Essays in Unitarian Theology

Edited by Kenneth Twinn

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in
Unitarian Theology

A SYMPOSIUM

Edited by
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PREFACE

ALL spheres of man's activities are confronted with new challenges in each generation. The new truths or new approaches of one field of thought impinge on all the others and often cause a fundamental reorientation, while deeper thinking in any area of man's interests in itself opens up new lines of inquiry. Theology and religious thinking generally are no exception. In the last decade or two challenges of this kind have arisen. Theology may thus be called upon to reconsider some basic doctrine or assumption of its own, to " come to terms " with some new theory or to resist another.

Conscious of this fact, the Council of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches appointed in 1957 a Commission to explore the theological field and to publish, if it felt it possible and desirable, the results of its deliberations. At the outset, the Commission was faced with the difficulty of deciding on the plan: whether to attempt to cover the whole range of theology or to deal with a limited number of themes which demand immediate consideration. The latter was finally agreed upon, though, as a glance at the Table of Contents will show, fundamental issues were treated.

The method of procedure was that, after the subjects had been mutually decided and allocated, each member prepared his paper and presented it to the group as a whole for discussion and criticism, in the light of which the author then emended it as he thought

fit, and submitted it again. No attempt was made to force any article into a mould that would command the agreement of all. Indeed, as will be seen, the members had widely differing approaches and convictions. Some were almost diametrically opposed to others, but these contradictions did not end discussion, because all shared the same spirit of " open-minded certainty " and tolerance, which has characterized the Unitarian movement from the beginning. Respect for others' sincerity and integrity, and the sense of an underlying community of purpose, were conspicuous during the whole of the discussions. For these reasons, too, each paper appears under the name of its author, who alone is responsible for the point of view expressed; and the book is presented not as an authoritative statement of Unitarian belief, but as a basis for further thought among those who share the same desire for honesty, freedom, tolerance and comprehensiveness in religion.

The Commission consisted of:

C. Gordon Bolam, M.A., B.D., Minister of High Pavement Chapel, Nottingham; Fred Kenworthy, M.A., B.D., Principal of the Unitarian College, Manchester; L. A. Garrard, M.A., B.D., Principal of Manchester College, Oxford; E. G. Lee, Editor of *The Inquirer*, Minister of Effra Road Unitarian Church, Brixton; Arthur J. Long, M.A., Minister of Unity Church, Bolton, Lancashire; Leonard Mason, B.A., B.D., Minister of the Great Meeting, Leicester; H. Lismer Short, M.A., Warden and Librarian of Manchester College, Oxford; and Kenneth Twinn, M.A., Minister of Chowbent Unitarian Chapel, Atherton, Lancashire. The last named, then chairman of the

General Purposes Committee of the General Assembly, was ex-officio chairman of the Commission. Though intending not to participate in this symposium, having no pretence to theological scholarship, he was prevailed upon to make a contribution. His paper, " A Personal Affirmation ", was so different from the others that he was urged to present it with little alteration, and it precedes the rest, which are more specialized.

It is hoped, then, that this work will stimulate further thinking among Unitarians and at the same time interest the religious seeker in the theological approach of the Unitarian movement.

On behalf of the Commission,

KENNETH TWINN,
Chairman.

The editor would like to express his thanks for invaluable help on the part of Dr. Dorothy Tarrant in seeing the manuscript through the press.

I

A PERSONAL AFFIRMATION

by Kenneth Twinn

Introduction

What I look for in religion is a system of thought that will give meaning to life—not necessarily that will answer all the questions I might raise, but that will give coherence to my experience of the totality; and a meaning which will at the same time suggest a way of life, involve a *commitment* or categorical imperative (to use whatever may be the jargon of the age), of the whole man. The conclusions I have reached, the system I have evolved, such as it is, is far from complete; it can be shot at from many sides, no doubt. It is not original, but influenced by what I have been taught, by patterns of thinking in which I have been brought up. I confess that I can never ultimately be satisfied with it, and that I ought to keep on examining it and modifying it, but it is something I can live by now. I recognize that it should not conflict with any facts that have been scientifically demonstrated, but equally it must respond to and correspond with all sides of my nature, spiritual and emotional as well as purely rational: my insight as well as my five senses. Therefore it has poetical as well as logical expression.

I was brought up a Baptist, but already in my early

'teens was drifting away from my local church through lack of sustenance for my growing intellectual and other interests; but I continued to attend services at churches of various denominations in my native town. My thinking was at the time being fundamentally influenced by the writings of Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells towards socialism and some vague form of vitalism or creative evolution. I then, quite by chance, visited the Unitarian church, and coming under the spell of the minister's personality, found a community and an atmosphere which allowed—even encouraged—complete freedom to follow truth wherever it might lead, and provided the worship which my natural mysticism, fostered by my earlier upbringing, and the sense of wonder at and reverence for the universe as I was learning about it, demanded. My university training in modern languages and my continued passion for adding to my acquisitions in this field, together with my later education for the ministry and professional exercise thereof, have kept me from becoming a true scholar in either. I make no special claims, therefore, for what I write here. I set down what religion is for me, an ordinary Unitarian minister, thought out over the years, changed and modified by experience and reflection.

God

I use the word "God" to denote that in which "we live and move and have our being". I could well use the word "universe", but it has a "material" connotation which not even the latest theories of physics or astronomy quite succeed in dispelling; and I have a transcending experience for which the only

appropriate epithet is "spiritual", even though I should have much difficulty in defining it satisfactorily for myself, let alone others. I could refer to "reality", but a flatter and more pedestrian word could hardly be found. The only substantive which possesses the overtones and undertones and associations required is God, although many traditional and historical connotations have for me been sloughed off. I come to knowledge of God through science in all its branches, through the recorded experience of the great religious seers and teachers of mankind, through my understanding of art in all its manifestations, but, preeminently, for me, in music and poetry, through communing by my whole being in what we loosely call "nature", through my own mental and moral and spiritual processes. What I find presents me with baffling perplexities, but these do not invalidate my fundamental response. Since I and all that have being, have being in God, God must have in some sense "given" or "created" or "caused" life and all things. Moreover, the whole complex of man's nature, which in its entirety is unique at least on this planet, lifting us above all other species, we call personality; it seems therefore inescapable to me that this supreme quality must be included within God. Whether it is an "emergent" personality, in Samuel Alexander's sense, which did not have existence before its development in the species *homo sapiens*, or as it has been similarly expressed in a very ancient Indian saying, "God sleeps in the stone, breathes in the plant, dreams in the brute and awakes in man", I am not prepared to speculate, but I find it difficult to conceive this to have been the case. I accept the latter image

as the metaphor for the various " levels " of God's self-revelation through his " creation ". My pronoun for God, therefore, is " he ", not because of any implied masculinity, but because of a lack of singular pronoun of common gender in English: grammatically, this would not arise in Hungarian and some other languages, which do not differentiate in gender, but metaphorically it is present in all monotheistic thought. Short of a deliberate manufacture of a requisite pronoun, the only solution is to submit to monotony and treat " God " as both noun and pronoun.

While it is always dangerous to draw logical conclusions from purely poetical expressions, it is, I feel, legitimate to affirm that God's " possession of personality " has a great significance for my relationship to him; and this further invalidates the use of " universe " or " reality " in this connexion. There enters here a profound distinction between my relationship with God and that with the whole universe except man, in which I can find no personality. Therefore I cannot equate or identify God with the universe, but can regard the universe only as an " expression " or " garment " of God. The further distinction between my relationship with God and that with man lies in the " creatureliness " (to use von Hügel's term) of man. Otherwise, there is a close similarity, which allows a wealth of imagery from human relationships to represent the divine–human relationship. Jesus described God as " Father ", and, understood figuratively and poetically, without the limitations of gender (for " parent " lacks the same emotional associations), this term has not been bettered.

Man

The implication follows, likewise, that man is " child of God ". He is this by virtue of that part of his nature which we designate as " spiritual ", i.e., by which he is enabled to perceive truth, love and create beauty, and seek and do good, or, in a word, to make value-judgements and to act in their light. This it is, like his capacity to record and communicate (speech, writing, etc.), which is, however, a concomitant of the former faculty, that differentiates him from all other living beings so far known to him. The possibility that he may share this capacity with beings on some other planet in this or some other solar system, though it may have other implications, does not invalidate the fact. Insofar as he can make such value-judgements, man is free; his perception of truth, appreciation of beauty and understanding of goodness may be relatively undeveloped or clouded by his personal circumstances or impulses from his complex nature; and his action may be likewise influenced. But the act of will arising out of his value-judgement is free. Therein lies the possibility of sin, for to sin is to refuse to act in accordance with the highest one has conceived, whether deliberately or by allowing such influences as I have mentioned to sway one's choice. The sin is not the act in itself but the disposition within that leads to the act. Individual human beings are at different levels of spirituality, from the seers and the saints to the savages and the perverts; and all act at different levels at different times. So that all men are sinners, but many act on occasion like saints or " almost like " saints. Every man is as complex spiritually as he is

complex physically. It is an over-simplification to say that man is " inherently " evil, or even " inherently " good. I am convinced, however, that he has the ability to develop spiritually, both as an individual and as a race, not automatically or inevitably, but only by continually striving. If God is of the nature which I have described, and if his relationship to us is as I have suggested, he offers us his help, if we are willing to accept it, but he cannot, or will not, rob us of our freedom. In the accomplishment of his purpose—and, possessing personality, he must have purpose or purposes: real personality is inconceivable without—God does not coerce us, for this would be a denial of our personality, except that insofar as we may transgress the " laws " of his universe, we must bear the consequences; but invites us to be his free and voluntary co-operators. How, then, are we to know the divine purpose? Does there exist some " blue-print " of God's purpose? This brings us to the consideration of Revelation.

Revelation

In times past, and to some extent to-day, the Bible has been claimed as some such by Christians, the Koran by Muslims, other scriptures by their particular adherents. My response is best expressed indirectly by a positive statement of how I believe God does reveal his purpose. But first, negatively: I do not believe there exists any " blueprint ". Personality is a complex of activity, the various aspects of which we name intellect, reason, judgement, memory, imagination, insight, will, emotion, conscience, reverence, etc. Psychology defines these terms, and sometimes attempts

to " explain them away "; but whatever final scheme of definition and function is formulated, the complex remains, and I believe it is through this complex as a whole that man explores and discovers and understands the reality in which he lives, and interprets God's purpose, and, inversely, God " reveals " himself and his purpose. The natural sciences are one avenue of approach, the activities of the artist are another, the procedure of the seer or prophet is another. All are partial, all are legitimate. The sciences investigate rather the " how " than the " why " or the " for-what ", and for their particular purposes " God " is " an unnecessary hypothesis ", as Laplace rightly said, but the great religious geniuses have given us their illuminating insights, fallible and partial, yet inspiring and cogent. These are to be found pre-eminently, though not exclusively, in the various scriptures; and though I am most at home in the Judaeo-Christian Bible, I recognize and reverence the others also. I can give to none absolute authority, but, while bringing all to the bar of my spiritual judgement, I humbly acknowledge the greatness of these spiritual giants. Of these, Jesus seems to me to be supreme and most fully partaking of that divinity which in varied measure is to be found in all the children of men. Though most of his teachings are paralleled elsewhere, there is no one else who gathers up what I feel to be the most essential, pregnant and creative principles of religion with quite the stamp of authority, nor gives them form and substance through a life of fearless self-dedication and integrity. Thus, while my upbringing in a civilization which has been enormously influenced by Christianity may guide me, I am drawn to discipleship to Jesus and

am pleased humbly to call myself " Christian ". That does not mean that I accept any or all of the dogmas associated with Christianity: indeed, I reject many, but contend that discipleship, not assent to dogmas, is the hallmark of the Christian. Thus, for instance, I cannot bring myself to identify Jesus as " the only-begotten son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father " (Nicene Creed). Jesus, I believe, reveals God, that is to say, uncovers more of the nature of God than was understood before, and partakes wonderfully of that nature, but does not incarnate him in fulness, even within the limitations of humanity. He does indeed spiritually out-top humanity, but he is still a man of the first century of our era, even though that era justifiably dates from him. I am unimpressed by the accounts of miraculous events in the records we have of him: for me they are not only unbelievable, but totally irrelevant. Jesus speaks to my reason, my conscience, my heart, " deep calling unto deep ", and that is enough.

Brotherhood

In the light of all that I have hitherto set down, and especially of the status of man in the universe, the relationship of human beings to one another is of paramount importance for my religion. In our records of the sayings of Jesus there are two, closely associated, which sum up the whole of his teaching: " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength ", and " Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself ". If God is as I understand him, the

supreme prayer is this: " O Thou who art the light of the minds that know thee, the strength of the wills that serve thee, the joys of the hearts that love thee, grant us so to know thee that we may truly love thee, and so to love thee that we may fully serve thee." If man's relationship to God is as I understand it, human beings are bound together by unequivocal ties. If God is best described as our " Father ", we are brothers one of another, and all that frustrates this brotherhood is not only evil but inimical to human life as such, because human life is impossible but in community. In the Parable, the Prodigal Son did not cease to be a son either by separation of distance or of will: it was when he " came to himself " that he returned to his father, and while in his new-found humility he did not presume to acknowledge it, his father received him as his son. Likewise, if we are children of God by virtue of our humanity, we cannot " contract out " of our relationship with each other, however much we may sin against it: indeed, those who are the more conscious of it may be called upon to suffer and to sacrifice on behalf of the unthinking and the evil. In our day and generation the world is becoming in fact so interdependent that the concept of " neighbour " embraces more and more human beings widely separated in distance. At the same time weapons of destruction are becoming more and more efficient, so that war threatens to annihilate the human race. Brotherhood is, however, a personal relationship, and the barriers of language hinder that relationship. That is why I have learnt the international language Esperanto, which brings me into personal touch with men and women of many nationalities, and, potentially, with all.

Nevertheless, my love for my neighbour, i.e., my respect for his personality and desire for his welfare, must begin with those nearest me, for if I cannot live at peace with them, I cannot hope to do so with those of different customs, tradition and background. I do not and cannot love every person as I do my " nearest and dearest ", or even my friends, but I ought to have and could have a " concern " for them in the sense in which the Quakers use that word, or, to quote the striking sentence of John Donne: " No man is an island, entire of itself; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never seek to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." However difficult, I ought to try to realize and act upon this as far as I can.

Eternal Life

There is another implication of the understanding of the nature of God and man which I have outlined here, namely, that man partakes in the eternal life of God, although I have not introduced the word " eternal " before. It is one of those words which logic contemns and poetry cannot do without. The ground of being must be eternal. If the origin of being is difficult to conceive, the *cessation of being* is inconceivable. Things may cease to be, but that which gave them being can " never pass into nothingness ". Our share of the divine nature, then, must include its eternity. This does not merely denote continued existence, but it is qualitative as well as quantitative reality which is also experienced in our

present life " on earth " as well as in an " after-life ". What eternal life means we may speculate about, but never fully understand: it implies, however, that our bodies, which decay, are but a " local habitation ", that there is something of us that persists. I may use the traditional terms " soul " or " spirit ", for without knowing exactly what they connote, I am sure they denote a truth.

The Church

This is a personal confession of faith, but for me the church is an essential institution. While in one sense " religion is what a man does with his solitariness ", " no man is an island ", and men will always need the company of their fellows for companionship, mutual encouragement and inspiration in the things of the spirit. The church is a human institution, and I can never invest it with the supreme authority which a Catholic gives to his church, but it is the vehicle of the wisdom and insight of the ages and is the only institution which exists for that purpose. It can help me to guard against the vagaries and fantasies of excessive individualism in religion because it embodies a tradition, and I owe it loyalty and respect because of what it is. There are churches and churches. I believe that " One holy church of God appears through every age and race, unwasted by the lapse of years, unchanged by changing place ", and I recognize that under various names and concepts " One unseen Presence she adores with silence or with psalm." To that invisible church I belong with all religious people the world over, although I find some practices and beliefs difficult or even impossible to entertain. There

is the Christian church, which has maintained through the centuries something of the revelation of Jesus, although it has also perverted it and has exalted him to a deity which I cannot accept. Nevertheless I belong to that church too, because I have been born and bred in Christendom. I can, however, give my full allegiance only to that organization which calls itself Unitarian, because it offers me the freedom in religious thought and life without which religion is for me a sham, and yet is committed to the pursuit of truth, goodness and beauty with all the discipline without which that pursuit is ineffective, feeble and vain. It is far from perfect, but its well-being depends upon me in company with all others who prize its aims and functions; these I prize so far as to have joined its ministry, but had I not taken that step, I should be called upon to support it as a whole and in whatever congregation there might be in the locality in which I might live.

Conclusion

This is, in brief, what religion means to me. A. N. Whitehead has summed it up in words which express the depth and vastness of what is man's supreme inheritance:

> Religion is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind and within the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real and yet waiting to be realized; something which is a remote possibility and yet the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes and yet eludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal and the hopeless quest.

II

BELIEF IN GOD

by Arthur J. Long

"THERE can be no surer sign of decrepitude and decay in faith than a prevalent nervousness about naming and commending reason, an unwillingness to allude to its existence, except under wrappings of language which suggest that it is but a necessary evil." Such was the opinion of an eminent nineteenth-century scholar.* If he was right, then it is obvious that contemporary faith is in an advanced state of decay. Nowadays there is no God but unreason, and Kierkegaard is his prophet. From the strange, tortured speculations of this nineteenth-century "gloomy Dane" we have, on the one hand, the open irrationalism of the Theology of Crisis ("The object of faith is something which is absurd to reason. . . . The hall-mark of logical inconsistency clings to all genuine pronouncements of faith"),† and on the other, the paradoxes and obscurities of Existentialism. On all sides we see the strain to base religious faith on something other than rational argument, in a pathetic attempt to evade the assaults of non-theistic philosophers.

There is, of course, nothing new in the repudiation of reason in religion. In a sense, it goes back to the Reformation.

* F. J. A. Hort: *The Way, the Truth, the Life*, p. 176.
† E. Brunner: *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 55.

