family; in his death, his mother and sister see themselves for the first time. We naturally assume (as in Camus' version of the story) that they can see no good in their son's death. But that is not necessarily so; it was not so for Jesus' friends, and it need not be so for us. What we read in the resurrection accounts is the sense of joy in finding grace and not condemnation in exposure. These accounts do not say, "Jesus did not really die (though he seemed to, by any tests we could perform), no, as he did not really die for good, so we need not die for good." If the texts did say that, they would present to us a Jesus who came close to exposing the disciples, but in the end failed to do so, thus promising us that just as we need not really face limitation in death, so also, we need not really face exposure in another's limitation.

2.7.2   New Faith

The resurrection stories are thus not claims that Jesus somehow was exempted from real death, but instead they claim that this exposure brought grace and forgiveness and new life and freedom, and not condemnation. It does not really matter whether the disciples thought they were seeing Jesus, what we would consider halucinations. It does not matter that the church fairly soon seemed to interpret these accounts literally, for in her "literal" interpretation she refused to draw or allow others to draw conclusions which would normally follow from a literal interpretation, such as that one might speculate, with the Gospel of Peter, on the actual circumstances of Jesus' awakening from death. Even though the Fathers do not practise twentieth century hermeneutics, they are not even tempted to draw literal conclusions from a supposedly literal interpretation. It is a question for us why not, but not in the limits of this essay. And it would not matter if Jesus *had* been resuscitated (a point which Shroud-of-Turin researchers seem to have overlooked), for resuscitations are reported of many figures in the

ancient world, and we never for a moment consider either that these
other stories might be factually true, or that the persons of whom they
are told might thereby be certified as God (or gods?) incarnate. J. D.
Crossan summarizes his thought on the resurrection:

> It is most probable that Jesus was buried by the same
> inimical forces that had crucified him and that on Easter
> Sunday morning those who knew the site did not care and
> those who cared did not know the site . . . Easter faith,
> the belief that Jesus is with God and that the crucifixion
> was not divine rejection but divine acceptance, arose in
> a manner no more and no less inexplicable than all faith
> before or after it.[16]

Why do we tell the story of the resurrection? In it we claim vindica-
tion for Jesus and redemption for ourselves precisely when vindication
and redemption cannot be seen. And we are not simply saying that
Jesus found what we would conventionally call "good" in his death
(i. e., that he didn't really die), while claiming that the story is in
some unexplainable sense exempt from canons of explanation, exam-
ination, verification, or falsification normally applied to purportedly
factual accounts. Jesus in life showed his friends how to find good *in*
limitation, not in evading it. If Mark is to be believed, and I think he
may be, they did not really understand him until he demonstrated what
he meant in the circumstances of his death. He loved them in life,
and again, if the evangelists are to believed, in life he knew that they
were of a character that would likely prove unfaithful under pressure.
After his death, as they realized how well he knew them in life, while
loving them anyway, it would have been a betrayal infinitely worse
to abandon faith when for the first time they could see themselves as
he had seen them. When for the first time they could see that he had
accepted them, how could they not accept themselves?

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[16] John Dominic Crossan, "Empty Tomb and Absent Lord," in *The Passion in Mark*,
ed. Werner H. Kelber (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 135-152.)

2.8   Incarnation and History

2.8.1   Revelation

We have presupposed in our discussion that God comes to us in the terms of our own time. This was the motive for a phenomenological quest for the sense of "god" and "God". We feel that we can understand preferences and choices and loyalty in an unproblematic way, one which does not raise metaphysical problems about the cognitive and ontological status of the referents of "god" and "God". It might be cautioned that when we seek access to the meaning of "god" and "God" through human loyalty, in no way do we prejudge that the gods or God are real or unreal, or figments of human imagination. Nevertheless, to confess faith in gods or God is necessarily to confess the belief in the appropriateness of that faith on grounds outside the mind of the believer. I say as much in delicately worded language in order not to prejudge the ontological status of gods or God. We shall come to that question in regard to God in chapter 7. In our attempt to describe and explain our life of faith, we must come to what we call revelation, and since Christians have seen the vehicle of revelation in incarnation, we must also give some sense for "incarnation".

For revelation I follow some ideas from Richard Niebuhr's *The Meaning of Revelation*.[17]   Niebuhr is arguing a view of revelation which is essentially new, and to see it, we must spell out the view of revelation I think we have held until now. We conceived the process of revelation as one in which we received information. Perhaps it was information through which we ordered our lives by faith, in a commitment certainly extending to action and affections as well as thought. The cognitive held a primacy in the dynamic of revelation, and in Niebuhr's understanding it will still do so. We also assumed that we could speak of revelation as information received by analogy to other receiving of information–telegrams, letters, and so on. In this model, the *content* of revelation could be located in the text of

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[17] (New York, Macmillan, 1941, PB edition, 1960). Page references are to the 1941 edition, with 191 pp; the PB has 139 pp.

Scripture, for Christians, or in TNK and Talmud, for Jews. If asked to imagine in detail *how* God might have delivered this information, we supposed visions or auditions, whether acoustic or in the mind's eye or ear. And there the process of explanation stopped.

What Niebuhr suggests as a starting point is the idea that revelation is the ensemble of those events in history which we use to make sense of all history.

> By revelation in our history, then, we mean that special occasion which provides us with an image by means of which all the occasions of personal and common life become intelligible. What concerns us at this point is not that the revelatory moment shines by its own light and is intelligible by itself but rather that it illuminates other events and enables us to understand them . . . Such revelation is no substitute for reason; the illumination it supplies does not excuse the mind from labor, but it does give the mind the impulsion and first principles it requires if it is to be able to do its proper work.[18]

This is a conception which leaves us room, when doing anthropology, for example, to ask questions about the contingent origins of the notion of gods or of God. It also allows us to confess our ultimate values and loyalty to God, in such a way that confession and explanation are not confused.

We are related in our faith, then, to history. We do not simply start from a faith postulated in the present, using history only as a convenient store of illustrations for a faith that does not have an essential connection to history. Our faith did not simply spring pristine and causeless into the present, we received it from people who in their turn received it, and so on. While we look to history as the roots of our faith, it does not follow that we are committed to some particular version of history in inerrant detail. We are still rooted in particular events even if we did not fully understand those events; in fact, we do not need *all* the details and facts that could be saved, for only some

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[18] Niebuhr, *Meaning of Revelation*, p. 109.

will suffice to root our faith. Nor can all the future be interpreted in terms of a few events in the past; revelation is not finished. We are a people on pilgrimage, open to the future and to new meaning to be discovered in the present and future.

Niebuhr continues, "First of all, the revelatory moment is one which makes our past intelligible. Through it we understand what we remember, remember what we have forgotten and appropriate as our own past much that seemed alien to us."[19] The revelatory event in history exposes our past, and when it is exposed, we can recover it, appropriate it as our own, and enter into community with the people, past and present, who share a common faith. We see that the biblical events are indeed our roots, though not always in the ways we had thought. It is an often repeated tale of modern research into Christian and Jewish origins that Judaism and Christianity borrowed conceptualities from the world around them in terms of which to express their own ideas.[20] All through our discussion, I have sought to dissect the content of faith from the conceptualities in which it is expressed. In reality, of course, content is never expressed at all, except in terms of *some* conceptualities. That content and conceptuality are distinguishable can only be argued by exhibiting two different accounts, in different conceptualities, and successfully claiming that the two accounts in fact carry the same content in spite of different terms of expression. This has become a commonplace, if one that is often not explicitly stated.

2.8.2   The Terms of Our Own Time

With this in mind, we say that God comes to us in the terms of our own time. Those terms are not the terms of prior ages, yet we have never felt we could sever ourselves from history. Herein is the practical recognition that conceptuality and content are to be distinguished. If we no longer practise animal sacrifice, we do not hesitate to link

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[19] Ibid., p. 110.

[20] Edward C. Hobbs, "Recognition of Conceptuality as a Hermeneutical Tool," *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, Band 88, ed. F. L. Cross (Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 1964).

ourselves with the history of a people who did, confident that we share with them – more! that we receive from them – values precious to us. The church borrowed from the mystery religions ideas that we see in the Paschal Mystery, though we have largely forgotten their origin.[21] Here, the extent to which we distinguish our own from hellenistic terms is not nearly so clear as in the case of animal sacrifice.

Among the hellenistic ideas we inherit is what we have traditionally called incarnation. It is incarnation that I wish to suggest is captured in the rubric that God comes to us in the terms of our own time. Theologians have often said that Christianity is an incarnational religion, meaning that God comes to us in common things, such as bread and wine, water and oil. Incarnation has been used specifically to make sense of the person of Jesus. We meet God in the realm of the cognitive as truth and exposure, as the church felt she had been exposed and saved paradigmatically in Jesus. But she also maintained that the truth she met in Jesus was not new in Jesus, and never *new* in history. That truth instead is something from before all time, which the church came to know in time, in Jesus. In hellenistic terms, it is personified in the Logos, which, in developing New Testament and Patristic Christology, is incarnate in Jesus. The terms of our own time are too much with us to be defined with confidence, but we might say that though it is not the case that Jesus *is* God, it is in Jesus that we *meet* God. (What would it even *mean* to say that Jesus *is* God?)

2.8.3   Jesus the Exposer

Jesus is called messiah, in Greek, *Christos*, soon regarded as a proper name. Yet messiah, or *meshiach*, had a technical sense, as the one sent by God to do justice, or *mishpat*. *Meshiach* simply means "anointed," hence the Greek translation; the anointing was ordination to do *mishpat*. The Old Testament conception of *mishpat* does not distinguish functionalities in the Indo-European sense, and this is one part of the

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[21] Odo Cassel, O. S. B., *The Mystery of Christian Worship and Other Writings* (Westminster, MD, The Newman Press, and London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1962).

confusion in the argument between the Church and the Synagogue over whether Jesus could or could not have been the messiah. What we recognize as the cognitive functionality figures prominently in the concept of *mishpat*; it is for this reason that we see in Jesus pre-eminently our exposure. Nonetheless, in Jesus we see how to meet God, not only in exposure, but also in limitation and need, though that is not of present concern.

When we chose Jesus as the event by which we interpret history and our lives, we confess our intention to embrace exposure rather than evade it. Even when the price of my exposure is someone else's suffering, even at my own hands, that exposure is to be embraced. Obviously, no one should *bring about* someone else's suffering in order to gain his own exposure; that is sick, and not at all what I mean. Rather, when the other's suffering has already happened, through my fault or not, then the exposure has also already happened, and it is to be embraced. If this radical concept of exposure is to be made central, then we are surrendering all claims of moral legitimacy. Without exposure, I shall not come to know myself as I really am, and the cost of this exposure, the involvement of other people, should be stressed.

2.8.4   A New Exodus

When we choose Jesus as the event by which to interpret, life and history, we recover access to the Old Testament, for the New Testament is a retelling of the Old; the Synoptics as a literary genre are not precisely a parody, but they do deliberately recall the structure and themes of the Exodus. This is their way of saying that what God did in the Exodus, God has done again in Jesus. The gospels are then simply doing what we say we always do with revelation: they are using past history (the Exodus) to interpret the present (the complex of first century events). That interpretation is new in their time, and we may similarly use their interpretation to make sense of our history before and since them.[22] When they use Jesus to interpret their present, they

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[22] We could clearly go through the several Old Testament theologies, further substantiating the claim that what they are doing is fairly captured in the summary of

are claiming that he is new revelation. Clearly, interpretation is going on at several levels simultaneously. That the gospels mean to proclaim God acting in Jesus by picturing Jesus as re-enacting the Exodus has been suggested but not generally agreed upon.[23] And we are enabled to say this of Jesus and of the New Testament because of events nearly in our own time, research of the historical-critical method. We would not have realized this except by the research which has grown out of the Enlightenment in the last century and this.

All of the presuppositions underlying our discussion are of recent development. They come from biblical research, hermeneutics, philosophy, phenomenology, sociology, sociology of knowledge in particular, and many other disciplines; in short, the whole temper of modern research as influenced by the discipline of scientific history. Collingwood explains for philosophy what I shall claim is paralleled in theology:

> The chief business of twentieth-century philosophy is to reckon with twentieth-century history. Until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, historical studies had been in a condition analogous to that of natural science before Galileo. In Galileo's time something happened to natural science . . . which suddenly and enormously

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radical monotheism presented here. But there is not space, and it would not add anything essentially new.

[23] Edward C. Hobbs, *The Gospel of Mark and the Exodus* (University of Chicago, Dissertation Series, 1952). See also Hobbs, "Death and Resurrection: That Rock Was Christ," *Motive*, April 1956; Austin Farrer, *St Matthew and St Mark* (London, Dacre Press, 1954); Idem, "On Dispensing with Q," in *Studies in the Gospels*, ed. D. E. Nineham (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1955); and C. F. Evans, "The Central Section of St. Luke's Gospel," in the same volume; and Robert Houston Smith, "Exodus Typology in the Fourth Gospel," *JBL* 76 (1957) 329; M. D. Goulder and M. L. Sanderson, "St. Luke's Genesis," *Journal of Theological Studies*, N. S., vol. VIII, Pt. I, April 1957, pp. 12-30. C. F. Evans: "Matthew has constructed five books of a Christian Pentateuch, in the first [sic] of which Jesus is depicted on a mount delivering a new Torah . . . while Luke has cast that section of his Gospel which is made up of non-Marcan material into the form of a journey to the borders of the Promised Land, a journey which follows that of Deuteronomy by way of correspondence and contrast" (p. 50). The evangelists in different ways and with no ironclad system expect their readers to hear the Pentateuch as they read.

increased the velocity of its progress and the width of its outlook. About the end of the nineteenth century something of the same kind was happening, more gradually and less spectacularly perhaps, but not less certainly, to history.[24]

The present and last chapters have been concerned to develop a theology with which it will be possible to engage the problem of history and its accompanying phenomena, relativity and pluralism. We shall not be concerned to explain how the historian does his work, or in what sense he knows what he knows. That is the problem for philosophy, as Collingwood says. What we are asking in theology is how shall we meet the discipline of history, with welcome, or with dread?

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[24] R. G. Collingwood, *Autobiography* (Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 79.

Chapter 3

History

3.1 The Challenge of the Modern World

3.1.1 Meeting God in Our World

The long argument of the first two chapters, that as Christians we find good in all and not only some of life, and in particular, in exposure, limitation, and need, was advanced in order to place history, relativity, and pluralism. For history is a species of exposure, cognitive relativity is a species of limitation or contingency, and pluralism, wherein we meet our cognitive neighbor, is a species of need. I claim that we are to embrace history, relativity, and pluralism, not for reasons of convenience, nor with tongue-biting and teeth-gritting, making a virtue out of necessity (although it probably is a necessity), but because in this area of our life, quite simply, embracing these three things is what Christianity is all about. To embrace history, relativity, and pluralism will not mean submitting to "bad" news, but rather opening our eyes, hands, and hearts to good news beyond belief.

The area of life in which we meet exposure, limitation, and need as history, relativity, and pluralism may be called the social construction of reality, after the book of that title by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. For the "world" we live in *is* a social construction; knowledge and experience of it are shaped at every level by the society we are

born into. This is true not only of how we know the world as it "is," but also of the institutions we participate in, and the roles we play in those institutions. We simply cannot afford to do all the cognitive work of getting to know the world as individuals, and so we trust our fellows; it is because of this that reality as we know it is "socially constructed." Sociology of knowledge studies this as a general phenomenon; history of science specializes it to science, a specialization we have maintained a continuing interest in.

We speak of the "modern world," as if there could be some other. It is in this sense that we construct the "world" we live in, and this phrase acknowledges the tremendous change in that world since the Reformation. The first appearance of the challenge to modernity was in the natural sciences, but by themselves, these would not have posed a serious challenge to the church. (The Copernican theory of celestial motion met opposition from the church, but Aquinas had said that though the theory of cycles and epicycles could be considered established, some other theory might suffice to explain better.)[1] The real sense of conflict with the modern world did not appear until the sciences gave rise to conflict with biblical history.

3.1.2   History as Exposure

It is in history that we tell ourselves how we came to be a people, and how we came to our religious faith. It is from history that the great challenge to the church has come in the modern world. For historical research has claimed that the church's account of its history was in error, and that claims of the logical kind the church makes could not in any case be based on contingent events in history. Awareness and contact with other religious traditions, chiefly oriental, further exacerbated the sense of threat, for such contact tends always to undermine any claims of absolutness. It is hard to claim that there is only one way to do something when people who do it differently are close at hand. Of these three, history was the first to occasion challenge to the church.

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[1] *Summa Theoligica*, I, Q. 32, Art. 1, ad 2.

Relativity as a recognized problem is earlier than the nineteenth century, but it is only then that it receives much attention. Pluralism is at least as old as the eighteenth century, but it too is a challenge on a significant scale only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

We shall look at the rise of historical criticism of the bible and Christian origins as a modern phenomenon. From criticism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, men in the church took to heart the charges of the Deists, and from this, modern critical research on the bible was born. Though concerted attack on the church from outside has continued, that attack has not been focused on the bible since the eighteenth century; serious critical examination of the bible has continued only within the church or on its edges. We shall review briefly the results of critical research, as they give a qualitative account of the changes in our view of the bible, and suggest the challenges to our view of God. Parallel to critical examination there appears in the modern world a literalism which is not literalism by default (as premodern literalism was), but methodological literalism arising at first from quite specific principles of interpretation, and continuing later from a desire to resist the relativising effects of critical research. We then examine the historical methods undergirding critical results, for they contain presuppositions which bear on our attitudes toward God and history. We are not concerned with Fundamentalism nearly as much as with the stance which gives critical history nominal allegiance while ignoring it for practical purposes. History in its turn demands that we face the questions of relativity, for history gives rise to the problems of hermeneutics, how we interpret ancient texts at all.

Facing relativity means acknowledging that the world we construct is *our* construction, and so facing the essential otherness of the reality beyond our conception of it.

3.2   History and Biblical Criticism

3.2.1   The First Critical Results

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Modern critical history probably owes its origins significantly to the high value Protestants placed on scripture, for minds newly critical in the seventeenth century would not otherwise have been turned to scripture. The first critical problems were in fact raised in the Reformation, at the time when printing was new. Men were faced with the question again and again, which manuscript to print, how to decide between variants in several manuscripts. Erasmus figured prominently in this work, as the editor of a New Testament which in Stephanus' revision received wide distribution and came to be know as the *Textus Receptus*, though it was hastily prepared, and from poor manuscripts.[2] Johann Albrecht Bengel printed a much more careful critical New Testament, the Textus Receptus together with a list of variant readings. Bengel asked which variant could have given rise to the others, and formulated the rule that one ought to prefer the shorter and more difficult reading as older, because copyists tend to lengthen, explain, and smooth out difficult texts.[3] Parallel to this "lower criticism" as it came to be called, are the first instances of questioning the authenticity and significance of documents quite appart from problems of the correct readings of their texts; the Donation of Constantine was exposed as a forgery by Lorenzo Valla, on grounds from linguistics, law, history, and politics. Criticism of documents from grounds both internal and external to their texts had begun.

In the seventeenth century, in the sciences, philosophy, and history, there is a freedom from biblical and dogmatic authority. The bible had been *the* authority, on any subject on which it cared to speak, but

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[2] Werner Georg Kummel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems* (New York, Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 40.

[3] Kummel, op. cit., p. 48. For the general shape of this summary I follow Edgar Krentz' treatment in *The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1975), ch. II.

preeminently on world history and cosmology. Grotius, Spinoza, and Hobbes are notable examples of the new attitude. Isaac de la Peyrere published his *Prae-Adamiten* in 1655, asserting that Adam was not the first man, but only the first Israelite, on grounds of gaps in the biblical record, contradictions, and external evidence. There was understandably an outraged response, which succeeded in refuting him, but at the significant cost of adopting his methods. Jean Mabillon, a Benedictine monk of Paris, published the first volume of *Acta Sanctorum* in 1668, in which he worked out a method for determining the date and authenticity of ancient documents. When enough thinking has occurred to raise questions of method, it is a sign that something significant has happened, and when a method is laid out explicitly, it means that anyone can use it to achieve similar results on any documents of interest. Descartes formulated as the more general principles of method, that man is the center of philosophical inquiry, that doubt and not tradition is to be the center of method, and that reason and not authority is to be sole criterion of truth. Spinoza attacked miracles on the general principle that they are the result of the Jewish custom of referring everything to God in disregard of secondary causes. This is an early instance of raising general questions as to the sense in which the biblical writers intended what they wrote, later (in the twentieth century) to become the science of hermeneutics. Richard Simon, a French Oratorian, wrote in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, intending to attack the Protestant pinciple of *sola scriptura* as untenable if its logical implications are worked out. Scripture needs tradition for sensible interpretation; he cited as grounds the uncertainties in textual traditions, the implausibility of Moses as author of the whole Pentateuch, and the evident long period of complilation of some biblical books. In the process of defending tradition, he had introduced a wholly new conception of scripture, greatly colored by critical reason as well as tradition. He was expelled from his order in 1678 and his books were placed on the *Index*.

What is common to all these stories is that while the charges raised against the traditional interpretation of the Bible were often refuted with more or less effort, the defenders of orthodoxy had to resort to the

methods of the attackers. Since the chief thrust of the attacks was in their methods rather than in the content of their assertions, the outcome could be regarded as a victory for the use of reason in biblical history. Some of the conclusions of these early workers have stood up into the present, such as that the long ending of Mark, though old, is not Markan. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, translators dared not depart from the Textus Receptus, and only in the present century, do many translations no longer print the long ending of Mark or the woman taken in adultery in John as part of those Gospels.

3.2.2   The Eighteenth Century

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Deist attacks arose from rationalist motives of ruling out miracle and the supernatural by presupposition. Yet there was more at stake than simply a principle of interpretation, for the opposing contenders represented very different interests in society. The defenders of orthodoxy were defending not only a method of interpretation, but also their established place and power in society, and the attackers sought to undermine a method of interpretation as a way of undermining that established legitimacy of power, from democratic and mercantilist motives. The flavor of the Deist attacks can be gotten from the titles of their books, John Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity, as Delivered in the Scriptures* (1695), John Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious*, or Matthew Tindal's *Christianity as Old as Creation: or the Gospel a Republication of the Religion of Nature* (1730).[4] Niebuhr comments that in the war between reason and revelation, both reason and revelation were sadly battered, though far from dead. "Scepticism, clothed in the episcopal vestments Butler gave it, or in the more worldly armor Hume supplied, was left in possession of the field.[5] Butler's reply to the Deists has the same color as the works it sought to refute, though with a difference, as its title may suggest: *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (1736). The

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[4] Kummel, op. cit., pp 51–54.

[5] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, pp. 2–3.

Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church credits Butler with a tone and level of discourse distinctly above the polemical color of much of the discussion. Significantly, he argued that in religion as in all of life, people decide on the basis of the weight of probability, rather than of secure certainty. The bible came to be interpreted as any other ancient document.

In the same century, Jean Astruc, a French physician, while not doubting Mosaic authorship, originated the speculation as to the sources of the Pentateuch, in his book *Conjectures on the Reminiscences which Moses Appears to Have Used in Composing the Book of Genesis* (1753). His reasoning was based partly on the variation in useage of the divine names. The Synoptic problem was posed, which gospel was used as material for the others, and Reimarus raised many of the questions which were to preoccupy New Testament research into the twentieth century: Jesus' eschatological preaching, the messianic secret, the passion predictions and the surprise of the disciples at the resurrection, miracles, the differences between John and the Synoptics, and so on.[6]

3.2.3   Modern Results

In the nineteenth century results on both Testaments we can see the modern critical appraisal taking shape. This work begins shortly before 1800. Reimarus' work was published anonymously and posthumously by G. E. Lessing (as the *Wolfenbuttel Fragments*, in 1774-78); he sought to convict biblical writers of conscious fraud, innumerable contradictions, and fanaticism.[7] There was an understandably sensational reaction in Germany, a reaction to occur again in 1835 to David Friedrich Strauss' *Life of Jesus*. Though many of Strauss' conclusions can only be described as fantastic, he brought to these questions the insight that the Gospels as literature are neither fraud, nor eyewitness accounts, but contain myth and legend. By the end of the century, it would also be clear that the Gospels were shaped principally by the

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[6] Krentz, op. cit., pp. 20–21.

