Hans W. Frei

Unpublished Pieces

Transcripts from the Yale Divinity School archive

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Contents

Foreword

In the winter of 1998, I spent some time working through the papers collected in the Hans W. Frei archive at Yale Divinity School, while working towards a book on Frei's theology.[1] This collection of transcripts makes available a few of the most interesting pieces from the archive, and a couple from elsewhere, all of them previously unpublished – and all of them, I think pieces which clarify and extend Frei's published works, or which cast interesting sidelights on his theology.

Several of the pieces are transcribed from messy manuscripts, two from audio-tapes of lectures; I have taken the liberty of tidying up punctuation and grammar in places, of expanding abbreviations, and from time to time turning notes or stumbling live speech into prose. I have also tried to complete (though not normally to supplement) Frei's sporadic and uneven references, to identify some quotations for which he provided no reference, and to add information about the availability of English translations for some of the German sources he quotes.

This project would not have been possible without the assistance of Martha Smalley, Research Services Librarian at YDS, the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Cambridge, who funded my trip to Yale; Charles Campbell, who provided me with a copy of one of the pieces not in the archive; Mark Alan Bowald, who transcribed the tape recordings of another piece missing from the archive; Angela Morris at Louisville Seminary Library who helped me get tape recordings of Frei's Greenhoe Lectures – and most of all my wife Hester, who endured my absence in Yale, and typed the 'Analogy and the Spirit' piece.

[1] The book in question was *Christ, Providence and History: Hans W. Frei's Public Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2004). A full list of the contents of the archive is available on the Yale Divinity School library website at http://www.library.yale.edu/div/div076.htm; my own annotated bibliography of the items which caught my attention is available at http://www.ex.ac.uk/~hkhigton/frei/bib1.html.

Abbreviations

CD	Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1955–1977)
CPH	'Primary Sources: Annotated Bibliography' in Mike Higton, *Christ, Providence and History: Hans W. Frei's Public Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2004) – followed by the reference number which the transcribed piece has in that bibliography.
EBN	Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale, 1974)
IJC	Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975)
KD	Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag/Zollikon, 1932–1967)
TN	Hans Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New York: Oxford, 1993)
YDS	Hans Wilhelm Frei Papers, Manuscript Group No.76, Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library. (YDS 13–199 = box 13, folder 199, etc.)

I

Theological Reflections

1
Analogy and the Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth

This is a densely argued

argument in the form which Anselm gave to it and his peculiar version of what is analogue and what is analogate in real understanding point in this direction.

I

Barth speaks of the proper analogy as *analogia fidei*. We may describe this as follows: Faith includes or is an act of apprehension (*vernehmen*) of a proper and unique object, God. This act of apprehension is undivided (contrary to Kantian dualism). In it the hiatus between thought as the content of consciousness (of which one may give a phenomenological description) and thought as the noetic form in which the object is genuinely present to thought, is overcome. One may describe the apprehension in two ways, once by way of the elements of rational consciousness, i.e. as a critique of reason, and once objectively as the judgment and intent concerning objective reality other than the thinking mind that grasps it. But these two descriptions must parallel each other since, as we have said, in apprehension there is no hiatus between object and apprehension. Insofar as we are speaking of consciousness, the unity of apprehension takes place within or prior to the duality of intuition (*Anschauung*) and concept (*Begriff*):

> Human knowledge (or cognition: *erkennen*) takes place only in intuitions and concepts. Intuitions are the pictures in which we perceive (*wahrnehmen*) objects as such. Concepts are the counter-pictures with which we make these perception pictures our own, by thinking i.e. ordering them. In this way they and the corresponding objects can be pronounced by us.[2]

Insofar as we speak of apprehension as objective judgment, its unity takes place within or prior to the duality of perception (*wahrnehmen*) and thought (*denken*):

> In that God has determined him and granted him to apprehend *God*, man is apprehender *generally*. Apprehension means taking another as such into one's self-consciousness … to be capable of doing so … Man cannot only posit himself, but in that he posits himself, he can posit something other and posit himself in relation to it as well as it in relation to himself … We know that and how man apprehends … By pure thought we cannot pass beyond the barrier of self-consciousness and thus cannot take another into our self-consciousness … (on the other hand) what I merely perceive and have not thought remains something external to me without being taken up into my self-consciousness as something other. Only the *concept* of apprehension

> is divided … The apprehension itself … is the undivided act in which perception makes thinking possible and thinking makes perception actual … As capable of such apprehension man is claimed in his relation to God … That he has *spirit* means, in man's case, first of all that he is capable, in this sense, of apprehension – first of all and above all of God; and because he can apprehend God, therefore and therewith the other in general.[3]

Faith, then, in one of its forms is apprehension: For be it noted that apprehension is apprehension of God's actuality as *this* proper being, or the one who bears the proper name God. The apprehension of *this* being takes place only in an act of obedience to the Word of God, in which that name stands revealed. Indeed apprehension is the cognitive form of this active obedience, faith. God is known in his Word, and the Word is given only in and to faith. When Barth speaks of *analogia fidei* he means first of all an identity of faith and apprehension, and he means further that in the act of the apprehension of God our words, intuitions and concepts are in a manner conformed to God.

Now we must add that by virtue of the fact that faith has as it were other forms than that of apprehension, the *analogia fidei* is more inclusive than the cognitive form in which we have here clothed it. For epistemological purposes, apprehension is identical with faith. Nevertheless, under other conditions one would have to say that faith as such and not simply our intuitions, words and concepts is conformed to God and to his Word.[4] It is important to say this because it is only as an *act* of faith, that of apprehension of God, our words, intuitions and concepts are conformed to God. They are not so conformed in themselves:

> That which makes the creature into an *analogon* of God does not lie within it and its nature, not even in the sense that God from within himself recognizes and accepts something within the nature of the creature as an *analogon*. Rather, what makes the creature into an *analogon* of God lies solely in the veracity of the object known analogically in the knowledge of God, and thus in that of God himself. Thus it pertains to the creature extrinsically in the form of apprehension and precisely not intrinsically.[5]

Analogy therefore exists only as an act of faith in or apprehension of God as object in which faith, our words, intuitions and concepts are conformed to God in the act in which he reveals himself in his Word (once again, in the *act* or *process* of faith and apprehension only! The analogy is therefore not so much in being as becoming). The conformity of analogy is not one of equality or

inequality, identity or non-identity, but rather 'a similarity (*Ähnlichkeit*), i.e. partial correspondence and agreement between two or more different magnitudes which limits identity as well as non-identity.'[6] We note immediately that analogy-in-apprehension means that God is an object. He is not myself. He is other than I or we. He is recipient or acted upon, albeit in unique manner, as a unique object, i.e. as the only one who is subject *in toto* even in his being acted upon either by himself or by the creature. Furthermore, we must add that his unique objectivity for us is not his primary objectivity, that in which he is objective only to himself, to his subjectivity. The latter unity of objectivity and subjectivity *in* which he is himself (i.e. behind which there is no being and therefore no *fons Deitatis*) is his Triunity. To us creatures he is uniquely objective in a secondary objectivity of which the primary objectivity is the ground and possibility. In this secondary objectivity he is himself once more and nothing less than himself but this time in hidden form, as a creature in the creaturely realm. This means that God is present to us as object only in revelation, i.e. in that activity and work (*Wirken und Werken*) *ad extra* in which he is himself the act, in the Incarnation of his Word and in the effective testimony to the incarnate Word.[7] Barth concludes from all this that analogy to God, since it takes place only in the act of specific divine self-revelation, does not occur in a general condition of created being conformed to general or absolute being behind the specific act in being which is the Triune God. He rejects accounts of an *analogia entis* (but with reservations, as we shall see!) open to interpretation by natural theology. Such theology, operating with concepts of general and absolute being apart from God's act of grace he regards as mythologizing or 'abstract' (in the pejorative sense of that term – which Barth does not always apply to it), if not downright sinful.

On the other hand, the thought and language of encounter, the purely 'existential' interpretation of divine–human communion, he also rejects as an exclusive mode of interpretation. Here, it seems to him the connection between faith and reason is broken, analogy is rejected along with nature as such as a significant medium of divine self-revelation. The result is a false spiritualizing or ethicizing of theology. Objectivity means at least that what confronts us has 'nature', and just this spatial or structural quality (by virtue of which the other that we apprehend resists our ability to penetrate and posit it in the act of apprehension) must be affirmed of the incarnate Word and, by analogy, of God. Thus exclusive use of the language of encounter distorts the understanding of revelation, though it must be used as one means of interpretation.

It is difficult to explicate just what one means by the 'partial correspondence' that takes place in the act of conformity which Barth has called analogy. Protestant theology has always relied on the affirmation that God is revealed in hiddenness or hidden in his revelation. We cannot dwell on

this suggestive and puzzling affirmation. We may simply draw attention to the fact that for Barth it does not signify the inconceivability of an ultimate being or of the Absolute (which is 'after all' simply correlative to its conceivability). Rather it signifies the positive, special presence of God who is

> invisible and unpronounceable because he is not there in the manner in which the corporeal and spiritual world which he has created is there. Rather, in this … world he is there in his revelation, in Jesus Christ, in the proclamation of his name, in his witnesses and sacraments and thus visible only for faith … This means that he is to be seen only as the Invisible one, pronounced as he who cannot be pronounced – and both not as the inclusive concept of limit or as origin of our vision and speech but as the one who orders and permits … and in free, gracious decision enables this our hearing and speaking.[8]

He is absent because he is present in a special mode, the mode of unconditioned freedom, as untrammeled Agent in one special act. Both presence in God's specific mode and his absence according to our general understanding of presence may be partial synonyms for what Barth means by God's hiddenness and revealedness. In any case the fact that God *veils* himself in his revelation excludes the notion of equality or identity (*Gleichheit*) between God and faith. The fact that he *unveils* himself in his revelation excludes the notion of total non-correspondence (*Ungleichheit*). Now this mysterious act of veiling and unveiling is not a quantitative balance (as the terms 'immanence' and 'transcendence' of God are sometimes taken to imply) between two magnitudes in God and (*per analogiam*) in man. 'Partial correspondence' means no quantitative division in God or man. The act of veiling and unveiling himself in revelation is a unitary act of the unitary God to unitary man, though it may only be grasped dialectically. But even the dialectic is teleologically ordered, for the gracious will of God to reveal himself is basic to his veiling as well as his unveiling of himself. The word 'partial' must be introduced then not for reasons of quantitative division in the relation between God and man but in order to grasp that our genuine apprehension and the conformity that takes place in it meet their limit in the very same act of God which enables them to come about in the first place. So the conformity or correspondence of faith-apprehension with its indirect object, God, remains partial.

Our exposition of Barth's understanding of the term analogy may stop at this point for the time being. We shall have to develop it briefly later on in connection with the three concepts to which Barth has chiefly sought to apply the term. First, there is the analogy of our words and concepts and their object, God. Secondly, and analogy exists between faith and the Word of God. (In

the chronology of Barth's *Dogmatik* this analogy is actually prior to the other.) Finally there is an analogy between God and man *qua* man, an *analogia relationis* which includes also a conformity of the rest of us to the man Jesus.

II

We must try now to set Barth's understanding of analogy into the wider context of his thought. We begin by reminding ourselves once again that he has equated apprehension with one distinct form of faith. It is that form in which God as well as the Word in which we grasp him appear as object. We have also heard that neither God nor man is divided. Obviously therefore God is subject even if it is extremely difficult for us to understand what that may mean. Man also is subject or agent, the irreducible agency focus of his enterprises. Human faith is the faith of a subject vis-à-vis another who is not posited by my subject-activity but can become an object precisely because he posits himself toward me, because he is the center of his own subject-activity. Thus faith for Barth is not only apprehension of an object but through the apprehension it is relation with a subject. Perhaps, though I am not sure, the language of encounter may be utilized to explicate the subject-subject relation. In any case it is not all-sufficient because it cannot speak of the objectivity of God, and the latter is not merely a mode of God's subjecthood directed toward the creature. He is an object, a determinate structure analogous to spatial presence.

But what may we say of God as subject and the creature's relation to him? At this point Barth touches on a problem which has nagged German Idealism and the tradition of German liberal theology over many years. Is it possible to describe the relation between God and creatures (specifically human beings) as a direct, immediate or internal one? Something like this claim had been a dominant note in nineteenth-century Protestant theology. Barth was confronted with a choice between some such affirmation and an apparently mechanical interpretation of revelation as a set of rational propositions derived from the structure manifest in the apprehension of the Word of God. This seemed to him to be Hobson's choice. In his doctrine of revelation he tried to avoid it by pointing to a relation which one may perhaps not justly call internal but which is distinctly one in which subject is present to subject, content to content. He balanced this view by insisting that the 'present' relation is matched by a

conditionally; but God can move man from within in such a way that his presence to God's Word is man's own act. Yet as such it is the act of God.

This difficult affirmation is absolutely central to Barth's thought. We may observe in the first place that it also relies upon a certain analogy between faith and God's Word. Faith now means not so much apprehension as subjective human participation in or presence to God, and thus a certain conformity of the human subject to the divine. God is not object toward faith in this sense but rather the openness of the Revealer in the revelation for the participation or presence of the believer. In other words God as subject is present to the believer. First God is fully present to himself in his own (state of) revealedness. This is the basis for his presence to the believer's subjectivity and then the basis of the believer's presence to God.

Secondly we may suggest that this affirmation, strange as it sounds, is so central to Barth's thought that we encounter it in the exposition of every doctrine. Because it is everywhere it seems to have no form basic to all others so that a certain (doubtless distorting) boldness is involved in searching for its fundamental formulation. We shall have to make just that attempt.

In the first place the affirmation that man's presence to God's revealedness is man's own act and yet as such the act of God, seems to be an echo of Barth's interpretation of a motif in traditional Christology. It recalls the mysterious conjunction 'and' of Christology: Divine and human natures are not merged, synthesized or confused in the act of incarnation. Yet any endeavor to see either nature in abstraction from its union with the other is precisely that – an abstraction, an unreality. We may not abstract the total qualification of human presence to and for divine revealedness from the absolutely prior revealedness which God is first of all in himself (the openness in which as Spirit he is open to the communion of the Father and the Son) and which on that basis he is *quoad nos*. On the other hand we may not abstract the revealedness of God from a participation in it which alone makes it real, although we must add that the participation is in the first place not that of the creature but that of God himself in his identity with his Word. Only after affirming the self-sufficiency of this divine self-participation may we add that it is wrong to abstract divine revealedness and human presence in faith from each other. Now we may add that such an abstraction would echo either Ebionitism (divine revealedness is naturally or automatically present to human subjectivity – the liberal view) or Docetism (divine revealedness includes within the divine presence to itself the presence of the human subject to God – the view of the objective Idealist). However, Barth stresses that the divine revealedness is the total and sufficient ground of human presence to revelation. He seems to affirm on the one hand that there is no necessary, essential or internal relationship between those two and yet he seems to provide just such a systematic principle when he declares the one to be the sufficient ground of the other. Once again the parallel to his

Christology is clear. The two natures bear no necessary, essential or internal relation to each other qua natures, and each is present in undiminished fullness. Yet God and God alone is the subject of the event of incarnation and thus also of the real and genuine human being and agency. It is in this sense that Barth interprets the meaning of *anhypostasis* and *enhypostasis*.[9]

In the second instance the affirmation that man's presence to God's Word is God's act and yet an act the subject of which is man and not God has obvious affinities with the doctrine of predestination. The focus and concreteness of divine being is a unity of Agent and being in a specific act, the act in which God is one in the unity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. This being in and as specific act is reiterated in the incarnation.[10] Contrary to what is usually taken to be the direction of Platonic thought Barth believes that the being and knowledge of being other than God is possible and real only through *this particular* divine being in act: 'It is this object and content for the sake of and in relation to which man's nature is a rational nature … In this particularity (*das Besonders*) the universal (*das Allgemeine*) is contained.'[11] A specific act or decree electing the specific man Jesus from eternity is the basis of predestination. In and through his election that of others takes place. In him the electing God and elected man coincide. To place predestination in an absolute decree outside Jesus Christ is to talk about an abstract God (an absolute or universal without concrete focus) and abstract man. Indeed man is simply eliminated from the equation by an on-rushing fatalism or some other mythology. But in contrast to every sort of fatalism God has the power to determine and move man by the utilization and activation of human freedom. God moves man from within in such a way that divine freedom is the indispensable ground and the enabling context for human agency and freedom. In the act of God's government over and in man the latter exercises his selfhood:

> To give honour to God means that in our existence, words and actions we are made conformable to God's existence; that we accept our life as determined by God's co-existence, and therefore reject any arbitrary self-determination. Self-determination comes about when God is honoured by the creature in harmony with God's predetermination instead of in opposition to it. It happens when we accommodate ourselves, not to the dominion of any power (history or fate, for instance), but to that of the One to whom alone there belongs right and finally might.[12]

Finally we may point to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the basis for the mutual presence of God and believer:

> The Spirit guarantees that to man which he cannot guarantee to himself: his personal participation in revelation. The act of the Holy Spirit in revelation is the 'yes' to God's Word pronounced by God himself on our behalf, but pronounced now not only *to* us but *in* us. This 'yes', spoken by God is the ground of the confidence in which man may understand revelation as something which concerns him. This 'yes' is the mystery of *faith*, the mystery of the *knowledge* of the Word of God, but also the mystery of a willing obedience pleasing to God. 'In the Holy Spirit' all this exists in man: Faith, Knowledge, Obedience.[13]

As the Spirit God is present to us and we through faith are present to him. In this mode of divine being he is not only the source of revelation, the revealer, nor only the content of revelation. Here he exists as revealedness, i.e. as revelation open for the participation or presence of the creature. It is to this openness that faith is conformed. Thus through him in his revealedness he is not only present to us but we in our inwardness are present to him.

Inwardness at first blush seems to have more in common with the subjecthood of the agent than with the objectivity of structure; and yet it does seem to point to a structural, static element – but in the agent. Perhaps it comes as close as any concept to representing the integrating and dynamic focus of agency (subjecthood) and structural continuity (objectivity). Its bond of union with objectivity and agency is so close that one may say that it penetrates these immanently. It is not a noumenon of which they are phenomena, nor a substance lying at a distance behind two or more perceptible qualities. It is therefore not the self which Locke assumed and Hume rejected. One recognizes without difficulty here Kant's noumenal self but even more typically Schleiermacher's feeling existing only in the passage to and fro between thought and will. Projected on a universal scale (and there is no intrinsic necessity why inwardness *per se* should be individual, since in this view individuality is usually simply equated with the empirical expression of inwardness) it may assume the shape of Hegel's subject, indeed of absolute spirit, or later of Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's will to power. In any case, it is a *content* filling a *form* of determinate *structure* moved by its own *agency*.