What can be more rationally impossible, laughable, ridiculous [asks Luther] than God's command to Abraham? All the articles of our Christian belief are, when considered rationally, just as impossible and mendacious and preposterous. Faith, however, is completely abreast of the situation! It grips reason by the throat and strangles the beast.*

But from the philosophical standpoint, the " prevalent nervousness " about reason, which takes the form of a repudiation of the traditional metaphysical arguments concerning the nature and existence of God, is commonly held to have begun with the epoch-making speculations of Kant—though there are those who see the first " great betrayal " in the determination of Descartes to doubt everything but his own existence.†

Kant, awakened from his dogmatic slumbers by Hume's *Enquiry*, was ultimately led to the conclusion that pure reason as such could never provide any information on such topics as the nature and existence of God, and the freedom and immortality of the human soul. Such knowledge, he maintained, could come only through what he called practical reason—through moral experience. This substitution of ethics for metaphysics seemed a simple means of disposing of sceptical critics like Hume, and a similar philosophical *tour de force* was repeatedly advocated throughout the nineteenth century. Schleiermacher found his secure basis for religion in feeling—and especially in what he defined as a " feeling of absolute dependence ". For him, rational argument could have no real place in

* Quoted Grace Stuart: *Conscience and Reason*, p. 123.
† See G. Allen: *Tell John*, p. 118.

religion. A religion which sought to penetrate into the nature and substance of things was no longer religion, but some kind of science.* In basing religion on feeling, Schleiermacher believed that he had found something which sceptical philosophers would assail in vain. In this, of course, he was mistaken. As Hegel was to point out, if the essence of religion was a feeling of absolute dependence, then Schleiermacher's dog was more religious than his master. The whole concept of feeling is, in any case, extremely ambiguous, and in defining religion as a feeling of absolute *dependence*, Schleiermacher had in fact given his whole case away. A feeling of dependence can never be a pure feeling. It must obviously contain some element of rational reflexion.†

Another important figure in the story of theological escapism is that of Ritschl. For him, the essence of religion lay not in feeling, but in the will, and he found its true basis in the " value-judgement ". This made him the hero of nineteenth-century Liberal Protestantism and the founder of an influential school of theology, which repudiated Christian dogmatics as an unhealthy intrusion of Greek metaphysics, and called for a return to the simple practical faith of Jesus. From the philosophical point of view, however, the Ritschlian principle of the value-judgement is extremely dangerous. It is all very well to affirm the divinity of Jesus, for example, as a value-judgement, and to dismiss the question of his ultimate nature as irrelevant metaphysical speculation. Sooner or later someone is bound to ask whether Jesus was really God or not—

* Schleiermacher: *Discourses on Religion*, p. 49.
† See G. Dawes Hicks: *Philosophical Bases of Theism*, p. 106.

and once any doubt on the point arises, then he obviously loses the value of God. For Ritschl, the Christian revelation was true because it worked. But many people do not want to know whether it works. They want to know whether it is true. In any case, how can we tell whether Christianity " works " unless we are first agreed on the nature and destiny of man and the purpose of the universe?

Traces of Ritschlianism still persist, despite the contemporary repudiation of the Liberalism which sprang from it. Rudolf Otto's famous book, *The Idea of the Holy*, is, in some respects, an off-shoot of the Ritschlian school—though it should be noted to Otto's credit that he does insist that religion demands convictions about the nature of the world. The contention of many psychological pragmatists that it does not matter whether religion is true or not so long as it is useful, is also good Ritschlianism. Perhaps we can see the ghost of Ritschl, too, in that modern example of theological escapism which takes the form of a tentative acceptance of the strictures of what was once called Logical Positivism, but is now more often known as linguistic analysis. Linguistic analysis, with its insistence that the language of theology is at best prescriptive and not descriptive, and at worst mere nonsense, stems, in a sense, from Kant's repudiation of metaphysics, though by a different route from that which runs through Schleiermacher and Ritschl—and just as Kant accepted the criticism of Hume and attempted to find some other ground of belief, so some modern liberals are quite prepared to surrender to the onslaught of linguistic analysis. It may very well be, they say in effect, that the language of theology is nonsense—but

this does not necessarily invalidate religious belief. It merely serves to remind us that we must seek some non-metaphysical basis for religion—a basis such as feeling or experience—the direct encounter with God, or the numinous awareness which comes at moments of crisis in the cycle of human life.

Unfortunately, this attitude ignores the all-important fact that the linguistic analysts are not the only ones who are sceptical of religious belief. There are also the psychological analysts, and they are just as ready to dismiss so-called religious experience as their philosophical colleagues are to dismiss metaphysical statements. What guarantee have we, after all, that so-called religious experience—even the encounter with God—is anything more than a neurotic delusion? And what about the man who says that he has no such experiences? Are we to conclude that religion has no claims upon him? To accept certain modern critiques of religion, and ignore the equally cogent psychological critiques, is clearly a case of special pleading. If it be argued, on the other hand, that the psychologists have not made out their case, cannot the same be said of the philosophers? In other words, we ought to be prepared to challenge not only the psychologists, but also the philosophers as well. The defeatist notion that rational argument has no place in religion must be rejected. As Professor Leonard Hodgson has pointed out, all real progress in religion has always depended upon the appeal to reason and conscience. The essential unreasonableness of contemporary religion was, for example, the constant theme of the Hebrew prophets, and it was thanks to their influence that a higher and a more reasonable religion ultimately

prevailed.* Of course, everyone in his senses realizes that religion goes beyond reason, that religious language abounds in poetry and symbolism, and is charged with emotional overtones. But if religious belief is to be effective, a rational, logical framework must lie beneath the superstructure. The whole matter turns on the question of objectivity. Any attempt to ground religion on mere feeling or experience leads, in the end, to the dilemma of George Tyrrell:

> As soon as ever I ceased merely to repeat the formulae of religion, and began to translate them into realities, the whole thing vanished as completely as Jack and the Beanstalk; not by reflex reason and argument, but because there seemed no object to lay hold of.†

But, it will be objected, linguistic analysis has demonstrated that the propositions of theology are devoid of meaning. How can logical structure be founded on meaninglessness? But is it really true that the language of theology is without meaning? According to Logical Positivists such as A. J. Ayer, the metaphysical propositions of theology are literally "non-sense" —words without valid significance.‡ Not all linguistic philosophers, of course, go as far as this. For some of them the language of theology is not meaningless, but it is essentially a kind of poetry or exhortation—something prescriptive rather than descriptive, an expression of an inner subjective feeling and a determination

* L. Hodgson: *Towards a Christian Philosophy*, pp. 15, 85 ff., 140 ff.

† *Autobiography* (Ed. E. D. Petre), p. 69.

‡ Cf. *Language, Truth and Logic*, chaps 1, 2 and 6. It should be noted that Ayer has subsequently modified his views to some extent.

to live in a certain way. But it is still commonly held that the most significant modern criticism of metaphysics lies in the Logical Positivist assertion that its propositions are essentially meaningless.* But can it really be seriously maintained that the proposition "God exists" is on a par with such a proposition as "the square-root of minus two is blue"? Surely the most that can be said is that "God exists" is similar to "leprechauns exist". If we are convinced that leprechauns are mythical beings, figments of the imagination, then it is clearly fatuous to maintain that there really are such things, and useless to try to argue about them. But this does not mean that the statement "there are such things as leprechauns" is meaningless. So also with the proposition "God exists". The statement may be ridiculous and irrelevant, but it is not meaningless.

Admittedly, we must define our terms. In the case of the proposition "leprechauns exist" we must know what we mean by a leprechaun. Similarly, when talking about God, we must know what we mean by God, and God is a notoriously difficult term to define. It is perhaps for this reason that some would probably be led to object that the proposition "God exists" and "leprechauns exist" are not strictly parallel. After all, the concept of a leprechaun is composed of different elements of beings which we know to exist. A leprechaun is a fairy creature—a little old man with a beard, smaller than life-size, reputed to be chiefly found in Ireland. The awkward will probably ask what we mean by a fairy creature—but it is at any rate easy to *visualize* a leprechaun. God, on the other hand,

* See *The Nature of Metaphysics*, ed. D. F. Pears, p. 124 ff.

is by definition a unique being surpassing human comprehension. But is this necessarily so? For the Barthian, perhaps, but not for the liberal—and not for the traditional Catholic either. Why can we not think of God in terms of the known, and argue from the known to the unknown? Jesus obviously did not see anything wrong in speaking of God in human terms. For the purposes of argument, why cannot we accept such a definition of God as " a supreme mind or intelligence behind and within the universe, an infinite being akin to the human soul, and one in whom the highest human values are eternally grounded "? When we ask if God exists, we are merely enquiring as to whether there is in fact an objective counterpart to some such traditional idea of God—and this is no more irrational or meaningless than the enquiry as to whether there is an objective counterpart to the idea of Santa Claus. When a child asks " Is there really a Santa Claus? " no sensible parent is going to say " I'm afraid I can't possibly answer your question. It is utter nonsense and I have no idea what you are talking about."

But sooner or later, in arguments about the language of religion, the question of verification crops up. The chief reason, apparently, why the linguistic analysts claim that theology is meaningless, is that there is no known method of verifying its propositions.* It could be argued, I suppose, that the proposition " leprechauns exist " is not meaningless, precisely because it can be verified. Those who claim to believe in leprechauns could be asked to produce one or to furnish concrete evidence for their existence—and there are probably plenty of people who would be quite pre-

* Cf. A. J. Ayer, op. cit., p. 19 ff.

pared to do this. But is not the situation precisely similar in relation to belief in God? There are those who would claim to have overwhelming evidence for his existence—and just as the question of the existence of leprechauns has to be determined not by any assertion of the meaninglessness or otherwise of statements about them, but by a consideration of the *validity* of the evidence, so also the question of belief in God *can* be in principle verified by an examination of the evidence.

And what is the evidence? We have already agreed that the argument from experience is not very helpful. Nor do the traditional theistic proofs get us very far. Despite the brilliant advocacy of the Neo-Thomists, the traditional proofs still remain essentially logical conjuring tricks, producing the rabbit from the hat by sleight of hand. But even when both the argument from experience and the traditional proofs are ruled out, there is still the empirical approach, as outlined for example in F. R. Tennant's *Philosophical Theology*, and I would maintain that it is this which furnishes the most satisfactory evidence for the existence of God —or for what ought more properly to be called the theistic hypothesis. However much traditional theologians and professional metaphysicians may demur, belief in God is essentially a hypothesis, and no more capable of being logically demonstrated than, for example, the Darwinian hypothesis. But, like the Darwinian hypothesis, the theistic hypothesis *is* open to objective verification. To this extent, therefore, the proposition " God exists " is *not* meaningless.

A full consideration of the evidence upon which the theistic hypothesis is based is obviously not possible

here. For our present purpose it is perhaps sufficient to point out that empirical theism depends, in effect, upon a restatement of the teleological argument—the argument from alleged design and purpose in the universe—and can be linked, therefore, with one aspect of traditional theism. The empirical approach can even be found in St. Thomas Aquinas. In the *Contra Gentiles* he writes: "In the world, things of different natures accord in one order, not seldom and fortuitously, but always for the most part. Therefore it follows that there is someone by whose providence the world is governed. And this we call God." * But it is important to bear in mind that the empirical argument begins not with any logical reasoning or preconceived idea of God, but with a consideration of the nature of the universe, and of the whole evolutionary process, culminating in the emergence of man.

The empirically-minded theologian [says Tennant] asks how the world, inclusive of man, is to be explained. He would let the actual world tell its own story and offer its own suggestions. . . . All that he can expect to emerge from his enquiry are grounds for reasonable belief rather than rational or conclusive demonstration. Should this seem a mean ambition for the theologian, we need but recall that other selves, as to whose existence each of us has an unshakable conviction . . . are neither directly apprehended nor probable otherwise than by cumulative pragmatic verification.†

In the section of Volume II of his *Philosophical Theology* which he entitles "Cosmic Teleology",‡

* Quoted E. L. Mascall: *He Who Is*, p. 55–6.
† *Philosophical Theology*, Vol. II, p. 78.
‡ Op. cit., pp. 78–120.

Tennant lists five main points in favour of the theistic hypothesis:

(1) The adaptation of human thought-processes to the objects with which they are concerned.
(2) The adaptation of the parts to the whole in each living organism.
(3) The adaptation of the inorganic world to the production, maintenance and development of living organisms.
(4) The beauty and sublimity of nature.
(5) The facts of moral obligation and value.

I am convinced myself, that considerations such as these not only furnish reasonable grounds for belief in God, but also provide the most satisfactory means of disposing of the claim that statements about God are meaningless. What is perhaps even more important, the empirical approach does enable us to make tentative suggestions regarding the *nature* of God. When all is said and done, perhaps the really fundamental question for religion is not "Is there a God?" but "What sort of God?" To say that God exists may not be meaningless, but it does not really tell us very much until we have decided what sort of God we are arguing for.

I now propose, therefore, to consider in more detail the basic and fundamental Christian statement: "God is love". That such a statement is meaningless I would, of course, deny. The statement may conceivably be on a par with such a statement as "leprechauns are fairies like little old men"—i.e., something having reference to a purely imaginary world. But

I would not agree that the proposition " God is Love " is equivalent to some such proposition as " dustbins are future-perfect ". But what of the criterion of verifiability? Perhaps the linguistic philosophers are on surer ground here. How can the claim that God is love be verified? What is the evidence? How would the world differ from the world as we know it if the opposite were true? Admittedly, this is a harder nut to crack, but before we tackle it, it is perhaps instructive to examine what would presumably be the answer of those who accept the critique of linguistic analysis, but who nevertheless still cling to the validity—in some non-metaphysical sense—of the proposition " God is love ".

They would insist, I suppose, that they believe that God is love because they have felt his love in their hearts, and are aware of it in their lives, as something quite apart from, and not in the least evidenced by, external circumstance. They would point to the experience of Jesus, who " for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame "; the experience of Paul, who, in spite of " tribulation, nakedness, peril and the sword ", was persuaded that nothing could ever separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus. They would further adduce the experience of the saints, who felt the love of God as a present reality, even in the midst of persecution and torment. An interesting example of Christian awareness of the love of God, even when all the circumstances seem to contradict it, is furnished by an incident from the life of the Quaker saint John Wilhelm Rowntree. When threatened with serious eye-trouble, he consulted a specialist, who informed him that there was no hope.

He went out from the consultation [says his biographer] under the doom of coming and irreparable blindness. He stood by some railings for a few moments to collect himself, and suddenly felt the love of God wrap him about as though a visible presence enfolded him, and a joy filled him such as he had never known before.*

Now it is obvious that such pragmatic verification of the reality of the love of God cannot be ignored. The scientist certainly does not disregard such methods when testing the validity of his hypotheses. Indeed, the extent to which modern medical science, for example, is pragmatic and empirical is often frankly astonishing. Many modern treatments including the administration of such drugs as cortisone, and even such drastic processes as shock-therapy and brain surgery, appear to be based on no surer foundation than that, in many cases, for some unknown reason they appear to work. Pragmatism, then, has a valid place —especially when it forms but one link in a chain of evidence. But to make *experience* of the love of God the proof of that love, or even the chief ground for believing in it, is very dangerous. It clearly plays straight into the hands of those sceptics who insist that the proposition " God is love " merely means " I feel a warm inner security ". It is, of course, quite conceivable that when a person says he feels a warm, inner security, especially in the face of adversity, he does so because he is actually aware of the love of God as an external reality. But it is also conceivable (as some psychologists argue) that he merely feels a warm inner security because he was subjected to the right methods of cleanliness-training in his infancy.

* Quoted *Inner Light*, a devotional anthology (First Series), p. 116.

Once again, everything turns on the question of objectivity. Is it possible to furnish any external evidence for the belief that God is love? I think it is. The traditional arguments—beauty of the world, harmony of nature, providence—can be passed over. They are not entirely without significance, but they can obviously be countered with a vast amount of evidence supporting the opposite conclusion. The experience of the early Christians, for example, could be said to support the view that God is *not* love (as Paul seems to have realized). The great Lisbon earthquake of 1755 was an important factor in the development of eighteenth-century scepticism. The only really valid external evidence for the love of God lies in the whole chain of reasoning upon which the case for empirical theism rests, and depends primarily on a consideration of the cosmic process in the light of evolution. Despite current astronomical speculations regarding the validity of the entire concept of evolution, it still seems possible, even from the strictly scientific point of view, to regard the world process as, in Tennant's phrase, a *preparatio anthropologica.*

> If man is Nature's child [he writes], Nature is the wonderful mother of such a child. Any account of her which ignores the fact of her maternity is scientifically partial and philosophically insignificant. . . . Man is no monstrous birth out of due time, no freak or sport. . . . In the fulness of time, Nature found self-utterance in a son possessed of intelligent and moral status.*

Empirical theism establishes the probability of a Divine Mind as the author and sustainer of the cosmic

* Op. cit. p. 101. For a strictly scientific confirmation of this attitude, cf. Sir Julian Huxley's essay *The Uniqueness of Man.*

process—and if man can be shown to be the culmination of the cosmic process, then it seems reasonable to conclude that the highest and most characteristic qualities of man—his capacity for love and sympathy, his awareness of beauty, his longing for truth and justice—are also the essential attributes of the Being from whom the whole cosmic process stems. But, it will be objected, love and goodness and an awareness of beauty are not the only qualities to be found in man. What about lust and cruelty?

The objection is pertinent, but not insuperable; for it is obvious that, from the time when he first became truly human, man has always acknowledged the priority of love and goodness—at least within the particular community in which he found himself. That it was his duty to love his neighbour man has always admitted. It is merely on the question of "Who is my neighbour?" that he has differed. (There is also the question of how he is to bring himself to accomplish what he believes to be his duty—but that, of course, is quite another story.) Evil is, in a very real sense, parasitic on goodness, and would not exist without it and the capacity for evil can be shown to be a necessary condition of the capacity for goodness.

Of more importance, perhaps, is the existence of physical evil at the sub-human level. It is this which is commonly held to vitiate the Christian belief in the goodness of God, and since the time when Tennyson, anticipating Darwin by some ten years, reflected on the problem of evolution and stood aghast at "nature, red in tooth and claw", it has often been felt that the evolutionary view accentuates rather than mitigates

the problem of evil. This was the position of even such a non-theist as T. H. Huxley, who, in his Romanes Lecture of 1893, *Evolution and Ethics*, repudiated the "gladiatorial theory of existence" which he found in evolution, and advocated, for human affairs, the reversal of the cosmic process.* The evolutionary theist, however, is bound to point out that any such view ignores the fact that man himself has emerged from the cosmic process. The microcosmic atom (to quote Huxley's phrase), who pronounces the illimitable macrocosm guilty, is himself the product of the macrocosm. This was well emphasized by Huxley's grandson, Sir Julian, who in his Romanes Lecture of 1943 took exactly the same subject as his grandfather had done fifty years previously, and arrived at precisely the opposite conclusion. In actual fact, even T. H. Huxley was not entirely consistent, and in the published form of his lecture he felt bound to admit that the ethical process was in reality part and parcel of the evolutionary process.† From the theistic point of view, therefore, it can be argued that even such evil as there may be in nature is an inevitable part of the *preparatio anthropologica.*

It is not possible [says Tennant] to imagine a living world, in which truly ethical values are to be actualized, save as an evolutionary cosmos in which free agents live and learn, make choices and build characters.‡

That there could be a determinate evolutionary world of unalloyed comfort, yet adapted by its law-abidingness to the development of rationality and morality, is a pro-

* See *Collected Essays*, Vol. IX, pp. 81–3.
† *Collected Essays*, Vol. IX, Note on p. 114.
‡ *Philosophical Theology*, Vol. II, p. 185.

position, the burden of proving which must be allotted to the opponent of theism.*

In any case, as Prof. Eric Waterhouse has argued, the mere fact that man is disturbed by evil, is itself evidence that goodness is the ultimate ground of the world process.