[7] *ODCC*.

theological agenda of the evangelists. Nineteenth century research concentrated on securing a veridical account of the life of Jesus; yet in the end, judgement was that it saw in the New Testament materials only illustration for its own theories of Jesus as nineteenth-century-liberal preacher. Albert Schweitzer's *From Reimarus to Wrede*, translated as *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906) recounted the story of nineteenth century research and its impasse in the realization of the extent to which the Gospel narratives are shaped by the intentions and interests of their authors. Wrede had shown (1901) that Mark was not unadorned fact at all. In particular, the sense of Jesus Messiahship was read into his life from the church's later interests; for treatment of messiahship occurs in text that can be assigned to Mark as editor rather than to his sources, assuming that he worked as compiler of oral traditons which can be located in the cores of the stories he tells of Jesus. In a related vein, Johannes Weiss had pointed out that Jesus was not only a preacher, but manifestly an eschatological preacher; he and his friends expected the inauguration of the New Age and the Reign of God visibly in history in their lifetimes. Their disappointment and adjustment to it was a major issue in the first decades of the young church. Weiss had incidentally exhibited an example in which Jesus was simply mistaken in his expectations; a major blow at all traditional conceptions of Jesus as Christ. In Old Testament research, Julius Wellhausen synthesized in the work of Graf and others, with his own organization, the dual thesis that the Law is younger than the Prophets, and that the Law passed through four stages of editing. Thus was the Documentary Hypothesis born, namely, that two editors, known as "J" and "E," collecting material during the early years of the monarchy, and using by preference the names *YHWH* and *Elohim* for "God," constitute the oldest layers of narrative and law in the Pentateuch; and that to this corpus was added a "Second Law," (Deuteronomy) by an editor known as "D," and the whole re-edited, and greatly supplemented in its legal provisions, by a Priestly editor ("P") at the time of the Exile.[8] Hence the theory is sometimes simply known as "JEDP" for short. Though the Old

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[8] Walther Zimmerli, *The Law and the Prophets* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1965), pp. 22–25.

Testament was quickly to lose whatever emotional ties it had held as literally true for Christians, Wellhausen was at one time forbidden to teach Old Testament on account of his formidable reputation.

On a parallel with the rise of scientific biblical criticism, and of a piece with it, was the rise in the nineteenth century of scientific history. It concerned itself not only with reconstructing the biblical past, but also the history of the classical world, especially the Roman Empire. Barthold Georg Niebuhr and Leopold von Ranke were notable in the origins of scientific history. The discipline soon passed to self-conscious reflection on its methods, which it conceived at first as borrowed from the earlier sciences, chiefly physics. This positivist history gave way in later years to a conception of history as a science with an independent method of its own. Here "science" is used in little more than the Latin sense of *scientia*, a disciplined and organized body of knowledge; yet scientific history early manifested in itself values and practices of a kind with the natural sciences, if its methods of reasoning and the structure of its results were different. The German development was notably advanced by Dilthey and others, as R. G. Collingwood has recounted in *The Idea of History*. We shall come to this in a little more detail shortly, as we consider just what are the methods and values of scientific history.

In the twentieth century, biblical research saw the genesis of Form Criticism, Tradition History, and Redaction Criticism, as dealing with special kinds of problems. Gunkel, Mowinckel, Alt, von Rad in the Old Tetsament, and Bultmann and his students in the New have been prominent in the advances achieved. An idea of how far we have come may be had from the methodological presupposition enunciated in Norman Perrin's *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (1976). He rejects as Dominical any saying or teaching that can plausibly be assigned either to the early church or to contemporary first century Judaism. This is done in the realization that ancient authors confidently put on their teachers' lips any teaching which they felt their teachers *would have* addressed to the situation of the students' time. "The early Church made no attempt to distinguish between the words the earthly Jesus had spoken and those spoken by the risen Lord through a prophet

in the community, nor between the original teaching of Jesus and the new understanding and reformulation of that teaching reached in the catechesis or parenesis of the Church under the guidance of the Lord of the Church."[9] This criterion is known as the criterion of disimilarity; with it, a body of teaching may tentatively be established, and from the teaching initially ruled out, what is consistent with it may cautiously be added as Dominical. The life of Jesus as told now is little more than an association with Nazareth, baptism as reported (this is factual because the evangelists are embarrassed by it, but feel they cannot omit it from the accounts, see e. g., Mt 3.14), life in Galilee, at least one trip to Jerusalem, culminating in death on the cross.[10] Similarly, some reconstruction of Jesus' teaching and sense of his own identity is possible, though the latter has little to do with the messianic titles used in the Gospels. Needless to say, this state of affairs in New testament research has raised deep and unsettling questions in regard to what we do know of history, and what we need to know in order to maintain our ties to history.

3.2.4   The Roots of Literal Interpretation

Parallel to the rise of biblical and secular history in and since the seventeenth century there is for the first time a method of reading Scripture which gives rise to Fundamentalism in the twentieth century, and to the interpretations maintained by orthodoxy in its own defense in the preceding centuries. It is in a sense ironic that Isaac Newton, the exemplary figure in the new science, should also have written at great length on biblical interpretation, using presuppositions which undergirded theological reaction. Much of what he wrote was never published, and so Newton was hardly influential as a biblical scholar. I cite him as an example of ideas which were current in his time and which are

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[9] Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York, Harper and Row, 1976), p. 15.

[10] See Hans Conzelmann, *Jesus* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1973), and Gunther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York, Hodder and Stoughton, 1960). Conzelmann's work is the *RGG 3* article of 1959.

the basis of much writing and thinking into the present. What was published reveals his interests by title: *Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms Amended*, and *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John*.[11] There are, unpublished, four separate commentaries on Daniel and the Apocalypse, a church history, rules for reading the prophets, a work on heresies through the ages, and more, from a background of wide reading not only in the Bible but also in the Patristic and more recent literature, the Talmud and other Jewish sources. Newton believed biblical descriptions were written by contemporaries, and that Moses had access to the most ancient documents of all time, the Law of God and the Book of Generations. Newton was no slave to authority; he was quite capable of heterodox conclusions regarding authorship of biblical books.[12] Moses had not written every word of the Pentateuch; yet this insight was not followed up as Astruc was later to do. Newton was quite capable of seeking the full meaning of biblical narratives through methods of reasoning borrowed from the lawcourts and humanist scholarship. Newton's interest in apocalyptic is understandable, as it presents an apparent challenge quite beyond anything in the historical books. "God's communication of these words to two chosen prophets was a historical act that made no sense whatever unless it was intended that their meaning should ultimately be deciphered. 'If they are never to be understood, to what end did God reveal them?' . . . Demonstration that prophecies and other divine promises had in fact been fulfilled in the historical world was one of the most ancient and enduring apologies for Jewish and Christian religion."[13] Newton presumed "that prophecies were congruent in all their parts without fault or exception."[14] While Newton cautiously and wisely stopped short of predicting the immediate future, he reasoned regarding the 1260 years in Daniel that "1200 of the 1260 years are run out already."[15]

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[11] Frank E. Manuel, *The Religion of Isaac Newton*, The Fremantle Lectures, 1973 (Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 11.

[12] Manuel, op. cit., p. 84.

[13] Manuel, op. cit., p. 88; he quotes an unpublished manuscript.

[14] Manuel, op. cit., p. 94.

[15] Manuel, op. cit., p. 99.

Newton seems to bring several assumptions to his biblical work which explain his conclusions. The whole scripture was inspired by God, verbally, and it follows as a corrolary that unclear passages in one author may be illuminated by helpful passages in another author without the slightest regard for the different authors' different sense or usage. The principles behind scripture are the same as those behind the motions of the heavenly bodies; God is reasonable and free, and accordingly arranged the Bible and the heavenly bodies freely in ways that reasoning men can come to understand. It never occurred to any of Newton's contemporaries that biblical language itself should be interpreted in any other than the obvious face-value sense.[16] Yet as we have noted, Newton could use the latest and most critical reasoning alongside these two assumptions of coherence and literalness.

In the twentieth century, Fundamentalism as a movement arose out of currents in the American churches, Dispensationalism and Princeton Calvinism.[17] After a series of publications in the early part of the century, Fundamentalism has never had a coherent organization, though it has prospered widely and promoted the principles we see first in Newton. The real problem for non-Fundamentalists is not the Fundamentalists, but residual assumptions we hold in common with the Fundamentalists. We tend to assume that at least *some* of the Bible must be taken at face-value, that we have an absolute legitimacy secure on grounds outside of the uncertainties of historical research. We accordingly do not look easily to scientific history for our sense of identity and legitimacy.

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[16] Van Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer* (New York, Macmillan, 1966), p. 20.

[17] Ernest R. Sandeen, "Toward a Historical Interpretation of the Origins of Fundamentalism," *Church History*, XXXVI (1967) 66-83, republished by Fortress Press as a pamphlet, 1968.

3.3   Method in History

3.3.1   The Anxiety of History

Christianity stands or falls with the tie that binds it to its historical origin. This is a commonplace, yet it locates the sense of anxiety we may easily come to have over the discipline of critical history. For it has seemed that critical history refuses to grant a status priviledged and beyond question to Christian origins in history. Christians have felt that their commitments were of the nature of presuppositions, and not subject to question. In a sense, this is true; one cannot uncover presuppositions underlying presuppositions in an infinite regression, one has to stop somewhere and say, "these suppositions seem to be simply presupposed without any prior basis, they are axiomatic." There is nothing wrong with having axioms; after all, where would geometry be without them? Yet it is also becoming increasingly clear that we should not identify our commitments of faith too absolutely with the linguistic expressions of those commitments, for the same faith has been expressed differently in different ages and by different groups in the same age. Our problem is still not simple, though, for we rightly feel in many circumstances that we have expressed our faith as well as it can be expressed linguistically, and certainly well enough to capture the distinctions between one faith and some other. It surely must be possible linguistically to express the fact that there is more than one faith, that all faiths are not equivalent, that the differences matter. (This is itself a commitment of faith, contrary to regarding all heuristic recipes for finding satisfaction as "equivalent" – the position that, after all, they all confer some satisfaction, and we may ignore as unimportant the extent to which they fail, and we may chalk up the differences in satisfaction granted to differences of taste, not properly subject for *religious* disagreement.) We believe in our use of language that commitments of faith can be captured at least approximately and at a level satisfactory for our purposes.

Yet our problems remain, for we are presented with language from our own religious tradition which we have grave difficulty making

sense of at face-value. The "literal" sense for any utterance depends always on presuppositions of interpretation which we bring to the utterance. There is no single literal meaning – and therefore, in the default sense intended by "literal," no "literal" meaning at all. Stanley Fish argues that meaning is only meaning within a context, and we always assume a context of interpretation.[18] We may or may not guess correctly which context its author intended. There is usually one context and a corresponding interpretation which is presumed as the most likely; this is the default interpretation. In dealing with sources which are thirty centuries old and from cultures very different from our own, difficulties of interpretation can arise without our even knowing it.

In the context of these difficulties, we discover that we had assumed that we had no difficulties, and we had staked a great deal on that assumption. Our legitimation and our apologetic and moral commitments were based on (presumed) clear interpretations, such as the vindication of prophecies of the future, factual records in the bible, all coming from God. Any venture into critical history quickly shows that our sense of the identity and legitimacy of Christianity cannot be based on history *as we have traditionally told that history*. Yet we do not embrace the new critical history, preferring to live with the older traditional history—the "literal" history— enjoying the legitimation it provides while disavowing its limitations. We know that we cannot disavow *all* of traditional history and still get any legitimation from it or establish any Christian roots in history; and without the last, we are in serious trouble. We do not see how to talk about God within the terms of the new critical history, and I think this is the reason why we are reluctant to embrace it, seeing critical history rather as something only of interest to "professionals," theologians, but not to the layman, the Christian *qua* Christian. We do not see how both to confess God in history and to explain what has happened in history. The traditional language both confessed and explained, but we find that we can no

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[18] Stanley Fish, "Normal Circumstances, Literal Language, Direct Speech Acts, the Ordinary, the Everyday, the Obvious, What Goes Without Saying, and Other Special Cases," in Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan, eds., *Interpretive Social Science, A Reader* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979).

longer do both with the same words. A confession of faith is not an explanation of history; if anything, it is a road-block, saying "explanation *stops* here." We seem to be caught between surrendering our confession of faith or our capacity to explain in history, surrendering our faith or our honesty; and this is not a little ironic, since our commitment to honesty came from our faith and its roots in history.

The difficulties we feel may be traced to history, though to its methods rather than to its results. It was in exploring method that historians, like natural scientists, discovered that confession of faith can not be dressed up as explanation in history. Accordingly, it is very useful to look into the developing sense of historical method and its grounding principles.

3.3.2 Collingwood

Scientific history at first conceived the way to make itself "scientific" as copying scientific method from physics. Collingwood has called this positivist history. In the positivist program, a man's task is to collect facts and frame laws which give a causal explanation of those facts. Thus history has no problems ascertaining what the facts are, and it only remains to find the "laws of history," which explain how nations and empires rise and fall (in one scheme), or how individuals do what they do in history based on causal explanations from another science, e. g., psychology (another scheme). This, however, greatly misconceives what historians do and what historical knowledge is. The facts are never so certain in history as they appear in the natural sciences, and the interpretation, if it is different from the facts themselves (it is not, Collingwood claimed), is on a basis entirely different from any conception of law taken from nature. History differs from geology, also a study of the unique and once-for-all, in that in geology, there are inanimate facts, whereas in history, anything that happens does so as a manifestation of activity of mind. The rise of scientific history is the rise of consciousness of the problems and appropriate methods for understanding past actions as manifestations of mind, purpose, and intention. As positivism had conceived that the only kind of knowledge

which is objective knowledge is that of the sciences, so history sought to liberate itself from positivism in the nineteenth century. The middle section of Collingwood's *The Idea of History* is a laundry list of English and Continental historians, with comments on how each tried to free himself from positivist presuppositions which would vitiate genuine historical work.[19] Some succeeded more or less, some lost nerve and succumbed to the revenge of positivism, some bolted and embraced positivism utterly. Collingwood's recipe for historical knowledge, that the historian knows what he knows by rethinking the thoughts of the figures he studies, proved in the end not to lead to viable progress in the philosophy of history. Nonetheless, he was surely right in claiming that the chief business of twentieth century philosophy is to grapple with twentieth century history. Dilthey and Bultmann posed the problems of hermeneutics in their modern form. From Dilthey, they are the dialectic between explanation and understanding, and from Bultmann, a pre-understanding which the hermeneut brings to the evidence he seeks to interpret. It became clear that it was impossible to understand the whole of a document without first understanding its parts; but the parts in turn required understanding of the whole. We make an estimate and proceed to refine that estimate, taking the chance that the initial estimate will lead to a process of refinement that may not converge at all or may converge falsely. But this is to stray from our interest, for the methods of history bear directly on Christian roots in history long before we encounter the "hermeneutical circle," as it is called.

3.3.3   Troeltsch

Ernst Troeltsch stands in theology at the watershed between positivist history and recognition of the character of historical method and its problems. In his article "Historiography" in Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* Troeltsch argues that historical causation is entirely different from causation in the natural sciences, because it is chiefly a matter of motivation. Though that motivation be psychologi-

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[19] R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford University Press, 1946), Parts III–IV.

cal, Troeltsch cannot follow Dilthey and Wundt in saying that historical aetiology can be methodized entirely by reference to psychology, for history manifests the constant incursion of the contingent. The contingent may appear as natural limitation on the scope of historic action, but it also appears in that psychology is helpless to actually predict what men will do, or to explain in any rigid or tight manner why they did what they did. "In the historical process, moreover, there ever emerges the fact of the *new*, which is no mere transformation of existing forces, but an element of essentially fresh content, due to the convergence of historical causes."[20]

In the same article, Troeltsch describes the process of historical reasoning:

> On the analogy of events known to us we seek by conjecture and sympathetic understanding to explain and reconstruct the past. From this point, again, we advance to the criticism of extant traditions and so to the correction of generally accepted historical representations. Since we discern the same process of phenomena in operation in the past as in the present, and see, there as here, the various historical cycles of human life influencing and intersecting one another, we gain at length the idea of an integral continuity, ballanced in its changes, never at rest, and ever moving towards incalculable issues.[21]

Here are the principles of analogy, criticism, and correlation. A full statement of the principle of criticism distinguishes it both from uncritical subscription to the "authorities," the received tradition of history, and from all claims of absolute knowledge unconditioned by the availability of evidence or the presuppositions of interpretation of the historian. Collingwood's great war-cry against uncritical history is to call it "scissors-and-paste" history; the historian cuts and pastes, but never asks himself, "do I believe what so-and-so is telling me?"

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[20] Ernst Troeltsch, "Historiography," in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (New York, Scribners, 1922), vol. VI, p. 719.

[21] Troeltsch, op. cit., p. 718.

Conclusions are only more or less probable, and always tentative, subject to finding new evidence and devising better ways to question the available evidence.

Analogy is the principle whereby historians reason from the known in the present to the possible in the past; it is only possible to make sense of the past in terms of the present. Now this does in no way rule out concluding that the past was different from the present in profound and subtle ways; the chain of argument from the present to the past may be quite indirect and powerful enough to grasp phenomena in the past unlike anything we know now. But that argument begins in the present, and not in some uncritical reading of the texts from the past. Our present experience may be dissimilar, but not radically so; we live in the same world, if in different "worlds."

Correlation is the notion that every event in history is intimately tied to its neighbors, both contemporary and preceeding and following, in a web of peculiarly historical causation that does not admit any transcendent "causes" intruding "from outside." No event can be isolated from its time and circumstances.[22] For example, if we try to imagine what actually happened in any of the miracles, we are repeatedly forced up against the success of our explanations within the assumption of regular behaviour in nature, and we find ourselves unable to conceive the very events themselves outside that regularity.[23] It is much easier to explain the texts as coming from an age when scientific regularity was not conceivable, let alone a concern. Instead, the texts use the conceptualities of their own age to proclaim a message not wholly dependent on those conceptualities. If ancients conceived the world as full of irregular events, the "miraculous," our problem is to understand their conceptuality and the ideas expressed in it, not to credit their accounts uncritically.

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[22] See Van Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer* (New York, Macmillan, 1966), pp. 14–15. My statement of analogy reflects an understanding of the problem of hermeneutical circularity not to be found so explicitly in Troeltsch.

[23] Gordon D. Kaufman, *God the Problem* (Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 130, n. 11, has an intriguing treatment of the particular case of the Virgin Birth.

3.3.4   The Historian and the Believer

A more recent treatment of the methodological presuppositions of history may be found in Van Harvey's introductory chapters in *The Historian and the Believer*. Harvey speaks of the morality of knowledge, in which the historian is committed to certain standards. He explains what those standards are, in effect an illuminating restatement of the principles of criticism, analogy, and correlation. And he asks the question which must arise, why can such a morality of knowledge find itself in conflict with the religion which taught it morality in the first place?

Harvey summarizes the morality of knowledge under four heads, autonomy, assessment, sound judgement, and the historian's standpoint. Autonomy is in effect the principle of criticism: saying it doesn't make it so, not of any historical proposition; nor does hearing it from someone else. The historian must judge, and take the responsibility for his own critical judgements. What is new in Harvey's scheme is the principle of assessment, for here the historian is committed to putting his conclusions in a form which other competent scholars can check or criticize. This is very important, the very substance of science, for it is the principle of objectivity. It is accordingly not proper to take a miraculous account and divest it of reference to phenomena which could in principle be checked. One suspects that some modern accounts of the resurrection have been framed with precisely the motive of putting them beyond criticism. Harvey calls sound judgement the principle whereby scholars bring to questions standards of what inferences are warranted on the evidence, and apply those standards fairly and uniformly, not selectively. The remarks above on the resurrection of Apollonios of Tyana are a case in point; one cannot divorce the resurrection in the canonical Gospels from those in the extra-canonical and pagan literature.

Under the historian's standpoint, Harvey considers the problem of analogy in Troeltsch's scheme. Apart from debates among modern philosophers of history as to how the present is to be used in reconstructing the past, there arises the opposition between miracles and the principle of analogy.

At each step of this historical methodology, a great blow has been struck at the traditional Christian legitimation, and at any possibility of erecting any replacement for it; that, I think, is the source of the lasting anxiety-producing efficacy of critical history. For in criticism, the historian has set himself above his source texts (*sacred* source texts!); in analogy, the historian has placed his own time above the times when God spake to men; and in correlation, the historian has grossly insulted the descriptions of God's mighty acts in history, trying to substitute human explanations for the divine proclamation of the Bible.

3.4   Historical Method and Theology

3.4.1   Methodological Atheism

Some of the sense of anxiety produced by historical method is captured in the phrase a kindred discipline, sociology of knowledge, uses of its methods: "methodological atheism." "Aha!" one may say, "Now they have admitted what we suspected all along! They have ruled out the existence of God as a presupposition, where it cannot be questioned!" This, I would suggest, though a natural reaction, is an inaccurate perception of what is going on. In fact, what methodological atheism does is not at all to rule out the question of God (conceived as existence or in any other way), but rather to refrain from addressing the question at all.[24] Why, if this is the case, was methodological atheism suspected of being a life-stance of (un)faith, rather than a research methodology? The perception of threat to religion from history and sociology was quite strongly felt, and reasons for it can be found.

There are two kinds of reasons. The first arises from the change in the sense of "God"; it is certainly true that sociologists of knowledge and historians, like any other scientists, presuppose value commitments to objectivity, honesty, and so on, as we discussed in the last chapter. There we argued that such commitments in fact are the commitments of radical monotheism, precisely faith in God. What we did not do there

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[24] I follow Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York, Doubleday, 1967), pp. 100, 180-185.

was to investigate the sense of the term "God," a project reserved for a later chapter. But the term "God" has also been taken as an ordinary substantive with an ordinary referent. It is this kind of assumption which history and sociology would bracket, with which they would refrain from agreement or disagreement. To question or support the values underlying science from within any of the sciences would be a little like trying to push the bus one is riding in, in Berger's simile. On both senses of "God," as refering expression and as value commitment, historical and other sciences must remain silent. They can of course investigate scientifically the rise of values or of senses of terms, "God" among them, but that is to do another thing.

The growing separation of the several senses in which we speak of gods and God have given rise to some of the confusion arising from a term such as "methodological atheism." But there is a second class of reasons why such methodological atheism raises anxieties, and that is that it is the method of a science which in the end succeeds in providing explanations where before there were in effect only creedal statements. We took those creedal statements – "why do we do such-and-such? Because God told us to" – as explanations. They legitimate what we do, our whole institutional framework of life. If these creedal "explanations" are to be replaced by other explanations, the institutions they legitimated will be without legitimation, and that surely will produce anxiety of precisely the kind we observe. The anxiety is aggravated when we see that the new explanations are not going to be at all sympathetic to legitimation of any kind. In effect what we have said is that we may not use 'God' to explain and legitimate the rise of religion. And we certainly did do this formerly; how did Abraham come to know God? Why, God came to him and spoke to him! And so on. It is this sort of explanation that is ruled out as not an explanation at all. God is not an explanation for anything.

3.4.2   Confession and Explanation

I would claim in a categorical way that many of our problems arise from the confusion of language which confesses faith with language

which explains the world. This is a distinction which was not made systematically before modern times. When we have explanations we of course provide them in answer to questions; when we did not have explanations, we used to respond with what is in effect a confession of faith. How did the world come to be? Because God created it. The "answer" confesses faith, but it does not answer the question. When the confessions of faith come to be cherished for their own sakes, there can be resistance to substituting real explanations where those confessions were used in place of explanations. One of the major functions of religion is to deal with the unknown, and at any stage of knowledge, most of the world must remain unknown, even if, as in the modern world, we know so much more than we did before, that we are very impressed with what we do know. The unknown will always bring a little terror, and religion has often been used to deny the unknown, though sometimes it has also been used to help people face it. We shall have more to say of religion and chaos when we come to the problem of relativity.