In some such sense Barth too sees human being or faith 'present' (the term now assumes an uncanny flexibility) to the Spirit that is its enabling present. One may say that here, much more clearly than in connection with the doctrines of Incarnation and Christology, the thought form emerges by which Barth can understand a human act or participation as one in which – in the actual event of revelation, of presence to each other of divine revealedness and human inwardness – the human being is untranscended subject and yet the act is God's! Von Balthasar[14] compares Schleiermacher's 'transcendentalism' and

Barth's 'actualism' in the search for an original unity in knowing and being. For both the point of 'greatest intensity' is the co-presence of duality with its own transcendence. For Schleiermacher the duality of intuition and feeling is overcome in the ultimate identify of God-consciousness in Christ and in religious (self-)consciousness. For Barth there is the much more stringent duality of revelation and faith, 'which however is overcome and turned into a unity *in actu* through the deed of the Holy Spirit grasping man.' The point of 'absolute intensity' in Barth's theology lies 'essentially beyond rational cognition although it is the basis of all reason; it is the Actual which justifies every condition, the non-objective from which every antithesis may be posited and explained.' This point of highest intensity and transcendence is for Kant the unintuitable transcendental apperception, for Fichte the original positing of the 'I', for Schleiermacher the original fact of religiously determined feeling; and for Barth it is 'faith as God's prime act of Grace upon man.' Because this reality from which the movement of thought derives and to which it points is beyond thought, thinking must be dialectical. Moreover this reality is the meeting point of objectivity and being. For Barth it is the focus of the unity of God and thence the eternal basis for the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ. It is the point 'from which creation originates, salvation is effected and the task of human culture must be undertaken'.[15]

Faith, then, is the point of contact or mutual presence between God's revealedness and human inwardness, of divine and human content, of the Spirit and human spirit. As the action of the Holy Spirit faith is the act of God and yet an act of which the human being is subject. Here duality and its transcendence meet. The thought form is obviously that of German Idealism. The issue which we must pose but cannot answer is if this thought form substantively dominates the content of Barth's theology. The steadily recurring accusation of 'Christomonism' (which infuriates Barth) points in the direction of an affirmative reply. On the other hand one may say that despite all tendencies to the contrary Barth hesitates to make of the transcendence into unity (e.g. *enhypostasis* or the doctrine of the Spirit) a *systematic* principle from which the existential or anthropological reality and its nature are to be derived.

Yet an element of doubt remains about his denial of transcendence and assertion of duality. If he were consistent in it he would be untrue to his basic theological principle, the absolute priority and independent, concrete reality of God, who is the basis for the being and truth of all else that exists. Simply to assert the duality of divine and creaturely realities would mean resignation from all significant theological statements of explanation concerning creation, redemption and faith. But on the other side there looms the threat of a monistic Idealism for which the reality of Spirit, and its openness or presence to itself, includes within itself every other reality and spirit. Is the thought form then

simply inadequate? But is there any philosophy of which the theologian must not finally say the same thing? And yet all theology must be clothed in philosophical dress.

We may point out that Barth frequently speaks as an existentialist both in his anthropology and his doctrine of reconciliation. Existence and the reality of historical events may not be derived systematically from the priority of eternal necessity. Existence and salvation take place within the context of irreducibly human decisions. Furthermore Barth steadily endeavors to balance his existentialist pronouncements – not by the monistic inclusiveness of Idealist ontology but by asserting the prior, independent, concrete and 'eventful' objectivity of divine being over against contingently independent created being. God is in himself objective and thus the basis of an analogical conformity of creatures to himself. We see that existentialism and traditional metaphysics supplement Idealism. But when one asks how historical event is to be related genuinely to eternal event, so that the inwardness of each becomes really present to that of the other in its eventfulness rather than simply confronting it after the fashion of purely substantial mutually isolated structures, the priority of Idealism emerges immediately.

Once again it is the doctrine of the Spirit which indicates the duality and its transcendence in divine and human action, the limits of Idealism as well as its positive function in the service of theology. Barth finds himself in basic disagreement both with Schleiermacher and with theological liberals precisely over the understanding of the Holy Spirit. The liberals through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries wanted to carve out a position similar to that of Schleiermacher but without his metaphysical understanding. By and large the theology of Schleiermacher and his followers was a theology of the Spirit. Its irreducible presupposition was the reality of consciousness, a quality of human inwardness which one could call inwards, faith or religion. In his essay on Schleiermacher in *Die Protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert*[16] Barth suggests that Schleiermacher put piety or religion at the center of theology precisely where the Reformers put the Word of God or Christ. Now the Reformers 'split' their center immediately by distinguishing faith from the Word of God even in faith was completely based on and created by the Word. God is known then once as the Word of the Father spoken *to* man and once as the Spirit of the Father and the Word allowing man to apprehend and participate in that Word. Schleiermacher also split the center of his theology, i.e. piety, by positing the historical even of redemption, Jesus Christ, over against piety. His starting point (human consciousness) might well have become a theology of the Holy Spirit since he starts with human awareness of God. But it was not such a theology for 'the Word is not so safeguarded in its independence over against faith as it ought to be if this theology of faith were to be a genuine theology of the Holy Spirit.' And so one must ask if religious

consciousness rather than the Spirit has not become the total subject matter of theology.[17]

We may interpret Barth to suggest that Spirit and faith become merged for Schleiermacher and subsequent liberal theology. Thus, even when Schleiermacher and the liberals insist as they do, on the objectivity of Father and Son (or rather God and Christ) to faith, that objectivity is bound to be purely relative; for prior to it is the immediacy, directness or internality of divine and human spirit in the order of religious knowledge. Does not this mean a confusion of the Holy Spirit with human spirit? In a sense the question need to be raised, for ontological question are automatically excluded for the liberals! One may simply avow that 'in faith' the Spirit (or God) and human inwardness are directly present to one another. The order of knowledge is therefore radically separated from the order of being. If there is any relation between them it is that of two contraries. In the order of knowledge a direct if not internal relation between God and man is asserted to the hilt. In regard to the object of this knowledge liberals desire to maintain the objectivity of God. Barth has always insisted that the order of knowing and the order of being (also the knowledge of knowledge and the knowledge of being) are parallel, with priority belonging strictly to being and the knowledge of being. He asserts that Father and Son are genuinely objective only if God as Spirit, revealedness open to faith, also remains strictly and unconfusedly God. The distinction between the Holy Spirit and human inwardness (divine presence to man, human presence to, participation in God through this Word) must remain complete in the order of being as well as in knowledge. The relation cannot simply be internalized. And yet *qua* relation it must at least find an internal expression. Here Barth seems simply to invert liberalism. While human consciousness does not contain within it the Word of God, the Word as revealedness is that Word pronounced not *to* but *in* us. In that sense faith is contained within the Word of God or the Spirit.

The unity of internality is in some sense basic to the external duality. But it must posit rather than deny that duality. And it would seem that at this point, where we must assert the mutual presence of the Holy Spirit and human inwardness (within the absolute priority of the Spirit) and their abiding distinctness in the orders of being and knowing, we have arrived at the limits of the usefulness of Idealism as a thought form. It is a fit means for expressing the absolute priority of the Word of God over faith as well as their genuine relatedness. But it cannot express either the mutual independence of these two structures, contents and agencies nor the nature proper to each, the uncreated. But is Barth's dilemma unique? Has not every endeavor to formulate the doctrine of creation encountered a similar or at least parallel difficulty?

To express this distinctness or mutual independence of Spirit and faith – in the orders of being and knowing – is a task in the execution of which

apprehension and analogy are indispensable means. Let us here remind ourselves of two facts. First, insofar as Barth has a system (parallel to classical German Idealism) it is the unity *in actu* of the Holy Spirit and faith within the absolute priority of the Spirit. To the extent that this is his basic position, apprehension of God (and his Word) as object is clearly included within faith as simply one aspect of a wider or more basic mode of being present to or participating in God. It is but the cognitive form of faith as a unitary decision–act. Likewise one would have to say that God, the object of apprehension, is more basically subject (Agency and/or content) than object (structure). In that case analogy (conformity which is neither identity nor total dissimilarity between human words, intuitions, and their object) is necessary and proper because it points toward a more basic univocal relation and indicates at the same time that this relation cannot be simply that of apprehension of an object.

Secondly however, insofar as Barth asserts the distinctness of Spirit and faith he suggests that the priority of God cannot be made the center of a system in which God and creatures are coordinated (Barth stresses the impossibility of a theological system over and over: e.g. KD II/2, p.198; III/1, pp.253f, 439). In that case apprehension is in no way superseded by any other form of faith. Moreover the objectivity of God cannot be transcended in his subjectivity. Analogy now is called for to indicate that the conformity of our apprehension to God remains a conformity 'at a distance', just as in God himself the unity of subjectivity and objectivity remains a complex unity of 'over-againstness'.

III

The relation between faith and apprehension parallels the order of being, i.e. the relation between God as Agent, subject or content and God as object or determinate structure. Ultimately then it is the doctrine of God which will determine the place of analogy as well as apprehension in the total context of Barth's thought, even though we must add hastily that the doctrine of God will have to be (for Barth) a completely Christological one, since God reiterates his specific eternal act which is his being in the specific historical act which is Jesus Christ.

We have already observed that Barth applies the concept of analogy, conformity in (but not apart from) apprehension as an act, mainly to the relation between apprehension and God as its object, to the conformity of faith to the Word of God and to the conformity of man as God's image to his Creator. The *analogia fidei* is first of all applied to faith and the Word of God. However, Barth himself observes that this strictly epistemological procedure is not necessarily the only proper one,[18] especially (one might add) since he himself insists so strenuously on the priority of *ratio essendi* over *ratio*

cognoscendi and the parallelism between *ordo essendi* and *ordo cognoscendi*. Furthermore the tension that we have observed between apprehension and participation or 'presence' will not be ultimately and properly dealt with except in the understanding of the being of God. It is therefore appropriate to turn first to the analogy between God and our words, intuitions and concepts.

We note immediately that God's being as Person in the most proper sense of the word occupies Barth's attention when he tackles the problem as we have seen it posed by his thought form. We observed the priority of Spirit as the systematic element in Barth's thought, and at the opposite pole we noted that Barth holds to the untranscended objective apprehension of an independent structure in the knowledge of God. The same dialectic occurs in the concept of God. God acts, he is act: He is not being behind the act; his being is to be the specific and concrete act which constitutes his Deity. He is to be described as *actus purus et singularis*.[19] Because he is in himself a concrete act filled with his own content for his own agency, he is act quite sufficiently and independently of his positive or negative relation (i.e. contrast) to creatures. This independence of the agent-being fulfilled in himself Barth speaks of as God's freedom, suggesting that it is a precise equivalent for the traditional understanding of God's aseity.[20] Now action in contrast to mere happening takes place only in the unity of spirit and nature. We must ascribe a nature to God or else confuse him with the world of spirit – from which he is actually as sharply distinguished as he is from the world of nature. 'In scripture the distinction of divine from non-divine happening does not correspond in the slightest to the distinction between spirit and nature … If God has no nature, if he is … chemically purified absolute Spirit, he does and can do nothing at all.'[21] In that case too all our statements about the Triune God are pictures, parables and symbols to which 'only the structureless and motionless being of a Spirit would correspond as their proper … truth, a Spirit properly suspect of being merely a hypostatization of our own created spirit.'[22]

Having assured ourselves of the coincidence or unity of nature and spirit in all action and in the divine act, Barth goes on to say that now we are able to say that the specific agency of God is that of the freedom of Spirit,

> not accident or necessity, not the conformity to law or fate of a natural event – although nature is not excluded from it – but the freedom of a self, knowing and willing and disposing over nature, distinguishing itself from that which it is not and that which it is not from itself. The peculiarity (*Besonderheit*) of the divine event, act and life is the special way of the Being of a Person.[23]

In this unity of spirit and nature God does not participate in the principle of personhood (*personifiziert*). He *is* properly Person, he is 'being actualizing and

uniting the fullness of all being in the actuality of his Person.' As such he unites spirit and nature in himself in a deliberately teleological order: Nature is subordinated to spirit in him. In this teleologically ordered unity he is not an 'it' nor a 'he' after the manner of creaturely persons, 'but actually (and thus also for actual knowledge) always an I: The I that knows itself, wills and distinguishes itself is in just this act of its perfection of power fully sufficient to itself.'[24]

What distinguishes God's being-in-act from 'abstractly intuited natural being' and 'abstractly conceived spiritual being' is that it is moved by itself.[25] In human being as person we only know man as the source of movement of both nature and spirit. '*We* live and thereupon there is living nature, living spirit.' In our activity the two are coordinated, 'spirit prior, nature subsequent, spirit as subject, nature as object, nature as matter, spirit as form.' But over against unmoved nature and unmoved spirit as well as our moved and moving being – over against both stands God's being as the one and only being moved by itself. In him alone activity or movement and being are completely one. No other being unites fully its 'I' with the spirit and nature that make up the determinate content of the self's agency. No other being is absolutely its own proper, conscious, willed and effected decision. Thus God alone, being completely as act, is properly speaking Personal Being. This his being-in-act behind which we may not look for some fuller, general or absolute being, is his being Person in the eternal modes of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is *this* Person and no other.

Man is not properly person: he becomes person or participates in personhood by being conformed to the Person of God on the basis of God's love of him and of the fact that he may return this love.[26] *Originally* only God is 'I'; human beings are not personal except in communion with him who is fully personal. 'What do we know', Barth asks, 'of our being–I before God has named his Name for us and has called us by our name?'[27] To be truly personal, to be a knowing, willing acting I is to be capable of and to actualize communion in oneself without need of another (and on this basis to extend communion to another). Only the being and love of God have this character. Thus also the concrete reiteration in time of this concrete, eternal personal being is the one genuinely human person that we know: 'The one, the person that we really know as human person is the person of Jesus Christ, and just this person is the Person of God the Son, into which humanity without itself being or having personhood was assumed into community with the personal being of God. Just this one man is thus the being of God making himself know to us as He who loves.'[28]

Our difficulty with Barth's thought is in part terminological. For example the original 'I' that penetrates its own nature and spirit is in the human person the focus of actual agency as well as the specific content which is structured in

determinate fashion in nature and spirit. But because God is self-moved being, there is in him apparently no *tertium quid* (as there is in the human person) to be distinguished in addition to nature and spirit. Agency and the specific content or inwardness by which God is *this* person and no other is as it were distributed over both his spirit and his nature. However the teleological subordination of nature to spirit in which God is 'he' or 'I' rather than 'it' would seem to demand a closer identification of agency and content with 'spirit' than with nature. Spirit is the 'being of comprehensive concepts (*Inbegriffen*), laws and ideas'.[29] If agency is closely associated with this ideal structuredness all that is left in divine 'nature' is matter or content. Secondly since agency is always specific act for Barth, the specific 'content' also that makes God *this* rather than that would have to be identified with agency. Thus 'nature' seems to be an empty action, despite Barth's evident desire to believe otherwise.

In any case what has been said of the term Person must be extended to the full content of the concept of God, to his being, love, freedom and all the perfections of his being as he who loves in freedom. All these, even the terms 'Father' and 'Son' are properly applied not to creatures and their relations but to God. Here they are used with reference to a concrete reality that corresponds precisely to each respective concept.

Here is the crucial joint in Barth's understanding of analogy. Undergirding the concept of analogy there is an insistence that with reference to God, and to him alone, conceptualization coincides with and is adequate to the reality to which it points. Concepts mean or intend that reality literally and they are adequate to their intention. The claim – implicit all along in our analysis of the term Person – is extremely bold. It may in part explain what Barth meant when appealed to the theologian to take genuine risks. Barth would suggest that something like this is involved in the courage to be – theologically. At least in its narrowest or most immediate context this view contrasts completely with Tillich's suggestion that every concrete reference applies to God symbolically.

But now Barth has to face the question: *Whose* concept is literally adequate to the reality grasped in the concept? The answer is obvious: God's concept, or if you will, God's Word. No one denies this, of course, but is it not silly to talk about this adequacy while we live on earth, on the other side of a vision of this adequacy? Barth's answer would be *no*, for if revelation does not involve an understanding of this adequacy it has little meaning. Obviously we do not simply reiterate or capture it, but in the act of revelation, in the state of revealedness and faith, our knowing parallels this unity of being and knowing, indeed it stands within it. Nevertheless – the adequacy is God's alone and thus the need for analogy arises. Our words and concepts as such are *totally* inadequate to the actuality of God. Insofar as we try to apply them to him as

our words and concepts we only repeat the egocentric circularity of Descartes' *Meditations*. But is this really a concrete possibility, this endeavor to understand ourselves and our world apart from God and to comprehend God as an implicate of this understanding? For Barth the endeavor is at least abstract, in the pejorative sense of that term. For our words and concepts are not in the first place our own any more than are the objects to which they point.

> The creatures which constitute the appropriate object of our human intuitions, concepts and words are his creation. Our thinking and our speech in their appropriateness to this their object are also his creation. Therefore the truth also in which we recognize this our appropriate object in the manner appropriate to us is his creation, his truth.[30]

And therefore while it has to be said that 'his truth is not our truth', one must add that 'our truth is his truth. This is the unity of truth in him as *the* Truth'.[31] The situation is obviously parallel to that which we have observed all along. Analogy arises as an act in which our apprehension, totally different from its object, is conformed to the identity of divine conceptualization with divine being. Our apprehension of divine objectivity and the systematic unity in which God is identical with himself and the ground of our presence to him are conformed to each other in a divine-human act. God as Spirit, Agent or Subject is the ground on the basis of which God as object may correspond indirectly to our apprehension of him. God as Person is the unity-in-complexity that includes or is at once Subject and Object. He is himself even in otherness from himself. He is Triune. Thus God lays claim to our words through his self-revelation, something he can rightfully do as their Creator and ours. In this act

> the miracle takes place by which we become participants in the veracity of his revelation, by which our words become true designations fro him. Our words are his property, not ours. And in his disposing of them as his property he places them at our disposal … and commands us to make use of them in relation to him. The use which is thus made of them is therefore not a secondary (*uneigentlich*), merely pictorial one, but their literal use. Symbolically (*uneigentlich*), and pictorially we use our words (so we may now say looking back from God's revelation) when we apply them within the limits of what is appropriate to us, to creatures. When we apply them to God they are not estranged from their original object and their truth but on the contrary led back to them.[32]

The identity in which truth and objectivity are one, in which God as subject is his own object takes place only in God's self-knowledge. This is the *terminus a quo* of our knowledge of God, but as such remains hidden from us. Our knowledge of him takes place in a conformity which is *a posteriori* and identical with his self-knowledge. It is an apprehension of his genuine objectivity as reiterated in that hidden form in which once again he as object and subject is one with himself, in Jesus Christ. Here nature, objectivity is indeed present, but nature is assumed into the divine subject-act. Is the objective apprehension then grounded in a *prior* (even though indirect) presence of the human subject to the divine Subject, or is this presence simply identical with apprehension? No decisive answer appears to be forthcoming. However, one may say that apprehension depends at all times upon a literal applicability of concepts to God. Thus apprehension, when it is internally distinguished into intuition and concepts, and analogy arises as the mode of conceiving God, still points in a literal direction. Analogy is therefore an act of *noesis* closer to literal than to symbolic understanding of the object to which faith is present. Analogical understanding is at least literal in intention though not in execution.