Whatever way we look at the matter [he writes] it must appear that the ground of the universe, and of our own existence, whether we call that ground God or not, has produced alike both the conditions which allow the appearance of evil and those which condemn and fight against it. If the former appearance of evil is quoted as evidence against the goodness of God, the latter fighting it affords equally good evidence against his moral impotence or neutrality. Why a being morally indifferent, to whom good and bad are alike just phases of the world-process, should create beings who are so profoundly affected where he is neutral, is just as serious a problem as why a good God who hates evil should permit it.†

It can, of course, be argued, that the basic fallacy of evolutionary theism lies in its bland assumption that what results from the cosmic process must have been there from the beginning. Admittedly, there is no necessary reason for this, and some such theory as emergent evolution is a possibility. But everything turns on the question of what is the most satisfying explanation of the universe, and evolutionary theism seems to leave less questions unanswered than any other theory. And if it be objected that we have no right to seek for explanations and meaning, we can only refer to the words of F. H. Bradley: "Metaphysics may be the finding of bad reasons for what we believe

* Ibid., p. 201.
† E. Waterhouse, *Philosophical Approach to Religion*, p. 173.

on instinct, but to find those reasons is no less an instinct "*—and in an evolutionary world, this, in itself, is significant.

There are rational grounds, then, for believing that God is love. It could, I suppose, be argued that we have only shown that there are grounds for believing that God is *loving*, and not necessarily that God is love. But, for our present purpose that is all that we need to do. If it be asked how the world would differ from the world as it is if the opposite were true, the answer is that it would be a world entirely devoid of all moral qualities, a world of lust, greed, cruelty and bloodshed —*and nothing more*—and a world in which no one bothered in the slightest. Walt Whitman wanted to go and live with the animals because, among other things, they never lay awake at night and wept for their sins.† In actual fact, we ought to be profoundly thankful that men do weep for their sins and for the woes of their fellow-creatures, for it is this in itself which, paradoxically enough, entitles us to believe that God is love.

It would, of course, be idle to pretend that this brief essay represents the complete case for belief in God. All that I have tried to do is to establish, particularly in relation to certain contemporary criticisms of metaphysical statements, that there are reasonable grounds, not only for believing in God, but also for believing in a loving God. In a fuller statement of the case much more attention would have to be given to the facts of moral obligation and value, and to religious experience in all its aspects. Experience in itself does not provide

* Quoted C. E. M. Joad: *Guide to Philosophy*, p. 257.
† *Song of Myself*, 32.

a satisfactory basis for theism, but once the probability of the theistic hypothesis has been empirically established, then the facts of religious experience assume a new significance.

It must always be remembered also that the case for theism does demand, in the end, what has been called " the leap of faith ". Belief in God depends on a hypothesis, and the final test of any hypothesis must be the pragmatic one. Does it work? What are the consequences when it is applied to reality? It is not otherwise with theism. Its final verification must be experimental. The truth of the matter is put very neatly by the genial old centenarian in the Spanish play *A Hundred Years Old*, by the Quintero brothers: " Live your life as if there were a God in heaven. . . . We can't be sure there is, you know. Nor you, nor I, nor anyone can be quite sure. But live as if there were." May it not be that it is only when we are prepared to make the leap of faith and to trust ourselves utterly to the Everlasting Arms, that we are able to glimpse the ultimate truth of theism?

III

IMAGES OF GOD

by Leonard Mason

DURING the development of religious thought many concepts, expressed either as visual imagery or as verbal symbols, have arisen to give focus and body to man's intimation of the supreme reality he calls God. For Christian devotion the expression " Our Father in Heaven " has remained central partly because it was the imagery used by Jesus himself, partly because the very hieratic transmission of the symbol by the church through twenty centuries gives it added devotional effect, and partly because it is a symbolism open to all. Within the family circle a human father represents both the providential and the restrictive factors in life, and these characteristics are directly attributed to God, Father of all. Unitarians have inherited this Christian symbol and have attached special value to it because it seems most theologically apt to express their non-trinitarian point of view. They hold that there is One Father of all, whose personality is not enhanced by being divided into several aspects.

But imagery fades, symbols become worn smooth by constant use, and expressions fail to hold the emotional and intellectual content they once had. We need to enquire whether the symbolic concept of Divine Fatherhood is still adequate to evoke a deep and intelligent response in contemporary man. Obviously

the symbol, even in traditional language, has not stood uninterpreted, for God is not Father in the same sense and to the same degree that man is father. He is quantitatively greater, being the ultimate parent of two or three thousand million living children instead of the two or three average in Western families; he is also in an extended sense Father of myriads of other living creatures who are dependent on his creative, provident and sustaining power. He is also qualitatively more perfect than man. He embodies the perfection of each father-like characteristic. Man procreates by biological means, God by a putting forth of spiritual grace; man provides for his offspring by limited power and resource, God puts the available resources of the whole universe at the disposal of his creatures; man instructs and disciplines his children by the light of his own experience and inherited customs, God instructs by the very grandeur of natural processes and by the sweep of history itself; man guides by his example of good manners and moral behaviour, God guides, in Christianity at any rate, by giving of himself in sacrifice for the whole of unregenerate mankind; man forgives his own children their immature faults, God offers forgiveness unto eternal life to all who are truly repentant. Man is partial, God is universal. Summing these characteristics of good fatherhood and carrying each of them to the limit of perfection, we arrive conceptually at the Divine Fatherhood. Obviously no man exemplifies all of these qualities, nor any single one of them to perfection, but the symbol " Father ", with its emotional overtones, can evoke both the sum and the perfection of Fatherhood, and that men call God.

The symbol is therefore a gathering-point, an evocative term suggesting all the possibility of human affection, care and provision; but it is also a leaping-point, intimating a Being quite beyond human dimension and capability. One who concerns himself with two thousand million people each at the same time must be ubiquitous as no human father is; he must also be omniscient in order to be aware of the needs and dangers of his vast progeny. He must have an infinite source of love which, like the biblical cruse of oil, never runs dry, no matter how many draw upon it for sustenance.

By this time the symbol "Father" has burst its seams, and is inadequate to contain the wines of omnipresence, omniscience and infinitude. It is too limited to bear the interpretation which religious devotion unreflectively places upon it. So long as it retains even the ghost of human dimension it cannot easily carry the scale of limitless time and infinite space by which modern man tries to compass existence.

Part of the traditional concept of Fatherhood is concerned with God's act of creation. As a human father begets new life, so God is father-like in the stupendously different "begetting" of the universe. He has been equated either with First Cause or with a present continuing Cause of all that is. Such concepts, however, are not easily verified; the meanings they point to are beyond the range of human investigation, and it is doubtful whether the symbol of a Being thinking things into existence, fashioning them, and supporting them on everlasting arms can imaginatively fill the void of human ignorance. In these matters there has arisen a cosmic humility. Human beings know only a

small sector of what exists and are not in any position to assert anything about the whole of existence, neither how it began nor how it operates in all its parts. We have learned from the physical sciences to recognize that from our standpoint there are three aspects of what we might call the Universe: a part which is becoming increasingly known, a greater part yet unknown but possibly available to future human investigation, and a further part beyond the range of possible investigation either directly or by inference. To claim that we can have a limited symbol which will effectively cover this whole tripartite range is to claim too much.

We are therefore faced with a much more modest task. Instead of trying to depict the universe in such human terms as fatherhood, loving purpose or creative thought, instead of seeking for something akin to human characteristics, though far greater in extent and potency, as the universal feature and ground of all existence, we need to examine the growing areas of known facts more minutely and more comprehensively, letting them suggest to us any universal principles which may be implicit in them and capable of symbolization. We must not impose on them our own crudely pictorial symbols which frequently express our emotions and wishes, our hopes that the universe might be constituted near to the pattern of our heart's desire. We must let the universe itself be our tutor.

Broadly speaking, there is here about us a going concern vast in range and time. We will not ask why it is here in this particular form and with this complex interrelated activity, for that would be a question to which no answer is available or else one which we

should be tempted to answer in human terms. To ask why is to seek for a purpose, a motive, a goal; it suggests desire and will, and it is hardly legitimate to apply such terms of personal motivation to the non-human world.

We will ask the simpler questions. How has it come to be what it is? How does it work? How does it change or develop from minute to minute and from epoch to epoch? These questions are still difficult enough in all conscience. But answers to them are mounting generation by generation. The universe, as at present understood, is described as a system of energy taking different forms. Expressed predominantly as intense radiation, it produces the rudiments of atoms diffused as rarefied gas and coalescing into giant swarms of protogalaxies. Expressed as electrostatic attraction and repulsion, it produces atoms and colonies of atoms making the stuff of the stars within giant galaxies. Expressed as orbital momentum and attraction of mass upon mass, it produces the fall-in or the swelling out of stars, the sweeping up of stray matter, producing suns and planets and maintaining the dynamic balance of well-integrated systems. Expressed as high molecular binding, synthesis and metabolism, it produces life as we know it on earth, and possibly other forms elsewhere in the starry worlds. Expressed as electro-chemical activity within a highly complex nervous system, it yields mental awareness and the higher activities of human ability.

These forms of energy are interlocking and interchangeable; we have to learn both the nature and direction of the interchanges before we can begin to understand such order and process as we detect in the

universe. When we have done that as adequately as possible we are in a position to say that the part of the universe now exhibited to us is the consequence of prior arrangements and transformations of energy.

Within the context of this descriptive analysis we may then speak of "creation" either as the inherent constantly changing activity, the continuous process by which conditions at any given time are transformed into conditions at the next, or else as the total sequence of prior events which has led to the present situation. What we cannot say is that "creation" is the production of something out of nothing. One form of energy expression, though undoubtedly a novel emergent occasion, is the resultant of prior forms. There is no conceivable first term in this infinite series of energy exchanges, nor any energyless void out of which forms appear. No First Cause is required, no Creator. If, for psychological or theological reasons, we still need the notion of a first term, being or maker, then the infinite series of connected and successive energy exchanges can stand for it. That which lies behind and prior to our present observable universe and upon which the present moment or epoch depends is another universe, and so on ad infinitum. What the universe is at any moment arises out of this infinite nexus.

Revised speculation in cosmology encouraged by astronomers and astrophysicists has possibly raised the hope that the scriptural and Augustinian doctrine of creation out of nothing can be reinstated. Inferences from the calculated rate of recession of the farthest galaxies suggest a definite time, about 3,400 million years ago, when all the energy of the universe was concentrated into a volume only thirty times as large

as our sun. Some gigantic explosion and rapid expansion lasting about half an hour are posited which " cooked " the original atoms and eventually led to a shower of stars and to the rudimentary form of our present universe. This seems like a true beginning, but the concentration and squeeze which led to the " big bang " was the result of a prior contraction of some former universe whose shape and constituents cannot even be inferred, because the process of intense contraction obliterated all structure and broke up whatever atoms there were into unstable protons, neutrons, electrons and mesons.

Another theory, unlike this catastrophic one, suggests a continuing and spontaneous creation of hydrogen atoms where no such atoms previously existed, to compensate for the recession of the galaxies. Such creation, making good the mass deficiency due to expansion, maintains a steady-state universe. At first sight this seems to accord with theological speculation; but closer examination reveals that such " creation " is not exactly out of nothing, it is still an effect of prior circumstances—in this case the lowering of the average density of matter in a particular sector of the universe. Where this average decreases beyond a certain critical value, the total mass-effect of the rest of the universe exerts a " creation-pressure " and hydrogen is produced until the critical density value is restored.

These recent theories still leave the scientific principle of universal causation intact, nothing happens without a sufficient and an efficient cause; there is still felt to be an infinite series behind any particular epoch. Many feel that the term " God " is legitimate to convey the complexity and extent of that infinitude; but the term " Father " seems inappropriate. Whether additional and qualifying symbols can be added to the bare term " God " is a matter of debate. Images attempting to do this in the past have been drawn from human craftsmanship—God as Artificer; from human social situations—God as King, Judge, Lord of Hosts; from human psychic experience—God as Spirit, Pure Thought; from human affection and compassionate striving—God as Loving Purpose. But as with the concept Fatherhood, perhaps these symbols deriving from human dimensions are no longer adequate. We can have no guarantee that the highest human values, namely, consciousness and self-awareness, choice of rational ends, moral behaviour and aesthetic insight, though the highest products we know in the universe, are the predominant events of the whole series, or represent the point to which universal process is driving.

Perhaps we should turn to cosmic processes themselves and find our symbols there. As once thunder, mountain peak or the glorious disc of the sun suggested symbols of creative power, so we look at greater wonders, at the spiral galaxy in the constellation of Andromeda, for example, and find in its form and grandeur a clue to the nature of the universe. Or perhaps we shall have to discard all imagery and admit that pictorial symbols at least are totally inadequate. Then we must stand and stare at the universe and call to mind as many prior states of that universe as we can rationally conjecture, and say: That be our God—infinitude of developing and proliferating power.

To many people, however, this approach seems sterile, or at best a newly-fashioned pagan naturalism.

It robs religious devotion of its special genius. Man, when engaged in religious activity and contemplation and in commitment to ideal standards of moral behaviour, feels himself to be in communion with personality similar to his own, he acknowledges that he is sustained, energized, prompted and guided by it. He distinguishes between this experience and any natural piety which might link his spirit with the grandeurs of cosmic process. In specifically religious experience men feel their own personality invaded by God's rather than by an infinite energy which shapes the star systems and gathers up the radiations of a million miles to make a living satellite of the sun. This felt interfusion of the divine with the human suggests that the symbolism "Fatherhood of God", in the sense of a personality from which human personality derives its being and strength, is not outworn.

Such spiritual insights, however, are notoriously subjective, they are not shared by all, nor felt at all times by those who experience them. Searching questions have been asked of such mysticism. What part do human wish and the desire to transcend the intolerable sense of man's cosmic loneliness play in the experience? How much is the awareness of a divine personality a projection of an internal psychic situation? The frail conscious ego of a man is invaded by other portions of his psychic life: by the under-swell of his libidinal energy releasing erotic emotions, so that he feels himself immersed in a sea of rapture; by the restraining forces of a well-developed super-ego, so that he feels constrained by the imperatives and disciplines and driven by the compulsions of father-figures; by dormant racial archetypes, so that he feels currents

of personal forces vaster than himself sweeping him to heroic or tragic issues. The fact that such questions have been seriously asked and seriously examined is evidence that the argument from direct religious experience is not as final as it is usually claimed to be.

Nor does this type of experience point exclusively to the existence of an objective divine personality. Men can and do commune in a very real sense with impersonal nature; they feel *en rapport* with the mood, strength or beauty of the natural world around them. Such communion often rises to an awareness of a "presence" moving in or through the sights, sounds and movements of the physical world. This has been taken as a surrogate for deity, but it does not necessarily imply personality. Quite the reverse, sometimes. A man is swamped by the immensity and ravelled intricacy of existence around him, by the felt infinitude of it, sometimes by its very impersonality, its sublime unconcern for human happenings. Confronted with something not himself, something which moves inexorably by purposes not his own, or by no conceivable purposes at all, he still has communion with it. There is a very real and not uncommon natural mysticism which does not imply personality in the object of reverence, and for which the term "Father" fails to express the core of the experience.

The question then arises: how far can one go in discarding traditional symbols? If the Fatherhood and Personality of God are felt to be inadequate, what of the Unitarian favourites: God as Spirit, Goodness, Truth, Beauty? These are verbal symbols, general abstract concepts which do not readily translate into rich imagery. By "spirit" we mean a depth and

intensity of experience not exhausted by physical and biological description. By " goodness " we mean an effort within existence which transforms human and possible cosmic processes into co-operative purposes. By " truth " we mean a tested insight into the reality of many things, and a statement of what has been discovered by such insight, or of what is self-evident. By " beauty " we mean that there are perspectives open to man by which his imagination and love are released because they encounter fitness, balance, proportion, smoothness or even a sudden fickle incongruity which pleases. And by " God " we mean the sum of these factors, their influence upon us, their power to redeem what otherwise might be pointless existence, their challenge to be expressing them in our lives. God is then the supreme symbol for ideas which we dare not lose. It seems therefore as though we cannot afford to discard this symbol, lest in doing so we forfeit the better part of our selves and deny to the universe a spiritual dimension which is felt to be the ultimate ground of its process and the very point of its evolution.

But how difficult it is to describe this God in more than verbal imagery, to clothe the abstract concepts with the garments of personality! Devotion and theology elaborate the concepts infinite mind, absolute goodness, supreme reality; but human understanding, equipped with a mind limited to a physical body, with a knowledge founded on sense-impressions of physical activity, with a morality conditioned by changing social circumstance, can scarcely encounter this transcendent Being, let alone respond to it. Indeed, to elicit any kind of response man has to wane out his normal modes of consciousness, shedding the distinction between himself and objective facts until there is only mystical awareness of an over-self, or an under-self, one pure consciousness, one sublime radiance. The Oneness is an ultra-human mystery, an imageless One before whom we maintain a noble silence, a silence of adoration and submissiveness.

Yet such theistic language, evincing from man mystical experience and reducing his images and symbols to rejected idols of an undeveloped mind, is not the only translation which can be made of his deepest insight and exploration. The symbolic statements: God is Spirit, Goodness, Truth, Beauty: can be expressed alternatively as: I respond to spiritual insight, to good deeds, to true discoveries and statements, to beautiful occasions with approval and excitement; I find them the most important factors in my life and determine to live by them as ideals. When we incorporate these discoveries and decisions into the inner fibre of our personalities we satisfy our hunger for meaning, we learn to live in terms of purpose and attempt to shape our world by them. This alternative language has dropped the symbol " God " and is frankly humanistic. Has the symbolism lost anything in the translation? There are many who will think that it has lost everything of importance, it has left God out of the reckoning—the ultimate heresy. But there are others who feel that the translation unstops the semantic blockage of symbols that fail to signify and to evoke any spiritual response. When the phrase " Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth " awakens few emotions and arouses no thoughts commensurate with all we have learned of the heavens and the earth, then we tend to lose our spiritual grasp,

to feel a sense of underlying purpose slipping away from us. When we read of the Eternal One whose ways and thoughts are quite beyond our own, our sense of cosmic loneliness is increased, and spiritual indifference frequently ensues. But if we can see that our own investigations into such aspects of the universe as we are acquainted with, and our own modest striving to live significantly and hopefully, are themselves purposes worth while, then this opening up of humanist ideals releases fresh springs of reverence and presents us with more immediate goals of moral endeavour. Better to be challenged by the human situation, appalled by the uneven distribution of human opportunities, encouraged by human excellencies attained, prompted by the vision of what human communities might become, than look for guidance to theistic symbols which have become vague, unreal, and void of the very evocative content for which they were expressly devised.

Whether the two languages, theistic and humanistic, are indeed equivalent though alternative statements of the same type of experience and interpretation; whether, for example, " God is the source of Goodness " is really equivalent in meaning to the expression " Men recognize an ideal of goodness as a standard for their personal lives and as a model for human association, and choose to act upon it "—this is a ground for continuing debate acutely stated in some parts of these essays. Protagonists on each side of this debate need to acknowledge that it is a discussion about linguistics rather than about experience. Unitarians, of all people, ought never to assume that there is only one type of religious language to meet all the shades of human experience and interpretation.