There is a sentiment abroad to separate language of confession from language of explanation, and claim that whatever happens to explanations, confessions need not be disturbed. The distinction maintained between *Historie* and *Geschichte*, though a legitimate distinction, has often been emphasized precisely with motives of preserving confessions impregnable against the ravages of explanation. But God comes to us in the terms of our own time, namely, our explanations of humanity, life, and the world. As our explanations change, so also must our confessions of faith change. A prime example is the argument of this paper, using phenomenological explanations of faith; faith can hardly remain unchanged by this endeavor. If people come by an explanation that such-and-such behavior is a commitment of faith, then they may very well engage in that behavior. And if one explanation explains actions better than another, their facility in such actions may be radically changed.

3.4.3   Interpreting the Past

If confession causes only confusion when it is substituted for explana-
tion, explanation is quite problematic all by itself. For in doing history,
we come upon and must eventually face questions about how we can
know history at all, let alone ground our faith in it. How, in short, can
the particular become once-for-all? We find ouselves unable to claim
certainty for our reconstruction of the past, and if we cannot know the
past with confidence, how can we put any weight on it? On the other
hand, suppose that we try to base all in the present. I think it can
be shown (from several grounds, as I shall argue in the next chapter)
that what we know and do in the present is thoroughly conditioned
by our own choices and so is no more likely to provide us certainty
than is the past. Morover, what we know and do in the present is thor-
oughly conditioned also by the past, and can only be understood after
an understanding of the past, an understanding in which we have no
confidence of certainty. In the end, I think we must face our inability
to find certainty, and proceed with confident faith rather than trying to
find confidence in certainty. It is a process which puts one leg in the
past and one in the present. We know each only through knowing the
other, and our knowledge is always tentative. This is what it means
to have radical faith: to risk when we do not know, and knowing that
we do not know, and to do so joyfully. Troeltsch worked hard on the
problem how we can stand in history, in view of the contingent and
tentative character of truth in history. I think he never found a solution
he considered satisfactory. We may succeed in identifying which of
our commitments are absolute in the carefully limited sense that they
are commitments without dependence (as far as we can see now) on
prior commitments. That limited absoluteness does not confer a fur-
ther absoluteness in the sense that these commitments are given and
guaranteed in the structure of reality. These commitments do not by
virtue of their axiomatic position become other than *our* commitments,
over against us, so to speak. There is no cause worthy of our loyalty
with an absoluteness over against us, except the embracing of the fact
(as we perceive it) that all our causes die. Accordingly, it is only in
this fact that we can properly place our hope of ultimate good. I think

we are not even able to know certainly that the causes for which we live all die, and in any case we are unable to attach any absoluteness to this particular *formulation* of the notion that there is only one God, that the other gods are in fact not Gods at all.

Our difficulty in knowing manifests itself particularly sharply in the interpretation of texts and other evidence from the past. This difficulty is known as the problem of hermeneutics. Collingwood, though he understood well the difficulties of scientific history in freeing itself from barren positivism, underestimated the difficulty of the historian's work. His explanation, in *The Idea of History*, that the historian knows the past by rethinking the thoughts of people who acted in the past, is in the end unworkable because it is an explanation that does not explain. To be sure, the problem includes the understanding of human motivation, and actions and events mean nothing except in the human motivational terms of the people involved. Though one can rethink thoughts from the past, one cannot *simply* rethink the thoughts from the past. The consensus of recent work is that interpretation is a double process, to which the interpreter brings an essential starting point. We start from documents, and by a dialectic between explanation and understanding, come both to explain and understand. Each presupposes the other, and so the process takes on an iterative character, wherein an initial estimate is improved by later work. The process must begin somewhere, and the interpreter brings to the texts a pre-understanding (*Vorverstaendnis*) which will suffice to pose for him questions through which he can begin the work of explaining and understanding the text. The pre-understanding is a prior relationship in the life of the reader to the subject matter of the text. It is out of this life-relationship that he can put questions to the text. A sizing-up of the whole of the text enables him to assess its parts, and results regarding the parts enable correction of the estimate of the whole, and so on. There is no way of guaranteeing convergence of this iterative process of interpretation, because the grounds on which one might declare convergence to a "solution" of the interpretive problem are themselves a result of the interpretive process. One can of course abandon interpretive presuppositions and

seek more fruitful ones when the interpretive process manifestly does not "converge," but rather leads to a morass of difficulties. Origination of the insight that explanation and understanding presuppose each other is generally credited to Wilhelm Dilthey, and the notion of a pre-understanding is Bultmann's.[25]

The modern reader of sacred texts, historian or simply devout believer, brings to the texts a particular formulation of some question of interest. This question can arise only on a pre-understanding of the subject matter, and an interest as to what the text is. Only on the basis of that guess can the reader come to know anything of the text, and what he learns, by reasoning based as it is on his pre-understanding, cannot lead to conclusions in opposition to that pre-understanding. Revision of the pre-understanding can be indicated only when it becomes difficult to reach unambiguous conclusions at all. When I first was introduced to *Oliver Twist* I had not the slightest idea of what a satire was, certainly not a satire on political or economic conditions. Accordingly, I missed much of what the story was about. There was no way I could easily have corrected the misunderstanding, and even though it was explained to me, I still could not place Dickens' ideas in my own life.

Thus the pre-understanding itself arises out of the interpreter's life in the present. In the end, comprehension happens at all only because the reader and writer of a text share enough experience of life for communication to be possible. In the message to alien life forms placed on the *Pioneer 10* spacecraft before it was launched, eventually to be sent into deep space beyond the solar system, the major problem in phrasing the message was how to anticipate the readers' hermeneutical problems. The problem took the form of asking what common experience it might be safe to presuppose. In the end, we presupposed optical vision and enough technical skill to understand

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[25] Regarding Dilthey, doubtless many secondary sources could be cited. See for example, Paul Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text," in Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan, eds., *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979). Bultmann's notion of pre-understanding may be found in "The Problem of Hermeneutics," in his *Essays Philosophical and Theological* (London, SCM Press, 1955).

and measure the spectrum of hydrogen.[26]

Barth, with many others, objected that there can be no pre-understanding of the Word of God, and thus that Bultmann's explanation cannot work for the reading of scripture. It is of course true that, in God, man meets something new, beyond what he could have done or imagined by himself. But the whole point of our argument of the first two chapters was precisely that – that a person meets in exposure, limitation, and need, particularly exposure, something which speaks to him from outside anything which he could by himself have been or done. (All that a person is is from outside himself, and there is in the end nothing for which he can really take credit. Thus, I do not take credit for having ten fingers, but I do take the responsibility for what I do with them. I think a discussion in which we hold a person responsible for his actions is of a logically different category from this, and we shall not pursue here how to distinguish those categories.) The scriptures are capable of exposing us and in so doing bringing us to meet God, but it is common experience that this power can be defeated by presuppositions which a blind reader can bring to the text. On the other hand, it is also common experience that only when another has explained some passage to us can we really be exposed by it, and so hear God speaking to us. Thus the Word, like any secular text, depends crucially on the presuppositions which the reader brings to it. If not, what would be the point of preaching or exegesis? It seems that sacred texts do not differ from secular texts in their interpretation. Bultmann in reply to Barth says that Barth has in effect brought in his pre-understanding through the categories with which he reads scripture, and that Barth should give an account of those categories.[27] I think Barth in his objection has changed the logical categories of the discussion, shifting it from explanation to confession.

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[26] Carl Sagan, *The Cosmic Connection* (New York, Dell, 1973), chapter three, "A Message from Earth."

[27] Bultmann, op. cit., pp. 259–260.

3.4.4   Conceptuality

We have thus far outlined a theory in which we come to understand another's writing through a presupposition which is grounded in some element of common experience. The other's language contributes significantly to the work of interpretation, but it is not only language, but also conceptuality, which must be interpreted. The writer's conceptualities are in effect a stock of parts out of which ideas may be constructed, and the reader may share them only partially.[28] It is at first counterintuitive that a strange conceptuality should function like a foreign language, but common usage describes total lack of communication (when from the words and sentences one would have expected quite clear communication) as "like trying to talk to one who speaks a foreign language." Conceptuality not only expresses thought, it channels it, enabling some ideas to be thought easily and others only with great difficulty if at all. And conceptuality must be distinguished from the understanding or content for which it is the vehicle. Thus there was a Gnostic conceptuality which some Christians borrowed, without thereby borrowing the Gnostic understanding of life. There is always a risk that the message expressed in a conceptuality will be taken to proclaim the old familiar content, but such a risk attends all conceptualities, and one cannot refrain from speaking on account of such a risk. One must use some conceptuality, and it may be changed profoundly by the new ideas one turns it to.

There is always, as I have noted, some degree to which the experience and conceptuality of the reader and writer fail to overlap. Much discussion has centered on the issue of how the reader can understand what he reads, and whether he can understand in some way except by means of experience shared with the writer. While some have argued that he understands *only* by virtue of shared experience, this position seems untenable to me, for it in effect says that the reader must already know what he learns from the text, and so that he cannot really learn anything new. This is a caricature of a position, but it suffices to reveal

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[28] E. C. Hobbs, "Recognition of Conceptuality as a Hermeneutical Tool," in *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* (Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 1964), *Band* 88, pp. 464–477.

the position's weakness. On the other hand, it is surely true that if there is *no* common experience, then there can be no communication. We build from what we do hold in common to what we do not, in regard to all three of language, conceptuality, and experience.

3.4.5   History and Relativity

Hermeneutics has for many years struggled with the problem of how and in what, if any, sense we can know anything objectively in history. It was early recognized that knowledge in history does not have the character of objectivity that knowledge in the natural sciences appeared to have. Out of this discussion come results such as Van Harvey's principle that a historian's conclusions must be posed in a form which leaves them accessible to the judgement of other historians. While there is not a decision procedure in history for assessing conclusions, as there appeared to be in the natural sciences, objectivity is safeguarded in the care that conclusions are accessible to other workers.

There has understandably been a feeling of relativity in all historical work. For many, the full weight of this feeling was not felt until history of science was touched. Thomas Kuhn, in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, presents scientific theories as paradigms, with which, like the models of Latin verbs, one views the world or some aspect of it. They are adopted by a scientific community on its own innitiative and with only the weight of its good judgement to back the choice. Those who had supposed that choice between competing theories was always clearcut, if only enough evidence were available, were considerably disturbed. The power and accuracy of Kuhn's description schema compelled a reckoning even in circles where his conclusions were not welcome. Kuhn in the end of the book suggested that science does not proceed to ever more accurate estimates of "The Truth," with an evolution of theory whose convergence may be exhibited for all to see. There is evolution *from* primitive beginnings, but not evolution *toward* some definitive solution.[29] Just this element was new in

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[29] Kuhn, op. cit., p. 172.

Darwin's theory of evolution (there had been several theories of bio-
logical evolution before, some widely known), and as with Darwin, it
is this element which has carried the anxiety-producing efficacy of the
theory. The pre-Darwinian evolutionary theories all saw evolutionary
change converging to some pre-defined goal, whether one set by di-
vine ordinance or not. Here also, anxiety comes with a change from a
goal-directed process to a process which simply happens. This change
is just the change from confession to explanation, from answering
"why?" with purpose to answering "why?" with cause or chance.

Our confessions of faith, or purpose (which is the same thing, for
present purposes), have often been made in the assurance that the world
"out there" corroborates the appropriateness of our faith commitments.
We have accordingly answered questions about how the world is by
reference to our preferences and faith. Since our knowledge of the
world at all presupposes some choices made in the process of coming
to know it (*viz.* ch. 1), knowledge is intimately involved in faith.
Faith underlies knowledge in just the places we might have wished
it did not. Living with this condition is living with the relativity of
our knowledge and with potential and eventual disappointment of our
preferences. History has been pivotal in leading us into the realization
that we live with cognitive relativity, for history shows just how people
came to hold the views and make the commitments they did. To the
extent that we share those views and commitments, history uncovers
the contingent origins of our views and commitments.

Chapter 4

Relativity

4.1 What is Cognitive Relativity?

The phenomenon of relativity has colored both theology and everyday religion increasingly in this century and the last. In "the old days," we each (and from *different* religious positions!) felt that there was an absoluteness to our religious world which we had to face and reckon with, and from which we could not escape. Today, that absoluteness is gone. We see people on every side of us doing things differently. This is the phenomenon of pluralism, to which we shall come in the next chapter. Relativity is the condition in which our knowledge, the world we live in, is contingent on causes which we can know and explain. Some of those causes are beyond our control, some arise from our choices. As Kuhn has asserted in the history of science, Peter Berger has asserted for everyday reality that the "world" we live in is our own construction, and that it can be changed by human choice. It will be instructive to summarize briefly the mechanics by which we construct such a world, with specialization to its religious aspects. Construction *de novo* does not happen, at least not in a way accessible to scientific observation, but we can observe world-maintenance quite readily. There are well-documented mechanisms of world-maintenance, as we shall see. World construction becomes religious when it deals with all of life, "life," as we say in "life's not like

that." Religious world-maintenance assumes the task of legitimating the institutions of society on a global scale. On this scale, religion presumes to order the cosmos, and it becomes a defence against anomy, the feeling of being in a context of chaos. Relativity assumes a special form with regard to Jesus, where it overlaps history. Here it reconfirms that Jesus was fully human, as it shows just how he was human and subject to the same contingencies as any other person.

Relativity brings a sense of threat with it. That we know we choose our religious allegiances puts a distinctly new color on all our talk about God. If formerly, we spoke of the will of God where now we admit our own choice, how much of our God-talk is imperiled? We can see in detail how we build the worlds we live in, and how we maintain those worlds against threats of coming unraveled. The threat from relativity arises from the sense of anomy which it engenders. World-construction and maintenance serve to give a person a sense of being oriented and placed personally, socially, and in the universe. To be oriented is to be able to conceive and effect meaningful action, and to make sense of limitation when action is impossible. To lose the sense of orientation is accordingly a serious threat to stability and well being. It carries the potential for wholesale disappointment of preferences. It is then not surprising that relativity is not everywhere welcomed.

I argued in a general way in Chapter 1 that all cognitive activity has origin in some choices on the part of the knower or in contingencies of his cognitive equipment. What we think of as "knowledge", objectively real, has a structure and social origin which can be explained in some considerable detail. Karl Marx asserted that perception of social reality depends heavily on one's class and interests; sociology in general and sociology of knowledge in particular went through a period of development in which the doctrinaire cast of the Marxian origin was revised, but the original insight remains valid. What we know, we know in a position relative to our place in culture and the world; that place is in effect the limitation which we must live with. We can ignore it, deny it, or we can come to know it (to some extent), and look for the opportunities it holds. Knowing that our knowledge

is limited, we can in some ways transcend those limitations, even if we cannot evade and escape them.

There are several definitions of relativity, all partially successful, all helpful. It is the inability logically to coerce assent of another (or oneself!) to one's relgious commitments and beliefs. We find that like all reasoning, which starts somewhere, commitment in the details of life starts from commitments which are freely chosen, at least in part; they could be chosen differently. The paradigmatic example of this is an axiomatic treatment of geometry, wherein the initial choices are called axioms, and the consequences are laid out by deduction as theorems. The realization of cognitive relativity comes to the high-school student when he is told that the parallel postulate might have been framed differently, leading to geometry on a curved surface. Not all subjects lend themselves to axiomatization of the kind one finds in mathematics; nevertheless, in all subjects thought does start from contingent beginnings. For example, Kuhn's observation of arguments between paradigms in the sciences is that all such arguments are circular. One cannot reach a choice between paradigms from grounds outside both of them. Such argument serves to convey just what it is like to live within each of the competing paradigms, so that it is possible to make an informed choice between paradigms. I think circularity becomes vicious when it is disguised, or when it claims to be a proof on some absolute grounds.

The full dimensions of relativity for human cognition arise from the fact that humans are unfinished biologically, that we must "finish" ourselves culturally and socially. Other animals have an inborn sense of identity, of place in the world, of how to behave, and so on, if one may speak this way of animals that do not have language. Humans are still developing physically well after birth, not just in size, but also in the qualitative structure of the central nervous system. This growth is influenced profoundly by the people around the new-born, society, in a word. But the greater part of the freedom humans enjoy lies beyond what is "programmed" in the nervous system, and can be accounted for only in the process of socialization. The human condition is in these respects one of freedom, and relativity is the state of confronting

that freedom as the need to choose.

In other times and places than Western society in the present century, much that is choice was fate, destiny, or institutionally fixed. The transformation from necessity to choice is one of the chief marks of relativity. We may say it is the self-consciousness of the choice, for much that is fixed locally in cultures but variable globally must be ascribed to human choice, even if the people involved do not perceive the matter as one of choice. Peter Berger has singled out the transition from necessity to choice as one of the key determinants of modernity. He considers the case of an Orthodox Jew, though his remarks, as he says, apply equally to other traditions. !break !spacing 1 !skip 3 !left 5 Today, within the pluralistic dynamic of American society, there must be very few individuals indeed for whom being Jewish has the quality of a taken-for-granted fact. Yet those who affirm an orthodox or even a moderately orthodox version of Jewish identity continue to define the latter as such a fact. Their problem is that they must affirm it in the face of empirical evidence to the contrary. The orthodox precisely defines Jewish identity as destiny, while the social experience of the individual reveals it as an ongoing choice. This dissonance between definition and experience is at the core of every orthodoxy in the modern world (the Jewish case is just a particularly clear case of a much more general phenomenon): The orthodox defines himself as living in a tradition; it is in the very nature of a tradition to be taken for granted; this taken-for-grantedness, however, is continually falsified by the experience of living in a modern society. The orthodox must then present to himself as fate what he knows empirically to be choice.[1] In former times, there was some plausibility to claiming necessity for one's religious arrangements. Now, one has only to cross the street to find others – or a whole other subculture – who demonstrate that all religious arrangements are not necessity but choice. There has been pluralism of this sort before; but in the past, divergent subcultures, existing side by side, did so in a cultural matrix which effectively kept individuals firmly in their own subcultures for life. Today, individuals can alternate from one to another with a casualness which is quite astonishing.

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[1] Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative* (New York, Doubleday, 1979), p. 30.

Short of drastic changes in Western society, such as by a catastrophe which would end economic and political liberty on a scale unimaginable today, the pluralism and the relativity of which it is a manifestation are going to be with us for some time. It is impossible to restore a condition of perceived necessity in religious (or other) arrangements as long as this relativity is with us. The various fundamentalisms doubtless will prosper nonetheless, but they do so at the cost of cognitive arrangements which I for one would rather not make. If we are to regain a sense of necessity, it seems it must be by embracing our freedom. If there is destiny, fate, or the will of God, it lies in the necessity of choosing.

4.2   The Social Construction of Reality

4.2.1   Knowledge as a Human Artifact

The reality which man builds and in which he lives is on analysis not a simple one, but instead is a collection of realities, with one being pre-eminent, the so-called "everyday" reality. This is the waking reality of people going about the simple business of living and working. From this reality people make excursions into derivative worlds such as the world of sleep and dreams, worlds of theoretical reflection, the special space and time of the world of liturgy, movies and art, sports, and so on. Each of these worlds, and all of them taken together, have a facticity which is grounded in the support of others, one's fellows. The primary mechanism of support for reality, for making it seem real, is simple conversation. It is in speech that we find out how others see the world. Whether they are correct or not, that they do see it in such-and-such a way has a facticity which by extension attaches to the perception of reality itself. Others' perceptions may be subjective, but the weight of others' subjectivity is overwhelming. In effect then, we depend on our senses and whatever other faculties we have for primary access to reality, but we depend on our fellows for guidance in how to interpret what we see, and for guidance in what to look for; in the end, we depend on our fellows for guidance in *what* to see. It is in

this sense that the reality we live in is socially constructed. Now it is counterintuitive that reality is made by humans; by definition, reality has a thereness which neither individuals nor consensus can change by fiat. Nevertheless, it is the tremendous revolution in sociological theory of this century to explain to what a thorough extent the world we live in is our own construction. Peter Berger coined the phrase "social construction of reality," as a title to the book he wrote with Thomas Luckmann, and I depend heavily on their treatment for my account of cognitive relativity as a general phenomenon.[2]

4.2.2   The Distribution of Knowledge

We may think of the worlds we live in as described by knowledge, and we may think of knowledge as like a commodity which is distributed quite unevenly through society. In the same vein, we think of society on "spatial" lines, with people "located" by class, culture and subculture, occupation, hobbies, and so on. Thus it is possible to think of knowledge as distributed socially and as a function of social location. Knowledge of double-entry bookkeeping has a distribution which is quite sharply peaked in some sectors of society, and all but non-existent in all others. Knowledge of auto-repair has peaks not nearly as sharp, and much broader and more diffuse distribution. Almost everybody knows how to tie his shoes. Everybody must know something of the distribution of knowledge, where to find specialists when needed, how to locate himself socially when away from home. Each of the worlds we live in, or visit occasionally, can be characterized by some knowledge. Thus in everyday life, there are no pet rocks, and they do not get colds, but in some (not all) fantasy lands, there are, and they do. And at the juncture between everyday reality and such fantasy worlds, we do speak of pet rocks in everyday life, for example, that their sales were up from this time last year. Or, we may speak of them as a way of

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[2] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York, Doubleday, 1966); see also Peter Berger's *The Sacred Canopy* (New York, Doubleday, 1967) for instantiation of the concepts of *Social Construction* to the particulars of religion.

expressing non-serious doubts about the realness of everyday reality.

Of another sort is what's-so knowledge; the foregoing examples are all of how-to knowledge. In some social locations, the Pentateuch was written by Moses, in others the question of its writing does not arise at all, in others it was written by four letters of the alphabet (JEDP), in others, these letters stand for theoretical constructs, in others the Pentateuch itself is superstition and its authorship is of no consequence. All of these estimates are, for the purposes of sociology, knowledge, and sociology has no interest in deciding which, if any, of them is "true." Sociology is interested rather in ascertaining what is the distribution of each species of "knowledge," and what are the reasons which explain that distribution. If we decide that in view of the reasons for adopting one of these accounts (serving vested interests, e. g.), that account ought to be questioned more closely, then we have put aside the sociologist's hat and are doing something else. To some extent, the sociological reasons for the distribution of some knowledge will always have the effect of exposure, bringing into question the knowledge so investigated. Sociology of knowledge derives its relativizing or "debunking" effect from its ability to exhibit to anyone other people who possess what *they* think is certain knowledge in contradiction to *his* certain knowledge, and to exhibit also how he believes what he believes not because it is so, but because he *wants* it to be so.

4.2.3   Stages in Constructing Reality

I have taken as examples of knowledge first how-to knowledge, rather than what's-so knowledge, as I think how-to knowledge will provide access to the process which generates knowledge and worlds in the first place. What's-so knowledge plays a supporting role. How-to knowledge starts when people do something for the first time, and then, of course, they do not know how to do it, they are just learning. To be fussy, they are creating the knowledge; those who go after can learn it, from them. An activity which is done only once does not generate knowledge, but one which is destined actually or potentially to be repeated does generate knowledge. In the first stage, knowledge

is created by the externalization of human actions. We become self-conscious of what we are doing, and in giving it a name, it takes on a reality which it did not previously have. In a second stage, the human origins of the actions are forgotten, and it assumes a further reality which merely naming cannot give it. At this level, we think not only of simple actions, but of collections of actions, conventionally called institutions, such as the institutions of marriage and kinship. Anthropology has amply demonstrated that these relations are not only quite variable, but that their variability encompasses just about all possible or imaginable ways of ordering kin and marriage. The stage in which the human origins are forgotten is called objectivation, for in this stage the actions and institutions take on a character of objectivity which is new. A third stage is reached when new people are inducted into the activities in question. For them, the activity starts with the quality of objectivity; their task is to internalize it. These three stages, externalization, objectivation, and internalization, describe the dynamic by which knowledge is created. What's-so knowledge clearly plays a supporting role to how-to knowledge, regardless of which precedes the other in time. The form of what's-so knowledge is that the world *in which we act* is of such-and-such a form, even if the actions are quite hypothetical, such as taking interstellar gas samples from distant galaxies. In the dialectic of externalization, objectivation, and internalization, society is at first a human product, then it is an objective reality, and in the end, man is a social product.