The hiatus between intention and execution is overcome only in act. Analogy is a conformity that takes place. It exists only in act or in process. Faith is an act, and the divine act in which the act of faith is conformed to God through his Word is the act of Christ in the presence of the Holy Spirit. *Analogia fidei* therefore is never *analogia entis*. For *ens* or *esse* appear to Barth to refer on the one hand to 'absolute' being supposedly more basic than the act in which God is who he is and which he reiterates *ad extra* in the Incarnation, and on the other to an abstract being of the creature apart from the act in which it is conformed to God. Indeed, it seems to Barth that being here is a comprehensive term univocally applied to include within itself both God and creature, Catholic protests to the contrary notwithstanding. This is the product of the Anti-Christ! In contrast to Protestant Scholasticism (in the figure of Quenstedt)[33] and Catholicism one may not speak only of an *analogia attributionis extrinsicae* between God and creature and not an analogy of intrinsic attribution. 'What makes the creature into an *analogon* of God does not lie in its nature … but exclusively in the veracity of the object analogically known in the knowledge of God and thus in the veracity of God himself. Analogy is for the creature therefore *extrinsece* in the form of apprehension and not *intrinsece* its own.'[34] It appears then that the creature is being conformed to the divine act in Christ. Barth insists that he does not mean to identify creation with redemption any more than he means to cancel out creation through redemption. He asserts that there is no intrinsic conformity in the contents of the two, outside of God's redemptive act in which he conforms created being to himself. One must not identify Christology and the doctrine

of creation but one must base the latter strictly on the former. It is in the act of its being conformed to the redemptive act that creation emerges concretely and clearly into view.

Roman Catholicism distinguishes sharply between our knowledge of God as Creator and as Triune Redeemer and Reconciler. Since for Barth knowing parallels being, he believes that this view necessarily involves a partition of the unitary God. Moreover God's being can be known only in his reiteration *ad extra* of the unitary act which he is in himself, in his work of revelation. Barth accuses Roman Catholic theology of circumventing this concrete setting and grasping for the knowledge of God *in abstracti* within a supposed community of absolute and relative being. When he encounters Catholic thinkers who are willing to subordinate *analogia entis* to *analogia fidei* but insist that in the act in which *analogia fidei* takes place there must also be a *participatio entis Dei* on our part, Barth agrees with evident surprise. With this interpretation of *analogia entis* he has no quarrel though he doubts that it is in any sense normative or even representative Roman thought. For the most, it seems to him, Catholic thought reverse the proper theological assertion, *esse sequitur operari* into a 'metaphysical' *operari sequitur esse* which must be rejected.

It is not necessary to describe at length the second (chronologically first) relation in which analogy arises. It is the knowability of the Word of God through faith. If in the first relation Barth emphasized the apprehension of the objective reality, in the second he tends to stress the other, perhaps more systematic side of the relation of God and man, the participation of man in God's Word. Indeed he suggests that mystical language and conception may be the most appropriate to employ on the description of this relation.[35] And yet it is true that the difference between the first and second analogical relations is for the most part merely one of emphasis. The Word of God is the event in which the hidden God reveals himself in the proclamation of the Church. It is as it were the form of which God himself is the content. The grasping of the Word involves a Deiformity,[36] the *analogia fidei*. Between the publication of the first volume of *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, and *The Doctrine of God*, Barth revamped his Christology. In KD I/2 he for the first time included very fully and explicitly a Chalcedonian understanding of two natures. He understood now that 'the message of the Bible is realistic', and that the ancient theologians were right in raising not only the ethical but also the physical question concerning revelation. Undoubtedly this insight prepared him more fully for an acknowledgment of *analogia entis* within *analogia fidei* than had been the case when he originally wrote of *analogia fidei* as a pure *analogia actus* in KD I/1. In this earliest volume he is simply concerned to speak of an 'indwelling' of Christ that takes place in faith. The point of contact between God and man, man's Deiformity, takes place in faith alone and thus on the sole basis of the Word of God effectively spoken *in* as well as *to* the new man in

Christ. The old man is an abstraction with whom there can be no point of contact, for faith and unfaith do not meet on the same level. He is as it were excluded from reality.

Far more striking are Barth's statements about the third relation which deals with the analogy – not of faith to God or to the Word of God but – of man, the creature, to God and to Jesus Christ. Throughout his treatment of creation and the creature Barth is plagued by the relation of Christology to creation. If Christology is the constant clue to the nature of creation – and we must remember that knowledge is the recapitulation of reality for Barth – what is there to prevent our saying that Jesus Christ is the only real creature? Is it not at least possible that the creature's reality consists in its presence to the one true human subject, Jesus Christ who is fully present to himself in and through his presence to all other creatures? Once again the problem of the thought form arises before us with its 'point of absolute intensity' where the duality of objectivity is posited (and not transcended!) by an overarching unity. We now learn that this complex conceptuality which Barth applied to the relation between God and creature and to God himself, applies also to the creature. The basic form of human being is analogous to God, but one has to add that unlike God, the human being does not have this basic form in himself but in another: human existence as *imago Dei* is co-existence. But it is only a conformity in act, in the act of co-existence. Moreover, it is an extrinsic analogy, an analogy to God that takes place only in relation between human being and human being. It is intrinsic only to God, not to man. Thus we have to speak of an *analogia relationis* (again in contrast to *analogia entis*!)

The conformity meets its evident limit (by virtue of which it is *analogia relationis* and not *analogia entis*) in the fact that only God is genuine I. He can and does exist and genuine 'I' because he includes 'thou', 'over-againstness' within himself, so that he is subject-object unity in specific determinateness. Other–self as internal relation! Is one of them more basic than the other, or is the bond between them the basic element? Where, one must ask, is the 'I' in this unity-in-complexity? Is it distributed over self (subject) and other (object) so that it has no focus but is simply an internal relation? Is it simply the bond between subject and object? Or is the genuine 'I' the subject more nearly than the object? Where is the divine unity? At any rate, it is just this divine unity in self–other duality that Barth wishes to proclaim. For it is the basis of God's relating himself to an other external to himself while yet remaining the same free 'I'. Because he is an 'other' to himself he can become the creature's 'other'. On the basis of this immanent dialectic in God, God can be both the object of the creature's apprehension in faith and the subject-Spirit in the presence of whom human spirit becomes actual spirit. And once again we confront the question: Is Barth the systematic theologian for whom the subject–Spirit is absolutely prior as the unity on the basis of which in

untranscendable self–other duality the apprehension of God in the Incarnation takes place? Or is there a dialectical balance between subjectivity and objectivity both in God and the divine–human relation?

Finally, the self–other relation in God which is the ground of the relation of the divine self to creaturely 'other' is now reiterated in secondary form between creature and creature. The analogy of relation between God and man is existence in the vis-a-vis of I and Thou. The analogy breaks down because in God this existence is internal, whereas in main it is existence external to itself. According to Barth's interpretation of Genesis the analogy to God which humanity has *qua* humanity consists in sexuality. Outside of any determinate state of human being in race, people or some mythical order of creation, humanity exists in the co-existence, the relatedness of man and woman. This analogy is the image of God, and sin can never obliterate it. But just in this connection we must remember that creation is not a state or *positum* in and by itself. Its meaning is beyond itself in history. The image of God, though certainly not obliterated must be seen in that concrete event in which it is more than promise, in which it is actualized in fulfillment. Obviously this event, this man is Jesus Christ and in the act of conformity to him – and in this act alone – every man is God's image. Furthermore the literal archetype of the interrelation in which the image exists, the vis-à-vis of man and woman, is the relation in which Christ and the woman given to him, the Church, exist together.

When Barth discusses the nature of man the outcome is obviously similar to his exegesis of the image of God. The only real revelation of what it is to be human, of humanity in its intended being as the covenant partner of God, is found in Jesus. He is genuine man for God, and man is naturally man only as man for God. Anthropology continues to be developed Christologically. To go on now to say that Jesus here reiterates the being of God as he is in himself and towards the human creature, i.e. that Jesus truly incorporates the self–other relation, is to make not a psychological but an ontological statement. It is the center of Jesus' actuality to be man for God and (in reiteration) man for his fellow man. When we say that this is an ontological statement we mean that there is no 'inner depth' in him where he is simply for himself or with God alone. His being human in co-humanity is the image of God. Thus, with all the dissimilarity between Jesus and other human beings he yet affirms a certain correspondence, an analogy between them and himself, a covenant capacity (based of course on the actuality of the covenant, i.e. upon God's grace and not on an *inherent* capacity). Here, in and through the correspondence between Jesus and other men the conformity between God and man is made concrete.

We have seen that on the human side this correspondence consists in existence in co-humanity. But only Jesus can be man purely for his fellow beings. In

every other human being the term 'for' signifies a reciprocity not existent in Jesus.[37] In every other man this reciprocity means that man is man neither as isolated individual nor primarily as one among many, where no genuine reciprocity takes place, but as one over against one, singularity with singularity. If this is the case, the 'I am' which otherwise indicates abstract man – the affirmation of humanity without fellow man and thus without Christ, as Nietzsche for example conceived it – the 'I am' is concrete, and 'I' in encounter or history. Being in encounter is analogous to God, and at the same time one may say that the 'I' is not reduced to its relations.

Once again: Is analogy, the act of being conformed, an expression of a Christomonistic system in which Christ is the subject-spirit in whose objectivity to himself all men have a presence in his sight? Or is the act of analogy the expression of an abiding duality between divine and human spirit in which God and man are present to each other in untranscended objectivity?

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1 See 'The Doctrine of Revelation in the Thought of Karl Barth, 1909–1922: The Nature of Barth's Break with Liberalism' (Yale, 1956), p.555; cf. 'Karl Barth: Theologian' in Hans W. Frei, TN, p.171. The *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* has 'ein Gottbetrunkener Mensch' attributed to Novalis speaking about Spinoza (Friedrich Leopold, Baron von Hardenberg, 1772–1801), but provides no reference.

2 KD II/1, p.203, Frei's translation; cf. CD II/1, p.181. Cf. H. Bouillard, *Karl Barth: Parole de Dieu et Existence Humaine*, vol. 2, pp.178ff.

3 KD III/2, pp.378f, Frei's translation; cf. CD III/2. pp.399–400; cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Karl Barth. Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1976), pp.148–68; English translation: *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, tr. E.T. Oakes (San Francisco: Communio, 1992).

4 Cf. KD II/1, p.11; CD II/1, p.13.

5 KD II/1, p.270, Frei's translation; cf. CD II/1, p.239.

6 KD II/1, p.254; CD II/1, p. 225.

7 Cf. KD II/1, p.58; CD II/1. pp.54–5.

8 KD II/1, p.213, Frei's translation; cf. CD II/1, p.190.

9 Cf. H. Volk, 'Die Christologie bei Karl Barth und Emil Brunner' in A. Grillmeier and H. Bacht, *Das Konzil von Chalkedon* (Würzburg: Echter–Verlag, 1954) vol. III, p.634.

10 Cf. KD II/1, pp.291ff; CD II/1, pp.257ff.

11 KD III/2, pp.382f, Frei's translation; cf. CD III/2, pp.402–3.

12 CD II/1, p.674; cf. KD III/3, pp.166ff, CD III/3, pp.154ff.

13 CD I/1, p.475.

14 Von Balthasar, *Karl Barth*, pp.213ff.

15 Ibid, pp.213f.

[16] Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag/Zollikon, 1952; English translation: Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History*, tr. Brian Cozens and John Bowden (London: SCM, 1972).

[17] Barth, *Die Protestantische Theologie*, pp.422f.

[18] Cf. KD I/1, pp.24ff; CD 1/1, pp.25ff.

[19] KD II/1, p.296; CD II/1, p.264.

[20] KD II/1, p.340; CD II/1, p.302.

[21] KD II/1, pp.297, 299; CD II/1, pp.265, 267.

[22] KD II/1, p.299; CD II/1, p.267.

[23] KD II/1, pp.299–300; CD II/1, p.267.

[24] KD II/1, p.300; CD II/1, p.267.

[25] KD II/1, p.301; CD II/1, p.268.

[26] KD II/1, p.319; CD II/1, p.284–5.

[27] KD II/1, p.320; CD II/1, p.285.

[28] KD II/1, p.321; CD II/1, p.286.

[29] KD II/1, p.301; CD II/1, p.268.

[30] KD II/1, p.257; CD II/1, p.228.

[31] KD II/1, p.258; CD II/1, p.228.

[32] KD II/1, p.258; CD II/1, p.229.

[33] [Johannes Andreas Quenstedt (1617-88), Lutheran dogmatician.]

[34] KD II/1, p.270; CD II/1, p.239.

[35] KD I/1, pp.232f, 253.

[36] Ibid, p.251.

[37] Cf. KD III/2, p.291.

2
Scripture as Realistic Narrative: Karl Barth as Critic of Historical Criticism

This lecture was given at the meeting of the Karl Barth Society of North America in Toronto, Spring 1974, and contains Frei's explanation of Barth's hermeneutical procedure and his stance towards historical criticism and factual claims; it also contains a fine description of Barth's Anselmian and Dantesque sensibility. Frei spoke from notes rather than from a full text, but the lecture was taped, and a transcription has been made and edited by Mark Alan Bowald. CPH 1974d.

A Dantesque Vision

I was struck by the theme of the conference this year: *Beyond the Theology of Karl Barth*. It made me wonder just what there is beyond Karl Barth. May I make a moderate proposal?

I think all of you who have found yourself not simply studying Barth but then finding his thought congenial will have noticed how difficult it is not to fall into the same language patterns as Barth, to use the same vocabulary, sometimes even the same kind of syntax, and you will have noticed that it sounds terribly awkward and secondhand when it comes from people other than Karl Barth himself. A friend of mine, a theologian, was asked by a particularly fine student, who is a devoted Lutheran, and who has worked hard on Barth, 'If one is simply *not* a Barthian what does one finally learn from Barth?' And my colleague, who is neither a Lutheran nor in any sense a Barthian, thought for a minute and then he said,

> It surely has been a long, long time since anyone has had a comic vision of the world, the sense, that is to say, of a vision of reality which is inherited from the tradition that is so profoundly embodied in Dante's *Divina Comedia*, the sense of reality being in the deepest way a divine comedy.

And it seems to me that this is particularly fitting when one recalls the way in which Barth as a Calvinist was always correcting, and being corrected by, Lutheran colleagues. We remember the Calvinist–Lutheran controversies and discussions which were revived in him – on the *extra Calvinisticum* against the *inter Lutheranum* (that is to say the question of the tension between the transcendence of the Divine Word over its own Incarnation, whether or not there is such a transcendence) or again the relationship between law and

Gospel, or again the relationship between justification and sanctification. In all these matters, where there really is no right or wrong and no final adjudication (but which are themselves, as Barth would have said, 'beautiful problems') Barth proceeded from so different a vision from his Lutheran friends and colleagues, even though, nonetheless, they were in such close contact with each other. The Lutheran finally proceeds always from a *religious* position, that is to say, he finds himself cast into the question of how he as a man under law, a sinner in a regulated world, can find a gracious God and how he can either solve or live fruitfully in the tension between his existence under law and his existence under Gospel. How different this is from Karl Barth who, even when he states the same issues, is proceeding from a totally different basis. He is proceeding not from, first of all, a basic situation of a *religious* problematic but a basic affirmation of a *reality*. He finds himself in a real world which everywhere manifests, first in the historical process in which mankind is engaged, but secondly even in nature itself, wherever he looks, the divine grace that emerged in the history of Israel and emerged for all mankind in the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His basic affirmation is that this is the picture of reality. The real world is to be talked about this way, Barth proceeds from this vision, and whatever problems may arise are problems that arise in reflection on this reality.

Recall that for Barth it was always true that the history of the covenant, that particular history, was paradigmatic. It was almost as if – indeed, one would want to say it *was* as if that history was the one real history of mankind, and all history (all other history that historiographers, or as the Germans say, 'scientific historians', construct – all *Historie* in contrast to *Geschichte*, as Barth himself said) is to be regarded as a figure of that covenant history. All other history is a history in its own right, yes, and to be seen as having its own meaning, yes, but nonetheless, finally, its reality is to be understood as a figure in that one history into which we are – not only as members of secular history but also in our own experience – to include ourselves also, as figures in that one history. All of Barth's theology was the constant sketching out in regard to particular doctrines or particular stages of that one history, this story as the vision of all reality. This was the vision of a *Divina Comedia*.

In the middle of the Twentieth Century the boldness and daring of that is so enormous and so right and so fitting that one cannot repeat it; one can simply either do something like it oneself, or go one's own way in respectful disagreement. How do you compare, how do you modify basic visions of the world?