We live in an age of experimental and critical thinking, when, so to speak, the electron-microscope of analysis directs its beams on the most time-honoured ideas and symbols. The structure is laid bare. What is likely to emerge from the scrutiny is not just the propriety or adequacy or even the oddity of our religious symbols, but whether we have sufficient experience of and faith in the valour and significance of human life, and dare to assert, celebrate and prosper them in a time of great uncertainty.

IV

THE LONELINESS OF MAN

by E. G. Lee

It is evident that one of the modern religious problems is that of man being left in a universe which he must claim as his own. The idea of a Creator God who willed the universe into being and sustains it every moment of its existence has vanished from the minds of millions of people. Consequently for these people—and their beliefs are a part of the spiritual climate of the day—there is nothing greater than man's own nature in the universe. And this leaves him in full possession, as it were, of what used to belong to the Creator God. Man, in a sense, has taken the place of God.

But this places man in a grave difficulty when he reflects upon his own nature. For whatever he may have believed about God, he is not that God, and he knows he cannot become so. And a universe without God, even without a God who, as it were, never was, is not quite the same place as a universe with God. It forces man consciously to live within his own nature; and this creates difficulties.

First of all, man is an ethical creature. He cannot be what he believes himself to be without the need for ethical decisions. These he has to make, and he cannot make them automatically, because there is nothing in him—if he is an ethical creature—which pre-

determines the choices he must make. If he is alone in the universe, completely alone, then the choice of decision is upon him. He can choose to be amoral, if such a state is possible; he can be deliberately immoral within any given social standard; or he can strive after what may be called the good life. Whatever decision he makes, it is his, without any reference to any power in the universe higher than his own. He is completely alone. He is free, if he chooses to bear the social consequences, to be as immoral as he chooses within any given social standard, for the social standard, if a man occupies the universe as his own, need not exercise any "ought" over him. There is not the slightest reason why other men should exercise any moral authority over him, if he chooses not to recognize this, for other men after all are just as he is, they too are alone, and that fact gives them not the slightest right—if he chooses not to recognize the right—to exercise any duress over him.

The lonely man, in possession of what used to be God's, must act as a God without the attributes usually ascribed to God's being. As an ethical person he must choose within a range of choices so wide as to challenge the existence of ethical conduct. The simple fact of being left with his own nature challenges the very existence of that nature, and threatens him with the disintegration of what he usually calls his self.

But even if a man, within a range of choice that threatens his selfhood, still remains a man—that is to say, still remains conscious of choices of right and wrong, with an imperative behind them—he still has to act within his own human nature. And this imposes upon him another spiritual problem.

For, acting within this nature as a moral being, he cannot but be aware of the manner in which it limits and seems to mock his moral conduct. He has to act within his own and his brother's humanity, and within that there seems to be no end to unpremeditated evil and unpremeditated good. The good man, for instance, must act within his own humanity, and within this all his goodness, even of the most exalted kind, is circumscribed. Not by evil, because presumably the good man does not will this, but by the very nature of the self that must do the willing. If, as an illustration, Mahatma Gandhi be taken as an example of the good man, then his goodness must be seen as active in his own humanity, and it would be difficult to say that it could be released from this in such a manner that it could be seen pure, unalloyed and certain in its results. If further it is placed, as it must be placed, in the complete range of all other human beings, it would be difficult to say that Gandhi's goodness could bring about the results associated with goodness. It is doubtful, for instance, whether his absolute pacifism, which is associated with his own personal goodness, would have the results in the whole range of humanity that it presumably has in his own personal life. It may lead to evil. Gandhi's own personal conviction, associated with goodness, may lead to unpremeditated evil. One is not now writing about ethical conduct as such, but about the raw material, and indefinable raw material at that, in which ethical conduct must take place. The range of good and evil is to be found in human nature, when ethical conduct is concerned, and that very nature of itself complicates and renders uncertain, often in a tragic manner, and often in an

inexplicable manner, the attempted ethical problem.

Now this situation, man being alone in the universe and being seemingly thwarted in ethical conduct, presents a religious problem, for presumably he does not wish to be alone and he does not wish to be thwarted or nullified. If there is no problem in being alone, and none in ethical conduct being thwarted, then there is no religious problem. Man's existence can be explained on a naturalistic basis and his conduct and its results be derived from that. But it is doubtful if this is an answer to what had better be called religious temperament, and doubtful whether it is an answer to unexpressed human needs that naturalistic arguments cloud over. Since this is an essay about a religious situation, it must be assumed that there is a problem about cosmic human loneliness, and the humanity in which man has to act. And since the problem is regarded as a religious one, namely that of an awareness of man's own loneliness, and not primarily an ethical one, which clearly is dependent on the first, it must be argued in religious terms.

The need is to escape from the limitations of being human and the threat these bring to the selfhood of man.

One of the classic ways of escape has been through the Christian emphasis on sin. There was a kind of inevitable taint in a man which he had to acknowledge and for which he was responsible. The realization of sin would bring him to the realization of God. There was a contrast between him and God, and a necessary communion, and out of this contrast and communion

could arise forgiveness and grace: forgiveness, that would end remorse and self-stultification for evil done, and grace, an uncovenanted power that could enter into a man and beyond his willing and deserving enable him to live the good life, not of himself but as of God.

But sin is not human nature in which a man must act, and for which he can hardly be responsible. To be human itself is to be plunged into the predicament of " the unwilled consequences of our willing ". No man, just because he is a man, can be held responsible in terms of sin for all that follows from his nature.

This truth beats through the Book of Job in many particulars. It may be summed up in the following quotation:

> If I have sinned, what do I unto thee, O thou watcher of men? . . . And why dost *thou* not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity? (Job. vii. 20–21).

If sin is a fact, if there is an original taint for which in some way man is to be held responsible, then obviously the contrast and communion between God and man based upon this could be ended by God in his omniscience pardoning the transgression. Acknowledgement of sin, or awareness of it, is no gateway, as it were, to the divine presence, for sin need not be. God has the power to end it, at least in its responsibility for choices of good and evil. But God cannot end the human nature in which ethical conduct takes place. This is never a postulate about the situation in which man finds himself, otherwise there would be no situation, and consequently there would be nescience. But it is from human nature that man asks to be

rescued, for in this lies his deepest perplexity. To be left in it is to be forced to ask questions of aloneness in the universe and the tragedy of ethical conduct that cannot end in good. Being human, he is forced to ask himself, what am I when the highest good in me fails and in some way is bound to fail? Being human is the tragedy of the good man, and the concept of sin is no answer to it.

Being human is the tragedy of the evil man as well, quite apart from any tragic consequences connected with evil. For the evil man is always clouded over with the pathos that he is never completely evil; his human nature is always with him, and, being with him, always mocks him with the possibility of reaching the good. No man can be completely damned. If he could, it might make some recognizable contrast between the completely good and the completely evil. There is, for instance, a great and unrealized pathos surrounding the people Dante plunged into the Inferno he imagined for them. They are all human; the might-have-been still clings to them; they compel compassion because, although damned, the aura of their humanity still surrounds them. The possibility involved in this haunts them. It is not possible to think of them as the embodiments of absolute evil, for being human rejects this, and in order to describe them at all they must be human.

It may be possible for imagination to create for mythical purposes an absolutely evil personage in the figure of Satan, but imagination cannot just stay at that point. Sooner or later the created figure takes on the figure of humanity, as in *Paradise Lost*, and with humanity becomes blurred with pathos and the might-have-

been. The figure becomes tragic, and not simply evil.

There is no escape. There is no absolute attainment of good or evil for man, to become God or the Devil, not because of some particular perversity or failure of will within him, but just because of the existence of his humanity. He is not God or a Devil just because he is human. This fact must always press upon him and defeat him if he wishes to remain alone in the universe, or if he wishes to try to explain his position in terms of sin. And if by any chance he thought he could escape the limitations of his own personal humanity, or construct in imagination the figure of a man who had done so, then the facts of his position would bear down upon him and remind him of what he was. The humanity of others would remind him of his own vulnerability. A voice of sorrow would reach him, even from the other side of the globe, and wrench from him the question, why? There is no escape. Either a man must bear the burden of his humanity in an empty universe, empty because there is no spiritual reality higher than himself in it; a burden of loneliness because it threatens the reality of ethical conduct and consequently of himself, and a burden of possible nescience because his humanity threatens to be all and nullify all his actions; or he must seek release in the knowledge, and in the experience, that what is human in him can be taken from him in a reality infinitely greater than himself.

This is hinted at by the story of the Crucifixion. It was hardly morality that put Jesus on the Cross. It was being human that placed him there. Iscariot, it is true, sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver, but

this act, say in terms of greed, was really meaningless in this particular part of the drama. At any time, it must be presumed, Judas the treasurer could have run off with the money-bag with considerably more than thirty pieces of silver in it. Whatever the reason for attributing the betrayal of Jesus to the exchange of the thirty pieces, the motive of greed could barely have been a powerful one. The act of Judas barely belonged to moral conduct at all, but to something much more primal than that.

The sentencing of Jesus scarcely comes within the range of moral conduct in terms of choices between good and evil. Indeed, Caiaphas the High Priest may have been certain he chose the good. He was doing his duty in condemning Jesus to death. Similarly, it is hard to place moral blame or approval on Pilate's condemnation. Before him was an insignificant Jew making fantastic claims, hardly to be understood save by his own countrymen, and the man was repudiated by them anyway. Why take chances? All the prudence of a proconsul would suggest that the insignificant man should be handed to his countrymen to be put to death. The executioners who put Jesus to death were doing what they were paid to do, and in their profession did in like manner to other condemned men regularly. Their act can carry no specific moral blame. All this inexplicable non-moral meaning of the Crucifixion comes to the point of illumination in the words attributed to Jesus on the Cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." No one knew what they did in sentencing Jesus to death on the Cross and carrying out the sentence. In the manner in which it is all reported in the Gospels it is

a tragedy of human nature rather than of moral conduct. Even if the implication of the Gospel stories is accepted, that the fault of those who put him to death lay in not recognizing him as the Son of God, this can be accounted as a failure of human nature rather than one of deliberate moral choice. It was not a deliberate clouding of the eyes to the implied truth, it resulted from the fact of being human in certain circumstances. The Crucifixion is a drama concerned with something far deeper than moral conduct, it is concerned with the fact of man being man.

Now, Christian theology has its answer to this situation. It was not only humanity on the Cross, it was God also. And there is little doubt in Christian theology about the meaning of this. Humanity was overcome, sublimated, transformed within the nature of God. At the point where being human was clarified in its most poignant meaning, there too it was lifted out of its essential loneliness and joined with the nature of God. Consequently (as one may judge if the concept of sin is left out) humanity was saved. The whole relationship between God and man could be understood through the event of the Cross. And that, it must be presumed, in the bare and truncated way in which it has been stated, is in some measure the traditional Christian position now. Man is not alone in the universe, and he has not to act ethically from his own motivation, but within the awareness of the God–man relationship of the Cross.

But this relationship as defined by the Cross has for many an insuperable theological difficulty. It is found in the belief that the Christ (if this word may

be used to indicate the theological God-like nature of man on the Cross) and the historic person of Jesus of Nazareth, as may be assumed from the records, was an historic person living within a particular period of history, and therefore subject to the conditions of human nature. And these conditions, as so recorded, are so paramount that they cannot be eliminated by what must be an essentially miraculous God–man relationship. Jesus Christ was human.

A mass of reasons and incidents could be offered for this, but one or two must suffice.

The first, in itself, may be regarded as overwhelming. Jesus of Nazareth was held within history, was subject to its limitations, and consequently was inevitably human. If he had not been, he would not have been a man, and therefore historically recognizable. He entered and accepted the thoughts of his age, if only as a basis upon which to express the ageless thoughts attributed to him. He believed in demons; he believed in a geographical hell; he believed that the Earth was flat; Satan was not a mythical figure, Satan was real. All these beliefs, not one of them present in the mind of the educated Christian to-day in the same manner, were real enough to Jesus. And it cannot be supposed that he was deceiving those around him. And it must be believed that according to the manner in which these beliefs are stripped from his teaching (and assuming that his teaching is of perennial importance), so the teaching is revealed in deeper clarity, and therefore nearer to what must be assumed as the truth. In a sense, therefore, the teaching of Jesus is clearer to-day in a historic setting than it was two thousand years ago. It and he were related to a

historic environment, and in that manner bear human limitation.

The force of this may be illustrated by one point, and it may be more necessary to make it because it is either unconsciously hidden, or never brought to mind.

Presumably Jesus of Nazareth worshipped in the Temple, or at least accepted without protest the rites of worship conducted there. The disciples worshipped there also. One of the rites of the Temple was animal sacrifice. An authoritative account describes this as follows:

> The great altar streamed with the blood of the victims slain in hundreds and sometimes in thousands, the air was filled with the stench of burning flesh, the priests must have looked like butchers, although they did not do the actual killing. The whole Court of the Priests became a shambles, and imagination revolts from the picture which a knowledge of the facts sets before it. *

As the historic environment of Palestine is penetrated, so similar difficulties of custom and acceptance must be revealed. Indeed, it would only be necessary to make a comparison between the culture of Palestine in New Testament times with that of the modern age to place Jesus in an environment that in outward act and belief is lower in value than the present. Through such an environment, of course, greatness can shine, but the environment must count, and within it and its difficulties must greatness be sought.

For many, therefore, the historic nature of Jesus of Nazareth cannot be interpreted as an interpenetration

* Travers Herford, *Judaism in the N.T. Period*, p. 14.

of the human and divine in the manner of the theological doctrines of the Cross. But they are still left with the religious need of overcoming the essential loneliness of human nature, as such. There is no need to lay down an either-or situation. It must be assumed that there are many patterns of emotional and intellectual adjustment through which men discover an Other in their universe. The effort, for instance, of reason as such to discover reason in the universe may be as emphatic a way of overcoming loneliness as any other; or the effort of the human to discover in Humanity some response greater than the self. But this is not the articulated religious situation. This implies seeking for or losing God.

For many, traditional Christianity no longer responds to this situation, simply because Christ-mysticism or doctrine based upon it does not carry conviction. The adventure, therefore, is met of seeking the religious solution within a Christian religion that affirms belief in God and a human Jesus of Nazareth. The adventure is what it is, with no easy spiritual path laid out for it, but for those who wish to live by the theistic fundamentals of the Christian religion, and at the same time cannot accept certain historic and emotional conclusions, it is an adventure worth while.

It is an adventure which (as has been suggested) may be undertaken in a number of ways; but a new way may be mentioned that has been opened to the modern consciousness. Indeed, this new way has become so much of contemporary experience that it is hardly possible to become intellectually articulate in religion without acknowledging its existence.

It is the way of science.

It is not the only way. The suggestions in this essay will emphasize that, but it is one that has now become important for a number of people, and it may be mentioned as an indication that all forms of human experience can help within the religious situation of loneliness.

One of the fundamentals of release from self-isolation, and consequently from the religious problems that this isolation involves, is the discovery of wonder, amazement and awe, first in relation to all the manifold forms of the universe, and then, through these, to the reality that must sustain or inform them. Without some such emotion as this it is doubtful if any reflective man is at home in the surrounding universe. There are many men obviously not at home, and deeply conscious of it; that there are such men, and that such a possible experience awaits every man, has been one of the assumptions of this paper. It is an experience well known to religious psychology, and it is of course not confined to the modern era. Many men, some for short periods, some for terribly long periods, can find nothing in the universe but nothingness. And it is well to hold such men in deepest respect. It is well, for instance, to hold in deepest respect the reponsible atheist existentialist. He discloses through himself, and frequently with a passion that gives the hall-mark of truth to what he discloses, what a man is bound to encounter if he has to try to live in a universe that has no meaning. In a sense the atheist existentialist makes a profound contribution to the religious situation. He defines in his own way its nature and makes it real through his own experience. In a sense, again, he adds to the awe and wonder, for those who feel this; for there is something deeply moving and to

be reflected upon when one who denies God brings God into the picture through the implications of his own articulated experience.

Assuming therefore that at the heart of the religious experience there is amazement and awe, how shall a non-scientist approach what he imagines science to be, to discover in this direction the nature of the experience?

The answer can be first illustrated by an analogy.

The Augustine who came to England was walking on the sea-shore contemplating the metaphysical mystery of the Trinity. He could see no way through its difficulties. He came upon some children playing on the sand. They had dug a large hole in it and were running down to the sea with their buckets and bringing back the water to try and fill up the hole. They told him they were trying to empty all the ocean into the hole. The harassed thinker thought he saw the light. He had been trying to empty the infinite mystery of the Trinity into the hole of his reason.

This is no defence for what, presumably, Augustine did with a metaphysical problem, and for the manner he found of dismissing it, but it is a suggestion about the situation of science. One of the first implicit assumptions of science is that there is no end to discovery. If there were an end, and it were known, then the method of science and its underlying philosophy would undergo such a change that what is regarded as science now would vanish. It is conceivable that something else might take its place, but that could not be the scientific experience that now underlies all scientific work. The belief is that the range in which the scientist works is endless, and always

will be so. One discovery will always lead on to another, and indeed the greater the number of discoveries the greater the number of possible discoveries that will be disclosed. The scientist will always be going to the ocean with his bucket and pouring into the hole he has dug the water he finds in the ocean; only, unlike the children, he does not believe that he can empty the ocean into his little hole. And it must be supposed that in a billion years' time, if this planet is still a planet, and if there is still such an activity as science, the future scientist will still be going down to the ocean to fill his bucket, and the ocean will still be there: and what is more, the relative size of the hole and the ocean will be just the same as it is now.

The ocean to which the scientist goes must be as real to him as the hole he has dug; and, what is more important, just as real as himself. More important, for when the scientist has faded away into whatever scientists fade into, the ocean will still be there waiting for the buckets of his future colleagues. There is no end to the ocean, no depth or height, each secret leads on to an infinity of secrets, and not merely the infinity of numbers, but of fathomless experience. To the scientist the ocean is but an impenetrable veil of mystery which he must explore. He may find illumination in the veil, but the mystery is always there.

To know what is impenetrable to us really exists [says Einstein], manifesting itself to us as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our full faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive form, this knowledge, this feeling, is the centre of true religiousness.*

* Quoted in *Relativity—A Richer Truth*, by Philipp Frank, Beacon Press, p. 233.

True religiousness need not be concerned, in the first instance, with highest wisdom or radiant beauty, but it must be concerned, if the condition of realized loneliness is to lead on to the revelation of God, with an impenetrable reality which provides meaning for every form of human activity—not least scientific activity. No matter how far, wide or deep science may range in discovery, and no matter what startling alternatives it may offer to the human condition (alternatives that no living man can possibly assess for the future), the ocean will still be there. The impenetrable to which Einstein referred is impenetrable in the sense that every major experience of living leads to this mystery. No one, for instance, has penetrated to the mystery of a great work of art. It is great because in some manner it partakes of this mystery. The religious experience feels the total mystery in the totality of things, and must do something about it. The accomplishment of this doing is —for this essay—left in various degrees of value and insight to all that men call religion. For the essayist it is found in the Christian religion, but only in the form that supposes that its basic truth is found in the needed communion between God and man, and in the belief that every expression of the religion is but a created answer to this need.