Externalization grows out of habit. Habit and the knowledge that grows out of it free us from decisions that don't matter for decisions that do matter. Actions become typified, and roles are established. With institutions comes the possibility of division of labor; clearly the process we are exploring was pivotal in the development of human culture. The actions which make up an institution become solidified in the process of externalization. They become independent of the persons who happen to be doing them, and through the medium of language, accessible to all.

Objectivation is the paradoxical process whereby man produces a world which he then experiences as something over against and apart

from himself, not a human product at all. One of the great advantages of objectivation is that it takes away from people the chance to try to decide over again matters that have been settled, for better or worse, in the prior organization of society. It thus functions as externalization in this respect, freeing people from some decisions so that they can worry about others. It clearly holds the potential (usually actualized) of strong support for established power. Here objectivation becomes legitimation, the making legitimate of the received institutions of society, and it is thus a cardinal aspect of universe maintenance. When men forget that they have made their own institutions, they are said to be alienated from their institutions. The process of alienation is terribly effective in stabilizing and legitimizing those institutions because it in effect takes away the power even to think of doing things differently. Objectivation falters and institutions lose their givenness when there is a general collapse of all institutions, for example in defeat in war, or when there is contact for the first time with foreign societies, or at the margins of society, among the disestablished, in dreams, and so on.

Marriage today is an institution in which that taken-for-grantedness is being questioned. For various reasons, mobility of Americans, weakening of ties between generations, and doubtless others as well, marriage no longer has the automatic permanence it once did. One of the great threats to stability, giving rise to the chief need for legitimation, is that people forget – they forget how and why to continue the received institutions. In the case of marriage, many of the conditions supportive of permanence have been undermined. The mark of this condition in society is the great frequency of divorce. And within the church, a response to this condition is once again conscious and deliberate, rather than automatic and institutional. Marriage Encounter is one example, but there are others. People are asking themselves what they need to do routinely to maintain the viability of marriages. Thus marriage has returned at least partially to the stage of externalization, prior to objectification. What is done is once again consciously a human product. Under these circumstances, the older legitimation and objectivation, "O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of marriage that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and

his Church," seems a lot less plausible than it used to, and it certainly seems to be an appendage to the collect rather than an effective or compelling legitimation of it.[3] This in no way is meant to undermine the seriousness of the marriage undertaken, or the sanctity of one successfuly carried through. It simply says that the marriage is a human product and not a divine command. To claim God's blessing on it, as I would certainly do, does not make it a divine command, in opposition to and delegitimation of marriage institutions other than the monogamous form familiar to western culture. Once again, we are up against the difference between language which confesses faith and language which explains. Honest explanation compels us to admit the human hand in the shaping of the institution, and faith compels us to declare in some manner that the commitment of the marriage has an ultimateness about it derived from the central commitments of our common faith which few other contracts and covenants share. There should be no conflict here, it should not be necessary to practise objectivation to a degree that it alienates people from their own products.

4.2.4   Bad Faith

Objectivation takes a more sinister form when it becomes bad faith, when people are enabled to say, "I have to do this to you, its part of my job," or "This is God's plan for me" (i. e., I don't have to take the responsibility for this decision). Berger in his early work used frequently the example of capital punishment, wherein at each stage of a man's journey to the gallows, the functionaries along the way are enabled to deny their part in killing him, to say, "it's the law," or "it's my job." Often these objectivations are not strong enough to ensure that their own hand in the killing stays forgotten, and religion is brought in to back them up, as in a British form of pronouncing sentence, "You will be taken from here to a place of execution and hanged by the neck until you be dead. And may the Lord have mercy on your soul."[4] I was quite struck by Berger's strident hammering

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[3] *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York, Seabury Press, 1979), p. 431.

[4] Peter Berger, *The Precarious Vision* (New York, Doubleday, 1961), p. 90.

on the theme of capital punishment as a paradigmatic example of bad
faith, until I saw the following remarks of a judge passing sentence on
a law student convicted of murder, "It's a tragedy to this court . . . It's
a total waste. You would have been a fine lawyer. I would have been
proud to have you practise in this court. Take care of yourself . . . I
don't have any animosity towards you."[5] "Take care of yourself" was
a little bit heavy. If capital punishment is an unusual case, bad faith is
by no means an unusual phenomenon. While many people are forced
to say, "Sorry, it's my job" in dealing with the public, other people will
use that excuse simply to avoid the hassle and time of an argument, in
other words, to avoid taking responsibility for their actions.

4.2.5   Internalization

For individuals, internalization is primary in time; they are brought into
a society which is for them old and objective, something fixed. Clearly
in the scheme adopted here, and in the development of institutions
themselves, (as different from the experience of individuals populating
them), internalization is tertiary. Internalization is subjectivation, the
giving of subjective reality to something which starts as objective and
over against one. It occurs in the process of socialization, in which
the individual is brought into society, or into some particular part of
it. Primary socialization is first both in time and in importance, and
all later initiation processes presuppose it so totally that it is forgotten.
Secondary socializations bring individuals into various groups, on the
job, in the military, into a clique or social set, and so on. All processes
of socialization have the effect of appropriating another's subjectively
meaningful view of the world or of some aspect of it. What is available
objectively are the external manifestations of that subjectivity, and the
new individual from these approximates for himself the subjectivity
lying behind them.

   In primary socialization, the individual acquires language and the
basic personal and social skills necessary to all functioning. The emo-
tions play a role in primary socialization that is pivotal in a way they

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[5] From a story in the Waterbury, CT *Republican*, Wednesday, August 1, 1979.

will not in any secondary socialization. The whole process is highly emotional, and there is strong identification with the significant others who are in charge of an individual's primary socialization. It is dubious whether learning of the thoroughness and depth and scope of primary socialization could take place without such an emotional dimension. Secondary socializations which hope to change the individual thoroughly and in depth will attempt to repeat some of this emotional dimension. There is an inevitableness about primary socialization which is unique. "There is no other game in town." There is a singularly nomic quality to primary socialization, it is more training than education. It is not just that it is how-to knowledge and not what's-so knowledge; the how-to knowledge is normative as well as functional.

Secondary socializations are quite varied and suited to the group into which the individual is being inducted. Schooling is the first of these socialization processes, and the first formal one. Now the structure of the process is formal and anonymous rather than personal. One can escape or opt out, usually without great difficulty. Secondary socializations which aim for some depth of change try to "block the exits," so to speak. Nevertheless, it is difficult to make any secondary socialization seem inevitable. When great depth or thoroughness is sought, aspects of primary socialization will be repeated, as noted. Religious novitiates and military induction are examples that come to mind.

4.3   World Maintenance

4.3.1   Legitimation and "Therapy"

Worlds not only are humanly constructed, they need to be maintained against the forces which would dismantle them. The chief of these is the same force which gives worlds their strength, human forgetting. People not only forget the human origins of institutions, they simply forget what to do within those institutions, and need to be reminded. Self-interest is probably the next significant force against stability of

human social constructs. Maintenance takes on an aspect not only of how to but why to: it becomes legitimation, the means of motivating people to stay within the received institutions. This maintenance takes two forms, as it is routine or in crisis.

Routine maintenance is accomplished primarily through conversation. Other people may disagree with me as to who I am, and their views have a great efficacy in correcting mine. But routine maintenance really functions in a preventive capacity, serving to integrate activities and to explain them within a broader context. Legitimation justifies the institutional order by giving normative dignity to its practical adjustments. How much of what is normative in our lives began as merely practical!

Vocabulary itself serves as the first stage of legitimation, for it objectivates some institutional structures and by implication delegitimates those merely potential ones which do not reach verbal expression. Rudimentary pre-theoretical legitimations appear as proverbs, maxims, and so on. With explicit theories, there is a differentiated body of knowledge providing a comprehensive frame of reference for some institutionalized sector of conduct. The complexity of this level of legitimation frequently requires entrusting it to a specialized personnel who will administer theoretical legitimation for the society as a whole. Self conscious and symbolic theoretical universes usually require a specialized personnel. These persons will, if there are not sufficient practical problems at hand to be solved, go beyond the level of pragmatic legitimation to that of "pure theory." At the highest level, legitimation has a global scope as well as a symbolic and theoretical form. This is the level at which the universe is constructed, and in which all its subordinate worlds are integrated. Religion functions at this level.

Crisis maintenance is designed to foster conversions into a social institution and prevent conversions out of it. The institution may be a symbolic universe, where we conventionally use the word "conversion," because such changes of mind are always in effect religious. It may on the other hand be a lesser institution such as a marriage, wherein the maintenance takes the name of marriage counseling. The

mechanisms of crisis maintenance are of the same form as routine maintenance, but more intense. Where ridicule suffices to squelch doubts on a routine level, maintenance takes on the color of therapy and is itself institutionalized and ritualized. Ritual purification is one of the oldest forms of such universe maintenance, notable even to ancient minds as cleansing from mental fault when no physical impurity presents itself.

4.3.2   Alternation

A suitable word for conversion, capable of encompassing a scope broader than the highest (religious) level, is "alternation." One alternates into or out of a universe or institution. Examples at that highest level are not only religious conversion, but also brainwashing, psychotherapy, and "compulsory re-education with the masses." While these are acute forms of alternation, some only induced from outside, in a pluralistic society, alternation takes on a much more casual form, which we might describe as "change of life-style." The phrase "life-style" emphasizes in all its usage the element of choice in all life-styles. Religious loyalty which once was a matter of considerable hazard and seriousness is reduced first to "religious preference," and finally merely to "life-style." It is this situation which interests us here, for relativity is a state of general crisis of maintenance, when alternation becomes chronic.

Alternation bears enough of the marks of conversion in former times that that process will serve to illustrate it. Berger tells a fictional story in *The Precarious Vision* of an individual who goes through a series of no less than five worlds. One Suzie Q. leaves the home world, a midwestern small town, for a beatnik crowd, from which she becomes successively a high-church Anglican, a housewife of a successful and rising middle-level executive, and a patient in therapy, the last two simultaneously and involving a daily and routine alternation. In another case, Gustav begins life in a mid-west ethnic neighborhood, goes through the military to a university, where he becomes a Marxist, and following his girl-friend to Eastern Europe, where she is arrested

and sent to a labor camp, he undergoes a nervous breakdown, and after some further shifts, including a period of Freudian analysis, ends up in Switzerland with Jungian and mystical interests. If fictional, these stories are plausible enough today. What is of interest is that at each stage of alternation, the whole biography is rewritten to make sense in terms of the new structure of meaning, and to legitimate the latest and presumably final alternation. Father Schleissbauer, Suzie's pastor in her Anglo-Catholic phase, says of Suzie, "The true story of any human being is the story of faith. This is why the decisive point in Suzie's story is the point of her conversion. Looking at her story in any other way will distort the picture."[6]

In some cases, the worlds these people opt into have elaborate symbolic mechanisms of explanation, which can place not only all the features of the life under interpretation, but also all the deviant interpretations from which the individual is coming. Gustav says on his conversion to Marxism, "Above all, I have the feeling with Marxism as if, for the first time in my life, I have come to grips with reality. It is a terrifying experience, yet full of the freshness of a breeze coming in from the lake. . . . " He continues a little later on, still in the process of his alternation, "I suddenly found myself shaking with the fear of losing my Christian faith, . . . thought . . . that I ought to hold on to the one great certainty I ever had. . . . I tried to combat this helplessness by the means which the Christian faith enjoins. I prayed, read the bible, went to services, partook of the Sacrament. But my state did not change."[7] He is writing as a Marxist, after the process has been completed. It is notable that of all the mechanisms of crisis maintenance suggested by the church, he did not try simple conversation face to face with a member of the clergy. Conversation and professional legitimators are much more effective than anything one could do alone.

If an alternation is to be induced from the outside, as by brain-washing, re-education, a religious novitiate, or other forms of therapy, several features of the process are worth noting. Not only, do we see

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[6] Berger, *Precarious Vision*, p. 28.

[7] Berger, *Precarious Vision*, pp. 33–34.

a highly emotional tone and measures to block escape, but much of the effort is a re-socialization, intended to dismantle and replace the previous socialization rather than to build on it. That is always a very painful process, for it is extremely disorienting. Deep fatigue may be induced, to the end that the subject simply gives up his hold on the former cognitive universe. Social support for the new reality is provided and disconfirmation from people outside it is prevented: the subject is kept within the confines of the new society. For this reason, recruits and novices are not allowed off base or out of the enclosure for the duration of their initial training. After the process is tentatively completed, the newly re-socialized individual can be trusted to be careful with whom he talks, aware of the crucial significance of conversation, and the risk of disconfirmation of the new reality by outsiders. There is a whole cognitive apparatus to legitimate the new reality and de-legitimate, or "nihilate," the old. This apparatus accomplishes the function of therapy, ensuring that actual or potential deviants stay within the institutionalized definitions of reality. Therapy applies the legitimating apparatus to individual cases, whether this is called exorcism, pastoral counseling, psychotherapy, self-criticism, or whatnot.

That the processes of therapy are essentially similar in structure in all competing universes, if they carry different names and labels, goes far to take away any color of inevitability from an alternation process. If, as with Gustav, we note that he failed to use any parts of the therapeutic apparatus which had any chance of success, then Gustav's alternation takes on a color, which it did not have without the light from sociology, even though the alternation was always acknowledged as voluntary. Gustav now appears responsible in a way that he would not, if we had not looked at his case from a sociological point of view.

The processes described here have a very real instantiation in the life of the church, because people are continually alternating into and out of the church, whether they are looking for one parish among several of one denomination, or choosing denominations, or reviewing their Christian allegiance altogether. Sometimes the processes of alternation are quite informal and unselfconscious, sometimes not. At a popular level, the fundamentalists have probably gone the furthest

toward a theoretical and self-conscious apparatus of therapy and theory of deviance (what is "of Christ," and what is "of the Devil"), but that does not mean the problems do not arise for other circles within the church.[8] The so-called "main-line" denominations have apparently tried to accomplish the interesting feat of simultaneously at the lay level cultivating an informality of social control like only a social "set," while at the professional level maintaining a full-blown theory of conversion and cure of souls, "pastoral theology." Thus when Father Schleissbauer speaks of Suzie, what he is doing is from a sociological point of view a procedure of the same kind as any other mechanism of universe maintenance. As we shall see in the discussion of pluralism below, the relativity induced by this realization has become patent, obvious to all who care to consider it. Recognition of the humanly constructed nature of the worlds we live in carries with it a voluntary character to all preferences which is quite stunning to any mind raised in a world pretending to be absolute. What was fate, destiny—or the will of God—has become choice.

4.4 Religion and World Construction

4.4.1 Legitimation and Anomy

Because the highest and most comprehensive level of meaning-creation is essentially religious, by whatever name it choses to call itself in different cultures, the sociology of religion plays a role at the center of sociology of knowledge and of sociology in general. We do not need to enquire into the details of religious structures and organizations, or into their taxonomy. Some remarks will be helpful regarding religion as a system of legitimation.

Legitimations serve to buttress not only the actions and roles of individuals within social institutions, but also the very order in the cosmos itself. The ordering of the cosmos is a defence against anomy, the state of being in a universe which is totally confusing. Religion

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[8] See for example the literature of the Basic Youth Conflicts Seminar, Box One, Oak Brook, Illinois 60521.

is peculiarly involved in the construction of a universe with mystery and awe. I would distinguish religion here from organized religion, although the chief focus of interest will remain on religions sufficiently developed to be organized. (Modern science, for example, is quite capable of mediating mystery and awe on a galactic and cosmological scale, though it is not organized for that purpose.) To some extent, the imposition of order on the universe is fully successful only at the center of society, in what we call "every-day life," and less so as one departs from every-day life, whether in fiction, dreams, sleeping, or physical distance from civilization. It is even true that at the edges of society, as with hobos, the unemployed, the dispossessed, useless intellectuals, and the super-rich, the givenness of the socially sanctioned structure of the cosmos is not quite so given. Far from civilization, people whom we expect to behave in civilized ways deviate under stress, as for instance in cannibalism among Western Europeans; we find such occurrences so gripping on our imagination precisely because they bring into question a world which we not only took for granted, but by whose taken-for-grantedness we attached great store emotionally.

We live in a natural and a social world. Both are humanly apprehended, but the social world is humanly made. It is chiefly this social world with which we are concerned, for here we see the effects of religion as a nomizing agent in ways which serve to estrange man from his humanly produced world. Imagine, with Peter Berger, a middle class husband who tries out his fantasy of being a pasha instead.[9] Needless to say, he will soon find himself in disagreeable conversations with his wife, family, persons of the law, and so on. What is of interest is that these external conversations will be mirrored in internal conversations, between the middle class husband in him, and the "man himself." The middle class husband role has assumed a reality over against the "man himself," in ways that he can no longer control. The pasha role is clearly a human production, but the conventional husband role is not. Even if he knows he produces the husband role, he is helpless to silence the "voice" of the husband within himself, should he try to deviate from that role.

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[9] *The Sacred Canopy*, p. 84.

4.4.2   Alienation

To the extent that the humanly produced social world has acquired an objectivity over against its producers and is separated from them, they are said to be alienated. The consciousness by which they perceive their world is a false consciousness.[10] While this alienation is sometimes useful (as remarked above, it frees people from unimportant decisions for important ones, and it is a major source of stability in society), it is not always so, and not always benign.

And while religion is by no means always alienating, it is often so, and quite strongly. Religion has often (usually) postulated a world which is alien from the human world, over against it, the holy, the wholly other, God, angels, and so on. In the process of constructing this world, much that is genuinely a human product becomes alienated from its human producers, as when moral sanctions are invented to legitimate and justify practises at all levels and in all departments of society, from the sacristy to dietary habits of the faithful to marriage and kinship regulation to funeral practises, to the regulation of power within society. If these moral sanctions are alleged to be based on the transcendent (genuinely alien) world, then it is that alienation and false consciousness result.

Alienation is something very different from anomy – its very opposite, and the strongest bulwark against it. The self thus protected from anomy is likely to be the stronger for it. Ambivalences are removed, contingencies become certainties, he knows how to proceed, and is enabled to do so with single-minded determination. Herein lies the tremendous incentive to religion to foster alienation. Nevertheless, religion demonstrably does sometimes insist on reappropriation of the human world as humanly constructed. Biblical examples are not hard to find. The story of David, Bathsheba, and Nathan, is one in which David is called to look at his own actions. More to the point, perhaps, is the prophetic strain typified in Jeremiah 7.4, the complaint against blind reliance on the Temple of the Lord.

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[10] These terms were originally devised in a Marxist context, but they have use also in quite non-Marxist settings. See *Sacred Canopy*, p. 85, and note (5), pp. 85 and 197.

It is not clear that alienation could be eliminated entirely, even if we wanted to. A program of de-alienation brings attendant risks of chaos where before behavior was stably regulated, and minimizing this risk merits some planning. But I would claim, and strongly, that we could profitably use a little more consciousness of the human origins of our human world. And when de-alienation occurs naturally, we would do well to welcome it. This happens, for example, when the human institutions falter, and thus cast doubt on the supporting religious legitimations which were supposed to be much stronger. If, as happens as a result of the effects of both history and pluralism, the origins of our religion are revealed to be a human production where we had supposed and explained them previously as "acts of God," perhaps we can find some good in the relativity thereby engendered.

4.4.3   Order and Chaos

Legitimations serve to buttress not only the actions and roles of individuals within social institutions, but also the very order in the cosmos itself. This order, as the context of human actions, serves to locate them cognitively and to give the cosmos a character of being "all-right." If not all-right, the cosmos is given a character of being evil, yet a named evil, one at least partially known, and so less terrifying. Intelligent action presupposes some knowledge of the world one is acting in, and inasmuch as intelligent action is directed to the satisfaction of some preferences, often quite dearly held, the same strong and dear emotions attach to the cognitive structuredness of the cosmos. In effect, for the cosmos to be ordered is a partial success for the plans and programs of the humans beings who live in this humanly constructed universe.

In spite of the fact that any such order is a humanly apprehended order, to which the cosmos itself is quite indifferent, any threat to that order can arouse feelings of acute anxiety and hostile defensiveness. Defensive response probably arises just exactly from the human quality of cosmic order, when the human source of that order is forgotten. For if the human origins of the perceived order in the cosmos are forgotten, that order is immeasurably strengthened in its ability to

guide people in arranging their lives. If we are to embark on a program
of acknowledging the human hand in fabricating the cosmic and moral
order in which we live, it would seem only kind to try to cushion the
impact of what must of necessity be the acceptance of bad news. This is
a difficult program, because it requires invoking very nearly the things
one proposes to undermine to mitigate the impact of that undermining.
Nevertheless, having come this far, simple honesty would seem to
compel us to continue. Once exposed, the human aspects of our
cognitive worlds cannot easily be covered up again. Beyond questions
of honesty, if we do embrace relativity and forego absolutism, we are
freed to exercise our own good judgement in arranging our religious
affairs. And if we embrace relativity, we are thereby enabled to see
our neighbors who have arranged their religious affairs differently:
relativity leads us into pluralism.

Chapter 5

Pluralism

5.1 What is Pluralism?

In pluralism, we come to the third and last functional manifestation of cognitive contingency, the encounter with other people who live in a "different world." It should be clear that history, relativity, and pluralism all share a common theme, and that the distinction between them is more for ease of conception than reflection of deep natural cleavages between them as phenomena. There are no such deep cleavages; the three phenomena blend into one another at all points. History and pluralism give rise to relativity, and vice versa. In the general phenomenon of cognitive contingency, those aspects which relate to encounter with other people have been reserved to the third function, in which we meet our neighbor in need of cosmic orderedness. But we meet our neighbor not just in need because he is in want, but also because he is in need to share. For our neighbor has some sense of order in the universe, and it is different from ours, whoever "we" may be. His need for fellowship is also a need to share his sense of cosmic order. The problem arises when the situation is conceived with the presupposition that one of us must give up his stock of cosmic order and opt into the other's system. When this is not feasible, it is often suggested that we both agree on what is common; but all the interesting parts are (almost by definition) not held in common. Or we could simply ignore each

other, each pretending that the other does not exist. This is a state of pluralism. The word "pluralism" ought by rights, as an "-ism" word, to denote not a state of plurality, but a policy of plurality, and I shall use the distinction shortly. In common usage, however, "pluralism" denotes the state of plurality, and so we shall have to say pluralism by policy when we mean that.

In a situation of pluralism, we may define several subcultures which share a common core-universe and each supply differentiated subuniverses. These subuniverses may compete, coexist, or cooperate. In a state of acute pluralism (the interesting case, obtaining in Western culture today), the number of subcultures multiplies beyond any easy accounting. In the distinction of "we" people and "they" people, the "they" people are themselves complex and pluralistic, even after one has conceptually distinguished from them as many subcultures as one would conveniently care to think about at once.

Pluralism and relativity occur in a dialectic relationship, each inducing the other. To some extent, only in a state of pluralism, when relativity is patent, can relativity be generally recognized as real. In this light, it is not surprising that the discipline of sociology appears only in a context of pluralism and faltering of social institutions in the modern world, specifically France and Germany after the Franco-Prussian War. Sociology does not thrive when absolute claims are enforced by might. Critical history in the same way arose in a time when absolute definitions of reality are under question, and history gathers momentum as that absoluteness falters more and more, from the time of the Reformation to the Enlightenment and the twentieth century. The Reformation was the breakup of the religious monopoly in Christendom, and in that state of pluralism there arose both science and critical history.

Pluralism as a modern phenomenon manifests itself as secularity, wherein what was formerly treated under categories of religion is today simply treated on its own merits, without any "religious" trappings at all. If something is to be treated under the categories of religion, it is in some sense to be integrated in a scheme which encompasses all of reality. When that integration mechanism is abandoned, it is possible

for sub-universes to become defined, each in relative disjunction from the others.