And how consistent it was! Do you recall that one aspect of Barth's theology where he showed his consistency most of all? He used a peculiar German term which comes from the early Nineteenth Century. It comes, as a matter of fact, from Christian Wolff's vocabulary as traced through Kant and

then through Hegel: *anschaulich*, or 'intuition', which always meant a kind of a concrete pre-conceptual grasp on the real tactile world. He used that word and with the early Heidegger he gave it a reverse twist and he suggested that we are to ourselves *unanschaulich*. We really don't, even in our most apparently direct apprehensions of ourselves, have a direct glimpse of ourselves. And do recall that in the tradition not only of Schleiermacher but of all early nineteenth-century German philosophy one of the basic affirmations was that self-consciousness, direct presence to oneself – either immediately or, for Hegel, in a mediate way – is the essence of selfhood. And recall also that the early Barth, the Barth of the second edition of the commentary on Romans, had suggested that this is *so* true – it is so true that we are directly present to ourselves, directly conscious of ourselves – that it is precisely for that reason that all contact with the divine escapes us. For, in contrast to the liberal theologians, he said, there is no presence of God included in our direct presence to ourselves. The presence of God is precisely the radical other of our presence to ourselves; because we are, for the early Barth, *anschaulich* to ourselves, therefore God is totally *unanschaulich* to us. And recall how gradually first in the Christian Dogmatics[1] and then when he scrapped that in the first volume of the *Church Dogmatics* and then, increasingly consistently (I would maintain) from II/1 on, he reversed that picture. The reality of our history with God is *so real*, it is *so much the one real world in which we live* that what is *anschaulich* to us is really that: our life with God – to such an extent that we are not really *anschaulich* to ourselves. We do not know, we do not grasp ourselves.

So consistent was he in that you see, that he suggested that our very knowledge of ourselves as creatures, but even more our very knowledge of ourselves as sinners (which is, again, the Lutherans' basic experience) is a knowledge, an apprehension, a tactile direct contact that has to be *mediated* to us. We have to learn it, in an almost Wittgensteinian way. (And there is, incidentally I think for me, a lot of relationship, a lot of similarity between the later Wittgenstein and Karl Barth.) We have to learn in an almost Wittgensteinian way how to use the concepts that apply to the way we know ourselves, because the world, the true, real world in which we live – the real world in which the Second World War took place in which Barth was so much engaged, in which the conflict with Nazism took place, in which the conflict or the *adjustment* with Communism took place later – that real world is only a figure of an aspect in that one overall real world in which the covenanted God of grace lives with man.

A Dialectical Relationship to Historical Criticism

That, then, brings me more directly to the thing that I am supposed to talk about. For the early Barth, you see, was the Barth of a radical negative criticism of historical criticism for whom, in line with the unintuitability of God, the *unanschaulich* of God and the *unanschaulich* therefore of the real subject matter of the Bible, the most self-destructive historical criticism was the right kind of historical criticism.

You remember what he said in the first edition? It was (and it is one of the few sayings from the preface of the first edition that I think he held to all his life) that he was happy that he did not have to choose between historical criticism and the old doctrine of inspiration, but that if he did he would choose the old doctrine of inspiration. He held to that. He held to that through thick and thin. He felt he did not have to choose. But he also felt that the priority belonged to something like the old doctrine of inspiration (although it have to be carefully modified) – the doctrine of inspiration which genuinely pressed you to the subject matter of the Bible which was in the text, rather than to the peripheries which were behind the text which was what historical criticism did. During the dialectical period, in the twenties, the way he held the doctrine of inspiration together with the historical criticism, the way he avoided literalism, was by understanding that historical criticism must be radical. In the second edition preface and again in his acrid discussion with Adolf von Harnack, he insisted that the critics are not radical enough, and at least through to the 1930s, at least through volume I/2 of the *Dogmatics*, he preferred those critics that suggested that all reliable historical knowledge fails us, particularly in regard to the New Testament texts and particularly those that bear on the origin of earliest Christianity, and of course particularly those that bear on the destiny as well as the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Barth, the early Barth, the Barth of the dialectical period of the 1920s, had a deep stake in the kind of thing that Bultmann was doing in indicating that we know precious little about the life of Jesus Christ – that, as Bultmann was to say in that famous ungrammatical expression of his, the *that* is all we know about Jesus Christ, or, if not all, then essentially most of what we know about him. Barth had a stake in that because it indicated to him that one could not go beyond the text if one was to read the Bible for its subject matter, if one wants to read the Bible, if I may use the word, genuinely *religiously*.

Similarly, he (probably without knowing it) had a stake in the writing of Albert Schweitzer; certainly Schweitzer's *Quest of the Historical Jesus*[2] was in one sense thoroughly congenial to him. That is to say, it was congenial in the sense that a radically Christian, radically eschatological orientation (in the sense of Barth's own strange eschatology of the 1920s) allows a use of the text only in the way that the form critic suggested it was to be used, or at least in a

very similar way: the texts are reports of preaching, they are *kerygmatic*. Therefore, if they are to be understood, if they are to be interpreted, they must be interpreted *kerygmatically*. To use the kind of terminology that we have learned from Donald Evans,[3] self-involving language can only be understood in a self-involving way. And it cannot be understood scientifically or objectively-historically.

The early Barth had therefore, I say again, a stake in the most radical kind of criticism and if he found it possible to have historical criticism and the doctrine of inspiration together it was by virtue of the fact that the best historical criticism had, in effect, a self-destruct mechanism built into it. That is to say then that there was no *positive* relation between historical criticism and theology but only a *negative*, mutually exclusive one. But in that sense they were highly compatible; there was indeed a remarkably strong negative dialectical relationship between the two.

An *Ad Hoc* Relationship to Historical Criticism

As Rudolf Smend observed in an article in the festschrift for Barth's 80th birthday, *Parrhesia* (and, by the way, the article that Smend wrote is the best thing that I know of on Barth and historical criticism; it is a superb piece of work),[4] Barth at that stage did not have a *nachkritische* exegesis, a *post*-critical exegesis, but rather a *nabenkritische* exegesis: the two things (exegesis and criticism) were *juxtaposed*, side by side. They were not stages on the way of exegesis but simply rested there side by side.

But in the 30s, you see, it seems to me at any rate that a radical revolution occurred, although it was gradual. It was a revolution in exegesis which goes thoroughly with that reality vision of his, with that insistence that the world must be looked at historically, that the only way we know the world is historically. And when Barth began to talk that way then he also began to talk in his hermeneutics about a new analytical category that he felt applied to the right kind of exegesis and he called it 'literary–historical'. And that is in a certain sense an extremely accurate description of what he now proceeds to do and how he now proceeds to relate himself to historical criticism.

It is, in a way, thoroughly parallel to another series of reflections he had. You may recall that he had in the 20s a polemic (a very sympathetic, profoundly sympathetic polemic) against Ludwig Feuerbach, in which he said that this notion of Feuerbach's that religion is just an illusory projection of our own self-apprehension is a profound threat to liberal theology but that it ignores two basic aspects of the human individual, that is to say, that he is a sinner and that he does not know his own limitation, namely death. Anybody who knows himself to be a sinner and anybody who knows that he is radically limited by death will never allow even the species notion of man to be

projected into deity. And at that point, all you can do after being profoundly sympathetic to Feuerbach is simply to laugh him off. But when Barth took up the polemic against Feuerbach again in the *Dogmatics* several times, especially in volume IV/2, it was on a totally different basis. It was not on a negative basis. He couldn't do that any longer because, you see, we don't even know our own sinfulness and our own radical limitation in the face of death. We don't even know that, really, directly. We know it only as communication from God. Then alone do we know what sin and real death mean. And so the only way you can polemicize against a man like Feuerbach who would raise man to the level of God is, as it were, by ignoring him, as it were by putting over against him a positive vision.

The reason I mention that is you see that from now on Barth's relation to historical criticism is of the same sort. You look steadily at the text and what the text says, and then, you utilize, on an *ad hoc* basis, what the historical scholars offer you. You cannot state systematically or in a general theory what the relation between theological exegesis and historical criticism is. You could do that in the dialectical period of Barth, when there was a general theory, namely a negative compatibility between historical exegesis and theological exegesis. Now you cannot do it anymore. The point however is that you must always be a theological exegete and then in particular cases of texts you will find an *ad hoc* relation, maybe negative, but maybe positive, with the always tentative results of historical criticism.

Reading Naïvely

In the *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, Barth has an exegesis which Smend, and Eichholz in the essay on Barth in *Antwort*,[5] both consider very important, as does James Wharton[6] in a fine talk that he gave at the Barth Colloquium at Union Theological Seminary two years ago. He has an important exegesis of Numbers 13 and 14, the story of the spies in the land of Canaan, the Israelites by the land of Canaan; and he precedes it by a prefatory hermeneutical remark because he says that this story should be called a *history*. And then he goes on,

> The term 'history' is to be understood in its older and naïve significance in which – quite irrespective of the distinctions between that which can be historically proved, that which has the character of saga, and that which has been consciously fashioned, or invented, in a later and synthetic review – it denotes a story which is received and maintained and handed down in a definite kerygmatic sense.[7]

Notice that there are certain distinctions here. First, *that which can be historically proven* – that is to say, empirical history, history to which our fact

questions are relevant. As my son said after coming home from a Sunday school lesson on the story of the resurrection when he was twelve years old, he said to me, 'What's the evidence for that one?' It's that kind of history: 'What's the evidence for that?' that Barth speaks of first of all, that which can be historically proven. The word he uses there is not *geschichtlich* but *historisch*; that's *historisch* history, that for which evidence is relevant.

Secondly, *that which has the character of saga*. And by saga he means a history-like story, but a history-like story which is poetic and therefore has grown up, as it were, through an oral tradition.

And finally, *that which has been consciously fashioned or invented*. That is to say what a later and sophisticated redactor will have put down, never mind whether something happened or not. And I would propose to you here that the nearest equivalent to that in modern terms is what we speak of as the novelist. The realistic novel is something history-like but it is at the same time invented. Now the novel is history-like in two ways. First, the author seems to be saying, 'I'm not giving you myth, I'm not giving you a fable or an allegory because a fable or an allegory always has a distance between the story, the representation, and what it means, the thing represented – whereas the representation *is* what I mean; I don't mean something else. I mean what I say. I am being literal.' And Barth, incidentally, wanted the text always to be literal in that same fashion: it means what it says. It is to be taken literally *whether or not* something happened. The novel is history-like in a literal way: just as history is rendered literally so a novel is rendered literally. And that means then, secondly, that such an account speaks about the interaction of persons and temporal incidents in such a way that these two things render each other and by their interaction render the story and the meaning of the story. The *meaning* of the story is not something detached from the story, but emerges out of these temporal connections of character and incident with each other, which mean each other and nothing else. Whereas, of course, in myth in particular the interaction of character and circumstance in time is only a surface element – and this is not so in a novel and, Barth says, not so in the Bible.

So Barth speaks, you see, of three sharply distinct things which do however have a common generic or literary–historical character. And thus, you see, what Barth can do now is to suggest that in a certain way we *can be critical*. We are no longer at the same stage as the naïve pre-critical forebears. We are no longer there. We do not read Genesis in the same way our forebears did. And yet it has the same character for us – the same literary–historical character in which we can read it as thoroughly sophisticated critics. Barth did not deny the truth or (in a peculiar, hard to get at sense) the *historicity* of Genesis. He always vehemently insisted that the creation accounts are *Geschichte* but he insisted equally strongly that they are not *historische-Geschichte*. First of all, nobody was there, and therefore the evidence is

ludicrous. But secondly, an event which is an immediate rather than a mediate relationship between God and man is something to which our notion of factual temporal event is not adequate, so that we cannot say how creation is a temporal event – or, shall we say, we can only think of it *analogically* as a temporal event. As such we must think of it as a temporal event, but our category for thinking of it as a temporal event must be analogical to our *historisch* category of event; it cannot be literally the same.

In these ways then Barth is indeed, you see, in the position to suggest that we must be as naïve as our forebears were before the rise of criticism in the interpretation of the Bible and as naïve as the Bible itself. There must be between us and the text a direct relationship, a direct relationship which is really, if you wanted to put it this way in a very broad sense, literary. We read naively. We understand the texts without any schematism coming between us and the reading, and yet we do not do it in the same unsophisticated way as they did it. We do it as those who are perfectly well aware that there is such a thing as criticism. But we have now, you see, unlike the historical critic, Barth claims, gone beyond it.

Let me then go on in the same passage,

> In relation to the biblical histories we can, of course, ask concerning the distinctions and even make them hypothetically. But if we do so we shall miss the kerygmatic sense in which they are told. Indeed, the more definitely we make them and the more normative we regard them for the purpose of exposition, the more surely we shall miss this sense. To do justice to this sense, we must either not have asked at all concerning these distinctions, or have ceased to do so. In other words, we must still, or again, read these histories in their unity and totality. It is only then that they can say what they are trying to say. To be sure the history of the spies does contain different elements. There is a 'historical' (*historisch*) element in the stricter sense. [Quite possibly these were, in our sense of the word, real persons. Certainly, judging by the archaeology, the names were those of real cities and real localities. So there is a *historisch* element there.] … There is also an element of saga (the account of the branch of grapes carried by two men, and of the giants who inhabited the land). There is also the element which has its origin in the synthetic or composite view (fusing past and present almost into one) which is so distinctive a feature of historical writing in Old and New Testament alike.[8]

(It is also, by the way, a feature of the novel, isn't it? From the very beginning in the Eighteenth Century, literary critics who were trying to understand this new genre always suggested that the novel must be about something

contemporary to the writer, contemporary to our manners, contemporary to the world we lived in, even if it took the shape of, and succeeded in reproducing the atmosphere of the old. The novel has its own peculiar way of synthesizing the old and the new, past and present time, successfully. Barth suggested that the same thing is very true of Old and New Testaments.)

> It is to the latter elements then, that we must pay particular attention in our reading of these stories if we are to understand them. For they usually give us an indication of the purpose which led to their adoption into the texts. But in relation to them, if we are discerning readers we shall not overlook the historical elements or even jettison those which seem to have the character of saga.[9]

We look for the common literary character in all of it. The meaning of it is clear, he suggests, and it is the text. The Bible is largely and centrally realistic narrative. He was of course well aware of the disjunctions and the distinctions of the Bible, but the comprehensive frame for Barth, the most important thing, which lends it unity more than anything else is that it is realistic narrative. And please bear in mind that that is not the same thing as that obscure and wretched notion called *Heilsgeschichte*. It is *not* the same thing. But as realistic narrative it is *clear*.

The truth of it, when we raise that question, and we have raised it for the philosopher at any rate, is a quite distinct question. Though for Barth, it must be added, that distinction does not really arise. Remember that, for Barth, it depicts the one real world in which we all live so that to understand the meaning of it is the same as understanding the truth of it. If you understand it rightly you cannot *not* think of it as real, what is depicted there. That strange, marvelous little book on Anselm's proof for the existence of God[10] is in a peculiar sense also applicable to Barth as an interpreter of the Bible as realistic narrative. He didn't make that application himself but it is clearly consonant with what he does. Bear that in mind.

So then, 'in relation to them, we shall never overlook the historical elements or even jettison those which seem to have the character of saga' because we can't hold them together literarily. How he concludes, then, is by saying, 'When the distinctions have been made', and we must make them, 'they can be pushed again into the background and the whole can be read', and – here comes the marvelous phrase – 'with this tested and critical naivety as the totality it professes to be.'[11]

That was what Barth's ambition was, to be a *direct* reader of the text, and not of some hypothetical subject matter behind the text. The subject matter is the text. But he did it not as an uncritically naïve reader but as a critically naïve reader, and as a result he felt confident that, even though he could state

no general theory about the relationship between theological exegesis and historical criticism, there was no conflict and given individual texts you would find how the two related themselves to each other, provided always that historical critical exegesis was not the governess but was in the service of the theological exegete. Even though he could never distort its results, nonetheless he must use it as a handmaid rather than either a mistress or a mother.

Questions

Question: How does Barth handle passages like the one in Paul where Paul deals with the resurrection by trying to point to what looks like to me some empirical evidence where he says, 'Look, over 600 people saw Jesus after he was raised from the dead'? Now there we see right in Scripture we have some effort being made to tie one of the Christian truths to empirical evidence of some sort.

Frei: Quite candidly I don't remember. The trouble is, one of the reasons I am hesitant to reply to questions is that I am in the presence of greater experts than myself. I should say that, although I read avidly in sections of IV/1, IV/2, I/2 and III/1 this time for this particular presentation, it has been some time since I really read in Barth so I will have to call on the experts to correct me here. But Barth's position is perfectly clear. He says in reply to Bultmann that it is perfectly obvious that in the biblical text the resurrection is something that happened to Jesus and not to the disciples. It is the right response to make. Whether true or not, the story has it happening to Jesus. But that limits one's options. And even though one has certain stories that affirm *Geschichte*, it is a *Geschichte* which is an immediate relationship between God and time, unlike most *Geschichte* that we know which is a mediated relationship, and therefore we are not in a position to make dogmatic statements about the relevance of concepts of fact and evidence to that. However, we go by the text and we do know that the relationship between notions of factuality and historical evidence should be related positively rather than in opposition to this divine–human history. And therefore to the extent that one can make it, in exegesis, come off, that there is as positive a relation as Paul's testimony claims – to that extent, we follow it and we obey it. Nonetheless, on the other side, there is the word of Paul also, that indicates to us, that warns us that we should not speculate. And I am now talking not about the Barth who wrote the book on the resurrection of the dead, but the later Barth of the *Dogmatics*. We should not speculate. None of us know really what a spiritual body is. We are not given an evidential witness scene of what a resurrection is like, and thus no matter how positive the evidence, the event itself remains, though strongly to be affirmed, an evidentially indescribable, rather than a describable event. And it

is not surprising therefore that here empirical testimony becomes not absent, but utterly confused. The Gospel accounts are confused and confusing, and to go behind them even with the aid of Paul's testimony, to go behind them to see the 'factual thing in itself' is therefore an impossibility. I think that's fair, though I stand subject to correction. I do believe that it makes good sense to talk that way.

Question: [Largely inaudible on the tape; the question is directed to clarifying the perception that early in Barth's career he maintained a separate and adversarial relationship between theological exegesis and historical criticism. The question ends with a reference to Barth's *Credo*[12] which made this point pungently.]

Frei: Yes, he used to do that sort of thing all the time. As you know he was a wonderful, delightful and perverse man who could make a point often by exaggeration. Remember, somebody asked him once whether the snake really talked in the garden, do you recall? And he said, 'I don't know whether it talked or not, it's far more important what it said.' And then he added, 'Yes! It talked!' I'm tempted to let it go at that. All I can say is that he was working on I/2 and doing preliminary work on II/2 at the same time that he was writing the appendices to *Credo*, and I think what he did there was to make a point by exaggeration. He was no longer really, if you read the sections on hermeneutics in I/2, that simplistic and separatist about the two things, theological and historical exegesis. But take the audience into account. He could not be subtle. He had to be direct and driving to make his point.