V

SCIENTIFIC AND RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

by H. Lismer Short

RELIGIOUS people do not usually have a merely undefined "religious" attitude to life; as a rule they make definite religious affirmations, expressing their beliefs or their knowledge. The question is, what are these beliefs or this knowledge *about*, and into how much detail can they go? Recent developments in philosophy, by denying the possibility of metaphysical statements (that is, statements which go beyond the verifiable facts), have raised this question in an acute form. Some modern philosophers would deny that religious statements refer to anything more than the speaker's own mood. According to this view, "I believe in God" means only "I feel secure", and "I believe in Jesus Christ" means only "I want to live in a loving or self-sacrificing manner". It is possible, however, that the same technique of logical analysis may be able to uncover a much firmer foundation for religious affirmations.

Scientific affirmations, on the other hand, are obviously meant to be verifiable. If a scientist makes a statement, he not only points directly at a fact in nature, but gives some indication of how others can see the same thing. Scientific affirmations are not dependent in any way on the mood of the scientist or of those who go over the same ground to reach the same

result. Moreover, the statement can in general be relied on if it is used as a basis for further statements or investigations. It is true that many scientific statements are understandable only by highly-gifted and highly-trained people; but there is no suggestion that this involves some spiritual superiority—in fact, some of the most difficult of these matters seem to be more within the capacity of electronic machines than of human minds. And however difficult the matter is, the same steps of calculation, or observation, or other procedure, will reach the same result every time.

No scientific affirmation is ever left to stand alone; it always becomes part of a collection of such affirmations, not only making up the branch of science to which it belongs, but spilling over into other branches. It is perhaps too much to say that every scientific statement is linked with every other, making up the body of completely articulated knowledge which is called "science" (indeed, there is some reason for thinking that this is a scientific myth); but there is a great deal of interdependence among scientific affirmations, so that they support one another. A scientist makes statements about "the natural world", which can be observed from many different angles. These various testable pieces of information add up together in so generally coherent a way, that the scientist often feels justified in believing, not merely that each statement refers to an objective fact, but also that all the facts so observed add up to a coherent universe, which also is fully objective (whether this is a completely valid inference is open to discussion).

In general, therefore, it can be said that scientific affirmations are reliable factual statements about "the

natural world", and that all such statements which can be made have considerable relations with one another. Scientific discourse then is objective and full of detail. The statements made can be accepted as true, without any metaphysical enquiries, so long as they provide usable information which can be trusted.

Religious affirmations seem to be in a much more precarious case. It is generally agreed that they are not available to any chance-comer, but that some depth of spiritual capacity is needed; and this is not the same as intellectual capacity and cannot be transferred to a machine. There is not the same interdependence between religious affirmations as there is between scientific. Each tends to stand on its own. You cannot always argue from one to another. Often there is direct contradiction. There is obviously a large subjective element in a religious statement—it is partly at least a sign of an inner state of the person making it.

It further has to be noted that religious statements by a number of gifted persons are not usually built up progressively into a coherent body of knowledge, as scientific statements are. Nor, in spite of all the efforts of saints, prophets, theologians and poets, is there a great quantity of religious statements—they tend to be few and simple, repeated endlessly without much development. It is true that myths multiply and proliferate detail, but that is not usually because new facts are discovered, but because ideas and images tend to grow from within, without contact with new fact.

All this would seem to support the view that, while scientific statements are genuine objective and reliable

information, religious statements merely reveal the subjective inner moods and uncontrolled imagination of the various persons who make them, and tell us nothing except about the persons themselves.

One answer to this is to hold that scientific and religious statements are really the same, but are expressed differently. This was the line taken frequently in the eighteenth century. Religious language—particularly biblical language—was regarded as a more solemn way of expressing the same truths which made up the mathematical universe of Isaac Newton. Newton himself, in the important scholium to the second edition of his *Principia*, explained the theological implications of the theory of universal gravitation. This demonstrated, he said, that God was not, as some mystics claimed, the soul of the universe, but was its external author and law-giver, presently active everywhere by means of universal gravitation. God was needed as a term in the scientific explanation of the universe, though, since the term was liable to superstitious misunderstanding, a better term was "the Author of Nature" or "the Supreme Being". Joseph Addison could versify the 19th Psalm in Newtonian terms as "The spacious firmament on high", and a hymn in the Foundling Hospital Collection could similarly praise God who had made "laws which never can be broken" for the guidance of the worlds. All religious affirmations, especially moral affirmations, were thought to be only scientific affirmations expressed morally or religiously. The same kind of rational argument, acting upon observed facts, produced either. Even truths which might have been regarded as purely religious and supported only by a venture

of faith (such as providence, and retribution after death) were regarded as plain inferences from the natural world.

In such circumstances, religious statements were objective and interdependent, but because they were really scientific statements put into religious language. It must be mentioned also that religious discourse was made fuller and more detailed because it was believed that the scientific method of discovering such truths was not sufficiently reliable by itself. The Author of Nature, it was believed, must have given men more certain information about such things than they could acquire by their own efforts. Hence the Bible, as God's infallible text-book of natural and moral information, and Christ, as God's special messenger. The information provided by the Bible and Christ was not different from that provided by scientific enquiry; it was only more definite.

One reason why this line cannot be taken to-day is that science no longer needs the " hypothesis of God ". If religious people insist on talking scientific language but adding God as the highest term, they are introducing something which scientists themselves as a rule do not mention. Further, the old idea of revelation through the Bible no longer can be related to scientific knowledge, since so many of the scientific and historical statements of the Bible are now believed to be untrue (the idea that the six days of creation, in the Book of Genesis, are really six ages of geological time, was a half-way house, and can no longer be taken seriously).

The eighteenth-century synthesis between religion and science broke down because of two developments, one imaginative and the other scientific. The imaginative development came with the romantic reaction. Poets and philosophers (but not usually religious men) asked whether too much had not been made of mere fact-finding reason. Was not this a merely superficial knowledge of the wonderful world? By objectifying, analysing and dissecting, had not the scientist missed the deeper apprehension of truth known by the poet? Was there not a realm of the spirit beneath the natural world of fact and law? Coleridge, who eventually influenced religious thinkers in both England and America, drew a distinction between " understanding ", the mere fact-grabbing faculty of the scientist, and " reason ", the divine penetrative power of grasping the inner meaning of the universe. Schleiermacher elaborated a complete philosophy of religion—one of the most impressive syntheses ever made—based on the same perspective. Natural knowledge, as handled by science, is said to be only the lowest level of a hierarchy of knowledge ascending beyond our comprehension towards the Absolute, towards whom we feel by a spiritual capacity of soul, of which the rational faculties are only a part. But there is said to be also a descending from the Absolute, who is incarnated (even though imperfectly) in the saviours and founders of specific religions. For Christians this manifestation is in Christ, with whom they maintain contact through the Church and its ritual. Christians must not despise other religions, for all are imperfect manifestations of the ideal; but there cannot be a generalized universal religion, for every religion must be specific and self-contained.

Religious men, who had been fighting a rearguard action against science in such matters as the age of the

earth and the historicity of the Bible, were just beginning to take heart from this new way of thinking about religious truth, when the scientific climate itself changed. Whereas in the eighteenth century science meant astronomy, physics and electricity—realms in which objectivity and mathematical measurability were paramount—in the nineteenth century attention was turned to spheres of study where development in time is important, like geology, history and biology, culminating in Darwin's theory of the origin of species. History and biology deal with matters we do not see just from the outside, as we do the movement of planets, but tell of changes in which we ourselves take part. The universe is not only a great machine or piece of clock-work; it is a living and growing thing; and we can understand it not merely by measuring it, but by feeling ourselves to be a part of it.

Was this the "deeper apprehension" of the poets? Could the metaphysical idealism be ignored, leaving a naturalistic appreciation of living change as the basis of truer knowledge?

So theology at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth again took hands with science. As a poet of the period sang, "Some call it evolution, and others call it God". As in the Newtonian age, religious terms were only more solemn variants for scientific terms. By time-thinking instead of space-thinking men would be brought back to religion; and it would be a religion reconciled with science.

But, as we all know, the reconciliation did not last. Scientists themselves shifted their interest, away from biology and its children, sociology and psychology,

back to physics. All the sciences endeavoured to become as objective and quantitative as physics. Behaviourism and psycho-analysis became the physics of the inner life. Religion was left high and dry.

Religious men countered with a revived interest in mysticism, and often were encouraged by scientists to do so. If all the knowledge discoverable by the mind is science, and is knowledge of the natural world, perhaps there is an object of knowledge beyond the natural world, and a way of knowing not included in science. Is it a way of intuitive apprehension, penetrating to the Whole, or the Infinite, or the Ground of Being, whereas science deals only with the parts and with mere existence? Some scientists offered this sop to religion, because it kept science uncontaminated with religious terms, leaving it free to pursue its own objectives, while apparently conceding a higher realm to religion.

The concession was in fact hollow, for if religion can only deal with the Whole or the Infinite or the Ground of Being, it really has nothing much to say. An inarticulate and incommunicable rapture offers little material for religious discourse. If an attempt is made to bring this down to some discussable theology, it usually turns out to be just another version of ancient Stoicism, a belief in the soul of the world and an inherent reason in men and things, which has always broken down as a defendable philosophy. For what do these entities do which is not already provided for by the ordinary scientific accounts of things?

Moreover, alongside this negotiation between science and religion over the last 300 years there has been a growing volume of protest against the whole enterprise.

Even in the eighteenth century, in the age of scientific enlightenment, there was the evangelical revival, insisting that the concern of religion was with man's condition and destiny, not with the circles of the planets. Kierkegaard in the early nineteenth century protested that a rationalized philosophical religion had missed the point, because the leap of faith was not the same thing as the answered argument. The strength of Barthianism and biblical theology in our own day is a sign that the main task of theology is not necessarily a reconciliation with science.

But merely to go back to pre-scientific ways of thought will not settle our problem. Science is here, and has proved its truth by its success. Religion does not necessarily have to be reconciled with science, but it must be able to exist and hold up its head in the same world, without having to apologize for itself at every turn.

The rise of linguistic analysis, as the main interest in philosophy, appeared at first sight to be a deadly challenge to religion, and was so interpreted by its exponents and by religious men. Its criterion of truth or meaning was verifiability, and this ruled out all metaphysical statements; that is, all statements claiming to provide information beyond this matter-of-fact world which are not open to the usual methods of testing. Much of theology was declared to be mere word-spinning, elaborations of metaphors, groundless hypotheses whose truth or falsehood made no difference either way. It was pointed out that many religious affirmations, like, for example, " Divine Providence watches over us ", are in practice so qualified by those religious people who hold them, that it is difficult to see exactly how much they imply. (In this particular

case, either good or evil fortune is equally interpreted as the action of divine providence, so it does not seem to matter which occurs.)

It was generally agreed among linguistic analysts that scientific statements were objectively verifiable, but that aesthetic or moral statements were subjective preferences; religious statements were of the same kind, but likely to be less reasonable, because mixed up with remnants of myth and ancient prejudice. It was not admissible, as it was in the eighteenth century, to use religious terminology to make scientific or moral statements, because of the superstitious and pre-scientific implications of religious terminology. To say, when it thunders, that God is speaking, is wrong, even if innocently meant, because to introduce the idea of God into the matter confuses the truth about thunder. So to talk about " God's will " when making moral judgements or referring to events is to confuse the issue, even though the intention is only to feel the situation solemnly.

The situation for religion is grimmer if it is accepted that the scientific universe is authentic " reality "; that is, that the objective factualness and regularity of the material world proves that the fundamental reality is a space–time universe, infinitely extended, completely articulated according to mathematical laws, like a great machine or clock; so that all non-material entities are either unreal or merely shadows cast by the turning of the cosmic wheels. It has always been felt that choice and purpose are meaningless against such a background, though ingenious arguments have been devised to make them compatible with complete determinism.

However, linguistic analysis has also been applied to the affirmations of science; and it looks as though the reality of the law-controlled space–time universe is also a metaphysical belief, as natural as the Stoic " rational soul of the world " and similarly unneeded for scientific thinking. Scientific enquiry has the assumption that there are verifiable facts, whose existence when not observed by me is posited; it also has to find verifiable regularities, though whether these are causal or statistical varies from science to science, and even in different parts of the same science. It takes for granted that there are relationships between one science and another; though what those relationships are has to be discovered and does not arise *a priori*. What discoverable facts and laws are worth seeking out depends on the interests and purposes of scientists; there may be countless discoverable facts and laws which, so far as we know, are of no interest to anybody. (Ultimately, of course, this reveals that the scientific enterprise has a subjective, purposive and imaginative element that somehow relates it to aesthetic, moral and religious judgements.)

The regularities discoverable by science have unnecessarily obsessed men's minds, as if they deprived men of freedom and choice. Partly this is because the earliest regularities to be discovered were of large material bodies, like planets. This meant that the universe so discovered could be pictured as a large clock, whose parts naturally have no freedom of movement. This " model " became the pattern for all thinking about laws of nature; though it was later discovered that there were other regularities, as of electrons or social groups, which were statistical, and

therefore not according to the clock " model ". Yet one kind of regularity is as important in scientific thinking as the other. It also became clear that not all " laws " follow the pattern of gravitation, that is, are universal; some refer only to specific areas of investigation, or have limits of scale, etc. In other words, the Newtonian mathematical machine is not the ultimate " reality ", but each science is a sphere of enquiry with its own language. Sciences overlap, but they do not all add up to a super-science which explains everything. Some sciences seem contained within others, as for example medicine seems to be a special branch of biology; yet medicine has its own language, and cannot be reduced entirely to biological terms. All sciences presuppose common-sense; yet they do not supersede it, even when they correct it. Science is the various kinds of systematized knowledge found by careful enquiry, and some of it is very surprising, and therefore corrective of first impressions. It can and does enter into every kind of activity, even when it may seem irrelevant—a man in poetic ecstasy writing a sonnet had better take note of the laws of grammar. Science is the most remarkable set of tools man has ever had for getting information about his circumstances; but there is no need for it to become the only instrument of truth.

That does not mean that there is another realm of being which can be described in some other way than by some branch of science. It means that if you want something other than information—aesthetic appreciation, for example, or moral choice—science cannot give it to you. Something else is involved. Nor, because its essence is generalization, can science give

you much idea of the individual as such, particularly of this individual instant in which you stand at any moment (which is, of course, the most important instant, and the one with which you have to deal). Are aesthetic appreciation and moral choice merely subjective, because they are not primarily concerned with generalized information?

The artist, or the man at an issue requiring moral choice, does not primarily think of himself as concerned with his subjective feelings. He considers himself to be making a judgement about an objective situation, and if he discusses it with others, he speaks of it in objective terms. He is, so to speak, orienting himself to the situation; and this requires an objectivity of attitude which is not at all a mere expression of private preference. He considers—and rightly—that a large number of other men would come to the same conclusions. If aesthetic or moral choices were purely individual and subjective, there would not be much point in making them.

But of course not all men will judge the same way; indeed, if everybody, with few or no exceptions, took the same views in art or morals, the question of judgement would hardly arise. It is because an element of choice is involved that the judgement is worth making. So an artistic or moral judgement is not merely an objective collecting of information, like reading a thermometer. The person who makes the judgement is involved, and usually he intends urgently to act upon his judgement. Of course a scientist intends to act upon the information he has collected (there would not be much point in collecting it if he did not); but the artist or the moral chooser is more

urgent about it—it is something upon which he *must* take action. A man is involved in a situation demanding judgement and deed.*

Such a man, equally with the scientist, will use "models" to make the matter clearer to himself. "The situation is like this," he will say to himself, indicating some similar picture which will show the relationship of one element in the situation to another. Formerly artists and moralists made much use of classical models on such occasions, naming Greek gods or Roman sages. Nowadays they are likely instead to appeal to the world of common sense, looked at from some unusually revealing angle, and to some part of the scientific world. There has been in modern times a great shift in artistic and ethical imagery. In particular, psycho-analysis has revealed some surprising information about the underlying mechanism of artistic and ethical activity, and so we draw readily upon that, as is obvious in any modern painting or poetry or moral discussion.

It is at this point that one can usefully discuss the

* A revealing example of a moral judgement is the saying of the dying Sir Philip Sidney, after the battle of Zutphen, when he did not drink from a flask, but handed it to a badly-wounded soldier: "Thy need is greater than mine." Plainly he was not merely expressing a subjective emotion; he was indicating what he believed to be the true pattern of the situation, upon which he felt compelled to act. It does not cease to be an objective judgement because another person—even most other persons—would not have judged or acted in the same way. The judgement and action were moral because they involved choice of just that kind. Moreover, when Sidney had so judged and acted, and the story had become known and accepted as part of a particular moral tradition, his action became a "model" for later ages, enabling others to judge and act likewise, and also providing material for moral discussion.

status of religion against this background. It is true that religion in the past has been much concerned with cosmic explanations. This is because religion was originally concerned with the forces immediately surrounding men's lives, with which they had to deal. As speculative thought progressed, these forces were given more and more generalized scope, until they accounted for everything. By that time religion was discussed on a cosmic scale, and much of it was primitive science rather than authentic religion. Christianity inherited not only Jewish monotheism but also Stoic rationalism, as the fate of Marcion's ingenious attempt to make a new beginning in theology shows. This made science possible, but it was at the expense of religion's primary function, which was to enable man to orient himself to his situation, that is, to make judgements and to act upon them.

As has been said in relation to aesthetic and moral judgements, this is not merely subjective, for it is not idle preference; but it is not just objective, like reading a thermometer. The man himself is urgently involved, and he must make a choice. Unless he is a very unusual man (and perhaps not even then), he does not make his choice " out of the blue "; he makes use of " models ", drawn from the actual past experiences of men who have chosen, thus establishing group-loyalties, and also from the imagery of his own subconscious (which is like the subconscious of other men, and so provides a well-established set of archetypal images, built up out of generations of facing similar situations). There is a great deal of objectivity in all this. In modern times, when the power of criticism is more highly developed than in pre-scientific

days, a man will be less likely to follow the first impulse; but he will follow *some* impulse, unless he is so devitalized that he has forgotten how to make a moral or religious choice at all. Some kind of religious organization and ritual is normally necessary to keep the pattern clear; though modern critical man is likely to be less automatic in his response than his pre-scientific ancestor; but he will lose something of value if he is so ultra-critical that no organization or ritual meets his need. It is unlikely, but not impossible, that he will be able to improve on tradition, though he will have to select within it.

It is at this point that Schleiermacher's insistence that a religion must be particular, and not general, is seen to be important, though not for Schleiermacher's reasons. If a choice is involved, that must be clear, and not dissolved away into generalities. A general religiousness is of little use in the world; a real religion tells its adherents to do this and not to do that, or that this is the best " model " for understanding their situation and not that; it recommends this association, loyalty and ritual, as the one needed, rather than that.