Critical thought, as student of history and other (especially Asian) cultures, came in the nineteenth century to face pluralism as an issue with a seriousness that was altogether new. One of the responses of critical thought was an attempt to construe the history of religions as a process of evolution, with the direction and course of evolution tending toward Christianity as its highest achievement and goal. This project was in its motivation in the end revealed to be an attempt to re-establish on a firmer and surer basis the old absolutist claims which had been relativized by the work of that same history of religions school. It failed in the end on several grounds; the evidence did not confirm the thesis, and it presupposed a convergent directionality to religious development which on analysis was essentially purposive, and which also was not confirmed by continuing research.[1] Development on examination reflected no such direction as the thesis of convergent evolution required. And the religious movements which the history of religions school studied display a diversity and individuality at all times and in all places which frustrates any attempt to discern long-term continuity or "essence" in any of the major religious traditions. Troeltsch, in particular, reiterated this claim against all hopes of finding such an "essence" of Christianity.[2] If there is one, it is historical and not dogmatic. What is more, any attempt to identify an essence depends profoundly on how one estimates the future of Christianity. If it has a future at all, that vision of its future will operate selectively on the past to define the "essence." With no future, the past is only a collection of "facts," with little coherence or life.

The somewhat older and more naive (but not less popular today) theory that all religions overlap to some extent, and what really matters can be located in this common ground or intersection. Unfortunately,

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[1] See for example the comments in Irene Lawrence, *Linguistics and Theology: The Significance of Noam Chomsky for Theological Construction* (Berkeley, Graduate Theological Union, Dissertation Series, 1979), p. 215 ff.

[2] Ernst Troeltsch, "What Does 'Essence of Christianity' Mean?", in Robert Morgan and Michael Pye, eds., *Ernst Troeltsch: Writings on Theology and Religion* (Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1977), pp. 124–180.

any such intersection, if not empty, turns out to contain little more than platitudes. Everything that is the least bit interesting in any of the world's religions is not held in common. All the richness is in the diversity, not in the overlap. This attempt to deal with pluralism, though less Christianly triumphalist, was at least as absolutist, in spite of all appearances of forbearance and tolerance, for it seeks to locate a body of dogma for which it does not have to give answer (which is just absolutism), save in its defining formula; but that defining formula functions as a stop and barrier to explanation rather than a means of explanation.

5.2   Pluralism and Plausibility

Pluralism is bad for plausibility. It brings severe theoretical problems for any definition of reality which has pretensions to a monopoly of reality-definition. Alternative definitions of reality are supposedly not *possible*, at least not for reasonable men, yet pluralism is the state of discovering and confronting daily men who subscribe to what are on one's own definition deviant views of reality. And these men show no signs of being unreasonable. A once monopolistic theory can try to perpetuate its claims by offering a theory and symptomology of deviance, but its theory must account for the fact that the deviants do not *appear* to be in the least deviant or unreasonable. This happens in a situation in which pluralism is enforced, that is, when outright forcible extermination of deviance is not possible. Such a symptomology of covert unreasonableness may work for a few, but not many are likely to take it very seriously. Hence monopoly claims are at best tolerated, at worst laughed at, as a rule humored. What is fascinating is that the old monopoly may teach its lay clients how to internalize and voice these claims within their own consciousness, and humor them even there, repeating them as if true, yet pragmatically ignoring them in day to day life. Thus are monopoly claims perpetuated.

This kind of pluralism is very different from the situation in which alternative universes are "over the horizon," so to speak, heard of, though not by all, and known in any detail by only a very small

minority, if at all. Medieval Christendom was nearly such a society.
Nearly, save for the continuing presence of Judaism. That presence,
however, was delegitimated by a combination of force, a theory of
unreasonableness, and measures to make sure that clients of Christian
reality never got close enough to Jewish mentality to see for themselves
that its carriers were not at all unreasonable.

Pluralism of the kind we have come to know "presupposes an urban
society with a highly developed division of labor, a concomitant high
differentiation in the social structure and a high economic surplus."[3]
Only in an urban context can many different universes be juxtaposed
in close proximity. Strong social inhomogeneity of labor contributes
pivotally; if everybody is engaged, perhaps not in the same tasks, but on
the same "production line," they can hardly support plural definitons
of reality. Only if there is an economic surplus can people afford
either the theoretical or even casual expression of several definitions
of reality. The Hellenistic and modern worlds are the chief cases that
may be cited.

How can a some-time monopoly legitimate pluralism? What is
ironic is that the case in point, Christianity, grew up in a context of
pluralism, though it hardly blessed polytheism. Monopoly trying to
legitimate pluralism does so at the risk of looking ridiculous, and
where it does, it will forfeit all consideration. The desire to avoid that
risk, on the other hand, can drive some-time monopoly to triumphalist
claims that nothing has changed, and seeming equally ridiculous. In
a situation of pluralism, the allegiance of the clients becomes wholly
voluntary. The only sanction for deviance is excommunication. The
power of that sanction is underestimated, but it again runs the clear
risk of making pretensions of monopoly seem ridiculous. If clients
can leave for competing universes with no great inconvenience to
themselves, the guardians of a religious tradition dare not take any steps
which might disedify the clientele. If strong allegiance of members is
not demanded, they will become just exactly clients. The possibility
of honest and open espousal of pluralism is not much considered,
and those who do have no easy way to make it appear legitimate

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[3] Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, p. 125.

and proper. For example, many would like to legitimate the pluralism which is encompassed by the spectrum of the mainline denominations, but the available reasons are largely practical and not theoretical. With Judaism, the shortage of excuses for accommodation is acute, and the number of enthusiasts for rapprochment is accordingly fewer.

5.3   Pluralism Encouraged

There are several possible cognitive structures in a situation of pluralism. They may be called pluralism (by policy), toleration, and indifferentism.[4] Toleration is the case of an established definition of reality, able to maintain its establishment by force, simply tolerating deviant definitions. These alternative definitions are defined as deviant, but they are not suppressed. Error has rights, on sufferance, save only the right to call itself truth. Indifferentism obtains in a society in which policy is that it doesn't make any difference at any level what a man believes.

The ideology of the churches today seems to be a form of toleration: though not monopolies, they talk as if they were, where theory is to be articulated, and act on quite pragmatic considerations of accomodation to a "marketplace" otherwise. Disruption is bad for business; mutual toleration is good for everybody. There is more than a little touch of indifferentism in the accomodations which the denominations make to each other. Those who do take seriously their own claims of monopoly are denounced as "cults."

Pluralism by policy, pluralism encouraged, presupposes that everybody gains by pluralism, that nobody has or should have a monopoly on definition of reality, and that while all share a common core of reality, the richness of life is contained in what is not held in common. That core should of course provide the legitimation for the state of pluralism. Pluralism by policy is the project of this essay – out of the general need for cognitive defence against chaos, and accomodation

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[4] The typology is offered by Edward C. Hobbs in "Pluralism in the Biblical Context" (Paper for the Pacific Coast Theological Society, November, 1973). The article has since been posted to the net, http:// www.pcts.org / pluralism.html.

to it, and out of the collection of cognitive resources, comes a society which enjoys them all. It enjoys also the burden and benefit of knowing that its cognitive structures are a human product; bad faith and alienation are more difficult to support in a pluralistic context. No one group becomes dominant or master, and the others do not become dependent. This is an essential mark of true response to need – help given and received does not result in dependency.

5.4 Why Pluralism?

I have presented in the immediately foregoing an argument for pluralism which appears to be *based on* biblical premises, and even stronger versions of the case may be found in the references there cited. There is a form of easy legitimation, in which if we can find something in biblical practise or theory, then it is "all right" for us to practise or teach it. Countless examples of this kind of thinking come to mind from discussions of polity and ministry. I intend a much more limited case, to the effect that the Bible does not oppose pluralism. I make this case for two reasons. The first is to anticipate objections which attribute to the Bible an anti-pluralist stance. The second (kin to the first) is simply argued out of respect for the possibility that the Bible might have opposed a practise of pluralism. A policy which the Bible goes on record against in an essential way can hardly be advocated in the name of radical monotheism. In the end, I advocate embracing pluralism not *because* the Bible says to, but for its own sake. The logic of an argument which seeks to legitimate a practise from the Bible is, 'the Bible says God says to do such-and-such'.[5] This logic is not only circular, but circular in a vicious way. One need only ask, "who says we should believe the Bible? God? Who says we should believe this is God speaking? The Bible?" I do not mean to make pluralism "all right" by justifying it as from God or from the Bible. Instead, I simply intend to confront the reader with the condition of pluralism as his neighbors in need.

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[5] Cf. John R. Fry, *The Great Apostolic Blunder Machine* (San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1978), p. 17.

Similarly for relativity, I do not even venture an argument that it is biblical, though that may be possible. I simply intend to confront the reader with an invitation, to embrace relativity because it is "the way things are," and to find good in it. History is to be embraced not because it is analogous to the demands of the prophets, though clearly a strong case could be made to that effect, but rather because simple honesty demands it.

The case for history, relativity, and pluralism is not in itself axiomatic; it depends on the argument that each is a species respectively of exposure, limitation, and need. But the case for embracing exposure, limitation, and need is scarcely made because "God says to," but rather as an unconditional demand. I argue that this demand is the substance of radical monotheism. But surely, if radical monotheism confronts a person with a kerygma or proclamation and demand for decision and loyalty, the expression of it ought perspicuously to reflect the unconditional character of the demand. The logic here is not "God says to," but "to follow God *is* to."

To embrace pluralism because God says to do so would be patronizing in the extreme; fortunately few today are likely to be taken in by such a scam. It would be an attempt to establish not fellowship but a relationship of mastery and dependency. The rationale for evangelism today is not 'come join us,' but 'see for yourself.' Others do not need the church, and for the most part, they know it. They can perfectly well make radical monotheists of themselves, with only a little help (if any) from those of us in the church (or the synagogue, for that matter). I am arguing for embracing exposure, limitation, and need, not in God's name, but axiomatically, and asking further that the reader rearrange his God-language to reflect the embracing of exposure, limitation, and need. Any person is free to decline the invitation.

Chapter 6

Good in History, Relativity, and Pluralism

6.1 History

6.1.1 History as Disappointment

With only the qualification just offered, that history, relativity, and pluralism are to be embraced because they are species of exposure, limitation, and need, it must be emphasized that they are to be embraced not for some derivative reason, not as means to some end, not because anyone commanded us to do so, but for their own sakes. They are not means to exposure, limitation, and need, they *are* exposure, limitation, and need. "Life's like that," we say, of its contingencies, and you can like it or not, as you please. I am contending that history, relativity, and pluralism are what in another age we would have called acts of God in the present, God doing a new thing, a new revelation. How can these three phenomena be seen as acts? Only by straining language, by claiming that the language means what I tell it to mean, as if I could get away with saying "banana" when I mean "peach," and expect those who hear me not to feel outraged or imposed upon. Here again, we meet a theme which has run through this whole thesis, distinguishing between confessing our faith and explaining the world. It is not as

if we have to do both with the same language, but we would surely like the two activities to use mutually consistent language. Instead of fostering self-involvement and existential commitment, our language, by its inability to conceive the rise of critical history as an act of God, prevents self-involvement and commitment. We are prevented by our language from meeting God in the new history. To the problem of language we shall return in the next chapter. Here, it is salutary to consider some of the ways in which we manifestly *can* find good and opportunity and blessing in history, relativity, and pluralism.

Let us consider history. The first reason for embracing critical history, and with it our roots in the past, is simple honesty. I have presented a call for a new conception of faith, with new language (from Richard Niebuhr, writing within the last forty years), but in fact the reality of that faith, of radical monotheism, is hardly new with Niebuhr's explanation of it. Nor is it new in its scientific manifestation in the seventeenth century. It was not new in the "New" Testament. Tracing it further back than the patriarchs is difficult, given the evidence and the texts that remain to us. Niebuhr, who explained radical monotheism as the embracing of disappointment, speaks of it in history:

> It has happened in our human history and it does happen in personal histories. Men may dispute endlessly about the worth of that happening, though when they do they always do so on the basis of another faith than faith in this God. But there can be no doubt of the fact that it has happened and that it does happen.

> How does it happen to the individual? It does not happen without the struggle of his reason . . . It does not happen without experience . . . It does not happen without the operation of something we must call spiritual . . . Furthermore, this transfer of faith does not take place without moral struggle, without recognition of the worthlessness both of our transgressions and our obediences to our moral laws.

> But for most men another element is involved – the concrete meeting with other men who have received this faith,

and the concrete meeting with Jesus Christ. There may
be other ways, but this is the usual way for us, that we
confront in the event of Jesus Christ the presence of that
last power which brings to apparent nothingness the life
of the most loyal man. Here we confront the slayer, and
here we become aware that the slayer is the life-giver.
He does not put to shame those who trust in him. In the
presence of Jesus Christ we most often conceive, or are
given that faith. We may try to understand how we might
have received the faith without Jesus Christ; but the fact
remains that when this faith was given, Jesus was there
. . .

We do not say that this faith in the last power is something
men ought to have. We only say this, that it is the end
of the road of faith, that it is unassailable, and that when
men receive it, they receive a great gift.[1]

Niebuhr does not in this passage reckon with Judaism, though he
does earlier in *Radical Monotheism*; he credits it with being at least as
radically monotheistic as Christianity. He does not mention the roots
in the Old Testament, though he could. He is simply reiterating the
"scandal of particularity," the contingency and rootedness-in-history of
our cognitive state. Those outside of the church, who are scandalized
by the particularity, have enough sense to see that contingency as it is.
Most of us inside the church have defended ourselves from particu-
larity and contingency by turning that contingency into absoluteness.
Niebuhr, and any others who have advocated embracing particularity,
because it confronts us "where we are" (and so exposes us), as gener-
alities cannot, knows that embracing particularity, and with it exposure
and relativity, leads to new life as well as to anxiety.

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[1] Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism*, pp. 124-125.

6.1.2   A Story of Faith

The rewards of honesty are not only the pain and anxiety of exposure (and of these there will be plenty, so long as we bring up our children on pre-critical versions of our history), but also the joy, joy beyond our wildest expectations, of finding the story of faith and commitment of our forefathers, and seeing the blessings which they found. We are still largely blind to this in the New Testament, where we think we are reading in the accounts of Jesus' resurrection accounts of a resuscitation, accounts of how for this man, limitation was, in the end, not real, not to be faced or embraced. We reasoned, "As for Jesus, so for us." But in the Old Testament, the story has become well known at least among scholars, how at different stages in Israelite history, men of great vision, courage, and faith were able to embrace contingency in their lives and find blessing and good in it. This estimate of OT history is held within a perspective of totally this-worldly (though hardly positivist) causality and explanation. Nowhere do these scholars intrude the "action" of God to explain any of the events or phenomena involved. They are simply describing the actions of men, from a point of view quite congenial to scholars of the metaphysical persuasion that God as cause or entity has no proper place in such a discussion. Von Rad is perhaps most prominent here, but I shall cite a few short essays of Hans Walter Wolff and Walter Brueggemann; their dependence on the work of von Rad is fundamental. Wolff has written of the several stages of redaction of the Pentateuch, trying to locate the characteristic terms of their kerygma, their proclamation of the good news and reign of God, in NT language. He identifies in Genesis 12.1-4a the paradigmatic announcement of the Yahwist's kerygma.[2]

> And Yahweh spoke to Abram: "Go from your land, from your kindred and from your father's house to the land which I will show you;
>
> Thus I will make you a great people and bless you, and I will make your name great, so that you will effect blessing.

[2] "The Kerygma of the Yahwist," in Walter Brueggemann and Hans Walter Wolff, *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions* (Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1975).

> I will bless those who bless you, but whoever despises
> you, him I will curse. So then, all the families of the earth
> can gain a blessing in you."

> And Abram went, as Yahweh had told him; and Lot went
> with him.

All the terms of the Yahwist's announcement of God's uncondi-
tional promise are here, land, descendants, blessing, office of blessing
for others. Parts of this formula of blessing reccur at intervals in the
Yahwist corpus at key points of editorial interpretation. The Yahwist
writes in the first decades of the monarchy, during the reign probably of
Solomon, and the legitimation of the monarchy is clear in this scheme,
yet there is also a standard by which the monarchy may be judged,
asking whether it is in fact bringing blessing to the peoples who are
newly subject to it. The Yahwist's question is, "how does the blessing
come through Abraham for the peoples?" He works out this theme
in the stories of Abraham and his descendants; they sometimes try to
take matters into their own hands, but Yahweh brings about in his own
good time the intended fulfillment of his promises. Through various
unforeseen and unforeseeable contingencies, the blessing is effected.

With the Priestly redaction of the story, we come to a bold reinter-
pretation. For if any had thought that the blessing was to be effected
through their offices as a people, they were of course correct, but not
as they had imagined. At the time of the Exile, it seemed as if God
had rejected his formerly chosen people, that the promise was ended
and the blessing a thing of the past; here the blessing for the other
peoples of the earth was forgotten totally. Yet the Priestly editors put
in God's mouth the stupendous command to Adam, "Be fruitful, and
multiply, and fill the earth, and conquer it, and have dominion over
it."[3] This, to a people barren, without heirs, crowded out, conquered
and enslaved! Some nerve, the Priestly editors had. Yet what else
does one do to hold together a people in exile? His contemporary, the
writer of Second Isaiah, sees the life of Israel in exile as the work of the

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[3] Brueggemann, "The Kerygma of the Priestly Writers," in *The Vitality of Old
Testament Traditions.*

Suffering Servant. It is precisely through the suffering of Israel that the peoples of the world are to gain the blessing which the Yahwist had put in God's mouth. How does such faith arise in history? It demonstrably does – and this faith is a discontinuity in history. Like discontinuity in other sciences, where discontinuity arises in history, we are not thereby justified in adducing causal agency from outside history to explain it. With more research, discontinuity can be explained in wholly intramundane terms. Someday we shall know better than we do now.

What do these stories (and there are many more; I cite only the Yahwist and Priestly editors for the sake of brevity and because all who come after build on them) give us for our lives in the present? They give us a freedom from the past and a freedom in the past. It is now ours, to embrace and to "own," to build on as is only possible with honesty regarding the past. These stories free us from ossification in the present, because we see in them examples of men who had the faith to proceed on their own initiative and responsibility, to reinterpret their history, in the light of their needs in the present, as God's saving work. Here, history leads again to relativity, for though before the nineteenth and twentieth centuries men did not know the name or concept of relativity, they knew the fact of relativity. There have always been some men who had enough confidence and faith to bear the necessary risks and take the actions that seemed to them to be indicated.

6.1.3   Other Benefits

With inspiration from the past, history provides us with a guide, a standard with which we may measure ourselves in the present. It thus is a safeguard against that gradual unfaith that comes by creeping stages, dulling first the ability to tell that something is happening to our faith. But we can look back to history in order to wake ourselves up. This is nothing new – every preacher in every age has known as much. But how can we do this unless we do honest history? It would be a little odd to combat false conceptions of history (for gradual unfaith always takes that form in the end) with yet another false conception of

history.

In history, we are reminded that we ought to be humble, for in studying history, we face others' contingency and courage. If we face the contingency of others' religious language, then by implication, we acknowledge our own. If we feel their intellectual limitations are redeemable, then perhaps ours (which we cannot, by definition, know) are redeemable also. There is no way we can redeem ourselves; all we can do is respect the past, and rest confident that if we are faithful, trusting within our state of cognitive limitation, rather than denying it, those who come after us will redeem our mistakes and redeem our unfaith. Furthermore, by acknowledging our debt to past heroes, we put ourselves under the judgement of their good examples, from Abraham the father of faith to the editors who put together the Bible, and even to the scholars of the last two centuries who realized what the process of biblical redaction was. Embracing the limited formulations of the past is a way of admitting that not only do the causes for which we live all die, but so also do our churches, liturgies, and even our understandings of radical monotheism.

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Outside the institutional forms in which we receive radical monotheism, it is not to my knowledge preached in any complete form, though it is sometimes practised. Again, I do not intend to prejudice future relations or accommodation between the Church and Synagogue. Without loss of generality, I hope, I shall confine my remarks to the Church. It is certainly possible to find outside the church advocates of the embracing of voluntary exposure. But if exposure is only voluntary, it is by implication permissible that limitation and need are embraced only voluntarily. The whole point of the argument in the first two chapters was that exposure comes against my wishes, involuntarily, and the real test of radical faith is to embrace it then. A good diagnostic seems to be to ask whether one is willing to be exposed and redeemed by another's suffering. The question then arises naturally, is one in consistency willing to confront Jesus' suf-

fering as paradigmatic example of such redemption? Or, we might add today, to confront the suffering of the Synagogue through history, as redemption of the Church from its blindness to its sister religion? Jesus was able to suggest to any who would listen that he was willing to look for good not only in his own limitation, but in the sins of his tormentors also. Because he considered them redeemable and lovable, they were enabled to love themselves and then others, and to face the truth about themselves. It ought not to be necessary to add that I am scarcely suggesting that we arrange another's suffering in order that we might thereby be "redeemed": that would be the depth of moral depravity. Others suffer quite enough through my faults; there is thereby redemption enough in the world if I would only seek it.

My point is not that radical monotheism is impossible to practise outside the institutions which receive it, but only that those institutions make it immensely easier. Attempts to do without the institutions have almost always ended by losing some part of monotheism. In the chapter on relativity, I summarized only those parts of Berger's argument to the effect that cognitive reality is a human product, leaving out the argument that it is an inescapably social product. People seem to need other people in order to construct and maintain cognitive and moral reality. While those who are already lost to the church may want to start more nearly "from scratch," those of us in the church would be foolish to try that course. And those outside the church may find it more practical simply to join a church.

On these same lines, embracing history afforda a means of community not horizontally, with other people in the present, but vertically, with men and women of faith in all ages. We are thus commited to find good in contingency even when we shall not live to see it, if we consider ourselves as part of a community which shall continue after us and which began before us.

6.1.4   History and the Language of Faith

The embracing of history also affords us a resource of language, enabling us to say of our encounter with God in the present, it is like

such-and-such occasions in the past. In the present, it is never clear that good can be brought out of the "bad" in life, but in the past, with the benefit of hindsight, we can see this. From the past we can infer to our present. This gives us language where otherwise we would have none; we inherit all the language we have. Confessions of faith, both the Church's and those from the Old Testament, are most frequently recitations of history. "When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances which Yahweh our God has commanded you?' then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt . . . ' "

The problem of history and language is not new for us, others have faced it in the past. The creators of the New Testament use Old Testament language in order to make sense of the events in their lives. But this is a conclusion at the end of a process of analysis of the relationship between the two testaments.[4] Some have thought Jesus consciously and deliberately re-enacted OT models in order to demonstrate that he was their fulfillment, or that he conceived his ministry and work in terms of OT models, and so interpreted himself to his disciples. Others (and much traditional interpretation) have seen Jesus as fulfilling OT predictions, whether as those predictions were intended or in some new and surprising way. Some think that the early church saw similarities in the structure of God's saving activity in the OT and in Jesus, and simply objectified these relationships as model/actuality or type/antitype. Hobbs would argue that the experience of divine salvation only becomes such experience when it is brought to language as divine salvation, that language plays a pivotal role in making the experience what it is. It follows then, that if the NT experiences are to be seen as God's actions, they must be "languaged" as God's actions, on the same lines as God's actions in the past, even if the conception of God's action is reinterpreted and transformed by the very process of applying it to the new events. If the NT writers practise this kind of languaging and reinterpretation (and the OT writers at the Exile clearly do so also), then we are certainly permitted to do so in our time.

Along the lines where we began this exploration of the good in

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[4] Edward C. Hobbs, private instructional materials.

history, a critical approach, after disabusing us of sentimental illusions about our history, goes on to give us examples of vision and faith from the past, examples which enable us to see our way a little further into the future which we face. These examples are not only in the far past, but also in the recent past. What are we to make of the rise of critical history in the nineteenth century, of the story told in Chapter 3? The men who did the work of establishing critical history were seldom thanked by the churchmen of their time. Often they were driven out and excommunicated. Sometimes they left the active and visibly cultic practise of Christianity on their own. But in some sense, they all remained "in" the church, if only on its edges, for if it did not matter to them, why did they continue to investigate its past? It is in this sense that I think the church can claim them as its own, not in a possessive way, though they were her sons, but in a spirit of humble gratitude to them as prophets whose message she has ignored as often as heeded. I think these men who began critical history can be counted as the church's own, because by contrast, all those who truly chose to leave the church did not waste their time trying to understand the history of an institution which they saw as utterly unredeemable and without merit or graces. And the men who did the work of critical history, while never very welcome in popular circles, were nevertheless provided for and supported in the church.