Question: Professor Frei, your presentation has done a magnificent job of showing the difference between the uses of *Geschichte* and *historisch*. I get constantly impatient with, for instance, James Barr – and there have been a whole number of others – saying that this distinction between *historisch* and *geschichtlich* is all just one big blur of confusion. I think, Dr. Frei, that you have made a real contribution in the way you have brought out the importance of this distinction in Barth's thought. On this matter of his tending to downplay the historical question, I think one has to recognize that Barth saw almost the whole of historical scholarship concerning itself with historical questions and hardly anybody except himself bothering about the theological question, and that he didn't tend to so emphasize the historical just because this was the thing worth worrying about.

Frei: Yes, I do agree with that, particularly in view of the fact that he, when he saw other people doing theological exegesis, especially as the 40s and 50s progressed, he thought that they were doing it in a hair-raising, *unhistorical*

way. One of the greatest objections he had to the whole existential syndrome, that whole malaise, if I may so call it (and in Germany I gather they now regard it as something that was something of a foolish wild mercury) was that it was totally unhistorical. It had nothing to do with the real world of outward events in which selves and political event, selves and ordinary history interacted. And he was desperately concerned with that all the time and he thought proper theological exegesis had to be concerned with that; so not only did he see historical critics doing no theological exegesis but even the theologians who were doing theological exegesis weren't doing what he regarded as the proper kind of historical-theological exegesis.

I do agree completely, but may I make one point with regard to Professor James Barr, since with some hesitation I shall have to admit to being something of an admirer of James Barr's work. I read his books assiduously. I just wish there weren't so many of them. There are now three that say much the same thing. He and I have had some correspondence. You are absolutely right in what you say about Barr's reading of Barth. I think he may be coming around. (You know how that is when one talks to somebody who doesn't agree with one, one always thinks they may be coming around. He probably isn't at all.) But I have suggested the reading of Barth that I have just given you to professor Barr and pointed out to him that again and again in the first or third or so of *Old and New in Interpretation*, the second of his books, he hammers home a literary theme, namely, that while it is extremely awkward to think about the Bible as a history, the history of the mighty acts, the history of God's self-revelation (all those terms that Barth did use, which Barr has put so heavily into question as hermeneutical devices) nonetheless one of the marks of the Bible is that it is a cumulative narrative, literarily. And I suggested to him that he has been misreading Barth, that this is an understandable misreading because everybody else has been doing the same thing as far as I can see, and that Barth ought to be read from his literary–historical texts as an exegete. Perhaps not as a theologian, but as an exegete. I suggested that, in effect, he was saying the same thing as

Frei:[13] The text of an ancient document is always subject to a variety of critical evaluations, like attestation, happenstance, source, form, and redaction criticism. Let us recall that these procedures, revisable as they are, and their conclusions even more revisable, are thoroughly appropriate, but that they say nothing either way about a direct reading of the text. They tell us about these texts in its cultural contexts, mayhap even the intention of the author and the redactor. But is there anything that tells us that the text cannot be looked at also in its own light if it makes syntactical sense, grammatical sense, and if it appears that you could show forth a kind of structure in the text itself not simply in the thought of the redactors? In other words – the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

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1 *Die Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* (Zürich: TVZ, 1982).

2 Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, tr. W. Montgomery (London: A&C Black, 1954).

3 Donald Evans, *The Logic of Self-Involvement: A Philosophic Study of Everyday Language with Special Reference to the Christian Use of Language about God as Creator* (London: SCM, 1963).

4 Rudolf Smend, 'Nachkritische Schriftauslegung' in Eberhard Busch, Jürgen Fangmeier and Max Geiger (eds), *Parrhesia: fröhliche Zuversicht: Karl Barth zum 80. Geburstag am 10. Mai 1966* (Zürich: EVZ Verlag, 1966), pp.215–237.

5 G. Eichholz, 'Der Ansatz Karl Barths in der Hermeneutic' in *Antwort: Karl Barth zum*

3
On Interpreting the Christian Story

The 10th Annual Greenhoe Lectureship, 1976

These lectures were given at Louisville Seminary, and although Frei spoke from rough notes which have not been persevered, an audio tape was made. Frei attacks 'story theology' before returning to the subject matter of both EBN *and* IJC*, the latter in a Wittgensteinian vein. Frei described these lectures in a letter to his hosts later that year as an attempt to push the project of* IJC *'a little further'. LPTS Audio Cassette, Cass: Greenhoe, 1976. CPH 1976h.*

1. Story, Fact and Mystery: A Reflection on the New Testament

Introduction

President Nelson, Ladies and Gentlemen, I'm honored to be here. I didn't know my life was going to be laid out before you so thoroughly.[1] The only thing that President Nelson forgot to tell you is the most interesting thing about me, and that's that I'm master of a residential college at Yale[2] that has attached to it 420 undergraduates; and the reason I mention that is that I'm on sabbatical once again (which seems to be a perennial state of affairs, but this time I earned it, after being in charge of 420 undergraduates). As masters and wives do we gave a reception for our temporary successors, who happen to be a husband and wife both of whom are professors of psychiatry. One of the undergraduates came up to them at the reception and said, 'So, you're both psychiatrists; I wonder what that says about this college, that it takes two psychiatrists' and the new incumbent, not to be outdone, said he had once done something like what he was about to undertake; he had once been in charge of a four hundred bed mental hospital. I suddenly knew exactly what he was talking about.

It is therefore nice to be able to sail under a different flag tonight. I'm going to be completely academic; I hope you don't mind. And for the more liberated spirits among you I'm a little bit traditional; I hope you don't mind that: it's not that I mind liberation in anybody else, it's just that *I'm* unliberated. And so the talk is going to be traditional academic theology. I hope you'll bear with me because no matter how well I prepare I don't like to read from a manuscript; I have to work it out from the notes.

Story Theology

Theology has always been a matter of fads, and I want to talk a little bit about one fad. There's an awful lot of publication, argument and writing about something that calls itself 'story theology' and I would like to simply start off and suggest that when I am talking about the Christian story, the interpretation of the Christian story, I am not talking about that; and yet it is worthwhile to say a word or two about it. Why is story such a fashionable subject amongst some theological folk – and I think also amongst some ministers and others? It is due in large part to the new interest that all of us have, I think, in the relationship between psychology and Christianity – there isn't a minister, I'm sure, who doesn't have that interest – and the curious and renewed interest not so much in Freudian but in Jungian psychology, with its directing of our attention to the great unconscious myths of the race.

We tend to go on from there to say that man is a myth-making, a symbol-creating animal.

with which we have been familiar in theology, especially in Protestant theology for 175 years ever since Schleiermacher and Kant (and now in Catholic theology, since the Catholics, I think, are trying to recapitulate 175 years of Protestant theology in one decade, for better or worse). In this tradition we have understood theology to be in some sense an expression of, or a report about, the religious character of man. And if one wants to talk about that, there are endless ways of doing it, but one way of doing it is to suggest that man is unique because he is a symbol-creating animal.

All theologians who stand in this tradition, which begins with a general anthropology, a general doctrine of man (it does not end there but it begins there) are in some sense also suggesting that religious statements and, derivatively, theological statements have a specific character. That is to say, they are *indirect*. All religious statements are unlike either scientific or metaphysical statements in that – as I think every introductory theological class is taught – they are not direct characterizations of what they talk about. That is to say, we say that 'God is…' then we add all sorts of things: we may say that 'God is love', we may say that 'God is righteous'; or if we are terribly traditional and not process theologians we may say that God is impassible (I didn't say impossible, I said impassible: that he is not subject to change or to being affected by anything external), and so on and so on. When we say these things in the tradition of Schleiermacher, in the tradition of theology that begins with anthropology, what we are doing above all is making a statement about the relationship between God and the religious man – let us simply say God and the human being. All statements about God are statements about the religious or limit situation, if you will – about the relationship between God and man, rather than about God himself.

I think it can be claimed that in this tradition the only thing that can genuinely be said as a straightforward statement about God is that he is transcendent. That is to say not that he is absolutely out of communication with us, but rather that his manner of being related to us is not the manner of an objective being 'in a super-world a world above this world', as Tillich used to like to say. It is not the fashion of a super-being in a world above this world relating himself to us. No. This above all is what one wants to suggest is *not* the case in the ultimate relation the relationship between God and man. One does not want to create God in the image of a finite object, therefore one says, Don't think of what is beyond the limit of our situation literally, don't think of it therefore as a world beyond this world; think of it as a depth dimension, an ultimate dimension to *this* world. Sometimes a shorthand formula is found for this sort of thing: 'Think of God as subject rather than object' is one of the ways of putting this. Think of God, the divine human relation, as a dimension that we discover at the limits of our own experience, rather than as a world that we find placed above the finite world in which we live.

Now let me press it just one but further. There is one more thing that one could say here. If one talks this way about the divine–human relationship, obviously one builds the notion of story into the relationship itself. The story has really two aspects to it: the story is itself the *relation* (our life-story is in some sense a coded form of the way we experience the ultimate), and the story is itself the *code*. The story is not only the *shape* of the experience the story is also the *verbal expression* of the experience. I use the word 'experience' a little hesitantly; nonetheless I think it fits.

What one finally has to say about this anthropology, this doctrine of man, in which man is basically and generally related to God, is that it finally speaks about a self that lies ineffably, for any expression, behind all expressions. For this kind of theological thought it is valid to raise that question that we used to raise when I taught in seminary twenty years ago (and we were always thinking we were terribly profound when we said it): 'Who am I? What is my true identity?' 'Well, simple! I am *me,* you know. I am also father of certain people, and I have a certain job and so on.' 'Don't give me that! Who am I *really*?' And when one raises that question one asks about that mysterious self which is related to itself, and related to the ultimate, always through symbols, and cannot get in touch with itself directly in any other way. It is a self, to use the language of the Nineteenth Century, that has to be mediated to its own deep roots through symbol and stories – to its own depth-experience.

There's a positive and a negative aspect to this. The negative aspect first. We used to think up until the Eighteenth Century that the self is a kind of spiritual substance just like physical substance; you know; there's the body, the philosophers of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century used to say, and there is the mind. And Descartes and Leibniz and Spinoza all had some problems as to how they would relate the body and the mind but they had no question that that is how see the human being, as made up as either two substances or two aspects of substance, body and mind. Then Kant came along and suggested that is the wrong way to look at the self – and Schleiermacher followed him and Hegel did too. The self is not another substance. The self, Kant said, is a *perspective* on all objective existence including its own body, including its own psychophysical organism; but it is not another aspect of this same configuration, it is a perspective on it. It is not a substance; it is a subject, it can never be an object. It is a perspective on things. It is my ineluctable perspective from which I see the whole world. It is that ineluctable perspective which is my self in this world.

But I am not part *as* subject of this same object world. So the negative task of this self that symbolizes and mediates itself to itself through symbols is to avoid again making the self a substance. And the positive aspect of it is – something that was said particularly in late nineteenth-century philosophy – that this is a way of claiming the uniqueness of the human being, and a way of

claiming that the only way that we know the human being is a way that is different from the way we know anything else. And *story* is one of the ways.

Now this is a long way round, but I think it is worth it as a negative counterpart because it is a fascinating tradition, and in some ways a great tradition. I would say that what I have just been describing to you is the tradition of liberalism in Christian theology. This is the kind of reasoning which traditional liberalism – at least one great part of it, for there are some other kinds of liberalism – functions in theology. If I may invoke the name Karl Barth here – if it's not a heresy to say it here – and ask what Barth revolted against when he revolted against liberalism, then it was the kind of thing I have described to you, the kind of anthropology and its relationship to God strained through the apprehension of an ultimate dimension in human life and consciousness and experience: that is precisely what Karl Barth rebelled against, and it would have included, had he lived long enough to see it, story theology. (He had begun to hate fads by the time his life ended; he saw several of them, including the 'death of God' theology which he compared once to the foam from two glasses of beer, one of which was entitled 'Bultmann' and one 'Tillich').

The Doctrine of the Spirit and the Doctrine of Christ

But I want now to switch. When I use the word story, and speak of the interpretation of the Christian story, I am speaking about something else, which has deep roots in the Christian tradition but also deep roots in a modern tradition in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theology. There have been two topics, generally speaking, that have pervaded Christian theology in mainline theology in Europe, Britain and America in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (It may be changing now, but at least traditionally this has been true). One has been the doctrine of the Holy Spirit; that may sound a little surprising but in point of fact what I have just been suggesting to you can be translated into terms of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, immediately, directly and very simply. Let me suggest that when one thinks that the basic way of being human is one's self-consciousness, one's depth experience, and then asks about the nature of ones relationship to God, then the answer of course is that God is present in, with, and through, and at the limits of, precisely that experience of depth, that experience of a limit, an ultimate limit to all our endeavors, to the ultimate limit of our consciousness – *that* is where God is present. And when one says that, the best way to designate what one means by that in theological terms is that the presence of God is conceived of as the presence of Spirit in, with, and through us individually and communally. But that has been only one of the topics, and incidentally was the topic that the Nineteenth Century wrestled with. The Eighteenth Century wrestled with

another topic that came in a most disturbing relation with that topic. The Eighteenth Century wrestled with the topic of Christology; that was the other central doctrine. But the central doctrine of Christology was not given to the Eighteenth Century in the traditional form of the incarnation of the godhead in two natures in one person. That metaphysical way was gone for the Eighteenth Century; in the eighteenth-century discussion the question was constantly, 'What is meant by revelation?' and 'How do we know that it is true?' I have no desire to go into that issue, but the fiercest attack in the Eighteenth Century was on the notion of revelation, and if you attacked the notion of revelation you attacked it centrally at one point: you attacked it at the point of Jesus Christ. And we have all heard about the distinction between the religion *of* Jesus and the religion *about* Jesus. In the Eighteenth Century it was believed that the religion *of* Jesus was the religion of any moral religious hero – except more distinguished. It was the true example of what human religion ought to be, but it had been perverted by Paul into a religion in which Jesus became the God-man. And Christian theologians had to defend themselves constantly; they had to argue constantly concerning the notion of revolution (a) that it is a notion that makes sense – a supernatural revelation by which God communicates his truth in an historical series of events or an historical story, namely those told in the Bible; and (b) that it is conceivably true, or that there is evidence for its factual truth. It was in the Nineteenth Century that David Friedrich Strauss wrote the *Life of Jesus*, but the problem that led to it was the problem of historical [illegible] of the reliability of the Bible that was [illegible]ed in the Eighteenth Century.

The Literal and the Figural Senses

In the process, the Christian story became interpreted in a variety of ways. And on that I would like to spend a few moments. I have to advertise my own wares here: This is what I have written about, so I know something about it. (An expert is a man from out of town who has written about whatever it is that no-one else either writes or reads about.) The Christian story, the story of the Bible, received an enormous shift of interpretation in the Eighteenth Century. Before that there had been, especially in the Reformation (and especially in the man who ought to be – whether he is or not –your patron saint, John Calvin) there had been a strong emphasis on the literal sense. And by 'literal sense' Calvin and Luther also meant something very interesting. The literal sense of the story meant for Luther and Calvin something that I might title as *literary*-literal not *grammatical*-literal. It does not mean that every word was the precise name for whatever thing it named, and that every word was fit,

mean that at all. What it *did* mean was that it was *literary*-literal, that is to say that it was the right description, not a symbol not an allegory – that it meant exactly what it said; that the biblical narratives described and depicted precisely what they meant to describe and depict. That is much forgotten these days but it is enormously important. For to the Reformers and to the Protestant Orthodox folk who followed them, until the end of the Seventeenth Century, this meant that the literal sense and the historical sense meant exactly the same thing. If the meaning of what is written is exactly what it says, and if it is not either allegorical or symbolic or anything else but what it says, and if it is a story, then it is a true story, an historical story. That was, in a certain sense, the heart – or at least belongs to the very heart – of Protestant and I think indeed traditional Christian pre-critical interpretation.

So much was this the case that the other sense that the Reformers and others gave to scripture, namely the *figural* sense, was regarded as being of the same kind as the literal sense. Remember what the figural sense is: there are certain things, or certain occurrences, or concepts, or whatever, in the Old Testament (say the law, or Noah's ark) which are what they are; they mean in their own right – and yet even though they mean in their own right they are also figures that will be fulfilled in what they prefigure. So you see the literal sense actually went hand in hand with the figural sense – that's the point, and that meant that you could read the Old Testament in such a way that you saw Christ prefigured in it and yet could at the same time also affirm that you believed in the literal sense and not in anything else. For figuration the figural sense had more to do with the literal sense than it had to do with allegory. When the reformers said that they found Christ in the Old Testament as both Luther and Calvin said, this was in no sense an *allegory* for them, it was a *figural* interpretation of the Old Testament.

You find something of this still in modernity; you find it done very imaginatively in volume II/2 of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* in a whole long section (he has nothing but long sections) entitled 'the old testament witness to Jesus Christ': a highly imaginative figural interpretation of passages from Leviticus. And it is not at all old-fashioned; you will find it startlingly modern, startlingly like what a good literary critic might do.

The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative

Now, when things changed drastically in the Eighteenth Century, story began to mean something else. The narratives and that which they are about began to separate. The literal sense was understood to be an argument for something else. Let me try to explain this, because it's a little difficult. The governing British philosophy, which I think is as good a philosophy as any to claim as being the philosophical backdrop of biblical criticism, was empiricism. The

originator, more or less, of British empiricism was John Locke. John Locke suggested that we have two kinds of ideas; he called them ideas of *reflection* and ideas of *sensation*. Forget about the ideas of reflection; it is only the idea of sensation that counts. The idea of sensation means that any idea we have we receive through our senses. There's the famous metaphor that the mind is an empty blackboard on which the senses inscribe with chalk whatever they want, but there's also the claim that each idea, since it comes from the senses, comes from the outside in such a manner that there is something 'out there' which is responsible for all our ideas. He called this thing out there 'substance'. And the idea in some way represents the substance as given to us through the senses.

What happens to the unity of literal and historical sense that we had from the reformers? They split apart now. The literal sense now is that sense which refers us to something 'out there' which is literally represented by the story. The story, say the Gospel story, has not only a meaning now; the Gospel story has a subject matter. The story refers to something outside itself, and that subject matter outside itself now is not only the meaning, but that subject matter if it is history can also be verified in various ways, or it can be disconfirmed by evidence. And from this notion historical criticism springs. I think logically it becomes more complex, but this is I believe how it begins.