But it is difficult to speak of religion only in the third person. Christianity seems forced upon me as I stand in the midst of the Western world. It is not the only choice open to me, for I can reject it for various Western secular religions and no-religions. I do not think that other religions, like Buddhism or Islam, are really options for me; if I adopted one of them out of a different culture I should Westernize it in the process, and it would probably turn out another version of Stoicism. It is true that I must learn from other

religions where I can, just as, if I were a painter or an architect, I might at some time learn much from Japan or the Aztecs. There is always need for the refreshing of vision, which comes best from sharp contrasts which shock. But I need to plumb the profundities of one religion. I do not want to adopt the whole of what Christianity has accumulated down the centuries; it has collected a lot of fossilized metaphysics, and not all from one source. God has been over-philosophized and over-familiarly described, and so has Christ. The most illuminating thing that Christianity presents to us is a man Jesus who appears to stand alone on the limits of existence, and to say and do the uncomfortably simple, courageous and compassionate things which are true, so that even if we cannot follow, we know that we ought to do so. Much of his story is obviously legend, but that does not very much matter, as the legends are very like the dreams which come out of the subconscious, reflecting immemorial human experience and hope. There is fear there too; this is not altogether to be purged out, because fear is real —I cannot avoid a tightening at the heart when I think of moral crisis, or of death, or of what may happen to the human race, or to some who are dear to me; but I hope, as a modern critically-minded and knowledgeable man, to keep my fears under reasonable control. Jesus, standing as he did as representative man, spoke of God as Lord of heaven and earth and as Father; I do not know all that he meant, and probably should not agree with all of it, but I can use some of the same language without superstition. The thing that matters most is that I should be rightly oriented to my situation, should have courage and

compassion to live in it, and should be able to communicate some meaning, courage and compassion to others.

What are religious beliefs or knowledge *about*? Not information about a metaphysical realm of being which is different from the world we know, but about our own situation, coming to terms with it by having an idea of its shape and pattern, so that we can act from choice. Our language about it is made up of archetypal forms, patterns derived from biography, etc. It has key-phrases and words and ideas. God is the outside term, which gives outline to others; there is much to be said here, both discursively and existentially. The language contains many "words", of which Christ is a principal one. Compared with the language of any science, it is less general and more existential, and it is directed not merely to understanding, but also to acting. And it is always shared with a group, and is a language of communication. In fact, language *is* communication; there are no private languages, created out of my own experience and unrelated to other people's. Descartes led philosophers astray when he tried to base the whole of philosophy upon my private conviction of my own existence. Every word I use has been socially forged and is a way of sharing in group-intentions. I do not make a personal religion out of my private experience, and then go out to find if there are others who think the same way; the group-religion, with its developed language, is always prior to the religion of an individual, however original he may be. Consequently, within any religion there is always plenty to talk about, in re-affirming and holding up to new examination the

group's key-words and models. It is these which are the subject of religious belief and knowledge, and out of them comes the religion's characteristic way of life. And at every point it is open to criticism, and must be criticized, both by those who accept it and by those who do not.

VI

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY? A LINGUISTIC INQUIRY

by L. A. Garrard

THE Christian is enjoined in the New Testament to be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks him a reason concerning the hope that is in him (1 Pet. iii. 15). The men who wrote the Bible and the early Christians were liberals. They knew there were intellectual difficulties in the way of faith, but they did not run away from them, they faced them. They believed and trusted God and his prophets because it seemed to them the reasonable, sensible thing to do. Christianity triumphed over its rivals, it has been said, because the Christians outlived and out-thought the pagans. If the lost radiance of the Christian religion is ever to be restored, we must outlive and out-think the pagans of our day. It does not disturb me to see Karl Barth writing ten volumes of Dogmatics of nearly 800 pages each urging that reason should abdicate from its throne; in trying to persuade us that the sensible course is to stop trusting reason, it is to reason that he is trying to appeal. I am in fact far more disturbed when I hear people who regard themselves as liberals applauding the sentiment that it does not matter what a man believes so long as he has the right feelings and leads the right sort of life. The flight from metaphysics has a long history in

Christianity, as is brought out elsewhere in this symposium.

The theologian will never be a popular figure. The philosopher suspects him of being a Public Relations Officer, who is set up to hand out bogus reasons in support of dogmas that are not really held on rational grounds at all, while the simple religious believer suspects him of constantly giving away too much and betraying the very fort he is supposed to be defending. Indeed, the sad fact is that many in both camps would like to see religion take refuge in irrationalism. Yet the theologian is performing a necessary task and, if he is a genuine liberal, he is trying to do it honestly.

There was a time when philosophers were confident that they knew the Truth. Their task, as they saw it, was to give a complete picture embracing all that is. And since only a philosopher could understand this picture, they were prepared to concede a place, though a humble one, to the theologian. His task was to construct a comic-strip version for the children of the truth that was known in its entirety only to the metaphysician. In the English-speaking countries to-day philosophers take a much more modest-sounding line. They would not dream of trying to construct a metaphysical system which undertook to explain all that is. They have set themselves the down-to-earth task of examining the accounts we give of our experience and telling us how it could be more accurately expressed. As for anything that lies outside human experience, there is no sense in talking about it at all; it is literally non-sense. It seems to me that the theologian may reasonably demand to know precisely what the philosopher means when he speaks of experience. We may

suspect that some of the fiercest contemporary attacks upon the truth of religion depend on an ambiguity in the use of this word. First we are made to agree that there is no sense in talking about what falls outside experience in the widest sense, and then we are told that religious experience is not experience at all in some narrower sense.

Ever since Professor Ayer published in 1936 his *Language, Truth and Logic* great importance has been attached to the principle of verification. Since religious statements are not mere tautologies, but profess to give us information, and yet their truth (like that of metaphysical and some other kinds of statements) cannot be tested by the ordinary methods used in science, Professor Ayer concluded that they are just gratuitous, dogmatic assertions with no real meaning at all. Later he had to broaden his basis of verification, so as to admit as meaningful some propositions in which so many people believe that a philosophy which declared them to be nonsense would be self-condemned; indeed, as Dr. Mascall and others have pointed out, the verification principle itself is something which is neither tautological nor established by sense-observation. Accordingly, most empirical philosophers are now prepared to admit that religious statements do mean something; they have their use, though they may not always mean what the religious man thinks they mean. But though philosophers now use a broader-based test than Ayer's, they still insist that there must be some test of whether what we say is true or false, unless we are going to admit that religion is irrational. This, it seems to me, the theologian must unequivocally admit, and he ought to be

grateful to the philosopher for making him face its consequences.

Let us consider a simple religious proposition. God is our father. To start with, this is obviously not to be taken literally; it does not mean that God assumed some mortal guise, as Zeus was supposed to do from time to time, and seduced our mothers. It means, I suppose, that God acts towards us in the same sort of way as a human father acts towards the children he loves. Now this is certainly not self-evident, and a good deal of our experience appears to contradict it. God does not prevent things from happening to his children that a good human father would prevent if he could. There may be an explanation of this. The most obvious explanation, that God cannot prevent it, is one that the theologian will avoid if he can—he does not believe it to be the true explanation. But there may be other explanations. God is wiser than human fathers, so he may be able to see that in the end it is better for his children that he should not prevent unpleasant things from happening to them. But this certainly is not always obvious, and sometimes it is very hard to believe. The theologian certainly has a case to answer. And in fact the theologian does try to answer it. A good deal of theology is theodicy, the attempt to justify the ways of God to man. But what worries the philosopher is his feeling that the theologian is not playing fair; he will use reason as far as he can to support his position, but it is not really based on reason, and he means to stick to his dogma at all costs, however strong the arguments against it. In fact, when the theologian says, " I know God is like a father ", what he really means is, " I am determined

to go on living as if God was like a father ", or even just " I feel secure ".

This the theologian will dispute. He will claim that he means this, but he means more than this. He will, however, admit that an important difference between religious and scientific statements has now come to light. The religious man is " committed ", as the scientist, taken as an example of the person who makes a simple factual statement, is not. The truth of the former's position affects him at the very centre of his being. Indeed, there is a moral element in the situation. To doubt God's love is not just a matter of doubting a proposition for and against which the evidence is in the balance; it is like doubting your wife. A man might be driven to it by overwhelming evidence, but to doubt on what might seem to an outside observer evidence amounting to a probability would often, in a man who loved, be an act of disloyalty. And this is not an irrational attitude. After all, the lover does know the loved one much better than the outsider and has a right to lay down what evidence would be overwhelming. This is the point of Mr. Basil Mitchell's parable of the Partisan and the Stranger in Flew and MacIntyre's *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (pp. 103 ff.). It is caught up and expressed in more philosophic language by Mr. Ian Crombie later in the same volume:

> Does anything count decisively against it? No, we reply, because it is true. Could anything count decisively against it? Yes, suffering which was utterly, eternally and irredeemably pointless. Can we then design a crucial experiment? No, because we can never see all of the picture. Two things at least are hidden from us; what

goes on in the recesses of the personality of the sufferer, and what shall happen hereafter.

Later he adds to these two further considerations. One, which is the reason the New Testament itself adduces for the Christian hope, is that we see in Christ not only convincing evidence of God's concern for us, but also what sort of love the divine love is. The other is that we see in the religious life of others, if not as yet in our own, an actual encounter with the divine love.

I think we must agree with Mr. Crombie that it is reasonable to bring in religious experience. It might be illusion, just a misinterpretation of some inner psychological process. But those who have had the deepest religious experience are not, at any rate not always, the kind of people we should expect to be deluding themselves. They include some of the best and wisest of mankind. Many of the philosophical objections to admitting religious experience as verification would apply equally against aesthetic experience. When the trained musician says that the music of Beethoven is great, while swing is trivial, he is not simply expressing a personal liking of his own, he is saying something with which every normal musically instructed person would agree and for which he claims he can give convincing reasons. The man who will not take the trouble to become musically or religiously literate has no right to claim that he shall judge the strength of the evidence which will constitute verification in these fields.

One of the strangest contributions to the debate about the meaning and validity of religious language is

that of Professor Braithwaite in his Eddington Memorial Lecture of 1955 on *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief*. Unlike most of the empirical philosophers, who are convinced that religion does not give us any valid knowledge of the outside world, Professor Braithwaite is not unfriendly to Christianity, and even professes himself a Christian. Nevertheless he is convinced that when the Christian says "God is my heavenly Father" he means nothing more than "I am feeling secure in my inmost being", and when he says "God is love" he only means "I intend to live lovingly". In the case of the latter statement this is, of course, in direct conflict with the New Testament; when John first formulated the proposition, he was thinking of certain events which had occurred and which seemed to him to demand a response of loving activity from the Christian: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son."

Professor Braithwaite does indeed see that there is nothing specifically Christian about having a feeling of security and making a resolve to act lovingly. He comes to the conclusion that one of the peculiarities of religions is that they include what he calls a "story". The story usually includes both history and mythology, but there is room for infinite variety in the extent to which it is believed to be true (ranging, in Christianity, from fundamentalism to Gnosticism), and it need not be consistent within itself; it may, for instance, include monistic elements which will inspire confidence and dualistic ones which rouse to action. The one thing a religion will demand is personal commitment.

It is unlikely that any Christian would remain content with this account of his religion. Christianity demands commitment, true, but it is commitment in the form of discipleship to a particular historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth. To the Christian it has always seemed that loving behaviour was the consequence of his belief in a God who demanded it and showed it, especially in sending Jesus to give a living example of a life of love; indeed, the behaviour is a test of the genuineness of the belief. What psychological techniques are used to reinforce the will is a matter of minor interest.

The fact is, it is not a matter of indifference to the Christian whether his story is true or not, though different parts of it have different kinds of truth. He may indeed, as Professor Braithwaite points out, derive inspiration for living from a fictional story like *The Pilgrim's Progress*, as well as from the life and teaching of Jesus, so far as these can be reconstructed by the historical critic. He may get it, for that matter, from legendary accretions, like the angels and shepherds of the birth story, the resistance to Satan at the Temptation and the confirmation of the victory over death in the finding of the empty tomb. But it does make a difference whether he believes that these things actually happened as they are reported or not. Nobody believes that a man called Christian actually met with the adventures Bunyan describes, but the story has a truth of a sort because we do have experiences of which they seem an apt allegory and it makes sense of our lives to see them as a pilgrimage. If we do believe that in Jesus salvation has become available for men, that he did set an example of complete loyalty to God,

that his personality did survive death and make contact with his friends, so that we can still have contact with him to-day, then the legends which objectify these facts have a certain truth, though not the literal truth they have often been supposed to have. If, on the other hand, we became convinced that there never was a man called Jesus, but he was a solar myth, or that though he did live once, we really know practically nothing about him, except that he was a Jew who made an impression on a few friends and who was later made the centre of a religious system with an inclination towards love and later deified by devotees who had never known him as a man, I do not see how the Christian story could have much meaning for us.

We should, of course, still have the body of teaching which was put out in his name. It would be futile to discuss how much of it was the genuine message of the original teacher, but there is a certain type of mind to which that would not matter. Indeed, from its origins in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, there has always been a strand in Unitarianism which has looked upon Christianity as a philosophy and an ethic and seen its founder as the enunciator of certain principles of conduct which, like mathematical truths, are universally valid and have only to be understood to be believed. The personality of the teacher has no more to do with the truth of what he expounded than that of Galileo or Newton with their discoveries. If anyone else can add to it or improve upon it, it is quite open to him to do so. The ideal religion is an eclecticism, combining the best out of all the historical religions and omitting whatever seems false or outmoded.

This is a position which it is not easy to refute. It can only be said that, while it appears to be true as regards science and mathematics that it is irrelevant to the value of a discovery who made it, the same is by no means true in art or music. History, too, is not the same for everyone, irrespective of his background and traditions. The events are the same, but their significance varies, and history is not just the recording of events, but the selection of significant events. The death of Nelson does not mean the same to a Frenchman as it does to an Englishman, and it means nothing at all to a Chinese. The death of Jesus meant quite different things for Pilate, Caiaphas, Peter and Paul.

Moreover, history has a strange way of getting her own back on those who ignore her, and though again and again attempts have been made to construct an ideal eclectic system, none of them has ever possessed the vitality necessary for survival. Christianity cannot be reduced to a mere code of ethics, divorced from the personality of the teacher. The implications of this are even wider than at first appears. On the one hand we find that, once we begin to discriminate between that part of the Christian teaching which bears the imprint of the great prophetic founder himself and that which was added by disciples and ecclesiastical organizers with varying measures of his spirit, we are committed to an endless critical examination which, while it needs to be undertaken by scholars, is clearly beyond the capacities of the ordinary man. And, on the other hand, we find ourselves more and more driven to the conclusion that we cannot have the religion of Jesus unless we are prepared to accept at any rate some of the Church's teaching about Jesus.

This is not, of course, to say that we have to accept the full orthodox position, as formulated, for instance, at Chalcedon. The New Testament contains many Christologies, not all of them compatible with one another. The Son of David, the second Adam and the eternal Logos are very different figures, rooted in different traditions. There are traces of the views that Jesus was a man who was appointed Messiah at his resurrection, his baptism and his birth. For a long time each of the great centres of Christianity continued to have its own characteristic emphasis.

The fact is, as Pratt pointed out in *Can We Keep the Faith?*, that Christianity is neither teaching (whether the teaching of Jesus or the teaching about Jesus) nor a code of ethics, though it contains both. It also includes (and it is perhaps the greatest weakness of Professor Braithwaite's position that he makes no allowance for this and is apparently untouched by it) a certain type of experience, which may vary a great deal from individual to individual and is not easy to define, yet remains something recognizable as specifically Christian. In its simplest form it consists in a consciousness that the Christian's life is oriented towards a God who is best thought of in terms of the symbolism of the family, as a father who expects his children to treat other members of the family as brothers, and a consciousness also (which is what distinguishes the Christian from the liberal Jew) that God has shown his love by speaking to us in Jesus and through him reconciling us to himself.

Many Christians, of course, have gone far beyond this. On the one hand we have the Christ-mystics, of whom Paul was the first to leave behind the record

of his experience. " I live, yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me " (Gal. ii. 20). " For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain " (Phil. i. 21). " If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit " (Gal. v. 25).

At the other end of the scale we have the ordinary simple Christian who in every age has at least had a fairly clear mental image of Jesus, helped for many centuries by the conventional portrait of the bearded figure in the white robe teaching or blessing children or hanging on the cross, still praying for his persecutors. He has said to himself, " God is like this ". If there is any truth (and nobody supposes that it is a literal statement of fact) in the saying, " God created man in his own image " (Gen. i. 27), then it is not surprising that people should use their idea of man at his highest to illuminate their thought of God.

Theological language is odd, like the language of poetry. But religious people cling to it because they find that only by the use of symbol and analogy can they form an overall picture which does justice to the whole of their experience. The task of the theologian is to understand what kind of language he is using at any given moment and what kind of truth it expresses. The Christian theologian is particularly well equipped for dealing with the linguistic problem, since from the first he has been engaged in translating, not only the actual words of his Master's teaching but the thought-forms of his faith, from Aramaic into Greek, then into Latin, then into English or even (a particularly hazardous undertaking) into Chinese. Bultmann may be said in his demythologizing to be translating the Gospel into Heideggerese, and Braithwaite into

Logical Empiricese. Some of these languages are very poorly suited to expressing the whole of what Christianity means. I have dealt at some length with the inadequacies of Professor Braithwaite's translation. The old Liberal Protestant language of the Social Gospel, in which " Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness " was translated into " Build the welfare state ", was certainly not adequate to convey the kerygma of the New Testament. Professor Bultmann's language, though I think it keeps more of the spirit of the original, is also open to serious criticism. Here the relationship of God and the world is depicted in terms of challenge and response, of an I–Thou relationship mediated through the revealing figure of Jesus, which is indeed one of the central insights of Christianity. No religion has put so much emphasis on personality and personal relationships as Christianity, and that is its great strength. It was built on a personality so strong that it came through even after death and apparent failure. Our modern understanding of personality has been largely moulded by the efforts of Christian theology to formulate its notion of personality in the Godhead. The Christian insight that the best medium of Divine revelation is human personality at its highest, and that it is possible for every man to have a personal relationship with the Power on which all things depend is the great contribution of this religious tradition, and should surely make a strong appeal to an age which has seen human personality threatened by the tyranny of the machine and the abstract idea.

Yet even Bultmann's reinterpretation leaves too much out. It is almost as individualistic as

Braithwaite's, and ignores the social side of salvation, to say nothing of the grand sweep of Paul's picture in Romans viii of the redemption of the whole creation, the "one far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves". The difference between Gospel and myth, and the reasons why some symbols should and must be discarded, while others must not, has not been analysed with the necessary care. Here Dr. Farrer has done a great service with his fourfold classification of the difficulties modern man has with the Bible symbolism.* First, there are the statements which are just false history or antiquated science and nothing more, and these must be simply and openly discarded. Secondly, there are symbols taken from the experience of an agricultural community living in the Middle East in the first century; these should be replaced where possible by imagery appropriate to the conditions of an industrial civilization of the atomic age. Thirdly, there is the difficulty due to the atrophy in modern man of the power to respond to poetry, and the only answer to this is re-education of the imagination. Finally, there is the difficulty that comes from the fact that many people have adopted a philosophy or religion which is fundamentally opposed to the Christian outlook. Dr. Farrer calls these respectively the necessary, the accidental, the lamentable and the factitious refusals.