If these men who began critical history can be claimed as the church's own, then the church presents to us the example of a phenomenon unique, or nearly so, in history. For she is now an institution which has communally embraced exposure, instead of rejecting it and trying to frustrate it. To be sure, many in the church work all too diligently and effectively to frustrate the exposure which critical history brings. There is no unmixed glory being claimed for the church here. But, it cannot be claimed that she has rejected exposure utterly and outright.

I would claim that alongside the stories of faith which we have of men in the Bible are to be added the stories of the biblical editors, and also the stories of the critical historians of this century and the last, Wellhausen, Gunkel, and Bultmann, and many more. In celebrating

these heroes of the faith, we shall discover that just as facing history compels us to reckon also with relativity, so finding good in history leads us also into embracing relativity.

6.2   Relativity

6.2.1   Opportunity and Freedom

To embrace relativity is to acknowledge it in the worlds which we humanly construct. That move imposes on us a humility and it opens up for us an opportunity. Humility is incumbent on anyone who thinks the cognitive world he lives in is his own construction. This position is different both from solipsism and from an absolutism which believes that it is in full possession of knowledge of the world as it is. Neither the absolutist nor the solipsist can see that there is a difference between the world as it is and the world as he apprehends it. The relativity acknowledger knows not only that there is a difference, but also that he is incapable of rising above the mechanisms of his apprehension of the world, though he may transcend them at least to the extent of understanding his own knowledge well enough to know that it *is* conditioned and relative. We cannot call this man a relativist, for that term already is commonly taken to mean one who believes that in view of relativity, nothing matters. The position that in view of relativity nothing matters is closer to solipsism. In fact, the terms "relativism" and "solipsism" represent the moral and cognitive aspects of one position. In any case, relative though human knowledge and actions may be, they still matter greatly, and acknowledged or not, people make choices at a fundamental level. While people may *say* they are solipsists or relativists, they usually deny as much in their actions. Choices matter very much.

The humility which is incumbent on the relativity acknowledger arises from the consciousness that he may be wrong outright, and that in any case, his views will almost certainly be revised by his successors. Acknowledgment of relativity is a safeguard against fanaticism. There is a saying that there is no bad man so bad as a religious bad man; it is

this kind of peril of religion that relativity protects against.

If relativity imposes a duty of humility, it also opens up opportunity. For knowing that the cognitive and moral universe we live in is our construction, we can consider changing it to suit changing times and changing needs. In some particulars, of course, we will have to say that we can do no other than we do. This will happen for instance with three-dimensional perspective vision or with such universal moral imperatives as the concept of murder (although the boundaries of what is murder are demonstrably cultural). Other matters, even though culturally conditioned, we will also consider as things in respect of which we cannot do other than as we do. But some matters will by the acknowledgment of relativity be opened up as matters in which we can use our own good judgement.

In general, we replace the rubric of legitimation "such-and-such is God's will," with a consciousness that if we may speak of God as having a will at all, he clearly wants us to choose, and he will back us up in our choices, since, if we are to believe the sociology of knowledge, he has imposed on us the necessity of choice. And we clearly must live with the consequences of our choices – God does not exempt us from them – but when we would later repent of our choices, we may trust that they can be redeemed.

There are two senses of "God says to . . . " One directly indicates bad faith, the other is a way of using language as instrument of self-involvement, a notion which I take from Donald Evans.[5] Language not only connotes and denotes, it also *does* things; Evans builds directly on the work of John L. Austin. In particular, language of "God" commits the person who uses it, in an absolute way, as indicating that that person has made some commitments which he regards as axiomatic and not derivative. Language thus confesses, as well as explains. When language of confession is taken to explain where it properly cannot, it becomes bad faith, attributing to the world a structure that is only imposed on it for conceptual and moral purposes by the human beings who use such language. Confession mistaken for explanation precludes all possibility of real explanation, and blinds the

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[5] Donald D. Evans, *The Logic of Self-Involvement* (London, SCM, 1963).

confessor to his action. The essence of confession is to acknowledge human commitment and desire, but mistaken as explanation, it locates these over against man, in the world "out there," precisely fostering alienation and bad faith. Perhaps one day we shall have language which avoids the drawbacks of the language we inherit; I do not think we have such language now. In the meantime, acknowledging relativity is a bulwark against bad faith.

6.2.2 Scripture Alive

The scriptures may serve as an example of how relativity affords us new opportunity and possibilities we did not heretofore realise. The themes of the vision and faith of the Yahwist and Priestly redactors in the Pentateuch have been a recurring theme for us. After exposure to critical results on the Bible, the stories of these men would seem to be some of the best and most rousing "Bible-stories" we have. Yet these men are not even mentioned in the Bible. (It is possible, of course, that we shall have to revise our theories utterly as to how the Pentateuch came to be written. That is unlikely, but if it were to happen, it is difficult to see how we could do other than to discover another story of vision and faith, for we have in effect presupposed as much in our critical methodology which seeks human origins for human phenomena.) The story continues after the work of the biblical redactors, as I have also remarked, with the work of critical scholars, from whom we may call Wellhausen and Bultmann to stand as representatives. These men have changed our religious world picture no less in our time than the great prophets whose names are in the Bible. They have done so in a story of faith and vision which we would aspire to imitate, for they were able to look with ruthless honesty at the origins of our religious faith, at great risk to themselves, and come through in the end with that faith vindicated.

What are we to do? How can we tell these stories to ourselves and our children? How can we tell these stories as stories of faith, myths to entertain and educate, examples to be followed, stories which locate us in the structure of the cosmos? If we limit ourselves to what

is in the canon of Scripture, it is difficult to see how these stories can move us at any deep level. If we presume to add these stories to the canon of Scripture, the difficulties are at least as great. Apart from the impossible task of securing agreement on what to include, and how to word the stories, what would we do when it came time to revise these stories in the light of new research and results? It seems that the canon, though a human product, is not one which we can practically change.

However, acknowledging it as a human product opens up for us a solution to our problem. If we look at the process of canonization, and the occasions which call for it, I think we can see how to proceed. There are two situations which call for the creation of a canon of literature.

One may be called the "desert-isle" crisis: you are going into exile (the prototype for this crisis is *The* Exile), and you have to decide which books you want to take with you. The Pentateuch and Deuteronomic History which we now have are an abstraction from a larger literature which included the Annals of the Kings of Judah, the Annals of the Kings of Israel, the History of Nathan the Prophet, the Annals of Jehu, the Annals of Shemaiah (our Samuel?), the Prophecy of Ahijah of Shiloh, the Vision of Iddo the Seer, The Book of the Wars of Yahweh, the Book of Jashar, and the Book of the Acts of Solomon.[6] These books, now all lost, are simply the works cited as references in the "footnotes" of the Pentateuch, Former Prophets, and Chronicles, and include none of the works whose existence is inferred from internal evidence in the received canon. Faced with the impracticability of carrying all the archives of Judah and Israel into exile, and after the return, faced with the incipient loss of much of this literature, it was imperative that there be an attempt to salvage from it all that was worth saving. Some of our present history cites earlier works in the confidence that a curious reader could easily verify statements from the Annals of the Kings of Judah and Israel. Though not all of the redactional work was carried out in the face of imminent loss of a corpus of literature, it has had that effect.

The other situation which leads to canonization is a crisis in which

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[6] These titles are simply what one finds by consulting a concordance under "book."

a community feels that it must distinguish itself and its values from other communities and other values. The Council of Javneh (ca. 90 CE) is prototypical of this kind of crisis. It was an attempt to guide Rabbinic Judaism in the reconstruction and salvage after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. On the same lines some years later, a Christian canon of New Testament literature was formed by growing consensus. When one sees the welter of para-christian literature now recovered and printed in the collections of M. R. James and Hennecke-Schneemelcher, much of it purporting to be "gospels," "acts," and "epistles," and most of it carrying a theology deeply at odds with the literature that was later canonized as the New Testament, it is no small wonder that the church was driven to publish a list of which works she regarded as authoritative.

What is the key to our problem today is that neither of these situations obtains for us. We do not have to create a new canon. The operation of canonization is fundamentally one of sorting literature, and of condemning or losing much of it. Canonization is therefore a matter to be regarded as a mixed blessing. Simplification is also loss.

The fact that some literature bears a canonical label and other literature does not, does not confer or deny the power to confront a reader or a community with God's kerygma. Anyone who doubts can examine canonical literature side by side with its own contemporary literature, and I think he will see that the decisions of the Fathers were not made lightly or for reasons in the least bit whimsical. In the New Testament, the number of books which could be questioned, either in or out of the Canon, is not great; what is more, the church herself was not until quite late at all certain concerning any of these works. One thinks of the Revelation, Hebrews, Clement, the letters of Ignatius, and perhaps the Didache and The Shepherd of Hermas.

In the ages since the closing of the canon, we have a great deal of literature, some of which rises to great power or sublime expressiveness. Different people have different favorites, and doubtless we would have difficulty agreeing if we were to try to create a new canon from this literature without the pressure of a crisis. If we were called to do so, the process would then be a pluralistic one, in which some-

thing is included for everybody; canonization is inherently pluralistic. It seeks to identify various manifestations of a common kerygma, a problem which we do not (yet, if we ever will, or even can) know how to tackle in the abstract, but which can be carried through in concrete situations.

As we use and review all the literature which we inherit, we are free to use and evaluate all of it, as we see fit. When we see how the canon was arrived at, lack of canonicity should be no discredit to authority for later literature, since there has been no need since the closing of the canon for a public designation of authoritative literature. What special authority the canon does have comes from its unique witness to radical monotheism in its own age. This authority, as I have contended, can in principle be verified and reviewed today, by comparison to contemporary literature. It would be strange to continue to claim canonicity for a literature which bears no discernable differences from other literature of the ages which produced it. When we deal with later literature, we know that only with the test of time and the judgement of many generations, is it possible with confidence to identify literature with authority. In practise, councils which decide canonicity merely recognize a consensus which must already be present; they cannot in the nature of the process canonize works which are quite recent.

Thus, in dealing with our problems, we are free to tell our children exactly what the Bible is and how it came to be written and collected – for they will ask, since they do not know a priori what a Bible is. A good rule of thumb would be to tell them nothing which they will have to un-learn later. It would thus be inadvisable to suggest in any way that the Bible is a book dictated by God. "The word of God" then needs very careful explanation; the best course is simply to explain that other people have called it such, but the language is not to be taken literally; it represents a view that has been shown to be mistaken, though it can be used metaphorically. Children are quite capable of understanding this, for they know exactly what it means to find out that one was mistaken. What they have difficulty with is adults who do not change once mistakes are exposed.

As we explain, to ourselves and our children, we can also tell the

story of the great faith of the men who put together the Bible, and of the men who more recently have discovered and deduced what was the process of creating the Bible. There is much more than just the stories of the J saga and the P redaction. Every biblical book provides such a story, though I scarcely need to review them all here.

We also may, indeed must, tell the stories of the creation of the Bible in a form suitable for ourselves as adults who not only listen with speculative curiosity, but who stake our lives on the history which we thus retell, and are prepared to make decisions that matter on the basis of what we hear. The Bible is not exactly a children's book, though children may be brought to it if it first becomes our book as adults. When we base our lives on the history we hear from critical scholarship, it ought to be unnecessary to add that we remember the tentative nature of the results. What we can do with sure confidence, though, is to popularize the presupposition that the Bible arose as a human document. That can hardly be done without indicating some of the detail of the results which flow from that presupposition. The presupposition of human origins is the chiefest part of acknowledging relativity.

The prime good we will find in relativity will be the ability once again to read the Bible *at all*. We have been losing that ability ever more totally in the last two centuries, as the presuppositions necessary for an "old fashioned" reading of it were eroded and left unreplaced. We will once again have a story of human faith, one which we can participate in, and a story which comes from the real world we live in today. We do not have such a story today, certainly not at a popular level. With the confidence which will come from such a story, a confidence which needs none of the false assurance of absolutism, we will be enabled to meet our cognitive neighbors; relativity leads into pluralism.

6.3   Pluralism

Relativity need not be threatened by pluralism, as absolutism inevitably is. Relativity is thus able to enjoy the riches of pluralism, able cog-

nitively to "go and visit" other peoples' religious worlds. The enchantment and wealth of a place like Manhattan – and there is a real enchantment, despite all the dirt and municipal mismanagement – derives precisely from its pluralism.[7] There are so many neighborhoods in such a small space. Some of them are only one city block in area— one thinks of General Seminary in the Chelsea district. In many areas, one can walk only a few blocks and need to speak a different second language.

Similarly, universities derive their considerable cultural wealth from an entirely analogous pluralism. The several experiments in pluralistic theological education, starting with the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, have discovered a wealth beyond what any of the member schools could have imagined before the confederations were begun. Students who can cross-register at other schools derive an inestimable benefit, for example, from the access to scholars who have specialized in both Luther and Aquinas, a breadth hardly to be imagined in any denominational school.

On a larger scale, we stand to gain much more than simply access to our religious neighbors. We will have a chance, for the first time in many, many centuries, to recover catholicity. For catholicity is the ability to encompass breadth and plurality. The price is giving up even the shadow of a claim of absoluteness. We will find that some of our neighbors are peoples who have no intention of taking any guff from The Church, for they have had far too much in the past. And so pluralism will mean maintaining differences, instead of blurring them. But those differences are precious, for they are the chief safeguard against cognitive alienation, bad faith, against the forgetting of the human origins of human religion, something which in the end becomes indistinguishable from idolatry. Perhaps some day, that plurality will be blurred by natural cultural effects, in which everybody gets to know everybody else well enough so that there is a "melting-pot" effect. That is not our problem, and is not likely to be for the near future.

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[7] I am indebted for this observation to several who have lived in Manhattan, as I have not; first of all to David Levermore.

Catholicity properly conceived was always marked by a willingness, even eagerness, to "baptize" the customs and concepts of a population which it evangelized. The whole rationale for evangelism will need to be reconceived in the light of pluralism. We cannot go and say, "Why don't you give up your culture and come and join us." Instead, we can say, "We have something which we like very much; we can explain it as best we can as follows . . . If you like it, you may want to do it differently, in your own way; we eagerly await seeing how you do do it, for we shall learn something about our own conception of our faith from seeing how you appropriate it. We cannot make radical monotheists of you; you, only you, can make radical monotheists of yourselves." To some, it may be more appropriate to begin ecumenical discussions with the view of first understanding each other's conceptualities, and then asking whether any elements of radical monotheism are already present in the other tradition under different linguistic labels. We may discover elements within our own tradition which we had not appreciated until meeting them in another; and we may find parts of the other tradition which we wish to appropriate for ourselves. Judaism presents a special case by virtue of its intimate genetic relationship to Christianity. We should look forward especially eagerly to non-Indo-European understandings of radical monotheism. They will in all probability not be Trinitarian.

6.4   The Choice Before Us

What is the real threat to Christianity today, if we do not embrace history, relativity, and pluralism? It is no less than the end of Christianity as a religion, certainly the end of its ability to change and grow.

The obituary of Christianity has many times been announced prematurely, but that does not make it impossible in principle. Religions have disappeared from the face of the earth, and some have lost the ability to grow, yet hung on for dozens of centuries, withering slowly. The threat to us is a slow one, not explicitly hostile in the present. It wins by demonstrating slowly in the public mind the increasing irrelevance of Christianity. This irrelevance consists in the growing disjunction

of Christian language of commitment from secular language dealing with the same commitments. The secular language speaks in words which bear their meaning clearly and straightforwardly, without need of continual translation. Our traditional language, without changing a single word or formula, slowly becomes nonsense, and Christianity with it becomes henotheism, because the common language which everybody speaks is not static. It changes – and so we must change our speaking with it. The threat to us also comes by demonstrating the increasingly essential un-catholicity of Christianity. I think people have an inborn and natural inclination to radical monotheism, regardless of the language that is used to explain it, and they know that catholicity (pluralism) is essential to radical monotheism. And the threat to us will succeed in the end by showing that Christianity does not make any discernible difference in life, owing to the inability of its language directly to engage any issue that matters to people. In every way, the threat to us has a deeply prophetic component. It should be warned that if we do change our ways, we cannot expect the world to be impressed when we start preaching to it what it has long ago grown weary of preaching to us.

One thinks of the prophets, who forecast a threat from the North many times before Judah finally fell. And Judah successfully fought off the threat more than once, too. But she still fell in the end. Similarly, in the present, sooner or later, some new movement will come along which will find it convenient to finish off Christianity, long after she has become dead from the inside.

There is a risk, of course. It may be too late, and Christianity may be beyond saving. We may provoke real hostility if we make it clear to any who care to look, that we embrace exposure, limitation, and need, in particular in history, relativity, and pluralism. So what? The gospels have long ago said others might see such a move as threatening to themselves, because by implication it invites them also to embrace exposure. Better to take flak for real faith than for unfaith calling itself faith.

Even if Christianity is destroyed – and despite our best efforts, it may be – if we really embrace exposure, limitation, and need, as we

say we do, then we are confident that some good will come out of such an eventuality. In particular, we may be confident that radical faith will re-emerge explicitly sooner or later, and for what it is worth, we may be confident that it will vindicate us in its history writing, when it feels secure enough to do honest critical history. It will of course also be able to see our sins as we cannot; so we had better be serious in our embracing of exposure.

Chapter 7

The Sense of the Term "God"

7.1 Language and "God"

7.1.1 Words and Definitions

In chapters 1 and 2, I proposed to treat only the question how we meet God in life, presupposing for the moment the notion of "God" we bring to that question from our religious and cultural inheritance. The argument about meeting God should lead us to examine in a new light the notion of "God" which we receive from tradition. I believe that embracing history and relativity leads us to revise our notion of God, in a way which will suggest to us that God is different from what we thought he was. We are lead not to abandon one God for another, but to reconceive an allegiance which we have had all along.

In the first two chapters we worked out the pivotal notion that radical faith consists in affirming all of life as good, not only some of it; in particular, good includes the "bad" news, conceived as exposure, limitation, and need. The major thesis of this paper has been built on that base, claiming that history, relativity, and pluralism are species of exposure, limitation, and need. There has been a secondary theme running through the whole treatment, distinguishing language which confesses faith and involves and commits the community using such language, from language which explains the world and man. In former

times, people used the same language for both tasks. While our language both confesses and explains, it is not clear that we meant in all respects to do both. History and relativity have presupposed that we distinguish between confession and explanation, and if we are to embrace them, we must do so. If we make this distinction, we shall find that it has implications for our concept of God, for our thinking about God. That is why it is time to return to the questions of God-language, confession and explanation, and the notion of "God" itself.

Language shapes experience. Without the notion of "gods" we would not have a notion of "God", for "God" was a notion constructed in response to a world which already had the notion of "gods." Since the notion of "god" is today problematic, the notion of "God" has become problematic also. The general notion of "god" is one for which we have fairly easily substituted instead the formula "heuristic recipe for finding satisfaction," or whatever other precise phrasing fits the needs of the discussion at hand. The term "god" is today used in colloquial language only by courtesy, always with a definition to be substituted for it ready to mind. We do not speak of the gods in our lives, and we use the word seldom except to explain literature which we inherit from the ancient world.

The case of "God" is different, for we do *not* normally keep a definition close at hand, saying, "when you speak of 'God,' here is what you mean." We speak simply and directly of, and more importantly, to, God. This language which we use shapes our experience. Because we do not speak of the gods, when we speak of God, the effect in shaping our experience is not the same as it was when our forefathers lived with the conceptuality which had a place for the gods. Even though radical monotheism stridently claimed that the gods were not really gods at all, that only God is real, in the ancient world there was not a problem such as we face. The real difficulty arises not because the gods are gone, for that happened more than a millenium ago. The difficulty arises because the conceptuality which supported the notion of "gods" and "God" alike is now gone. I do not propose a solution, for I have none, though I think a solution is possible; but I can illuminate the problem somewhat.

The question arises, or ought to arise at some point in our reflection on religion, "how did the concept of 'God' develop in history at all?" We cannot simply say with Exodus 6 that God came to Moses and told him his name, "Yahweh." Here again, we are up against the impossibility of substituting confessions for explanations. The temptation, for lack of a ready explanation, is to say that in some metaphorical or spiritual sense, God *did* come to Moses. Well, no doubt he did, in *some* sense, but that does not explain for us; instead, it precludes any explanation.

It would not make any difference for us if God *did* speak out of thin air; that would not explain God or the notion of "God" at all. From time to time there are fictional attempts to portray such divine speaking, and in all of them, the people who hear are unimpressed. We have thoroughly presupposed that natural things (the acoustic waves carrying such divine speech, for example) have natural explanations, even if we cannot get those explanations readily. Because of this, fictional characters are unable to mistake the natural phenomena *themselves* for a call to faith. That we can imagine being shaken up by a natural phenomenon and so make a response of faith does not locate a call to faith in the phenomena in question.

If we are interested in how we came to have a concept of "God", we ought also to ask why some other cultures do not have a concept of "God" as western culture does; China is sometimes cited in this connection. Cross-cultural comparisons may enable us someday to understand ourselves, though I am not able to pursue such questions here.

The usual approach to the problem of God is to ask about the referent of the term "God." Systems constructed to give an account of the reference of "God" can be quite subtle and intricate. I contend that all such inquiries are bound to fail through failure to distinguish confession from explanation. Explanation is a matter of causality, and of processes which operate in place of causality when causality does not apply, as often happens in the sciences, for example in quantum mechanics. Any attempt to give an account of the reference of the term "God" almost invariably presupposes in the notion of reference

that "God" is being used as part of an explanation, and that speech of God explains the working of something. But the language-game speaking of God is played by rules different from those governing explanation and causal discourse (to put a Wittgensteinian construction on our problem), and so is not properly judged by criteria applicable to explanation-language.

Nevertheless, granted that it can be shown that God-language is played by different rules, and that it is unfair to demand that it be judged according to the rules of secular explanation-language, problems still remain. Why, if God-language is a different game, does it insist on looking so like explanation-language? The question becomes acute when, because of attempts to explain the very language we use in speaking of God, it appears promising to look for better ways to do what God-language does. In these circumstances, and because of the difficulties inherent in God-language, many people today have simply decided to look for other language-games to play.

God-language as we have received it is conducive to forgetting that it is itself a human construction. We say, "He has made us, and not we ourselves," yet wherever we investigate either the mechanisms of origin or maintenance of our religious world, we run into evidence of our own hand in the making of the *concept* of God. To persist in naively using our inherited God-language when it blinds us to our own hand in what we do can be seen variously as comic or abominable.

Along the lines of the satires in Wisdom 13 and Isaiah 44, let us imagine that there was once a man, and he had an hour (he works quickly); with one half, he fashioned a differential equation, taking great care to locate its eigenvalues and boundary conditions, and solving for the eigenfunctions as a linear combination of hyper-geometric functions. He used this differential equation to engineer the heating of his house and the cooking of his food to best economy of energy. With the other half of his hour, he constructed a concept of God, drawing on biblical and historical theology, modern philosophical work from existentialist and analytic traditions, carefully establishing all his terms and inferences. With this mental construct, though he is aware that it is only a thought-machine, and not a real machine, and so cannot even

do the things for itself that computers can do, with this construct he hopes to find help in solving all his problems. For material sustenance he prays to an idea, for guidance in the real world to a fiction, for a sense of place in the cosmos, he prays to the projection of his own loneliness.

7.1.2 Like Us, But Better and Different

If this is a fair caricature of some professional attempts to rescue our inherited concept of God, and I think it is, it does not go far to illuminate that inherited concept. How, then, did we explain God to ourselves? What we said can be organized under three rubrics: God is like us, but better, and different. When we said that God is like us, *but better*, we in effect are affirming in the specifics of "better" those values which we hold absolutely, without prior grounding in other values. Because those values are axiomatic and because we are willing to stake our lives on them, there attaches to them a quality which way be described as numinous, mysterious, or whatever; we invoke this quality when we speak of these values with God-language. When we said that God is like us *but different*, we acknowledged that God-language is not like other language, and that it is not safely treated as ordinary explanations are.