If you now want to hold scripture still to be true in the Eighteenth Century, what do you say with regard to the story, the story of Jesus in particular; since the centre of Christian belief is that Jesus is the divine revelation in history as attested by the Bible? You have certain options. Some people said that the subject-matter of the Bible, what the words refer to, is really a series of natural events that were erroneously reported. If you don't believe in miracles (and remember in the Eighteenth Century you were haunted by the question of miracle) and yet you want to give the Bible the benefit of the doubt, you say, 'Well, what they say there when it is written that Jesus walked on water is in fact that the disciples saw him moving in the morning mist by the side of the lake, as in good eighteenth-century fashion he was getting his lecture ready for that day, walking up and down, and the distance seemed foreshortened, and being either superstitious or something they translated that into his walking on the water. In other words, *something* took place, but it was *natural*. A historical fact was there, but it was not the fact that was reported in the story. These people are called naturalists.

Then there were of course supernaturalists, the folk who became something like our fundamentalists – and it is interesting to note that in the Eighteenth Century these folk were *modern*, because they bought the new philosophy, they bought the notion that evidence was relevant to estimating the truth; they said 'No, it is perfectly evident that the Gospel writers are intelligent, sincere, and not deceiving folk, and therefore what they wrote is bound to be a correct and

not a distorted report.' Like the naturalists they believed that the subject matter or referent of the stories is historical happening, historical occurrence, space-time occurrence, but it is the space-time occurrence literally reported. But you see that in both cases the story's meaning is now found outside the story itself, in that to which it refers, that which lies outside it.

This was followed by certain folk in the late Eighteenth Century who discovered the theory of myth. They suggested that the true meaning of the Biblical stories, especially the miraculous stories, is neither the natural event nor the supernatural event but rather the folk-consciousness of the people who told these things perfectly honestly. If you want to get at that meaning, you will have to demythologize it. Demythologization was invented in the late Eighteenth Century and not in the middle of the Twentieth Century. Again, the meaning of the story lies outside the story.

Now there were several other such. The point is in each instance that the representation and that which it represents have a gap between them. What I want to suggest is that the striking thing about many of these stories – and I suggest that you re-read your Gospel of Luke as perhaps the paradigmatic instance of what I'm talking about – is that the story itself has, if I may put it this way, a startlingly *realistic* quality; that is to say, whether miraculous or non-miraculous events are being reported, they are being reported as though the author is saying, 'I mean what I say, whether or not something happened.'

That is to say that, in a certain sense at least as literature the case may be made for taking these stories neither symbolically, nor as having a natural or supernatural referent beyond themselves, nor as myth, but precisely as saying what they mean. Now, that sense of the biblical story says something very, very different from the sense of man as story-bearer or symbol or myth-bearer which I started with; it is in fact the exact reverse. It says that, quite apart from what a historical critic might do, at the level of interpretation the story ought to be taken for what it says and not as a symbolization of a New Testament religious limit or depth experience. And what I am suggesting you see is that it is precisely this, namely, the sense of the story as it is, which became lost in the kind of theology that began to think of theology as based on a general anthropology; the sense of the story is lost; the sense of the realistic story is lost even in that extension of liberal theology which is called story theology.

Reading Realistic Narrative

What would an alternative interpretation, however, be like? 'Does this mean,' one wants to say, 'that the story makes sense only as literature? Does it make sense only literally? Do I have to believe it literally?' Let me remind you that these are questions that one wrestles with perennially; they are not simply done away with. The sense of a story in a realistic story is precisely this, that it

makes sense always cumulatively; it is like any realistic historical narrative, in that it does not have a subject matter that you can state apart from the narrative itself, just like you cannot state what a history is about apart from the historical narrative itself.

If we say, for example, that Jesus is the Christ, or if we say simply Jesus Christ, what we mean by that is exactly the story of the enactment of his life and death and resurrection. He is not Jesus Christ apart from that story of his. It is precisely in that story that he is the Christ. And this already begins to suggest something of where the difference is located between consciousness or liberal theology and what I am trying to shape. The self in the consciousness theology is precisely that: a consciousness perspective on the world. In a realistic story the self is a specific agent. There is no *general* anthropology here; the self is a *specific* agent who is what he does, not the consciousness lying behind. He is what he does and what is done to him, so that (if I may put it in theological terms) Jesus Christ the person is nothing other than the enactment of his person in his work. Who is Jesus Christ in the story? Not a messianic consciousness: no, he is the obedient Christ who died and rose again. He is what he does and what is done to him.

But now if you go on from there and say, 'What about the historical facts here?' – what facts? Do we know what the facts are outside of the description? Remember what facts were for the empiricists: facts for the empiricist were always those separate occurrences, quite apart from the description, quite apart from the story itself – those separate historical, empirical occurrences which could be confirmed or disconfirmed by independent evidence. What are the facts that are being referred to here? *They* are facts that we *cannot* have apart from the story. That is precisely one of the most important things about a realistic interpretation of the Gospels.

I'll put it in the words of a modern English philosopher who said, 'We have reality only under a description.' We have this reality only as it is rendered under the description, only as it is rendered by this narrative. It is as though the Bible, especially the Gospel story (if I may put it is this boldly, and following a theological friend of mine) were a non-fictional realistic novel.[4] It is as though it were a genuine narrative, the reality of which is not rendered by anything other than the description itself – the reality of which is indeed rightly called I think, for Christians, true fact, but rightly called true fact in a way which, although it may bear a family resemblance to that set of empirical facts we call history, is not identical with it.

The true fact of the Christian story, the centre of the Christian story, is that passage in which Jesus is most truly who he is, crucified and resurrected. The resurrection is not an ordinary historical fact in an empirical sense. Is it therefore only a symbol? I believe that is not the Christian vision, nor the Christian witness. The resurrection is a fact the truth of which Christians

affirm even though they have to say that the nature of it is not such that we are in a position to verify it, because even though we affirm it we do not think of it under the category of an ordinary empirical datum; it is a fact which is rendered effective to us through the story and we cannot have it without the story in which it is given to us. So that if I may end by quoting the distinguished British theologian Austin Farrer, it is as though the story of Scripture were like Christ himself; the Scripture is for the Christian in a mysterious way God's self-enacted parable.[5]

It as though we, ordinary human beings, were living in a world in which the true reality is one that we only grasp in this life as if it were for us a figure. Yes – but it is *we* who are the figures and it is that reality embodied by the resurrection that is the true reality of which we were only figures. It as though our sense of reality were to be turned about; it is what is depicted – the world, the one world, God's and man's, depicted in the Bible – which is real, and it is ordinary world history which is a parable, a figure of that reality. And that is the mystery it seems to me of our life into which the story and the facts fit together.

2. Interpretation and Devotion: God's Presence for us in Jesus Christ

The Essence of Christianity

One way to title what I'm about to say is simply 'Confession of a failure'; another would be to say 'Notes on leaving things the way they are.' And you will find in a little while that I mean the latter at least very seriously, and something of the former too. What I'm going to talk about is a problem that was set for me at least in two ways: both by my academic studies in the history of modern theology, and personally. Let me pick up the trend, the theme of what I want to say, from last night. I am unlike many theologians who are still, whether they like to say so or not (usually they like to say so) deeply troubled by the issue, 'Given the Gospel, embodied in the Bible written in an idiom so long ago – miracles, myth, and so on, and apparently a claim to exclusive salvation only in that name of Jesus Christ – how does one make *that* very austere and long-ago kind of message meaningful today? And by 'meaningful' they usually mean how does one allow it to be a *possibility*, how does one so bring out its content that it speaks to the deepest needs of – to quote an absolutely unheard of phrase – this secular age? In a certain sense, like most people I share that and yet there always seemed to me something callow and shallow about it that bothered me.

In my own perverse moments when I first read about the death of God theology that the real meaning of the Gospel is that God has died and we are

now released to live a full spontaneous life, my reaction was something like this: 'Well if that's what it takes, if that's the price you pay to make it relevant today, well then I'll go somewhere else.' (I never took it in its literal form terribly seriously, though it seems to me that the death of God theology did bespeak a certain problem. The problem might have been this – I simply propose it to you for consideration – that some ministers, theological students and theologians found it difficult to pray, and because they found it very difficult to pray they said God was dead.) But what I said to myself at the time was, 'Well, alright, if Christianity is going to go out (let us assume for a moment that it depends on what *we* do and not on the grace of God!) it's had a magnificent history and I'd rather see it go out with an orthodox bang than a liberal whimper.'

Now, I say that's perverse; I think one shouldn't divide the world into orthodoxies and liberalisms and things of that sort. But what I am saying is that for *me* the great problem was always this: how does one express, grasp, and speak – let's just simply say articulate – how does one articulate the sense of Christianity? What is its *essence*? A question that has disturbed and puzzled theologians certainly since the question was raised formally in the late Nineteenth Century by people like Harnack and Troeltsch, but before then too and since then too. And if the Bible has anything to do with that, how does one properly get the sense of the Bible? And I should hurriedly say obviously I do not think of the Bible as a simple straightforward unity; the Bible is our canon but that does not mean that the books are of one kind and they all say one thing. But one might find for oneself a certain centre in the Bible and says 'Here is where I find the Gospel more clearly expressed than in any other part; this shall be the centre for me of the canon'; and one might say that and then go on and say, 'I want to articulate that in such a fashion that it makes sense.' For *me*, that was the very first question: How can I grasp a part of the Bible so that I can be sure that I have its sense?

And then for me the question of its translation – to use that very common metaphor that theologians used strictly as a metaphor in the neo-orthodox period, especially in the 1950s, the question of how I can so translate it that it becomes meaningful, so that it speaks powerfully to a secular age – that for me is a secondary problem. The problem is for me to have some assurance that its sense is really what it says there; that I really understand what it says there. I'll let its meaningfulness take care of itself. That was the problem for me; that was the task for me.

And that is why I invested my time, my study, my pondering, my meditation, as deeply as I could in finding that part of the Bible in which it seemed to me I found a total coincidence – a total *identity* if you will – between what was *said* and what the words, the statements, the sayings were *about*. Many find the centre in St Paul; some find in Hebrews; Luther found it,

startlingly enough, as much in the Old Testament as anywhere (my colleague Jerry Pelikan likes to say that if Luther had been a modern seminary professor he would have been professor of the Old Testament); others find it in the Gospel of John; but to me it is in the Synoptic Gospels. There it seemed to me (wherever others found it differently) we have the identity of the account with what the account is about. And if I may recapitulate what I said last night very simply, it seems to me that in that case *Christology* is the centre of the New Testament. Lets put it this way: in a non-technical way a high Christology – a Christology very much focused on Jesus Christ as not simply the unique revealer but also the atonement through whose death and resurrection we and the whole world have life – that seemed, to me at least, what was being said there, and that was where I found it most of all.

Here as far as I could see we have in the form of a realistic story the rendering of our salvation – in the form of a realistic story which of course claims to be true. In that in the form of a story that claims to be true we have the rendering of our salvation; but if it is not true *that is still what it means*, and for me the problem of the meaning on the one hand and the truth on the other hand were quite distinct. Even if I could not believe in its truth I wanted at least to be able to say I know the meaning of that which I cannot believe. I *do* believe it, but in the end I would still say, regardless, 'This is its meaning.' I did not want, in order to be able to believe it, to reshape its meaning in such a way that it would render a truth that is acceptable to me. That seemed to me to be playing dirty pool.

And I did not for a moment think that in order to do this, in order to maintain what I hope would be some integrity in scriptural reading, that I had to turn fundamentalist; it did not seem to me for a moment that that was the case.

Christ's Identity and Presence

Now, it was then for me terribly important to raise the question, Who is Jesus Christ?, and to see that identity, the identity of Jesus Christ, rendered through the story of his life. If I may put it now in a somewhat more theological fashion and use the words of a friend of mine who told me what I had done. (You know how that is, we all have some very clear-headed friends and they often seem to us like that famous saying, of a man who said 'I have written a play, I'm having it translated into French because it loses so much in the original'.) He suggested that what I had written about was Jesus Christ *as the self-enacted agency of God*; the self-rendering, self-enacted agency of God; *that* is the identity of Jesus Christ that I had wanted to talk about.

Now, having said that, I then wanted to enter in again into the problem that modern theologians and many modern Christians talk about: 'How is he

present for us?' – and that's what gave rise to my title. I put it to myself in a very simple, perhaps rather naïve way, which ultimately derives from the ontological argument, of Anselm of Canterbury. I want to tell you how that came about, but let me simply state it: If Jesus is really who the Bible says he is; if that is his identity; then he *cannot not be present*. If he is who the Bible says he is then, having died once, he lives; he is in some manner present, here to us – to be sure in a very unique and unrepeatable manner, and yet he is.

And that, it seems to me, is one of the two things that the history of modern theology has all been about. Remember I said yesterday that there were two problems, two doctrines if you will, with which modern theology has always dealt? One was Christology – the endeavor to see if a unique revelation in history was a notion that made sense. But the other one was that, really, of the presence of God in Christ to our present age, or any given present age; *the presence of God in Christ now*. This I said was the essence of liberalism, and in a certain sense it is not only the essence of liberalism, in a certain sense it is also the essence of pietism – the endeavor to have him here, to be here with him now, to know him, to be living, and to convert my dead heart. It is a very modern preoccupation (and I think pietists in this sense are as modern as the liberals.)

Now when you occupy yourself with that then you raise some very disturbing questions. Because it may very well be (let me put it as simply as I can) that then one goes to church on Sunday constantly expecting not only something but *the* thing, if you will, to happen. One expects to have, in Wesley's terms, one's heart strangely warmed. That may be one way of suggesting what it is about, what one expects.

Or some believe that the presence of God is not a specific conscious experience. The general expectation in modern theology, as I suggested last night, as it endeavors to look on modern Christian religion in this secular age, has been to think that man is consciousness, basically at the deepest level, and that there are limit situations, and limit experiences in those situations, in which we also have to use limit language (which is what I suggested symbolism, stories, and myths are usually thought to be). That is the only way in which we can express the impingement of a God who does not impinge through the statement simply of doctrine – for to have faith is not simply to repeat a creed, we have always been told; to have faith is to have a living faith that makes an impact now, and in some sense it is thought that God makes that impact now through certain limit situations, situations in which we may not be aware of anything but we trust he is there in the darkness, perhaps. We trust he is there when we are driven to the ultimate of our reflections on ourselves and our situations, say in the presence of death. In such situations, when we say 'I trust', *that* perhaps is what it is like to have the presence of God.

The presence of God here and now has in some sense to be the same presence that was articulated in the enacted identity of Jesus Christ. That seems to me have been, if anything, the single statement of the modern problem in theology. It has been stated in any number of ways, and some solutions to the problem have been stated in any number of ways.

For example: Kierkegaard spoke about this as 'being contemporaneous with Christ', the disciple at second hand who is contemporaneous with Christ, through – and he proudly confessed it – through a paradox: this is something we cannot conceptualize. This is something we cannot think. To enact the presence of God here is a paradox, something paradoxical in virtue of the absurd, as he said; it is to understand faith as a risk; it is to risk a life *as though* this were true; as though that offence that was committed way back there of a man calling himself God and being put to death helplessly – as though that were the presence of God now; that is absurd, that is paradoxical, and faith is the decision to say, 'Yes!' to that in one's life and not simply to profess it externally as a creed about something called reality; it is a *subjective* and *existential* truth. That's one way of expressing the issue, that deeply religious and theological issue, and a suggestion for how one can meet it.

We can also follow Paul Tillich, who said that there is a given or miraculous side to revelation – but he went on to say there is no revelation that is not *received*, and he called the receiving side of revelation 'ec-stasy' (and usually when theologians want to be profound they put a hyphen between two symbols; there is whole hyphenated theology that grew up after the first and second world war): standing literally outside oneself; being driven to the limits of ones being, apprehension and life and then being driven beyond them; that is what receiving revelation is like. So what we have here is first of all the objective side or the miraculous side of revelation which Tillich compressed into one phrase: 'the biblical picture of Jesus as the Christ', and that is if you will the content of revelation; but in addition to biblical language expressing revelation there is also a certain power in biblical language, power in the picture – and its power is that it *occasions* what it *expresses*. It occasions the very power that is inherent in the picture itself. So the meaning of that biblical picture, that story from the past, is at least in part that it has an ec-stasy-lending power for us today. That is perhaps one way of bringing the two together.

Now notice in both cases – in Kierkegaard and in Tillich – what I have suggested here is that there is a way of explaining a solution to a problem. First you state the problem and then you suggest a possible answer to it. Or if you will it is the supplying of a certain technical or theological conceptual frame for a religious answer, supplying a technical theological language which will be explanatory of what goes on in the meeting of this problem. Here's where everything seemed wrong to me. It seems to me that the Christian does not see a technical problem here; he sees a religious problem here, not a

technical problem. But more than that, it seems to me that if there is a problem here then the notion of meeting it with a conceptual explanation is a frighteningly misleading one; it seems almost as if the Bible itself dealt in concepts; it seems almost as if the Bible dealt in specific technical concepts – and I had been taught by a certain Austro-English philosopher, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, that language doesn't often work in technical concepts; language can be conceptual but it doesn't often work in technical concepts.

But I still had my own problem and that was that it seemed to me that having affirmed that I understood what a biblical articulation of the identity of Jesus Christ was, I still, if I were a Christian believer, had the problem of talking about him as present, and admitted – I *had* to admit to myself, I think – that this is not an easy thing to do. It is especially difficult to do if one tries then to *explain* by translating the notion of presence into some explanatory concepts. That is precisely what I think cannot be done, and what I think need not be done. There is, it seems to me, a very ordinary way of talking about the presence of Christ.

Ordinary Christian Language

And now let me hark back to what I said at the beginning – namely, that I was going to title this lecture, 'Notes on leaving things the way they are'. One of the tasks, in fact *the* task of Christian theology is simply to talk about the way Christian language is used by Christians, and to ask if it is being used faithfully. The theologian simply examines contemporary use of Christian language to see if it is faithful to what he senses to be the traditional use or the biblical use – usually some combination of the two: the use the Church has made of its source, namely the Bible; that is what theology is about.

Notice that I do not say that it is the task of the theologian to *translate* the language of the Bible, to *translate* Christian language, into a language that will be relevant to our situation. I think the whole metaphor of translation there is misleading; it is an erroneous way of looking at it – though I don't have time right now to look into that. And furthermore it seems to me that at the centre, at what I took to be the heart of the Bible, it *means what it says* – so there is no need to translate it; no need to reconceptualize it. There may be a need to *redescribe* it, but that's a very different thing.