Let us conclude, in the light of what has been said, by examining the Christian "story".† Its foundations, of course, were laid down centuries before Christ,

* Bartsch (ed.), *Kerygma and Myth*, p. 214.

† A good account of the "story" will be found in the *Report of the 1958 Lambeth Conference*.

notably by the school of writers who produced the book of Deuteronomy. The story of the world and man's place in it is best seen as a great drama, in which the author and chief actor is God. The creation, in six scenes, of which the last depicts the coming of man, was very good, but at an early stage something went wrong. Man used his freedom to transgress the Creator's law and sought to become God's equal in power, but not in goodness. The consequence was his subjection to sin and death. But the world was overwhelmed by a flood, and man's attempt to reach heaven by his own building was overthrown in confusion. God begins to select certain individuals like Abraham, and one people in particular, to be the vehicle of his message to mankind and in some measure to stand as representatives of man as God wants him to be. The patriarchs, only partly comprehending its nature and meaning, respond to the call that comes to them to leave the city and go out into the unknown. Moses, the deliverer from oppression in Egypt, introduces the basic law given him by God for the governance of human life and the restraint of sin, and shows them that God has chosen them and made a covenant by which he and they are indissolubly bound together. As time goes on it becomes more and more plain that the mass of the people, and even their leaders, are not faithful; it will be through a tiny remnant that pure religion will be preserved. The political disaster by which the Temple was destroyed and the cream of the people led into captivity was not the end of God's care and the frustration of his plan. There would be a new, more inward covenant. A deliverer would come who would be the representative

of the ideal Israel, bearing the sins of others in order that light might come to all mankind. More and more it came to be felt that one day God will forcibly intervene and end it all. Then there appears one who proclaims himself the representative Man who will bring in the new age, the representative too of his people, as the servant of God who takes on himself the sins of the world and through suffering becomes the light of the world. His will is so brought into harmony with the divine will that he feels himself to be in the fullest sense the Son of God. The religious leaders of his people join with the governor of the occupying power to compass his death. *Tetelestai*, he cries, It is finished. And so it seemed to those who thought they were rid of the troublesome prophet from Galilee; so, too, for a moment to his bewildered followers. But *tetelestai* has another meaning, It is accomplished, it is made perfect.* The great event of history, the event from which our era is reckoned, had taken place. The old order was ended. A man had died, but the grave could not hold a personality like his. First his old followers, and then more and more of other races as well as his own, became convinced that he was with them still, that death was no longer triumphant, that the old entail had been broken. The function of divine representative, which had narrowed down from chosen people to remnant and remnant to the individual Son of Man whom God had " sent ", begins to broaden out, first to the Apostles (those who are " sent "), into a new holy people, a church for all nations, filled with the divine Spirit which had been

* I owe this point to Goguel, " The Problem of Jesus ", *Harvard Theological Review*, XXIII, p. 120.

alive in Jesus. The new Israel, like the old, has been unfaithful again and again, the Spirit has been at work sometimes in a tiny remnant, but all can now see that God is at work in history, the conquest of death which makes it reasonable to believe in immortality is a token that the power of evil is broken, though it lingers on and comes back again and again. In the end good will prevail, there will be a judgement, after which Christ will give back his authority as God's representative and God will be all in all. The strain and sufferings of the present are but the birth-pangs of the new order which is already in the process of creation. Meanwhile the challenge goes out to the individual Christian to measure his life by the standard of the man who, by identifying his will with God's, has shown what human life is meant to be—the second Adam, the one man of whom in the fullest sense we can say, " This was a man ". To many, indeed to the great majority of Christians, he is also God. In this one man the divine immanence has become a full incarnation. Unitarians will continue to feel that this modification of the original story, however useful it may have been at one stage in translating its message in terms intelligible to those trained in the language of Greek philosophical speculation, is to-day more of an incubus than a help, and, however reassuring as a reminder of God's presence in the world, must weaken the force of the story's challenge.

It would be idle to deny that the story has its difficulties for the religious liberal. In the main these difficulties seem to me to be of two kinds. In the first place, modern man has come to accept a different story, which seems to be more in line with what

scientists and historians have told us of the development of human life. The idea that the world was created very good, and that evil entered only with the fall of the first man, seems untenable and conflicts with the generally accepted evolutionary story (though it is worth noting that Freud tells a story which is much closer to the Fall-story than to the evolutionary). Are we confronted here with one of Farrer's " necessary " refusals?

The second type of difficulty comes from what many liberals feel to be an inconsistency within the story itself. Is it compatible with the goodness of God that he should constantly frustrate man's efforts to save himself without God's aid (the Prometheus motif)? Is not the whole idea of a covenant and the choice of certain individuals and one people a denial of the universality of God's love? Worst of all, is not the notion of a judgement at which some will be sentenced at the mildest to exclusion from God's presence for ever an exaltation of justice at the cost of love?

In view of these difficulties many liberals conclude that we can keep only those parts of the story which are confirmed by scientific and historical research and which appeal to the enlightened modern conscience. They would combine with them the modern " stories " of biologists like Sir Julian Huxley and historians like Arnold Toynbee. But, alas, as we have seen, the modern stories are often just as irreconcilable with one another as they are with the traditional Christian story. Moreover, while liberalism has rendered a valuable service to religion by distinguishing the different languages in which different parts of the story are spoken, and thereby delivering us from the

idolatrous insistence of the fundamentalist that they are all equally sacred for all time, it is particularly prone to Farrer's " lamentable " refusal to speak any language but the prosaic one of science and scientific history. It is for ever engaged in peeling off what it believes to be the husk, in the vain hope of finding a solid kernel of literal truth to which it can pin its hope of salvation. This is admirably brought out in Professor Wilder's *New Testament Faith for Today*, and he quotes a characteristic passage from Reinhold Niebuhr's *Beyond Tragedy*:

> The message of the Son of God who dies upon the cross, of a God who transcends history and is yet in history, who condemns and judges sin and yet suffers with and for the sinner, this message is the truth about life. It cannot be stated without deceptions but the truths which seek to avoid the deceptions are immeasurably less profound. Compared to this Christ who died for men's sins upon the cross, Jesus, the good man who tells all men to be good, is more solidly historical. But he is the bearer of no more than a pale truism.

There is exaggeration here, but Niebuhr is right. It is surely better to make what we can of the story as a whole, recognizing that it is compounded of different languages, discarding only those parts which belong to the " necessary " refusal, since they are so contrary to the story accepted by all enlightened modern men that they have lost all philosophical or even poetic validity, or they are so violently in contradiction with the essentials of the story that they only weaken its effect. All the time the truly liberal mind will be scrutinizing its own presuppositions to ensure that it is never guilty of " factitious " refusal and does not reject the Christian story because it has adopted a

fashionable contemporary *Weltanschauung* which is in reality shallow and immature.

Coming now to the particular difficulties I have outlined above, I think we may have to substitute the evolutionary story for that part of the Christian story which tells of a Fall, since historical knowledge seems to demand it. Yet it is a less satisfactory story as it stands, since it appears to reject the goodness of the creation and may easily lead to a dualism of nature and spirit which it was the great merit of the Judaeo-Christian outlook to have transcended. Hence the attempt has been made to combine the two stories, keeping the idea of a Fall, but throwing it back to a period before the differentiation of species.

The other line of difficulty requires careful examination. Anything in the story which is really inconsistent with its main theme of the unfolding of God's love must certainly go. This will include eternal punishment, and perhaps even annihilation of the wicked; it does not include judgement, for it would be a strange love which did not wish to bring the evil-doer to a realization of what he was doing. The covenant and the selection of individuals as God's mouthpiece are an expression of the supreme importance of personal relationships. They do not necessarily imply an arbitrary favouritism, though in the Bible they are sometimes so presented. We must lay all the emphasis on those parts of the story that insist on the wider outlook, where it is plain that the choice is not made solely for the sake of those chosen, but for the sake of all mankind. It was, indeed, because this emphasis, which is to be found in the best teaching of the prophets, was so strong in Jesus that

he offended his own and his disciples had to break with Judaism. The false view of election came back, of course, but the best Christians have always known that, whatever truth there may be in the words "extra ecclesiam nulla salus", they do not apply to the visible church. The God who brought the Philistines from Caphtor and raised up Cyrus has assigned a part in the historical process to every nation and every individual; even Pharaoh's resistance has its place within his purpose. It may be a hard gospel, but, as Dr. Vidler says,* it *is* a gospel that God's purpose embraces even the most rebellious misuser of his freedom.

If, in Kittel's phrase, some liberals still find the "scandal of particularity" an insuperable stumbling-block, they must think whether they be not mistaken. However untidy it may appear to the perfectionist, life is like this; the pattern is one not of mathematical equality, but of infinite variety and differentiation and degrees of value. We can at any rate dimly perceive that this is bound up with the supreme importance of personality and its development in freedom, the values which lie at the heart of the Christian story. The Utopian desire for a tidy uniformity has inspired some of the most unchristian acts in history. Liberal Christianity should not reject the notion of election, but ensure that it is broadened so as to embrace the whole creation.

In the same way, I do not think the liberal need reject the word "unique" when applied to the Christian revelation. In a sense every revelation, indeed every event and every person, is unique. The idea becomes objectionable only when the emphasis

* *Essays in Liberality*, p. 72.

falls on the negative implications in the way of exclusion of others rather than positive appreciation of the value of the individual whose uniqueness is affirmed. We shall prefer to think of Christ as " the first-born among many brethren " rather than the " only-begotten " Son of God. But the levelling tendency which discourages commitment to the good we see because it might prevent us from finding some theoretical good elsewhere is inimical to a vital personal religion.

In the last resort we must accept or reject the story as we feel that it is or is not a help to us in making sense of life as we have experienced it. If philosophy seems to be blowing with a bleak and destructive wind, it has at least cleared away the fog of platitudinous verbosity in which some theologians loved to dwell. It has compelled theology to criticize its language and thought and find more accurate forms of expression. Unitarians, with their enthusiasm for veracity, should not be behindhand in this work. The only way in which religion can be saved from idolatry is through constant criticism and reinterpretation. Symbols which have lost their meaning must be replaced by others which can still evoke the desired response in contemporary man. We shall return to those that are still meaningful with a deeper, because more enlightened, understanding, and we shall thank God for their power to speak to the soul and bring it nearer to him.

VII

JESUS AND THE GOSPEL

by Fred Kenworthy

THE question of the historical basis of the Christian religion and the place of Jesus in the Christian tradition is still hotly debated, and is likely to be so for a considerable time.* It is of vital importance not only for the scholar, whether he be theologian, historian or philosopher, but also for the humble Christian, " the man in the pew ". For the last named the grounds upon which those who are his pastors and teachers base the faith to which they have committed themselves are significant. That is true whether his loyalties are to orthodox or to liberal Christianity. If it is said that we can really know nothing of him who is regarded as the Founder of Christianity, or that it does not very much matter whether we can or not, or that the Gospels which are our only records of his life, teaching and death are of very little historical value, then he will certainly experience profound doubts about his religious faith. Many Unitarians and liberal Christians in particular who have been accustomed to look to Jesus as the author and perfecter of their faith will find the grounds of their confidence severely shaken.

The claims of Christianity to our allegiance have

* See H. G. Wood, " The Present Position of New Testament Theology ", in *New Testament Studies*, Vol. 4, no. 3, April, 1958.

long been based upon its nature as a historical religion. Its foundation by a historical figure is said to be one of the reasons why it survived what T. R. Glover called "the conflict of religions" in the Roman Empire. Cults that were contemporaneous with the rise of Christianity and which were in some senses rivals to it all perished, while Christianity conquered the Western world. The essential difference between Christianity and other religions of the time, a difference which gave it survival value, was that it received its impetus and character from a historical figure. Christianity, it has been claimed, was rooted in history in a way that other cults and religious affiliations were not. The claim has not been confined to any one expression of Christianity. It has been made, and is still being made to-day, by both orthodox and liberal forms of the faith, though clearly they do not all make it in the same way and they rest upon different emphases.

We may consider first the orthodox standpoint. The orthodox claim that their faith is based upon and is confirmed by such historical events as the Incarnation, the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, and so on. These are historical testimonies to the authority of Jesus Christ and established him as a "Son of God" in a way that cannot be claimed for any other religious teacher or founder of a religion.

This claim, that Christianity rests upon events which have taken place in history, has been part of Christian apologetic from the earliest days. From one point of view the Gospel according to John may be regarded as a protest against those who tried to detach the Christian religion from its historical basis. Coming as it did when eye-witnesses to the events of Jesus' life must

have greatly diminished in number, if they had not completely died out, it was an answer to those who sought to safeguard Christianity by lifting it out of the plane of the historical altogether, a process exemplified by the contemporary gnosticism. Hence, notwithstanding his conception of Jesus Christ as the pre-existent Logos, he insisted on a true humanity and a real Incarnation. Also, assuming the fourth evangelist and the author of the epistles of John to be the same, we find him saying: "For many deceivers are gone forth into the world, even they that confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist." *

Similarly, from the second century onwards the same insistence upon history is to be detected. The Apostles' Creed, the earliest of the Christian formulations of belief, was possibly in existence in a rudimentary form as early as A.D. 150. It has been described by H. R. Mackintosh as a "commixture of supernatural and historic facts", but he makes the significant point that history was insisted upon.† It aimed to combat docetism and the more extreme forms of gnosticism. The symbol arose less from a desire to exhibit Jesus Christ as a marvellous divine being than from an instinct for his true humanity. It was the reality of his birth, and not its unique character, that was emphasized, and other events, such as his crucifixion, his burial and his resurrection, were included because they were regarded as facts of his career. As such, they distinguished Christianity from its rivals.

Under the influence of biblical criticism and of

* II John 7.

† H. R. Mackintosh, *The Person of Jesus Christ*, p. 137.

critical inquiry into the development of Christian doctrine, the traditional presentation of Christianity as a historical religion has been considerably modified. In so far as they have discarded the Virgin Birth or a fleshly resurrection of Jesus as established facts of history, liberals and modernists have made inroads upon the generally accepted orthodox position. Nevertheless, they have insisted upon historicity in another way. For example, in his *Living Religions and a World Faith*, W. E. Hocking has emphasized the importance of personality in religion. He is arguing, so to speak, that religion cannot exist in a vacuum; it must have expression in human personality. So the highest religions of mankind look to those in whom the truths of their faith have been made manifest. That is the way Christianity presents its own case and, he suggests, its strength lies in that it can maintain " Here, at least, God is visible, and in a way clear to all men . . . here at least we see the human being exercising a divine forgiveness." He continues:

> The instinct of mankind, when confronted by a generality of religion or philosophy, is to say ' Show me by illustration what you mean ' or ' Show me by an accomplished fact that your way is possible '. And so Christians are able to point to an illustration—to Jesus Christ—for the ' veridical traits of actuality are there.'

Hocking, one might assume, would not insist on such events as the Virgin Birth as being essential to the Christian faith, but he would put the particular historical fact of the life, teaching and death of Jesus Christ at the centre.*

A further example of the importance of history to

* See Hocking, *Living Religions and a World Faith*, pp. 234–7.

Christianity may be drawn from Professor C. H. Dodd's book *Gospel and Law*. Here the author draws some important distinctions between the pattern of Christian ethical teaching in the Roman Empire and the teaching of other agencies, such as Hellenistic Judaism and Stoicism. All dealt with very much the same kind of subject, but Christianity provided one significant difference from the others, in that it presented to its adherents an objective standard in Jesus Christ. Here was a human being who had lived and died in a particular time and place and was a concrete example of the kind of life the first Christians could seek to achieve.

This insistence, therefore, on a core of historical fact, on a person and on events that are rooted in history, is characteristic of Christianity. It is not confined to any one aspect of it, since both orthodox and liberal exponents of the faith make an appeal to history. In the nineteenth century, indeed, the liberals believed that the application of historical method would prove a reliable means of strengthening their case, since it would enable them to distinguish between the secondary or legendary elements in the tradition and those which were firmly grounded in history, and thus make the faith more secure. Hence nineteenth-century liberal criticism applied itself to the task of distinguishing between the primary and the secondary, between " the historical Jesus and the theological Christ ". It set out to discover the Jesus of history. It was a magnificent effort. Albert Schweitzer called it " a uniquely great expression of sincerity, one of the most significant events in the whole mental and spiritual life of humanity ". The aim, in Harnack's words, was to

strip away the husks from the kernel. It was believed that by stripping away the accretions of myth and legend, or of illegitimate theological speculation, one could finally arrive at the true centre of it all, one could reach Jesus of Nazareth, the original historical personality. The result, in view of the immense effort that was expended, was disappointing. Out of the immense labours of the nineteenth century there did not issue, as many had hoped there would, a single, clear and homogeneous picture, reliable in all its details, of the historical Jesus. Instead there came out of it something that was very different from what many anticipated—there came Schweitzer's eschatological Jesus. That appeared to be responsible for far more problems than it solved.

It is on this issue of nineteenth-century scholarship that certain things may be said at the present time.

It is often maintained that since the publication of Schweitzer's *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* * any search for what is called " the historical Jesus ", or " the Jesus of history ", or Jesus as a historical personage, has been rendered either hopeless or irrelevant. But that was by no means the necessary conclusion of Schweitzer's work. Surely the conclusion was not that we could have no knowledge whatever of the historical Jesus; it was that the historical Jesus was different from what men had conceived him to be. Hence it was that Schweitzer dismissed as mistaken, or even futile, the work of the nineteenth-century scholars who thought that by stripping the Gospel of its later accretions they would discover as it were an original Jesus who would

* 1906: translated into English (1910) as *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*.

be readily understood by contemporary thought and prove acceptable to contemporary aspirations. It was in that sense that Schweitzer dealt a heavy blow to, if he did not destroy, the liberal Jesus of the nineteenth century. He did not maintain that the search for the historical Jesus was vain, but that the historicity, so to speak, was grounded in eschatological conceptions. The historical Jesus, who certainly existed, was moved by ideas and conceptions that were very different from the dominant ideas and conceptions of the nineteenth century. Thus, in his own well-known words:

> The historical Jesus will not be a Jesus Christ to whom the religion of the present time can ascribe, according to its long cherished custom, its own thoughts and ideas, as it did with the Jesus of its own making. Nor will it be a figure which can be made by a popular treatment so sympathetic and universally intelligible to the modern multitude. The historical Jesus will be for our time a stranger and an enigma. *

One undeniable result of Schweitzer's work has been that no interpretation of the gospel of Jesus, or of the New Testament as a whole, can ignore the presence of eschatological conceptions. They have to be reckoned with. But these conceptions do not make either the message of Jesus or the Gospels remote or completely unsympathetic to our age. For instance, one effect of Schweitzer's interpretation was thought to make the ethics of Jesus of no more than limited validity or application. They were regarded as being interim ethics, i.e., rules of conduct designed for the brief period before Jesus returned to the earth on the clouds of heaven as the Son of Man. That view of the ethical

* *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1945 edition), pp. 396–7.

teaching of Jesus can certainly be discounted. If the Kingdom of God, or the rule of God, is in some sense always present, if man stands constantly under the grace and judgement of God, then the ethical teaching of Jesus has reference and relevance to our and every age. The teaching represents a moral ideal for those who have accepted the rule of God. It merits constant discussion and consideration, as the ethics of the New Testament have been expounded and their significance brought out afresh by Professor Dodd in the book already mentioned.