While we spoke of God in language which superficially resembles explanations which use terms which have demonstrable referents, I think we knew all along that our language-game could not be played by the rules of other explanations. We explained that God is like us, that is he hears us and understands, though he is different, for he never sleeps, and can listen to all of us at once, and can hear us anywhere. We said that God is like us, but has no body, thus calling him a spirit. These explanations describe God as he is. Others describe him as we relate to him. Pivotal for our investigation are a class of sayings of which the following are typical.

> (18) God has no hands but these, no mouth but this one, etc.

(19) He came singing Love;
He lived singing Love;
He died singing Love;
He rose in Silence.
If the Song is to continue,
We must do the singing.

(20) God helps those who help themselves.

(21) If God doesn't give you what you ask for, maybe
he has something better in mind.

All four of these sayings recognize that in our relations with God, it is we who have a responsibility, we who must act. In effect, these proverbs are rules which indicate the limits beyond which we dare not press the language in which we speak of events in life and the world as God's acts and God's gifts. We may treat life and events as gifts so far as our gratitude and response goes, but not in considering God as causal agent of events.

7.1.3   Misleading Language

Objectors have pressed us to explain our language of God in several ways. Some have asked, why don't you set up a double blind experiment, give medicine to some and simply pray for others, and *see* whether prayer works? This is the demand for verifiability, or, failing that, for falsifiability in God-language. We should respond, "You have totally missed the point of prayer." Because most of us have not been in a position to explain prayer, we were vulnerable to attacks which presuppose such a misunderstanding of prayer, or a similar misunderstanding of God-language in general. D. Z. Phillips has worked out in detail for the case of prayer the rules of the language-game in which

we pray, showing that while it moves some of the same "pieces" as other requesting language-games, it has different rules and is doing something different.[1] Petition is not simply a request, serving to effect that which it requests, thereby conceiving God as little different from a natural phenomenon. Petition results in freeing the petitioner from dependence on the thing he petitions for; the paradigmatic petition is Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane. All prayer, and not only petition, serves to transform our preferences, changing us, so that we see good and God's gift in those areas of life of concern to the one praying.

One might then object, "If this is what you are doing in your God-language, why don't you use language which cannot be misunderstood, which reflects clearly what it is trying to do? Why do you leave yourself open to the misunderstanding that you are praying and speaking of God in a way which is idolatrous (seeking good in only some of life, defined by your own convenience), superstitious (living with a world view which is anti-scientific and pre-scientific), trying to influence God, and emotionally infantile? If you want to be freed from dependence on something, why don't you simply ask for freedom from dependence on that thing? Which does not even raise that question of whether God 'exists'; though in your latest explanations you seem to be saying that he does not, in which case you should not be talking to him at all."

I suppose we would have to reply that it is not as if we have not thought of these objections, they arise for us all the time, but any language so far suggested to replace our existing religious language simply does not accomplish the things which our present language does. And we might further reply that the language which we use, while capable of being misunderstood, does not compel the misunderstandings just cited. In any case, it is impossible to foresee all the misunderstandings which the human mind in its ingenuity is capable of conceiving. At this point both parties to the discussion would probably see further conversation as pointless, and part company with different estimates of what religious language does. The objector from outside

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[1] D. Z. Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, and New York, Schocken, 1965). He bases his argument on Wittgenstein, though it also includes concepts from J. L. Austin.

sees it as superstitious and idolatrous, and while the believer knows from how it "feels" that it is not, he still does not have a clear explanation of his language. Explanations of what religious language *does* are just beginning to be found; language which successfully commits and involves us and is at the same time consistent with our explanations is not yet in sight.

The language which we use is composed of what Gilbert Ryle has called Systematically Misleading Expressions.[2] Ryle coined the term "systematically misleading expression" to mean not an expression which deceives, intentionally or accidentally, but one which by its form appears to be another kind of expression than that which it is. We use systematically misleading expressions all the time and are not in the least confused by them, for their proper *use* is perfectly clear. The difficulty arises when we attempt to reflect abstractly on what they mean, for then their structure and form are no clue to their meaning. It is not only philosophers who are misled, but also the ordinary man who embarks on abstract thought.

Some examples may help. We say the sun "rises," yet we would be astonished to hear anyone suggest that thereby we mean that it starts from sea level and moves vertically upward through the air from the earth's surface. Ryle considers an example which involves difficulties at a deeper level. The sentences

> (22) Mr. Pickwick is a nonentity.

> (23) Mr. Baldwin is a being.

> (24) Mr. O'Neill is the Speaker.

all have the form "Mr. X is a Y," yet (22) and (23) have a very different meaning from (24). (22), if true, is not about a real person, on the sense of the sentence. Similarly, (23) cannot be about Mr. Baldwin, for if it were false, it would not be about a real person, and

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[2] Gilbert Ryle, "Systematically Misleading Expressions," published in *The Procedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1931-32).

we expect a sentence to make sense regardless of its truth or falsity. (24), by contrast, is clearly about Mr. O'Neill, who may or may not be the Speaker; the sentence makes sense either way. Paraphrasing (22) becomes rather complicated, as it is in effect a negative existential quantification involving the name "Mr. Pickwick":

> (25) There is no person properly called "Mr. Pickwick."

Language using the term "God" is more complicated still, I suspect, for it invokes a whole complex of ideas like (25), ideas which have not yet as an integrated cluster been uncovered and exhibited satisfactorily.

7.2   Human Senses of "Why"

7.2.1   Aristotle

We have traditionally said that the world exists *because* God created it, that the Sabbath is set aside and holy because of God's commandment, that we celebrate the Eucharist because Jesus instituted it, that we embrace Jesus because we want to be liberated from our sins. We say that the Ten Commandments have the form they do because that form was significant in Ancient Near Eastern culture, and that Jesus preached an apocalyptic message because apocalyptic conceptuality was ready to hand as no other was. We ask *why* do we call the Eucharist "the Eucharist," why do sacraments have a form and matter, why did Jesus have to die, why do I have to fast some days, why did God lead the Israelites the long way around through the desert. We ask why do you drive instead of take the bus, why does wet wood not burn, why does the moon appear larger near the horizon than high in the sky, why did the evangelists tell us Jesus had risen, why did the Philistines give the Hebrews a set of gold mice and gold tumors when they returned the Ark of the Covenant, why do metals conduct electricity, why does the Nile flood every year, and so on. All this and much more "why" and "because" language we inherit and know instinctively how to use correctly.

We use why-because language of both humans and of God, and if we investigate into the senses of this language, it will be possible to see that it does very different things in different situations. While the uses speaking of human actions are relatively straightforward to illuminate, the uses of why-because language speaking of God will turn out to require a very different understanding. Why-because language when used of God has the form of language of explanation, but not the function of explanation. If we try to make sense of it as explanation language, as we can make sense of why-because language used of humans, we run into insurmountable difficulties. Accordingly, we shall turn to investigate its function of confession, asking just what it does to and for us when we use it. We shall discover that our conventional God-language both confesses our faith and also purports to explain the world and man. We intend the former but not the latter, and I do not know of language which will successfully do what and only what we intend.

Yet several senses of "why" and "because" are meant here, and sometimes more than just one. Why-because language reports both cause and purpose, and if we sort out the senses of this language, we shall be able to make sense of some problems in theology which are particularly acute today. Aristotle classified the senses of "why" and "because" (or "why" and "cause", *ti* and *aitia*) in the *Posterior Analytics*, Book II, ch. 11. He lists definable form, logical necessity, efficient cause, and final cause.

Definable form, as in "Why is the union of the segments joining three points a triangle only when the three points are non-colinear? – Because it's a definition" need not detain us. Logical necessity, as in "Why do the angles of a triangle add up to 180 degrees? – Because it follows from the Parallel Postulate" will not bear on theological language either. (One might ask how to classify "Why is there only one line parallel to a given line through a point not on that line? – It's an axiom." It fits not altogether comfortably under definable form; Aristotle's classification may need more revisions at the hands of language philosophy than just the ones I shall propose here.)

Aristotle cites as a case of efficient or prior cause events in the

Persian War. "Why did the Athenians become involved in the Persian War? – Because they had raided Sardis with the Eretrians." He cites as a case of final cause, "Why does one take a walk after supper? – For the sake of one's health."

7.2.2   A Modern View

I would like to revise this scheme along lines suggested by R. G. Collingwood.[3] He lays out three senses of "cause". In the sense of "cause" used in history and related disciplines, what is caused is the "free and deliberate act of a conscious and responsible agent, and 'causing' him to do it means affording him a motive for doing it." In the sense of "cause" used in the applied and some of the pure sciences, what is caused is "an event in nature, and its "cause" is an event or state of affairs by producing or preventing which we can produce or prevent that whose cause it is said to be." In the sense of "cause" obtaining in others of the pure sciences, the relation of cause and effect is more complicated. They must satisfy the logical condition that the case of cause without the effect does not occur, as well as other conditions which may serve to distinguish between the cause and effect, into which we need not go here. Both the scientific senses of causation deal with occurrences in nature, where human motive is not an issue, but human motive is pivotal in the historical sense of "cause". The purpose of investigating why-because language when used of humans is to enable us to compare that usage with usage of God, particularly the usage in which we speak of God as "acting" in history and human lives.

   I contend that Aristotle's efficient and final cause are both subcases of Collingwood's historical causation, as both Aristotle's cases involve human motivation. Thus, while the Athenians went to war because of prior events, they could have simply surrendered and been sold into slavery; it was in order to avoid such an eventuality and to secure the fruits of victory, here independence from Persia, that they went to war.

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[3] See the discussion in *An Essay on Metaphysics* (Chicago, Henry Regnery, 1972; the original edition was by Oxford University Press, 1940), pp. 285-290.

On this analysis, both the Persian War and a walk after supper are not "caused" at all but done for a purpose. One might also say that the walk after supper was "caused" by the prior event of the supper. We answer the question "Why" by citing either the antecedent conditions affording a motive for the action or by citing the future conditions sought, the motive itself, according as we believe one or the other is of pertinent interest.

It is of course true that when one knows another's preferences and purposes, one can produce or prevent a state of affairs which the other will take as affording motive for some action which one wishes to produce or prevent. In this sense, it is possible to "cause" another's action. But only if one considers human preferences and future purposes to be fixed in natural law is it possible to "reduce" final cause to efficient cause. Claims that human motivation is determinate in a way that is practically predictable are not convincing. Such claims may work at a statistical level, or partially for an individual, but no general theory has been advanced to account for causation of human behavior at an individual level. I would hardly suggest that such a theory is impossible; not after pleading repeatedly for the universal possibility of explanation of natural phenomena, which is after all, the most fundamental presupposition of the sciences. I would, however, suggest that human nature is unlikely to be as simple as our present level of theorization is capable of comprehending. Recent developments which lead to this suggestion are for example the theorems in computer science to the effect that there is no general way to predict the outcome of programs on at all interesting computers, except to run those programs. Thus, while the processes are determinate at every step, and even of finitely many steps, prediction is impossible in principle. If this analogy holds for human beings (and we know sufficiently little about the human brain that such analogy is at best a guess), then there is no way to predict what another person will do except to wait for him to do it.

I digress this far into the matter of human motivation in order to defend the distinction between, and legitimacy of, both cause and purpose as answers to the question "Why?" In the examples Aristotle cited it was possible to cite both prior event conceived as cause, and also

subsequent (future) desired condition conceived as purpose. I suspect that for human questions, both answers are in general possible.[4] The ready availability of one kind of answer has often been falsely adduced as evidence of the impossibility of the other kind of answer.

7.3   Why-Because Language Used of God

7.3.1   God as Agent

We use why-because langauge of God in at least two prominent ways, when we speak of God as acting, in history and in our lives, and when we speak of the will of God for us. Events in history happened because God acted to bring them about, and we do some things and not others because it is God's will. Yet we run into troubles even without examining this language too closely. Compare,

> "Be strong and stand firm; be fearless, be undaunted when you face the king of Assyria and the whole horde he brings with him, since he that is with us is stronger than he that is with him. He has only an arm of flesh, but we have Yahweh our God to help us and fight our battles." The people took heart at the words of Hezekiah king of Judah. (2 Chron. 32.7-8, Jerusalem Bible)
> Yahweh says this: For the three crimes, for the four crimes,

> of Judah, I have made my decree and will not relent: because they have rejected the Law of Yahweh and failed to keep his precepts, because the false gods which their

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[4] Margaret A. Boden, in *Purposive Explanation in Psychology* (Harvard University Press, 1972), has argued at length for the legitimacy of both causal and purposive discourse in psychology. Mary Midgley, in *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature* (Cornell University Press, 1978), argues for a conception of human nature grounded in the natural sciences yet which fosters the notions of human dignity and human values rather than fights them. Both arguments are digressions far afield from the pesent discusssion of language we use of God, yet both bear a close kinship to the present discussion.

> ancestors followed have led them astray, I am going to
> hurl fire on Judah to burn up the palaces of Jerusalem.
> (Amos 2.4-5, Jerusalem Bible)

Can both be right? Both call on the name of God; one, that God
will fight for Judah and against the Assyrians, the other, that God
will sack Jerusalem by means of the Assyrian horde; no other than
Assyria can be intended by Amos, for there is no other power capable
of such an act when he writes. Others prophets after him interpret
the defeat and exile of Judah in the same light, far more than follow
Hezekiah. Hezekiah stands out as an exception to the weight of the
prophetic message. It would of course be possible to harmonize these
passages, saying that both were right; for Amos does not explicitly
specify the Assyrians, Jerusalem does eventually fall, but Sennacherib
is humiliated and defeated by an angel of Yahweh and then murdered by
some of his own children; Jerusalem is saved, if only for a time. But all
attempts to harmonize these texts are at odds with basic presuppositions
of critical study; on any fair principles of interpretation, Amos and
Hezekiah are of quite contradictory views, and we may not adduce
the action of God to explain the events or the texts. Refraining from
adducing God as explanation is a presupposition, justified only by the
fruit it brings in its efficacy to foster other explanations. So who was
right? We shall find that Amos and Hezekiah were using language
to do something quite different than explain, if they also intended to
explain. We shall be able to look at what they, and we, do in such
language in a some suggestive detail.

Critical history assumes in the principle of correlation that histori-
cal events are defined and demarcated by other intramundane historical
events. It has no place for intervention from outside the web of his-
torical causality, and has no patience with rejoinders that historical
causality is different from scientific causality, or that not even in sci-
ence does causality obtain everywhere. If we are to embrace critical
history, the principle of correlation comes as part of the package. Gor-
don Kaufmann's discussion, noted above, bears inspection.

> For example, is it even possible, any more, to think clearly
> what is meant by the "virgin birth"? It might be supposed

that this idea is clear enough: it involves conception with-
out the activity of a male partner.   But how are we to
think of such a conception?   Are we to suppose that at
some point a male sperm appeared within Mary's womb,
there fertilizing an egg?   If so, how are we to think of
this? Were the requisite number of atoms and molecules
created instantaneously and out of nothing within Mary's
body and somehow infused with life? How is it possible
to conceive this in view of the assumptions (indispensable
to science) about the conservation of mass-energy, and of
the slow evolution of life? . . .   I am far from contending
that any or all of these questions can or need be answered;
my point is that the way we have come to think of concep-
tion and birth under the tutelage of modern biology makes
it inevitable that such questions will arise. For we cannot
clearly think . . .   what an event without prior finite causes
and conditions would be, . . .   and so, no matter at what
point in the process of conception and birth we begin, we
inevitably and necessarily inquire about the antecedent
conditions. . . .   That is, for us, all chains of events, such
as the growth of the boy Jesus, presuppose preceding
chains of events, such as the development of Mary's preg-
nancy, and these in turn presuppose other chains; and this
continuous recursive movement may not be halted simply
arbitrarily. The question, then, is whether it is even possi-
ble to conceive clearly the idea of a supernaturally caused
event, or (what is the same thing) the occurence of a finite
event without adequate finite causes, or whether such a
notion is not quite as self-contradictory as the notion of a
square-circle.[5]

Our task here is not to beat the dead horse of biblical literalism, nor
is it to answer any of the rationalizations which could be advanced
in defence of such literalism. I think that at some point each such

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[5] Gordon D. Kaufmann, *God the Problem* (Harbard University Press, 1972), p.
130, n. 11.

rationalization simply cuts off the process of inquiry into antecedent causes. Our task here is to examine what we were doing with such language in the first place, and to try to find other ways of doing that. Incidentally, the writers who framed the biblical narratives never intended that they should be picked apart by people seeking antecedent causes; the problem we face is wholly of modern origin. On one level, the problem can be solved quite simply, by noting that Luke has very specific things to say about Jesus and his significance by means of the birth narratives, and that that significance can be stated other ways.

But the problem re-asserts itself when we consider the larger claim that Jesus is God's act in history, or that the liberation at the Exodus or from the Exile were God's acts in history. For in these larger cases, we seem to be in grave difficulty if we want to claim any divine significance for these events unless we can construe them as God's actions. Because in the small, as with the virgin birth, the claims of God's action are no longer given literal credence, we lose the ability to credit God in the larger scheme of history, and so we find that the bible has grown "strangely silent" among us. To be sure, we can, as I have contended, embrace history and so recover a story of faith—quite staggering faith—but where does that leave us when we want to speak about God? For critical history has no place for God in the stories it tells.

If we try to imagine God's purpose in history without God's action in history, we are again in trouble, for I do not readily see how purpose can be conceived without accompanying action and agency. Agency is in effect synonymous with causality, in a scientific sense, as well as in a simply historical sense. Even the historical sense of cause which Collingwood expounds is dependent on a prior scientific causality, for how can anyone, man or God, afford somebody a motive for doing anything, (the historical sense of cause cited above) without that "affording" manifesting itself in some form as palpable natural phenomena, which must be caused in one of the senses of the sciences, i. e., by producing or preventing some event or state of affairs? To say that God does it "spiritually" is simply to defy attempts to explain.

7.3.2   God Not as Agent

W. G. Pollard has noted that scientific causality does not explain all the events in nature, and that at the quantum level, it explains very little. His remarks are found in his review of Monod's *Chance and Necessity*, and there he explains very well the difference between causality and chance.[6] A phenomenon is random if, for whatever reason, we choose not to inquire into its antecedent causes. A phenomenon may be random for the purposes of one science, such as the statistical mechanics of the motions of gas molecules, but determinate for another, as in the classical mechanics of the motion of those same gas molecules. What is determinate for psychology is random for sociology. Some phenomena are intrinsically random, as in quantum mechanics, where no inquiry into antecedent causes can succeed. Pollard would introduce the agency of God at the point of quantum randomness, saying that God influences events in the small to the end of influencing events in the large, rather like the computer embezzlers who stole large fortunes by forcing fractions of a penny always to be rounded down, and deposited the resulting accumulation in their own accounts. This seems to me again simply to defy the rubric that one may not introduce God into nature as an explanation of anything.

How, then did we get this rule in the sciences, that God is not an explanation for anything? If Michael Foster is correct, it came from the Christian doctrine of the creation.[7] Science assumes at a fundamental level that the world is real, intelligible, and good. These assumptions are made in contrast to different views held in Greek, and in particular, Aristotelian, philosophy and science. The crisis of the seventeenth century issued in precisely a repudiation of certain

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[6] William G. Pollard, "A Critique of Jaques Monod's *Chance and Necessity*," *Soundings* 56 (1973) 433.

[7] Michael Beresford Foster, "The Christian Doctrine of Creation and the Rise of Modern Natural Science," *Mind* XLIII (1934). Two more articles followed in 1935 and 1936. This article is reprinted in O'Connor and Oakley, *Creation, the Impact of an Idea* (New York, Scribner's, 1969). The same thesis may be found in Stanley L. Jaki, *The Origin of Science and the Science of its Origin* (South Bend, Regnery/Gateway, 1978). Jaki is useful for his bibliography, but his case is less detailed and less carefully or temperately argued than Foster's.

Aristotelian elements in philosophy and physics. The end of Foster's argument is that because God is a free and reasonable creator, to understand his creation, we must inspect it (empirical method), and we are guaranteed its intelligibility by his reasonableness (rationality). It further follows, since God is omnipotent, that if he puts matter under laws, those laws are obeyed always: there are no exceptions. A corollary of this is that the scientist need look nowhere but within nature for the causes and explanations of events within nature. And so there is no little irony here, for out of the Christian doctrine of creation has come the very principle used to attack it. This principle was first applied in physics and astronomy, and from there extended slowly to the other sciences. People in the church, watching the attacks on theology, and watching the extension of this principle, have observed that God was being progressively squeezed out from the world as we know it. Some hoped to defend a fortress impregnable against the ravages of the principle that God is no explanation, others sought a notion of God which could yield to that principle.

7.4   What God-Language Does

7.4.1   Performative Language

Causal language used of God breaks down if pressed in every instance. The problem becomes acute when evil is considered. I have contended that the distinctions between good and bad and between right and wrong are different, a difference which I did not pause to defend. It remains that some behavior which we attribute to God when we speak of him causally is not behavior we would approve of in humans. If a person has to face some limitation and contingency, we used to say that God had imposed on him that contingency in order to test him, to give him an opportunity, or to bring about some other good. To that extent, our language was in fact true to our faith, for we did and do trust that good will come out of all limitations. But in ascribing those limitations to God as their agent we put God in a position exactly like a child-beater. When human parents break their children's legs

in order to test them, or to strengthen them, or to teach them, or for any other purpose, however good, we are not very sympathetic. We tend to regard such behavior not merely as wrong, but as sick. To use the same language of God is to make him The Great Child-Beater in The Sky. Such talk ends by defeating the very thing it intended to foster, the trust which looks confidently though with clear eyes and without illusions for good in all of life, the "bad" parts included. If the language we use says something different from what we mean, how are we to answer those who ask, "Why do you talk the way you do?"

Let us look at what our language *did* for us, and see just how it involves and commits us. If we speak of God and the world as we have been acustomed to, then we are committed to see the world as good, a gift, the truth as true regardless of our liking or thinking, the world as real regardless of our views on it, and life as good regardless of our current feelings about it. We felt that we could infer that God "does things" in the world, sometimes, or all the time, or everywhere, variously in various interpetations. The commitments we would like to continue, but not the metaphysics in the notion of God as acting causally in the world.

We acknowledge God's glory and holiness, his authority and promise, and we commit ourselves accordingly. Donald Evans has worked out the performative function of biblical language of creation along the lines suggested for performatives by John L. Austin.[8] His major emphasis is on the performative function of the language ascribed in the Bible to God; I shall be interested instead in the performative function of the human ascribing of this language to God. First, we ascribe authority to God, and so put ourselves under obedience to him. Thus his word has what Evans calls *exercitive* power: it accomplishes what it announces, as in the Priestly creation account, in which God creates by his word; utterance of words has effects in the material world. We do not delay here to inquire whether the authors and first readers of this account read it "literally" or in some sense "figuratively." The exercitive force of God's word is manifest primarily in the Law, which is law precisely because he says it is. God's word is also

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[8] Donald D. Evans, *The Logic of Self-Involvement* (London, SCM Press, 1963)

what Evans calls *verdictive*: it has the force of a verdict. "This is what the Lord Yahweh showed me: a basket of ripe fruit: 'What do you see, Amos?' he asked. 'A basket of ript fruit,' I said. Then Yahweh said, 'My people Israel is ripe for destruction; I will no longer overlook its offenses.'" (Amos 8.1-2)

Most prominent is the *commissive* force of God's word: he promises and so commits himself to Israel. To Abraham, he promises land, an heir, descendents more numerous than the stars, blessing, and through him, blessing for all peoples. He promises the monarchy to David and to his dynasty for ever. In the covenant of the Law, he promises blessing, though here, the covenant includes a reciprocal promise on the part of Israel. Over and over, in many ways, he says, "I will be your God and you will be my people."