So it seems to me that when one talks about God's presence one is not trying to explain, one is trying a much more modest task; one is trying to step back and describe the use not of a technical language, but of an ordinary language, and a very specific ordinary language: the specific language of ordinary Christian usage. And that is what the word 'devotion' in the title is about. I use 'devotion' simply to circumscribe, to have a term for, *Christian language in use*. Christian language in meditation, in public worship, private

prayer, in the obedience of the moral life: Christian language in the public and private use of faith.

Now this is a totality-language – that is to say, it is a coherent language; it is held together by the usage of a community – to be sure a riven community, but a community nonetheless; and it is held together by the community's empowering agent who is one; but still it is a multifarious language. Faith itself is not a single thing to be defined. This is, I think, one of the half-hidden tensions between Lutherans and Calvinists very often: that Lutherans tend to think that there is perhaps a root form or root articulation or root expression in the life of faith; I think not, and I think I tend to be Calvinist there. If I understand Calvinism at all, Calvinism tends to think of faith – one finds it in the first book of the Institutes – as first of all a peculiar form of knowledge – but it is other things too. It is obedience, an obedience through the forgiveness of ones sins, an obedience to the law, for there is a third use of the law, and there is sanctification, and there is a kind of moral life. (Let me also say that I think this has profound social consequences, obviously – there is an obedience not only in the individual life, there is an obedience of society; we will be held to account for the things we have not done rightly. The church will be held to account; America is held to account; Russia is held to account; we are all held to account before the one God who is not the God of a single nation or group, not even of a single ethnic power, not even the God of a single sex.) Faith, then, is a knowledge; faith is an obedience; and faith is also a trust; it is a leap; it is a belief; but a belief in the very strongest sense, a belief in the existential sense of total commitment. But faith is not only total commitment; it is not only knowledge; it is not only obedience; and it is not the case that one of these is the root form and the others are derivative. Well – I think not.

The language of the church is, I am saying, a highly various language but it is a language in use. No ordinary language, no language, that is to say, that is not a technical language but an ordinary language embodied in life, is simple or straightforward. It is always a language which we *learn*. But how do we learn it? How do we learn the concepts that are embodied in that language? We learn them by using them, by speaking them. One of the marvelous and – to my mind – startling and liberating little sentences that Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote was when he said, 'Don't ask for meaning, ask for use.' There are technical languages, you see, in which the concepts – say the concept 'atom' – always means the same thing: it has a fixed, stipulated meaning; and when you deal with a language like that you can ask for the fixed, stipulated concept as a general term which runs by its definition and is always connected to other concepts by its definition. But ordinary language does not work that way; that does not mean that ordinary language doesn't have its own rules, but it is very difficult, in fact sometimes impossible to state the rules apart from the use; it is the ruled use that gives us the rules, and the rules may be highly various

depending on the use to which the concept is put in the context in which it is being used.

It is foolish to take a biblical concept (like 'God' or 'reconciliation' – any of the concepts of the Bible) and think that they function as though they were technical concepts – and yet many, many modern biblical commentators and many biblical theologians have done this. No-body has ever admitted that, but they have been treated that way as though the concept has a kind of unitary meaning – 'the biblical concept of revelation' (a word that's hardly ever found in the Bible), 'the biblical concept of peace', 'the biblical concept of God', 'the biblical concept of reconciliation'. Sometimes it is admitted that these words, these concepts may have a history – as the Bible is a book that has a very long history of its own – and yet even then it is as though the concepts have a history of their own apart from the social, religious, worshipping community context in which they are used, so that there is a certain accretion: 'In the pre-Hellenistic period here is what it meant'; 'Hellenism influenced it in such and such a way and it came over into the New Testament like that'. It is as though there were an *intellectual* history which was insulated and self-enclosed and gave us our concepts pure, and technical; and this is precisely what it seems to me is not the case.

I suggest even that the notion of 'presence' may be something that is actually a technical theological term, a technical concept rather than an ordinary usage.

Metaphor, meaning and understanding

We learn a language through the use of a language, and I want simply to keep for a few moments repeating that in a variety of ways. In regard to parables there is a great debate on whether parables are not really metaphors. Well, if they are, if it is metaphorical language, then what *is* a metaphor? Have you ever noticed that we all know what a metaphor is but as soon as you ask us to define it it someone runs out on us? We knew this was true about the notion of time; Augustine told us so: I know perfectly well what time is, but as soon as somebody asks me to define it, I'm in trouble. We know perfectly well in the ordinary usage which unites us, in our ordinary language, how to use a metaphor – even some strange metaphors. 'Violence is a metaphor for American life', some people who just cannot get tired of violence on the screen tell me; well alright maybe it is; I'm not quite sure I understand what the word metaphor means here, but maybe it is: there's a kind of an emblem here. Or – I'm still thinking of recent usage – 'Kent State was an obscenity'; I'd never heard before the late sixties or early seventies a public event called an obscenity; it was as though the word 'obscenity' took on a metaphorical meaning. Don't ask me to define it however; it struck me, whether I agreed

with it or not – and I happen to agree with it, if I understand it – that I knew, I understood what the metaphor 'Kent State was an obscenity' meant. But if you ask me to define a metaphor I'm not sure that I can do it for you. Again, the principle, if there is a principle here, is very simple; it is simply that we know the rules of ordinary, as distinguished from technical language, simply through use of the language.

Let me press on. There was a raging debate among literary critics in the early '50s about the meaning of 'meaning', with two distinguished critics making an inquiry into the topic. But once again – do we really use language like that? When we see an ordinary statement, is it really true that there are the words, and then in addition to the words there is the meaning of the words? Is the meaning something that is separable from the words themselves; is the meaning a container that the words, or the concepts, always carry round with them wherever they go? It seems to me that this is not the case. When I use the term 'meaning' I use a puzzle, what Wittgenstein called a verbal cramp, about some kind of an objective situation: the meaning is out there in the words.

Now let me use the subjective correlate to that: the word 'understanding'. What does it mean to understand? This is what hermeneutical inquirers, people who have been interested in theory of interpretation, have been asking themselves; what does it mean to understand? Well, perhaps, in ordinary language, it doesn't mean one single thing. Suppose you are having explained how a certain person misbehaved in public, was very offensive to his hostess one evening at dinner before startled company, and then a psychologist tells you that there were certain things about this man's home background that meant that there were some occasions that he half-remembers which triggered a certain kind of behavior. 'Ah, I see.' You say. Then you go on to say, 'Now wait a minute, there's still a question in my mind.' Let's take both of those. The expression 'Ah I see' is a kind of momentary analogy, simile, perhaps a metaphor for something that happens: a kind of mental event. 'Aha!' In fact, irreverently one may call it an 'Aha!' event: there was a whole series of those that some theologians (like Gerhard Ebeling and Fuchs) spoke of as something very profound, they spoke of them as 'speech events'; I hard a hard time understanding the technical language involved, and in plain metaphorical language what it always seemed to me that they were talking about was an Aha! event, an 'Ah I see!' – which we all experience. To make *something* of it is at once very important and rather platitudinous; to make an enormous amount of it is something that always puzzles me. That's *one way* of understanding: there are ways of understanding which are analogous to or like a mental event, like a sudden seeing.

But then we go on to say, 'There's still a question in my mind', and when I use that phrase 'question in my mind', am I saying that there is a mental,

internal equivalent to the kind of statement I could make when I say, 'The cat is in the room'? Is a question in my mind something mentally equivalent to a cat being in a physical place? We know it isn't so. There are times when understanding is not best compared to a mental event (especially since we are not only internal but also external beings, which is a very important thing to remember). It is not the case that we do something internally in a mental space first and then it reverberates physically. It is bad to think in those dualistic terms; it is dangerous; one submits oneself there unquestioningly to a very problematic metaphysic. But at the ordinary level it isn't the way understanding always functions. At the ordinary level, understanding sometimes functions the way we do when we do an arithmetic or a geometrical progression; somehow, however, 'to understand' there means being able to follow the rules, having a capacity to follow the rules; or, as Wittgenstein said, understanding in some situations is the ability to go on, rather than being a mental event or an Aha! event.

In ordinary language, understanding is not always the profound internal thing that it is sometimes taken to be by certain philosophers and some theologians too. I could go on, but alas I am getting very close to the end of the time. What I want to suggest is, then, that there is an ordinary language that we use in infinitely many contexts, and the common words by which we try to grasp what that ordinary language is vary from ordinary language to ordinary language. There is not a single simple paradigm for meaning; there is not a single simple paradigm for understanding – but there *is* simply a way of being able to say, 'We have learned the use of a given language.' It functions alright when we have learned how to use it. There is nothing wrong with the language. It doesn't have to be improved, it doesn't have to be 'translated'; it doesn't have to be put into new concepts; it functions just right. And what I am suggesting is that when we use the words, 'the presence of God', 'the presence of Christ', simply as ordinary believers, we are using not a technical language that has to be translated. We are using ordinary Christian language. How does one learn that language in its multifarious uses? I have suggested that one way of speaking about that language is to use the term 'faith'; and to say that 'faith' itself has several uses. How does one use that language? By living the life of the Christian community. And by doing those things that Christians, whether in the run-of-the-day life, or in a crisis, whether personal, or social, or even gigantically cultural, have always done: to use that language – the language of prayer, the language of creeds, the language of confession, the language of obedience, the language of trust and total commitment, and so on and so on – in the, I hope, not worn out channels that the church continuously and recreatively provides for us.

If one does this then I think one has got rid of a verbal cramp; one has got rid of a verbal cramp about the word 'presence'; one has got rid of a cramp that

makes one think that one has got to have an extraordinarily profound concept, or if you will an extraordinarily profound experience in order to be able to say, God is present. No. God is present to the world, through the church, outside the church, in the ordinary events, the ordinary reflections, the ordinary meditations, and even in the extraordinary meditations, say the meditations of the mystic as much as in the meditation of a totally non-mystical person like Pascal or Kierkegaard. God is present in these public and private events. If he is who he is, then there is really nothing to worry about. If his identity is that which he has given in the Scripture then one may speak about the Holy Spirit without recourse to an extraordinary experience or an extraordinary vocabulary.

One more thing. One of the problems that has agitated theologians in our day and time has been that when they've tried to define the essence of Christianity, they've come, ever since 1700, across two things, and we find an echo even where there are heresy trials in our own day and time. There are always two kinds of definition of Christianity. One will say you've got to believe certain things, and if you don't believe those then, no matter what your life is like, you're not a Christian: to believe is to confess certain things. Now, always, one goes on to say, 'I don't mean confessing them simply as a dead letter, as an objective truth – No, it's always confession in a living way' – but one's got to confess certain truths, and specifically that Jesus Christ is Lord and that God is enacted in him. Then there have been people who have said the reverse. Some have said it liberally; they've said that 'So-and-so may profess all the Christian belief in the world; he may be thoroughly orthodox, but what I saw him doing to his brother shows me that he is not a Christian.' That's the liberal way of putting it. Or there can be a more pietistic way of putting the same thing: 'So and so believes indeed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God but have you ever heard or seen him really testify in his life that he's been saved by the blood of the lamb? No. It just remains a profession of dead belief for him.' So you can state in a liberal or in a pietistic way that it is the living disposition that makes the Christian; or one can state that it is that which one believes in with ones living disposition that makes the Christian. And it has always been the case that it has been virtually impossible to pull these two things together. People have always started in their quarrels from one or the other. And theologians have always tried – and this again is one way of putting what theologians have tried to do in the modern times – they have tried to give us an explanation of how these things fit together. I am suggesting there is no need for an explanation. I am suggesting there *is* no explanation. I am suggesting that *there is no problem*. I am suggesting that this is precisely the function of Christian language; this is its character, its ordinary use, and, if you will, at the same time its uniqueness: it is both these things. They cohere; in the use of Christian language; in the use of Christian concepts, they are

given as being there together. To try to go

4
Historical Reference and the Gospels
A Response to a Critique of *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (YDS 13–199)

In these notes, Frei responds to a critique of The Identity of Jesus Christ *– a critique which I have so far been unable to identify. The notes provide a brief but important comment on the kinds of historical reference which Frei thought the Gospel narratives achieved.*

There is some confusion over the papers that make up the notes. There are two free sheets, numbered 5 and 6, then a pad beginning with an isolated, unnumbered sheet, and continuing with pages numbered 7 to 15. I give the isolated sheet from the front of the pad first, and then the numbered sheets in sequence. It is clear that there were other sheets which at some stage have been lost, but what remains is connected and long enough to be of value. CPH ?1981c.

Between Liberal and Conservative

Suppose someone who believed

(1) that Jesus Christ did live,
(2) that this is essential for the religion named after him, and
(3) that the accounts describing his life state some things that are more important than others for the affirmation of (2),

then, I want to say, the crucifixion and resurrection are the most important. On this a non-believer and a believer should be able to agree.

Not only whether, but in what mode this described sequence is historical is so far undetermined.

Now someone might then go ahead and say: Simple! Just adduce evidence about the credibility of the witnesses, the veracity of the authors, the possibility that God can perform miracles because he's in charge of the universe, the direction which we find religion and the history of the world in general taking, etc., and you can make the transition from hermeneutics, or exegesis of the texts, not only to the affirmation of their veracity but also to a clear statement of the mode in which these events happened (e.g., the resurrected body of Jesus was or was not subject to the law of gravity).

This sheet breaks off here, but the other sheets pick up the argument at about the same place: the description of ways in which the 'mode' in which the crucifixion-resurrection sequence is 'historical' has been determined – in this case, by conservatives and liberals.

On the one hand, there are liberal affirmations to the effect that the logical and real subject of resurrection statements is the faith of the disciples, that statements about the resurrection do not describe events but the *significance* of other events, that the resurrection was spiritual, that it isn't crucial to Christianity, etc.

On the other hand, conservatives not only claim that Jesus is the subject of the statements about the resurrection but that these statements describe the manner of his resurrected state, e.g. that one can adjudicate whether his resurrected body was or else was not subject to the laws of gravity.

My dilemma is the obvious one: The first set of remarks seems to me a pure evasion of the texts and implies a willingness to surrender what seems to me an indispensable aspect of what makes the Gospel good news. The second I find impossible to believe.

A properly modest and realistic self-appraisal is imperative at this point: Can one find another way that is honest to the texts? Or does one, in the search for such an option, simply discover in the texts (with great excitement) the fruits of the theological and hermeneutical seeds one has oneself sown prior to and independent of the exegesis? I tried at least to be alert to that problem, whether I escaped it or not in making my exegetical inquiry.

Exegesis over Hermeneutics

I must stress however that the exegesis was of extraordinary importance to me, and that I tried to make the hermeneutical instruments as minimal and non-interfering as possible. My exegesis was not merely the proof-text of an argument for me. It should be discussed because it helped not only to test but to shape a third option, as well as the conditions necessary for understanding and believing it. I tried to allow the text to influence not only the content, i.e., the application of the rules of thought to my re-rendering of the descriptions given in the texts, but to influence the rules of thought by which I was proceeding, 'the conditions for the possibility of understanding' the texts, as our phenomenological friends would say.

Not that I believed there is no 'pre-understanding' (to quote another set of friends), that there are no formal rules for making intelligible statements as well as claims, no rules covering various types of argument. But I believed and still believe that I ought to leave open the possibility that a reading of the texts might actually and in principle influence, modify, change these preconditions, rules, or what have you. Obviously, my desires may have dictated not only that notion but the way in which it affected my actual restatement of the texts. I can only hope that this fault remained within bounds, and also that I did not become incoherent as I went along in this process. I hoped that coherence between the content of the exegesis and the description of the formal rules under which it took place – both, and not only

the former, being referred to the text – might actually constitute an argument against those who

wrong in this particular instance. Right now I want only to say that the latter is the case, if my exegesis of the narrative is right and the text forces us to revise, in this instance, our usual assumption about the formal rules. Whether more than that can be done is a different matter, on which I will touch in a moment.

The same thing, of course, has to be said with respect to the relation between the meaning and truth of the Gospel narratives. The former, according to the accounts under this exegesis, cannot stand independently of its truth (contra your essay, p.16). In the view of the accounts those who deny its truth have not understood who Jesus is; i.e. the contrary to truth in this case is self-contradiction, meaninglessness, not falsity. That this is a startling claim I admit. I believe it may well be an absolutely unique case, and that this revision of the rules may not apply to any other factual case, for in no other case is the relation between *quidditas* and *haeccitas* analytical. And so a perfect island does not exist necessarily, nor was someone fitting the narrative description of Othello raised from the dead to be our Savior. However, should the same story as that about Jesus be told of someone else – say somebody who calls himself the Rev. Mr. Moon – then there is a problem, and I would make up my mind between what I can only take to be rival claims on the basis of which account and therefore which person I believe to be inspired by divine grace and therefore authoritative. Until better instructed I believe Scripture to be of unique divine inspiration, a miraculous grace for which no independent external evidence or *a priori* reason can be adduced, though some *a posteriori* support can be given, e.g., the extraordinary fitness of Jesus' attitude in the story to a vision of life and salvation infinitely richer than that of the Mr. Moon, to the extent that I am acquainted with the latter's life and attitudes.

Assumptions and Conclusions

On one matter, of which you make much, I plead guilty to a kind of fall-back on common sense, to which someone may say I have no right. I am assuming that somebody roughly fitting Jesus of Nazareth as described in the Gospels really did live. If and when it is shown that this assumption is unwarranted and the person invented, I will no longer want to be a Christian. Until then, I plan to go on being one and saying, 'We know him only under a description, viz., that of the Gospel accounts, and they say that the point at which possibly but not necessarily fictional depiction and factual reality are seen to be fully one is the resurrection. In abstraction from the full connection between them at that point of the depiction, the relation between every description of individual incident and putative factual assertion corresponding to it is simply more or less probable.'

More bothersome to me is the continuing misunderstanding between us on a matter which is basic to what I have claimed in *Eclipse* (but see also the Preface to *Identity*). It is admittedly not easy to put, but it needs airing and argument, and it covers what I have already referred to with regard to your relating of sentences and propositions as well as meaning and truth. At this point, then, I want with due caution to make a more general case of a hermeneutical sort rather than simply appeal to the hermeneutical requirements congruent with the Gospel accounts.