While therefore the search for the historical Jesus had surprising results and, certainly, it did not achieve what at one time it was thought that by patient and sustained endeavour it would achieve, nevertheless it was far from being vain. At the present time we find various attitudes to the relationship between Christianity and history.

Some would maintain that while the search for a historical basis is not indeed in vain, the claim of Christianity to be a historical religion is still a dubious one to make owing to the large element of interpretation that is embedded in the traditions from the very beginning. It is true that all writing of history involves interpretation, and in so far as they are historical documents this applies to the Gospels. It is also true that the historian has not only to discover the objective historical fact but must also assess its significance, and it must be admitted that different historians will interpret the same fact differently. But that does not mean that fact does not matter, or that facts cannot be found in the Gospels, or that all interpretations are as good as each other. These considerations are as relevant to the

Christian religion as they are to any other phenomenon of history.

Others would maintain that there are indeed historical facts, but that they have no significance for the Christian faith. An upholder of this point of view appears to be Rudolf Bultmann. He does not deny that there was a historical Jesus. In the first volume of his *Theology of the New Testament* * he has clear and definite historical statements to make about the eschatological prophet, Jesus, who was active in Palestine and was crucified there. But this prophet does not appear to have anything to do with the proclamation of the Word which the individual Christian accepts and which is the essence of Christianity. It might therefore be said that for many defenders of the Christian faith history does not need to be taken seriously. Objective historical facts are not of any great account.

This scepticism in certain attitudes to the relationship between Christianity and history is not justified. If, in the presentation of Christianity, history is discounted or ignored altogether, then dangers are encountered that may ultimately be completely destructive of the faith. It seems to us that the following considerations are relevant to the issues at stake.

First, whatever conclusions we may feel have been reached by the researches of New Testament scholarship, it surely cannot be denied that Christianity was founded upon a life and a personality. The figure of Jesus is of crucial importance for the origin of the Christian faith and the Christian community. The problem can no longer be stated in a way that once was fashionable—did Jesus really live? It used to be

* English translation.

claimed by the opponents of Christianity that it was really no more than a kind of mystery religion with a legendary divine hero for the object of its faith. In other words, it was tradition that brought into existence a mythical founder. Defenders of Christianity used to write books to prove that Jesus really did live.* Did the fact of Jesus create the tradition? Or did the tradition bring into existence a mythical founder? These are surely no longer live alternatives. It was the fact of Jesus that created the tradition. Historical evidence for the existence of a human being who lived and taught and was crucified in Palestine in the first century is as sound as it is for most other historical figures. Even if we say with Schweitzer, and in more recent days with Bultmann, that Jesus was no more than an eschatological prophet, he was nevertheless a tremendous historical personality; he was a fact of history. On that fact a faith was founded. What it is important to maintain is that we know enough about the fact to pass judgement on the faith or the interpretations of the faith that are founded upon it. For instance, Bultmann appears to say that while we can know something about the historical Jesus we know so little that we cannot use what we know as a corrective or as a court of appeal against later Christologies, either in the New Testament itself or in later thought. That is an unjustifiable conclusion. It is pointed out elsewhere in this symposium that in the New Testament there are many Christologies and that not all of them are compatible with one another. We are not compelled to accept them all indiscriminately, nor can

* See, e.g., *Did Jesus Really Live?* (1911), by H. J. Rossington, a Unitarian author.

it be maintained that there is but one true line of doctrinal development. It is legitimate to maintain that we know enough about Jesus' own conception of his mission and purpose to say whether or not the doctrine of the Virgin Birth or the constructions of the conciliar creeds are consonant with his own self-consciousness. Unitarianism has every justification for its existence.

Second, while we must admit that the materials of which the Gospels are composed and the purposes for which they were written do not allow us to construct anything like a full-scale biography of Jesus, nevertheless they give us a pretty reliable outline of his ministry. Recently Dr. Vincent Taylor published a book which, if some modern critics are right, ought never to have been written, since they would maintain that the materials for it do not exist. In *The Life and Ministry of Jesus* it is recognized that detailed events in the life of Jesus cannot be narrated in anything like chronological order. It is recognized that the Gospels were shaped in large measure by the needs of the early Church. It is recognized, too, that those needs very often determined what has remained of the teaching of Jesus, the form in which it appears and so on. But historical phases in the life and ministry of Jesus can be determined. For instance, Taylor divides the ministry of Jesus into five parts:

(*a*) A brief period before the Galilean ministry.
(*b*) The ministry of Jesus in Galilee itself.
(*c*) The period of the withdrawal from Galilee.
(*d*) The ministry in Jerusalem.
(*e*) The Passion and the Resurrection.

It is not true that we know so little about the factual life of Jesus that it is possible to imagine all the narratives about him are a myth.

Third, it will be agreed that it can never be said with absolute certainty of any occasion in the Gospels that here we have the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, the very words that he spoke. It can never be said, "This is most certainly what Jesus said." Nevertheless, this does not mean that there are not many occasions when we *can* say, "We can be sure that we have got as near to the words of Jesus as we can for many other figures of the ancient world." In the first three Gospels there are frequent examples of different accounts of the same incident. When the accounts are compared and analysed, the variations in the story and the words attributed to Jesus are brought out. There is, for example, the story of the rejection at Nazareth, told in both Mark and Matthew, though omitted in Luke. By the use of textual criticism, literary analysis and so on, it can be determined with a considerable amount of accuracy which of the accounts comes nearer to historical reality. It can be accepted with considerable confidence that here is a genuine incident and the reader is pretty close to some genuine words of Jesus. There are many details in the Gospels of word and incident that are there because they happened and were remembered, and not because they met the needs of the early church. Some of them were, indeed, very embarrassing from the point of view of the church.

Fourth, even though we can never get to the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, of many aspects of his teaching we have more than enough to know that here is a vision and an ideal that men both within and without the churches

will always find moving and compelling. Without going into details, it may be said that of four aspects of his teaching this is true:

We know

(*a*) Something of the nature of the kingdom of God.

(*b*) The character of the God who is the ruler of that kingdom.

(*c*) Something of the kind of life that its citizens are called upon to lead.

(*d*) The inward nature and quality of true religion.

As H. G. Wood has recently remarked: "The finality of the Christian faith is to be discerned in the non-finality of any given formulation of it." * Jesus' teaching is constantly being understood anew, while it remains the same.

Finally, it is impossible to eliminate altogether the personal or the denominational factor in assessing the work of Jesus, but it is a counsel of despair to say that no one can ever make a genuine attempt to do so. In spite of all the problems that surround the Gospels, they do give us a vivid picture of the personality of Jesus. In the collection of sayings that is known as the Sermon on the Mount; in the parables; in the Lord's Prayer; in the Beatitudes (in spite of the fact that we shall never ascertain what was the original version either of the Prayer or the Beatitudes), we have a memorable outline of his teaching. The claim of Christianity to be a historical religion, and to have its foundation in the life, teaching and death of one who

* Op. cit., p. 181.

was supremely what he taught, is soundly based. The historical figure is something that we can go back to again and again as an inspiration and as a corrective. It may be asked, after all, what is the great and supreme difficulty for us in the life and teaching of Jesus? Is it that we never know what it is? Very often we do know what it is. There are questions on which we can have no shadow of doubt. Can we say, for instance, that on the question of divine forgiveness we do not know what Jesus taught? Or that we do not know what the divine demand is or what is the Christian responsibility? The supreme difficulty for us is not always that we do not know. It is, quite simply, putting into practice what we do know. That is the supreme difficulty. And that is why the life, teaching and death of Jesus Christ remain for us an imperishable standard against which we in the West must always judge and measure our attainments.

VIII

THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM: A VINDICATION

by C. Gordon Bolam

THE contributors to this symposium met for discussion conscious of the inimical climate of opinion in which the modern theological liberal has to offer his apologia. From every quarter blow the bleak winds of critical condemnation and disapproval until he feels he relives in real fellow-experience the circumstances of the philosopher in Plato's *Republic*, who, in the days of declining Athenian greatness, where people cared nothing for his ideals and derided his principles, felt like " a man in a storm sheltering behind a wall from the driving wind of dust and hail ". *

The factors producing the unfavourable contemporary situation are so frequently the topic of exploration and analysis that there is little need now to rehearse them; suffice to mention two as more particularly significant. There has been the *débâcle* of two world wars, with the consequent collapse of accepted patterns of thinking as well as confusion in the sphere of economics and society generally. One by-product has been the feeding of a sense of spiritual defeatism, which has expressed itself in a tendency towards totalitarianism in thought and action. Liberalism in all its manifestations has become the scapegoat and a

* *Republic* (Lindsay's trans.), vi, 296.

word of reproach. Independently of this, though not unconnected, liberal thought had reached a point at the close of the nineteenth century when it was being recognized that its horizons needed to be extended. On many frontiers of thought the new ideas which had illuminated men's minds for over three centuries had reached speculative deadlock, and it was obvious that a new era required re-examination of the seminal ideas if regeneration was to ensue. The pace of events in this century prevented any gradual re-assessment, and the forces of liberalism were forced into defensive positions before they could be redeployed. Not unnaturally, much of the criticism derogatory of liberal theology is thus directed against positions liberals themselves would have come to abandon. Nels Ferré, for example, writes:

> Theoretically modernism failed because its standards were not primarily religious. . . . It claimed to be a religion, i.e., a faith, but its standards were those of science and reason operating within the limits of what can be demonstrably seen and known. Why modernism should have chosen these standards is, of course, easy to understand, for these were the borrowed tools with which it had cracked the crust of traditional theology. *

Whilst, from another angle, it has been stated that,

> . . . the fallacy of liberalism which makes it in practice so destructive a force, is, . . . that it implies the possibility of achieving imaginative ends by the exercise of the will. †

By mid-century it is clear that we have to acknow-

* *Return to Christianity*, p. 21.
† Malcolm Muggeridge, *New Statesman*, 20 Dec. 1958, p. 876.

ledge we now live "in a post-liberal, post-idealist, atomic age in theology".* But the change has been cataclysmic and, like an avalanche, has spread devastation in its path. It is now an illiberal world, marked by the repudiation of reason as a valid guide to truth; the dogmatic interpretation of history, whether from the particularity of traditional Christianity or Marxist materialism; and a fundamental disregard of the authentic value of human life. Facing this new situation the present writers are not concerned to advance arguments which are but weak alternatives to either traditionally accepted Christian formulations, or the varieties of scientific humanism. There is a pressing need for a creative handling of human experience in such a manner as will be true to the initiative in the insight of Jesus which alone keeps the religious quest dynamic, experimental (that is, being put to the test in all ages) and a continuing discussion. Thus may religion be saved from becoming a formal recapitulation of the life of the Master merely as a rehearsal of historic happenings. It is not that the liberal theologian is engaged in trying to invent a Christianity without Jesus, but he takes the equipment which the modern world provides and seeks to expound a Christian truth as intelligible and significant in the situation in which men now find themselves. This is a very different attitude from assenting to doctrinal formulations as though this were the living core of religion. It is the attempt to harmonize the complementary nature of perceiving the truth in Christ and living that perceived truth as personal encounter where in the Johannine sense we must do the truth, be the

* R. Gregor Smith: *Metaphysical Beliefs*, Intro. p. 5.

truth. As Schweitzer has expressed it: "The truth has no special time of its own. Its hour is now—always."

Ferré speaks of failure because the tools for the quest were borrowed from non-religious techniques, but this does not invalidate the quest nor the need to find newer and more adequate tools. In suggesting that these are already at hand, F. H. Heinemann argues * that it is essential to be free from the schools of thought represented on the one hand as stretching from Descartes to Berdyaev and on the other from Parmenides to Heidegger. Whilst we have to start, he writes, in metaphysics just as in any other science, with first principles, the mistake occurs when these are called *absolute* presuppositions. It cannot be ignored that men in the past have indeed taken them as absolutes, but we should now regard these attitudes as properly relegated to the realm of history or psychology. First principles remain relative, hypothetical, open to question and replaceable at any moment by other principles. They are the rules for co-ordinating our experience. Thus it becomes possible to escape from what John Oman called the "three finalities": Fixed Organizations, Fixed Ideals and Fixed Theologies.

The clue to a newer philosophical approach is to be found in the verb *respond*. In the past Descartes used *cogito* (I think) and in our time *existo* has been substituted as a way out of the sterile argument produced by Descartes, but, says Heinemann:

> Response is more general than answer which is restricted to speech. Response is an answer originally given not in words, but in movements, reactions, feelings, impulses, etc.

* *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament*, p. 190.

Provided the statement, "I respond, therefore I am", is regarded as a matter-of-fact truth and not a truth of reason, its usefulness as a key-symbol in unlocking many doors cannot be questioned. The phrase may be inverted to stand: "I am in so far as I respond."

> I arise on all levels of my being (body, sense-organs, soul and mind) only by responding. Man comes into being by an act of response; his evolution consists of interrelated and complicated acts of response. As long as he is alive he responds; when he is dead he no longer responds.

What in the rest of nature is purely mechanical response can become in man, with the dawn of consciousness, a conscious experience, wherein he may be aware of how he reacts or how he should respond. Determined as he may be by the stimuli of his experience, he is yet free in the manner in which he may respond; and indeed at liberty to refuse to respond beyond the sphere of merely mechanical reaction.

As the ship's compass is "free" to reflect deviations and is still fufilling its function when not always directed to its magnetic pole, so the key-symbol of response provides a concept which makes understandable the notion of unity of the spirit with diversity of local interpretation. It avoids the difficulty of shutting out of the sphere of religion those who in all honesty confess that their response is best described in terms other than those common among theologians. It provides an imaginative approach to meeting the problem of the particularity of Christianity over against

that of other great religious systems. It is a concept which keeps no man out of the range of the love of God and seeks to bring all men into the fellowship of the Kingdom of God. To the discipline of truth it owes allegiance in all ages and in all places. No less than the compass gives the navigator freedom of the seas does the concept of response give the spirit of man confidence to negotiate the oceans of experience.

From the time of Descartes thinking has been the occupation of part of the human personality to receive pre-eminent recognition. In the light of psychological penetration we can see the more fruitful use of a verb such as Heinemann has selected because it opens up immense possibilities of development. Responses may be experienced at all levels, subconsciously and supreconsciously as well as at different centres of consciousness itself. Thus the door is opened from the limitations of a merely cerebral interpretation of reality in the now old-fashioned sense of its being completely explained in terms of the rational activity of man. It also helps us to break down the artificial distinction (which seems so obvious to commonsense) between "external reality" and "internal reality". This dichotomy has for long been employed to give science an assumed prestige over metaphysics, aesthetics and theology. External reality belongs to the measurable and taken to be the more real. In fact we are responding to only one reality which, for convenience, we differently describe as external or internal. Response to internal reality is not less valid than response to external reality: it is differently described. Much more important is the question: What is it that we respond to?

It is inevitable that those who answer such a question with an affirmation that response is not to an "it" but to "God", apprehended in terms of personality symbols, will enlarge the interpretation of their experience in religious terms. They are also aware of the need to revise their use of religious symbolism when it has worn thin like coins which have lost their superscription. But to the religious mind response has this further awareness. They are not bridgemakers seeking to construct a way across the abyss from the human to the spiritual as though it could only be achieved from the human side alone. Their effort is met from the side of the divine. It has become more than a lonely search for Truth: it is a personal encounter. Though others may not share with them this experience, they do not turn it into an exclusive camp which keeps out all other seekers. They can enter into other responses with sympathy and maintain the integrity of their own.

For historical reasons the main stream of liberal theology has flowed in those churches now bearing the name of Unitarian, but it cannot be too strongly asserted that it would be a contradiction of the inner ethos of the movement if its adherents advocated a "party line" or anything that could be called "Unitarian" Christianity. Unitarianism is now honoured by its martyrs and by suffering, but it is no more than a name which describes those whose quest is ever determined by the unflagging search for truth. With all the equipment of scholarship and research the modern world provides, they seek not to preserve a religious position intact from criticism, but co-operatively would live out of their religious insights in a

world where the old signposts have been destroyed for ever. " What can men live by? " and " What ought men to live by? " are questions to which they address themselves and they set no frontiers to the bounds of their search.

Such a quest may first be stated as the recognition of the need of an ideal for the individual. Response means a personal encounter. Religion to be vital must come out of a situation where I have existentially apprehended it. But since no two people live in exactly the same mental context this requires an expression of worship and theology which permits of diversity within unity of purpose. The ideal for the individual has its roots in the Old Testament, where the humanism of " Son of Man, stand upon thy feet " becomes actualized in Jesus and henceforth presents the type-figure of Christian humanism.

Secondly, we recognize that religion must set forth a vision for society. In worship we meet as brethren of the Kingdom. In the church there is the practical awareness of knowledge which can only come to us by participation and not just as spiritual self-culture. Our response in this sphere is arrived at by our belonging to a definite group or participating in a particular experience or activity. To give significance to the concept of church as a fellowship of believers means returning to the clear differentiation Jesus himself made between " neighbour " and " brother ". What is commonly spoken of as the brotherhood of man ought more strictly to be regarded as the neighbourliness of man, where the moral basis of life requires of us at least a neighbourly responsibility. Brotherhood belongs to those who have voluntarily accepted

the discipline and obligations of living in the context of the Kingdom of God. By neighbourliness we are lifted from self-interest (which a pure individualism would lead to) into the solidarity of common service. But a " brother " has a dual function: he has a special relationship to the rest of the brethren and, secondly, he has to act as a catalyst in the world, transforming and transmuting. In the world it will be upon his shoulders that the burdens of the unthinking and the evil fall. Thus societal religion has to face the challenge that redemption is by the path of sacrifice.

Thirdly, we recognize that what has failed so tragically for modern man is the collapse of an imaginative awareness of God. Many of the papers in this symposium are deeply concerned with this issue and seek by examining discarded or decaying symbols to reach a profounder concept. Karl Barth recoiled from what he termed the " subjectivism " of liberal concepts of God. But it may be asked whether his " objective " approach does not end in as great a difficulty where God is not merely remote but actually sundered from human communion. To speak of God breaking through to man by revelation is ultimately a counsel of despair, since revelation is subject to human interpretation and is not self-vindicating. God speaks to man, though it may be that man mishears and cannot always rise up with certainty and exclaim: " It is he." Yet God speaks and will continue to do so; and this means that we hear through our subjectivity, the message is to us and we must learn to interpret it. And though Schleiermacher has been subjected to much severe criticism, his timely sentence is still directed against a narrow dogmatism which would shut up ideas

of God instead of opening out new vistas of interpretation: "You cannot believe in God arbitrarily, but only because you must." The liberal is not projecting his subjectivism on to God, he responds with love to love.

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The cover, by Grenville Needham, is suggested by a comment of Leonard Mason at the end of his essay, and is based on an electron microphotograph of a nerve-muscle junction. This edition published in 1966 with cover and binding by Latimer Trend & Co Ltd of Plymouth.

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