7.4.2   What We Do in Speaking of God

In ascribing these words and above all these promises to God, Israel commits herself in turn to see the world and the blessings she experiences in a certain way, quite apart from the explicit reciprocal promises she undertakes in the 613 commandments of the Torah. While Evans notes the *commissive* force of the explicit commitments undertaken by Israel in the Bible, I would contend that a far more significant commisive force is operative in the ascription of promises to God. In this ascription we see life and the world as a gift, not as something which we found, stumbled upon, stole, own as a possession by right, or endure as hostile or indifferent. This is not to ascribe *to the world* an animate and purposive benevolence. On the contrary, it is to describe the world as like God's house just as small children live in their parents' house. The furniture and appliances are thereby deprived of all animate or wild status, though they are not thereby conceived as animately benevolent. Instead, though some appliances are dangerous, their danger is safe in that they are Daddy's. We children treat them with respect, perhaps as "off limits"; that does not invest their danger with animateness, precisely the opposite, it deprives it of any such animateness.

Obviously, despite the thoroughness of the vision of the world as God's gift, this vision (Evans calls it an *onlook*) does not lose the distinction of God's gifts from Ben's or Joe's or Sally's gifts. We look on life *as* a gift; that does not mean we expect "life" to arrive in the morning mail; literally, that kind of language is like "colorless green ideas" which "sleep furiously." In an onlook, when we say we look on X as Y, what we are doing is saying that, for pertinent purposes, X and Y share some characteristics of interest. What is pertinent, what is of interest, what those characteristics are, are all left unspecified. They are usually obvious, even if the labor of spelling them out would be enormous; that is the work of philosophers.

The language we use affords us great economy of words, and the term "God" and the rules for its correct usage are one of the most powerful economies of language we have. In fact, we can enjoy these economies of language without having to specify what language we would use if we had to do without them. That makes language both wonderful and mysterious! Yet this "feature" of language also carries a peril, as when we not only ignore as obvious those aspects in which X and Y differ, though we look on X as Y, but also forget and lose the ability to recall the aspects in which X and Y differ. We can forget that the simile of X and Y is an onlook especially when we do not have language or conceptualities for dealing with X without the aid of the onlook. I think much biblical language has suffered this fate in the modern world.

What would we do if we found language which will do what we intend— commit us to an attitude toward life and the world—without also appearing to subscribe to a metaphysics we do not hold to? We would have to adopt such language, I think. Failure to do so would be performative of uncommitment where we intend commitment, or of subscription to a metaphysics we claim we repudiate. We are in a predicament until we find such language, for we want to be like our forefathers, who see life as a gift, yet we want also an honesty which raises grave difficulties in speaking of a giver. The rub comes in language in which we say "Thank You," language which is the ultimate performative of an onlook seeing life as a gift. Failing performative

language which is at least as powerful, we shall be like the Israelites who said to Moses, "Were there not graves enough in Egypt, that you must lead us out to die in the wilderness?" The course we embark on will indeed take us through a linguistic desert. The options open to us that I can see fall into several categories, of which these are paradigmatic examples:

(26) I look on the world as good

(27) The world is good

(28) In this good world, . . .

(29) God made the world good.

(26)-(28) are of increasingly strong performative force, not by gradation of vocabulary, but by virtue of differences of form. (29) is at least of the strength of (28), and allows us a general way of making the claim that is presupposed in (28). (26) by its form considers the goodness of the world as a proposition for discussion, and acknowledges that others may not affirm it. (27) states the goodness of the world and so tenders it as a proposition for discussion, though it does not acknowledge that others may differ. (28) presupposes the goodness of the world, and then goes on to say whatever is of interest. By putting the goodness of the world in a presupposition, where it is beyond question, it makes an immensely stronger statement than (26) or (27). (29), invoking God, I suspect converts the strength of (28) into a form which may be used in many conceptual and syntactic contexts. The name of God now invokes not only the goodness of the world, but also a whole host of other related propositions; this is the immense power of God-language, It is language of this power which we seek, language which maintains our ties with history and God-language, which commits us as strongly as possible, and which says what we mean and not something else.

We seek language which will enable us to find good in all of life and not only some of it, and which will enable us to maintain our ties with our religious history. We would interpret all of life and the

world as humanly significant, yet not blind ourselves to our hand in that interpretation, and we would also stake our future on vindication of that interpetation. What form could such vindication take? We have ruled out any principle or process in the universe which will "take care" of us, for there are no reasons to assume any such process. And if there were such a principle or process, it would not be what we intended by "God", yet we find that however we speak of God, he is misinterpreted as just such a natural principle or process. The problem displays itself paradigmatically when we want to inform and enliven a life of prayer.

Worse than these problems, how can we be vindicated at all, when we all die, and when the causes for which we live all die? We stake our future on the possibility of looking on life as good and a gift; it is difficult to see how that possibility can fail. It may be that the vindication we seek is in our faith itself.

Perhaps we shall be without a "concept of God" for a while; there are strong precedents in the Old Testament for doing without. When Moses asks God his name, he receives a very cryptic reply which is not a name at all, though it is turned into one. It is variously translated as "I am who I am," or "I shall be there as who I am shall I be there." (Exodus 3.14)[9] W. A. Irwin has somewhere translated God's answer as "'I Am' is who I am." The E source has here risen above the sophistication of even the Priestly redactor! For the author of this passage realizes that God is not like the gods, that despite having a name, for our syntactic convenience, there is no easily grasped referent to the term "God." Instead, we are up against our sense of the need to respond in faith and gratitude, and the very lack of someone to be grateful *to* imparts our faith and gratitude its character of mystery.

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[9] John Courtney Murray, S. J., *The Problem of God* (Yale University Press, 1964), pp. 6, 10.

Chapter 8

Some Things to Do

8.1 Teaching and Learning History

8.1.1 Good News and Bad News

Embracing history, relativity, and pluralism will take us on a course whose end is not clear and whose way is not always easy, though I think, as I have said in Chapter 6, that the rewards will be apparent early. It is much easier to continue as we are, doing little or nothing to actually meet history, relativity, and pluralism, yet protesting, if any inquire, that we strongly endorse them all. Seminary graduates invariable, when asked, express the devout hope that the laity will all become better informed theologically and historically and biblically. Yet when the time comes to motivate such learning, it is much easier not to disturb or disedify the faithful. In a sense, I am being unfair to the clergy, because though they are complicit in the general ignoring of critical history and the theological questions of relativity which it opens up, the laity are just as much to blaim for demanding to be left undisturbed. The laity make this demand not explicitly, but by silence and incomprehension when critical ideas are broached; this kind of passive opposition is much harder to deal with than outright and explicit rejection. Yet as the oldest child is told, "You are not more at fault, but because you knew better, you are more responsible," so

shall those be held more responsible who have seminary educations and have the knowledge to share. It is painful to speak out when the message is that the "traditional" easy and sure answers are simply mistaken, without giving new answers and a new certainty and security to replace the old. Nevertheless, any who accept critical history (seminary graduates, necessarily) must believe that this is the proper and truthful message. It is a message the more difficult for clergy to broadcast because it undermines the traditional legitimation of the special place and leadership of the clergy. Yet Christianity is meant not to deny ambiguity and insecurity, but to help people face and find good in ambiguity and insecurity. It is not properly in the business of supplying certainty and security; instead, Christianity belongs on the side of those atheists who have insisted that in this world there is no such security; otherwise, how can it claim good news is to be found in that insecurity?

8.1.2   Popularizing Critical History

Let us look, then, at some of the things we might do now to fulfill the commitments we make when we accept history, relativity, and pluralism. Often, we have done nothing because we could not think of anything to do, and could not think why it is so important to meet history, though we knew we ought to do something.

If we say we believe that honest history is critical history, and if we say that as Christians we care about our ties to history, then we must teach and learn history, and do so at a popular level. It is not necessary that every layman know all the details or the latest controversies and speculations from critical research, but it is necessary that he know the general shape and outlines of critical results. Only by seeing what follows from critical presuppositions is it possible to see what those presuppositions entail – that is so simple as to be tautologous. If we only endorse critical history, but never learn it, then we are free to go on living in a world in which God intervenes "magically."

How are we to go about teaching critical history? It is a big task, involving the re-learning of a whole concept of what the world was

like in ancient times, and the learning of a whole new understanding of the documents we have from those times. Yet the world we learn about is the same world familiar to us in modern times, and the documents we receive are not so altogether unlike modern documents. There is a paucity of teaching materials from a critical perspective, though that shortage is being corrected slowly. Much teaching must still be done with lectures by someone who has a seminary education, but we have such a person in every parish. The burden of the work is not in presenting the historical results. It is in preventing misunderstandings which persist in reading a literal and mythical sense into the texts. This mythical sense pervades the texts in so thorough a way that it will be a major task to eradicate it.

Lest any say that critical history is too hard, beyond our strength or beyond our reach, forever sequestered in technical scholarship, and lest any ask, who will go and get it for us, so that we may hear it and learn it, an example may be cited in which critical history has been popularized easily. The *Newsweek* cover story for Christmas 1979 presented a summary guide through the current state of scholarship on the life and teaching of Jesus.[1] *Newsweek* explained that the gospels are theology rather than history, and explained just why so little can be relied as literal history. It gave some sense of the distinct theologies of the Evangelists. The whole was presented with a fair account of some of the more radical appraisals of the Gospels an account remarkably complete for its brevity. The writers allowed a good news in the Gospel accounts, in spite of the cultural differences between the first and twentieth centuries, and did so using considerably less theological machinery than that developed in chapters 1 and 2 above. It is thus not too difficult to popularize critical results in a way which is both comprehensible and unthreatening. No, the good news in critical history is not far away or abstract, it is close at hand, and close to our hearts, if only we have the will to learn it.

Most of all, the major work will be in finding ways to explain not only that such-and-such happened, but that it was an instance

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[1] Kenneth L. Woodward, Rachel Mark, and Jerry Buckley, "Who Was Jesus?", *Newsweek*, 24 December 1979, p. 48.

of humans finding opportunity and good in an apparently indifferent or hostile world, and finding ways to "language" the faith whereby they received that opportunity and good. We might institute festivals celebrating the major redactors of the Pentateuch, for we know more about them, even though we do not know their names, than we know of many who are only names, yet enjoy red letter day observances. Similarly, we might celebrate the evangelists in ways which bring out their distinctive theologies, rather than continue tacitly to permit the notion that they all tell the same story. We might celebrate the heroes of critical history, instituting some remembrance for Troeltsch, Wellhausen, Bultmann, Gunkel, Weiss, Wrede, and so on. Since we do not have the perspective of time on these men's contributions, we need make no claim that future generations will concur in our estimate of their significance. Yet families remember their departed faithful, and if we consider these men to be part of our "family," we are entitled to honor them accordingly. They have been the real pioneers, making possible faith for us where otherwise we might be left with neither faith or language of faith at all. That is a major debt of gratitude, but one we can certainly afford to honor.

8.1.3   The Story of Creation and Man

When we tell the story of creation, we can borrow the latest and best astrophysical cosmology, just as the Yahwist and Priestly editors borrowed the best science from their contemporaries. In so doing, we obviously acknowledge its tentative character, but this should be no problem if we intend to encourage accommodation to ambiguity rather than denial of it. We do not say God *made* or *created* the world, the world simply came into being; here we use directly the language we receive from the sciences. The whole concept of God *acting* in history is a mythological one. Even if we do not have ways to see good in history while at the same time clearly acknowledging the intramundane character of all that happens in history (and nature), we shall never get such language if we do not acknowledge our need and desire for it. If we insist on finding good and receiving it with gratitude *only* when we

can describe it comfortably within a mythological world-view (which means almost never in the present), we shall never in our lives or history find good to which we can unhesitantly respond in gratitude. As we tell the story of creation, there are many opportunites in the inanimate history which offer striking parallels to faith in human history later on; when the earth's atmosphere was poisoned with oxygen (and the first anaerobic life did find oxygen poisonous), there developed an aerobic metabolism which far from finding "bad" in that disaster, found in it the opportunity to extract significantly more energy from each gram of carbohydrate consumed. When we come to evolution, we do not claim that it is directed by God; this was settled in the last century, for any who cared to inquire into the pertinent science. The rubric for interpretation is not "God made and directed it," but "It developed itself, like a game with its own rules, and God is willing to play." Parents enter into the games their children invent – here we can still use the analogy of human family relations to describe our relations with God! When we come to anthropology and the history of religion, we acknowledge simply that the concept of God is a human invention. As we work out explanations of our faith in the present, we shall increasingly start with a phenomenological description of our human activity of faith, for that seems to be the only place we can make any headway.

When we come to the history of Israelite religion, we teach nothing that has to be unlearned later; and so it might be well to begin with the stories in 1 and 2 Samuel, and the crisis of the monarchy, telling how the Yahwist and his contemporaries came to put together the J material in the Pentateuch and the related material such as the Succession Narrative. These stories were collected to hold a kingdom together and to remind it of its duty, a theme the very stuff of children's stories. As the story progresses, all the stages can be told, moving both backward to the Exodus and forward to the Exile. Perhaps other pedagogical schemes would work as well. I offer this one as a way of starting with what is manifestly historical. It seems to me there is no need to leave an intramundane history for a mythological world-view at any stage in the story, in the Old or New Testaments.

8.2   Living With Relativity

If we acknowledge relativity, we cannot really go on talking as if God has a "plan" for our lives. If we are to attribute to him any will at all, it seems clear that we must say that he wants us to make up our own minds, and live with the consequences of our actions, on our own responsibility. When we do something, we must then clearly admit that it is we who decided to do it. For example, the discussion of marriage today reeks of the language which attributes to God the origin of the institution of marriage. Marriage seems to be the issue which preoccupies many people as the most salient test of their Christian faith. We search for ways to hold marriages together, to build marriages that will stay together, to deal with marriages which are in all fairness impossible to continue, and doing all these consistently is not going to be easy. Some desperately want to say that the solution we finally settle on is not our doing but God's. Others, who acknowledge the relative and human origins of marriage, have trouble seeing God present in this issue at all. To be sure, we want marriages that stay together, and this goal is second to few, if any, other goals in ordering human sexuality. But can we really plausibly assert that we are incapable of pursuing our goals without the supporting bad faith and alienation of deceiving ourselves that some invisible powerful being has preferences in the matter? If we want stable marriages, there is nothing to stop us from having them. Attributing the responsibility to God is not only bad faith but also a defence against that exposure which reveals in a broken marriage partners who did not really want what they said they wanted, stability and life-long commitment. A thorough commitment to accepting exposure would go a long way to bringing out the difficulties in a marriage; a commitment to accepting limitation makes it possible to live together; and accepting each other's need will sustain the whole enterprise – the whole idea would work out in its details remarkably like a traditional Christian theology of marriage. Yet there is no need to pretend that God has written the rules for this human institution. Some may say that admitting the human hand in framing human institutions takes away their mystery, but I think that once axiomatic human commitments are identified, their axiomaticity

will carry quite enough mystery without having to engage in bad faith
– mystification – as well. And if we could get it out of our heads that
God invented marriage, we might be able to approach the difficult and
sticky task of creating a theology of marriage (and divorce), which we
desperately need.

More generally, in the world-view we live with, we cannot in
good faith live with two worlds, one mythological, ascribed to the
ancient world, in which God comes to us, and the other "everyday,"
un-mythological, in which there is no language for describing the
encounter with God. We can maintain both, and bend and distort
language and experience to make the everyday world fit the categories
of the mythological – but that is not a very effective strategy, and it
leaves vast areas of everyday life untouched. Claiming that we live in
a mythological world when it is clear to all but the dullest observers
that we do not is unlikely to impress many. To have two worlds, in
only one of which God meets us, while we live most of the time in the
other, is effectively to shut ourselves off from God.

8.3   Meeting our Neighbors

Ecumenical worship services have never attracted very many people
in my experience, and they have always left me feeling that no serious
worship had taken place, though many find such services profoundly
moving. Instead, real pluralism should manifest itself in ways which
respect the traditions instead in trying to mix them all in dilute pro-
portions. It is difficult to imagine events in which everybody can
participate, but some suggestions are possible. An Anglican parish
which wants to maintain a sense of the presence of its neighbors could
send groups as visitors to its neighboring congregations' services, both
routinely and for special occasions. Special occasions could include
other congregations' patronal festivals, or occasions such as Reforma-
tion Sunday or Pesach. Jewish congregations should be included in
such friendships no less than other Christian congregations.

It is also possible to observe others' feasts and fasts, though not as
they do. Thus we would not observe Yom Kippur as a Christianized

festival; what Jews do on Yom Kippur, we do in Advent and Lent. Instead, a very different observance is called for – though a penitential one. The tone would be one showing solidarity and support for the other tradition reckoning with its own sins; obviously, we remember on such an occasion that we have sins enough of our own to repent of. Yet it is not the same thing as our reckoning with our own sins, either. Similarly, there has been a growing interest on the part of Christians for some form of Passover observance. This interest has grown out of several sources, chiefly twentieth century events in Europe and a renewed awareness of the centrality of the Old Testament in the life and interpretation of the New. Yet a Christianized Passover lacks liturgical integrity. Those who are fortunate enough to be invited as guests to a Jewish home for the Seder have a simple solution; but that does not solve the problem for most of us. A proper observance would foster a sense of solidarity with and support for the other tradition, but not seek to repeat its festival. For Christians, the corresponding celebration is at Easter, and it does not make sense to do the "same" thing twice, less so twice in one week. That only makes both celebrations needlessly diffuse.

Closer to home are the Protestant churches, and if we are to foster a sense of the presence of these neighbors, then we need to teach and learn some American Church history on a broader scale than just the history of the Protestant Episcopal Church. We celebrate the feast of John Wesley on March 3; I do not know what if any observance Methodists make. Our own celebration is a little different, for we rightfully claim him as an Anglican, while the Methodists see him as their Father Founder, yet we can be present at their celebrations, even though they remember a prophetic call which the Anglican church as a whole responded to only very badly.

Our contact with Judaism will inevitably raise questions of christology (as well as reciprocal questions regarding the place of the Torah), and some of these questions may not be altogether comfortable. A substantial part of the Synagogue's continuing witness and protest against the Church has been a witness against Docetism, which divinizes Jesus and ecclipses his humanity. The predominant sin of the Church has

been just exactly Docetism. Discussion, by authors such as Rosemary
Ruether and others, has focused on issues of christology, asking how
a place can be made in the Christian "universe" for other traditions,
yet safeguard the absoluteness of Christ's challenge. That there are
not yet definitive solutions is no reason for protecting the laity from
knowledge of these discussions.

Other religions, such as Islam and Buddhism, are in a different
position for several reasons. In the first place, they are a small minority
in America, and most of us do not have Buddhist neighbors to get to
know at all. (California is unusual in this regard; I can think of many
counter-examples quite close to home.) Encounter here may take the
form of study. Oriental conceptualities are quite strange to us, and
we can expect to gain a wholesome outside perspective on ourselves
as well as an appreciation of others from such study. Expecting early
results from such contact is not a good idea, in view of the tremendous
cultural gaps to be bridged. Only a few will feel called to pursue such
studies. What should be obvious common sense is that not everybody
needs to do all of these things. It is necessary, and easy, however, for
local parishes to encourage them all.

Out of contact with other traditions will probably come cooperation
in enterprises which all can share in, such as world famine relief efforts.

It is not clear to me what is our proper relationship to the general
secular population. In one sense, it stands for a kind of diffuse poly-
theism which unequivocally stands under judgement; but in that very
sense, the general population includes Christians. In another sense,
the secular population stands as prophet over against the churches,
protesting in the name of honesty, humility, and catholicity. But since
the secular population is not organized, there is not an obvious way to
meet it. Heeding its prophetic message by embracing history, relativ-
ity, and pluralism would help. I commented on a possible rationale for
evangelism above in the discussion of pluralism in Chapter 6. We do
not engage in religious and cultural imperialism, seeking conversions
by asking converts to abandon their former cultures, but instead invite
others to embrace exposure, limitation, and need in their lives and in
their own way, something which they can do quite well without our

supervision.

These are the things I can think of now which we could do. They will open up other possibilities, naturally. But chiefly, they will foster a spirit of openness to our neighbors, and out of this spirit new projects will grow.

8.4   The Life of the Spirit

For the moment, the ideas advanced here will seem very counter-intuitive, both regarding God as he is, and as we meet him in exposure, limitation, and need. But intuition is a trained thing, and the ideas promoted here are, I think, simpler than the ideas of God and commitment we have all grown up with. I look forward to the day when these ideas will add intuitiveness to their simplicity.

The Christian life is a rich and complex one, and though I have outlined some central ideas in the first two chapters, I have not even touched many areas, such as liturgy, ethics, the life of prayer, eschatology and last things, to name a few.

How is an ethic to follow from the notion that all of life is good and not only some of it, that the essence and origin of sin is to call only some of life good, and other parts bad? That is a question which I do not yet know how to sharpen or answer, yet it must receive at least some tentative answers if we are to see Christianity under the rubrics of calling all of life good. We do not yet know how human actions grow out of perceptions of the world at all. An ethic which grows out of a perception of all of life as good will not be capable of rigidness, though it will necessarily be tough, for it must know resolutely how to look for good even in the "bad."

How we are to deal with death and last things in a post-mythological world is not clear, especially when prominent biblical traditions assume (in the resurrection) a metaphysics we often do not, one in which there is some form of afterlife. Yet there are other biblical traditions which have no concept of the resurrection, and we may find our help in them.

If we go down the road which begins by embracing critical history, there will be no turning back; like Adam expelled from the garden, we

shall find the way back barred. Good explanations are too useful to give up, and we shall not be able to pretend that we do not know what we have learned from critical history. What will we find, how will we feel? We may feel like those whom Exodus reports murmured in the face of Moses and God, afraid to go through the linguistic desert, where we will for some time be without language to speak of God and without conceptuality to think of him. Yet where we are now, we are in bondage, for our present conceptualities offer us scant ability to meet God and only a bare rememberance of our forefathers' freedom. Worse, we do not see ourselves as bound by our language; that is the very mark of slavery.

I end on the life of prayer, because we eventually pray in the same language with which we talk about God. What expression of our new view of God can we look for in our prayers? These may give an idea of what is possible. Some have the form of a Berakah, others the familiar collect form, though recasting them each is easy.

> O Lord our God, you meet us when you show us who we really are; you show us also how we might grow into the fulness of being which you give us. Blessed are you, O Lord our God, king of the Universe, who meet us in exposure.

> O Lord our God, who meet us when you show us who we really are, show us also how we may grow into the fulness of the being which you give us to be, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

> O Lord our God, who meet us in the givens of life as well as its gifts, teach us how we may receive the givens as gifts and opportunities for new life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

> O Lord our God, Lord and Giver of Life, we meet you in our neighbors in need; give us such spirit that we may open our eyes, such vision that we may open our hands,

such diligence and zeal that we may open our hearts, to meet our neighbor in need, that together with him we may find that happy fellowship which is true Life in You. Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who meet us in our neighbor.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who meet us in Exposure, and Limitation, and Need: give us grace always to welcome You, the One God.

Almighty God, as you gave to the man we know only as the Yahwist the grace, imagination, and skill to weld together out of diverse traditions a unity, telling the story how his forefathers found your mighty promises fulfilled in their time, grant to us also the vision and courage and wisdom to see your mighty promises fulfilled in our history; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, who gave to the men we know only dimly as the Priestly Redactors courage in desperate times and vision where others expected only to be confounded, grant us also and always the vision and courage and resolution to see you and your hand when you seem most absent from us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, who gave to the men we know only as the Deuteronomic Editors the skill to regulate the life of Israel: grant us also the wisdom to arrange our lives justly and with generosity, remembering always that our laws are under you but made for us, and not we for them; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty God, who in the man we know only as the Elohist called his neighbors back to you from temptation

on every side, give us also the grace to see true obedience as that love and fear and loyalty which accepts life's dissapointments, no less than its gifts, as blessings from you.

O Lord our God, as it is you who have made us, and not we ourselves, yet we and not you who have made Your Name, look mercifully on us who have no call on you, and grant us always that confidence which you gave to our Lord Jesus Christ, that we too may call on you as Father.

Bibliography

A bibliography is properly exhaustive or normative, listing either all the works bearing on a subject, or all the important works. This is neither, as I have made no attempt to consult all of the pertinent literature. It is instead simply a list of references, for the convenience of listing in one place the sources that have been used.

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