If you are clear here, I take you to be saying that the meaning of a statement is not the statement itself, or the sentences, or, in our case, the narrative, but, logically distinct from any and all such, the propositions they 'express' (is that really a good term?) In other words, the meaning of the Gospel narratives is the ideal truths or else the spatio-temporal occurrences (or both) to which they refer. Now of course I do not deny that the narratives may or may not refer – in fact I believe they do at a crucial point – but I believe this is not their 'meaning' but a judgment made about them. They mean what they say (unlike some other types of narratives) whether they refer or not. Thus, when I treat them exegetically, or hermeneutically, I have at least to make a distinction between 'assertion' as part of the narrative sense, and 'assertion' as trans-hermeneutical judgment, whether the author's, mine, or that of other readers, and confine myself to the former. Indeed I am not quite confident that 'assertion' in the usual sense, even in the former mode, is applicable to the descriptive meaning of a statement. Whatever I believe the authors believed (and of course I think they believed that what they wrote was true), the meaning of what they wrote is a logically distinct matter and is the subject of hermeneutical inquiry.

Which if any assertion(s) is (are) identical with the story and therefore part of the narrative sense rather than a matter of judgment is a far more complex matter in a hermeneutical inquiry than you allow for (indeed, I think, more complex than your analytical instruments permit you to handle). My sense of the matter, admittedly groping and uncertain, is that 'assertion' or something like it as a matter of the narrative description rather than logically distinct judgment is part of the narratives and, again, its focus is at the point of the resurrection. Again, that is what is so startling here, that it is part of the descriptive sense rather than a matter of judgment; and the reader is asked to understand it as such. No novel and no history, I believe, does this. In novels and histories the sharp distinction between meaning and assertion is sharply implied, and a contrary judgment given in the two cases. And this is a well-understood agreement; you might even call it a quiet conspiracy between writers and readers.

The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative

I proposed in *Eclipse* that the identification of meaning with (true or false) assertion or proposition, and the resultant equation of meaning with reference is an instance of a category mistake, or a confusion that has had disastrous consequences in the history of modern exegesis and theology – consequences that were all the worse for the fact that those perpetrating the confusion were prevented by the rigidity of their formal instruments from seeing what was happening.

The consequence was that there was forced on us as exclusive options the following: Either one became a rationalist (affirmative like Paulus, or else radically skeptical like Strauss or in our day Van Harvey who, unable to stay with the conclusion they had to reach on this basis, i.e., that of identifying the meaning of the narratives with their not referring – since obviously there must be something to these stories – gave up altogether on the relation between sense and reference in regard to the Gospels and fled to myth or existential perspective for their interpretation); or else one became a rational Supernaturalist.

Small wonder that theological liberals fled into their desert of vagueness to escape this choice; small wonder, in the face of this Hobson's choice, the bacchanalian frenzy of procedures like Hegel's: Anything to escape this blunted and rigid exclusiveness and try to get formal procedure and Christian content into some kind of more fitting relation! Small wonder that the richness of orthodoxy got lost, unable to distinguish itself from the reduced rationalist–Supernaturalist version of itself. And now you want to fit me into that very Procrustean bed – which I had indicated, clearly I thought, to be an exegetically wrong and hermeneutically confused and therefore impossible enterprise. And you propose that as a position 'that shows promise of overcoming some of the difficulties in Frei's view of realistic biblical narratives'!

Referential Reserve

I'll return to that matter in a moment. But in order to do so properly I need to pay heed to the sentence 'My car is red', whose meaning, as distinct from the statement 'My car is red' is 'proposition B' (I suppose: 'My car really is red'). I am, of course, not at all sure of your intention here. It could simply be an affirmation that the

that we can know him only in that story, whereas you apparently have something else in mind as counting for identification of the person, though just what it is you haven't said. So let us assume that we do agree that Jesus is the logical and real subject of statements about him, including statements that he was raised from the dead.

My problem is with the possible further force of the statement. I may be mistaken, and if so, just cancel out what I'm about to say. In the meantime, however, I take it that for you the force of the statement is that it is in principle subject to empirical confirmation or disconfirmation. I'll admit that my own view of the matter has serious difficulties – though I am content to choose these rather than the optional set of problems. 'My car is red' presumably stresses not only that it is the car and not the barn that is red, but that the car is red rather than blue and that it is red in the way cars and New England barns are red rather than the way Lenin and Stalin are said to be red. In other words, I take it that you are using the predicate in such a way that you (1) know the mode of its signification, and (2) want to affirm that mode to be such that confirmation and disconfirmation is in principle appropriate to statements containing this predicate. The statement or assertion that your car is red is, I take it, equivalent to saying not only that it is Jesus who was raised bodily from the dead but that as that subject his body was characterized by weight or weightlessness, i.e. specifiable bodily characteristics of which one set was more probably the case than another.

At this point I want to exercise the greatest possible reserve, as you noted with disapproval (p.8, your essay).

And there, sadly, the notes end.

5
The Specificity of Reference (YDS 12-189)

This is taken from a transcript of a manuscript (which seems no longer to exist) of a paper probably delivered at an American Academy of Religion seminar responding to a paper by William Beardslee. The transcript was apparently made by someone unfamiliar with Frei's handwriting or his subject-matter ('Fredric Jameson's The Prison-House of Language*', for instance, has been rendered 'Fadic Lamison's* The Prison Tense of Language*'), and I have had to make some guesses as to what Frei's text might originally have said. I've noted those places where my alterations affect the sense. CPH U6 ('Beardslee and Hermeneutics').*

Reference and Reality

There is a tenacious sense that all of us have, even those of us who most apologetically have to confess barely knowing the difference between causal efficacy and presentational immediacy, that our descriptive concepts *refer* – that all statements are propositions, and propositions are cast in the shape of assertions under the form of judgments. In other words, even for those of us who are not philosophers or philosophical theologians and therefore blunder foolishly into process hermeneutic groups because a wiser man than ourselves has kindly made a passing reference to a book we may have written once in a foolishly reckless moment – I say even for *those* there is a tenacious sense that the ladder from logic through *experience* to the most refined speculation is one in which self and reality, mind and nature belong together; that the dualists, both metaphysical and epistemological are wrong. We may, for example, say that the mind is the mirror of nature after all, against those who with Richard Rorty[1] claim that the only reason the Seventeenth Century did not 'misunderstand' the mirror of nature[2] was that they *couldn't* misunderstand it, since after all they had *invented* it.[3] What an irony Rorty's claim would be – if I may simply entertain it as a hypothesis for a moment – for the cutting edge of his suggestion is that anyone who moves in to heal dualist splits is bound to play the game on his opponents' grounds, since they *invented* the game or the problem, and the revisers, try as they might, can't do more than change some of the rules (i.e. the conceptual descriptions) by which it is played; it's still the same game.

But that is indeed no more than a tempting hypothesis for the moment, a momentary if elemental, sudden and therefore frightening state of affairs, and we return to our tenacious native sense that mind and reality belong together. And certainly we look with something like pity – no, that's wrong, with reverse sympathy – on those who seem to have the very opposite elemental reaction.

They say that the best way to get out of the problem or the dualistic game is not to become solipsistic Idealists but to pursue an option such as speaking of the social character of language – in a sociological rather than parapsychic sense of the term social – and to say that language as a social construct is the very condition of experience, rather than vice versa; that communal languages have their own irreducible integrity even as they are porous[4] and open in time and therefore have their own natural history. There are of course those who experience this kind of persuasion, including the consequence that reality is a social construct, as a relief, a therapeutic release from what they regard as hypostatized and therefore insolubly generalized problems like 'reference' (as though that were a single univocal term) or truth (as though that term had a single universal status which is given conceptual content by referring it to another universal which is termed 'meaning'). Against this kind of globalizing, the irreducibly social, particular form of language comes to some people as a relief. But others regard that possibility with a fear well expressed in the title of Fredric Jameson's book, *The Prison-House of Language*.[5]

May I confess to being torn hopelessly both ways? The muting of 'reference' as a single universal in favor of[6] concepts referring in various ways – or rather, people referring by means of concepts in various ways, comes as a relief, since referring to God, to my Dachshund, to the way I love my children, to the self that loves them, to the nuclear structure of genes, and to the biography of Leopold Bloom which has just been written despite or because of the fact that hitherto he had never existed apart from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, may not be the same thing in all these cases.[7] But on the other hand, the prison-house of language image comes up, and relief and fear live side by side when I deny that elemental sense that I am an embodied mind, subject or superject, in a real world of which I actually am a social and temporal location or series of locations. But relief or fear aside, sometimes the native affirmation of the sense of being able to know the true character of reality is to the fore, sometimes the sense that all speculative thinking to demonstrate the referential character of words and concepts is futile.

It is obvious, then, that I am neither determinedly antagonistic to nor wholly ardently committed to the problematic that preoccupies Professor Beardslee. If I do have to use large-scale technical language I want simply to affirm my belief that 'hermeneutics' has to do with 'meaning', i.e. with criteria and rules for sound interpretation of texts, rather than with 'truth', and I want to stress that even the limited use of 'truth' to mean 'true interpretation of a text' rather than 'relation of the text to true reality' is only secondary for me, though I won't deny that I puzzle about it. Hermeneutics has to have *breathing space*: don't move in on it too quickly with (trans-)hermeneutical concerns, e.g. the character of symbolization; Christian theological hermeneutics is a second-order discipline on a practice, a practice that is communal, and the

relation between signifier and signified in that practice is a semantic matter, so that premature reference to, e.g., how symbols may be reality-laden through mutual participation of symbol and reality only tends to get us back into that representationalism all of us want to avoid.

Narrative Sense

I am deeply concerned about the specificity of narrative texts, but there are all sorts of texts, and the Bible includes all kinds of texts to which different hermeneutical rules may apply. For example, I may want to read a letter in a different way from the way I read a story – non-narratively, that is – even if the same person crops up in the tale and in the correspondence, viz. Jesus Christ. In other words, I hope nobody thinks of something called 'narrative sense' as kind of hermeneutical absolute. On the other hand, it does impose some constraints:[8] consider Bultmann, to whom Beardslee refers, and who takes personhood as a kind of root concept, and then identifies a specific person – Jesus of Nazareth – as irreducibly himself. Now the way we identify specific human agents in their specificity (we can do other things with them too, we can use them as illustrations of microcosmic organic wholes or as non-narrative repeatable textual structures or as deconstructionist misprisions of the interpreter) is by telling their specific self-enactment in their specific context, whether historical or fictional, so that the issue of reference is *hermeneutically*, though probably not *theologically* irrelevant – so, I think that the hermeneutical rule for irreducible identification of a person in a narrative text is: you follow the diachronic, not the synchronic line, you *narrate* him or her because he/she is not a separable subject/substance from his/her depiction in or as his/her story. Yet what Bultmann wants to do is both to *identify* the specific person – if you will, Jesus' scandal of particularity – *and* to dismantle the narrative – which, as Professor Beardslee rightly remarks, is simply not to play by the rules that govern this game; he has a lousy, indeed an impossible hermeneutics. More than that I don't want to say. I am not saying narrative is all, or even that narrative texts can't be dealt with by other rules of exegesis.

(And, by the way, whether or not the narrative depiction claims that the 'transcendent is encountered beyond the ethical rather than the aesthetic' is a moot question for me. Hermeneutically, once again, I'd rather leave that aside; I don't know what 'the transcendent' is doing in the first place messing around in my modest second-order rules exhibited in the first-order use of language, and nothing but language. But *if* I have to deal with that kind of sweeping generalization, I suppose I'd say that some people long before Frank Kermode – to whom all honor – have thought of narratives as more nearly aesthetic language-play and others (F.R. Leavis the most scary example) as moral enterprises. I focused on a limited type of narrative in a limited hermeneutical

context; realistic narrative as the mode of personal identification: Who is this person in and from his story? Identity-depiction of that sort is ethical yet also aesthetic, you could even call it the ontologization of the irreducibly particularist warning against well-intentioned endeavors to restore to ethical character.)

The Irreducible Variety of Hermeneutics

I am neutral about how to integrate this approach with that of narrative as an aesthetic linguistic world in which strong readers find irradiating moments in discontinuous quanta. I am not sanguine about finding a global hermeneutics to cover these and other narratives – as well as non-narrative texts – since I believe the variety of phenomenological hermeneutics may be far worse than either structuralist or deconstructionist procedure allows. Nor, however, do I regard this as a matter for distress as I gather Professor Beardslee does. Hermeneutics in general, yes, not sacred or tailored to the uniqueness of the Bible; but there is no one general hermeneutics. The only way to get one is to have a general philosophical theory or system foundational for the general hermeneutics, so that all seemingly divergent elements of general hermeneutical approaches may be harmonized by having their specific places in the total scheme assigned to them. But that foundational endeavor I mistrust deeply – I want my hermeneutics to allow me to mean with my texts in *independence* from the reality-bearing of the texts and the hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics, though general, is, I believe, context–specific. And that goes for the tools as well as the textual stuff on which they work. Do I want to leave it at that? Didn't I confess a yearning for interconnection and, more, a common transcendent reference that could function as a common norm or truth for what is right in interpretation? Half of me agrees with Professor Beardslee's dream and I doubt that it comes closer to realization than in today's western world.

In the meantime I find that Professor Beardslee encourages me most kindly, as does Paul Ricoeur among the phenomenologists,[9] to persist in 'rediscovering the reality of the "narrative sense" as part of "the self--construction" of an entity', one in which the function of a proposition is focal. I am grateful to both, but want to do so hermeneutically, i.e. with the option of having my narrative interpretation (on which I don't rest everything in any case), and thus my narrative hermeneutics, without appeal to foundational thinking. And so I take off my hermeneutical hat to Professors Beardslee and Ricoeur, but at the same time wave an equally friendly yet arms-distance maintaining hello to my structuralist, poststructuralist, and deconstructionist companions.

All that that means is that at the risk of looking utterly relativist to some and utterly reactionary to Professors Beardslee and Kermode, I want to do hermeneutics in the tradition of Christian theology as reflections on the use of communal language, and that as a language that has an irreducible integrity of its own, it is not systematically grounded by reference to a systematic pre-understanding or pre-linguistic experience (or expression) of reality in general.

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1 Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p.113.

2 [The transcript has '…the mirror of nature or the iniac eye otherwise…']

3 [The transcript has 'revealed' for 'invented' here, but 'invented' in the next sentence.]

4 [The transcript has 'poems'.]

5 Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1975).

6 [The transcript has 'rather than'.]

7 [The transcript has here 'And this relief from logical and trans-logical universalism may go on to cover the very systematic preoccupation with the thinking procedure that has the conceptual name-tag, truth or reference, to say nothing of "reality".']

8 ['It does impose some constraints' is my addition.]

9 [The transcript has 'most kindly I my (corrective sense) as does Paul Ricoeur to the phenomenologists'.]

6
History, Salvation-History, and Typology (YDS 18-278)

Frei gave this talk at a symposium in April 1981, and later gave an account of it in a letter to Juliann Hartt (reproduced after the main text). As Frei says in the letter, the talk was 'about discerning patterns of providential government in the sequence of historical events', and Frei runs this ecclesiologically in a dialectical way: the people of God are a sign of the eschatological shape of all humanity, and human history in general foreshadows the travail and glory of God's people. As is his wont, Frei rejects any view that might 'reduce specific events to instances of either natural pattern or ideal generalization.' Such a view involves claims about agency and events; it also involves claims about typological reading and political theology.

Sacred and Profane History

For at least as long as the Augustinian tradition has been with us, and probably well before then in writings like those of Irenaeus and Eusebius of Caesarea, Christians have puzzled about the relation of their community to the world at large and to the passage of empire – under the eye of that providence which is also the consummation toward which all things temporal are hurrying.[1] One can pick out almost at random a number of topics under which theologians have translated that elemental human and religious concern into their own more technical themes. Perhaps most pervasive has been the constant, haunting background persuasion they have shared with all their fellow-creatures that the sense of time's passing is countered only in affirming its opposite, a permanence that transcends time completely. But as soon as we take refuge in some such realm, we ask immediately just what does it refer to, and even if it does refer to something other than the projected reversal of our experience of constant passage, is that realm the fulfillment or the denial of our ordinary temporal experience, or something wholly different from both?

If this is the common screen against which we all play our games, or the canvas on which the most serious among us, the speculative philosophers and literary artists paint their varied and often awe-inspiring pictures, Christian theologians refract some special images from it. Perhaps most persistent has been the question of the relation between sacred and profane history, or the special destiny of the Christian community, this peculiar people, the spiritual Israel, among all the others in the world. Christians who have reflected about human historical destiny are not exactly famous for their genteel treatment of the nations when they imagine the last day, and from Augustine's time to that of the Puritans, pagans and the worldly within the church have had good reason

to think that the rope of Christian mercy looked more like the hangman's noose than a strand to aid the drowning. But even the sternest Christians have hesitated to consign the whole political and cultural history of humankind to the ash heap. After all, it was in the wake of belief in the Incarnation that the vision of a single universal history first became strong, even if God would save only a remnant from all the nations of the world. But surely we would not want to spend too much time on a topic not only speculative but arid in the extreme, the ultimate obliteration of all save Christian history. But there is a related matter that invites attention: The Christian community is indeed distinct and at the same time spread in degrees of most uneven density throughout the world. But its presence among the peoples of the earth is hardly of the sort contemplated by our vigorous European and Anglo-American forebears when they sallied forth in that most missionary of centuries, the nineteenth, to Christianize the world in one generation. Indeed, since then, though the church of Christ surely remains 'catholic' – small 'c' – the course of secular history has provided it with a variety of surprises that make Christian modesty a virtue much to be appreciated. In the face of this development which often makes us look like sectarians by necessity because the *corpus christianum* with which we would naturally affiliate has vanished, all kinds of old questions are posed to Christians about their relation to their non-Christian neighbors in a way that calls for a candor, a sense of equality, a grace that we have not often mustered in the past. 'Openness' is the term one often hears about these relations from Christians and one tends to swallow for reasons that have as much to do with the nature of Christianity as with human pride. The openness all too often resembles that of the oyster shell under the knife.

The theologian undertaking to depict these matters under the topic of history and human destiny cannot help wondering, given a sense of increasing cultural isolation of the Christian community, and yet also of its increasing sense of solidarity with humankind, which figure is most appropriate: Ought we to see sacred history, the history of the Christian community, as ultimately identical with, subsumed under profane history, human history at large, so that Christianity stands as an eschatological synecdoche for humanity? Or is it, conversely, that the Christian theologian has to see profane political and cultural history incorporated into and thus as figure or foreshadowing reality of sacred history – after the fashion, very broadly speaking, of the New England Puritans before the Half-Way Covenant came to disturb their vision of a holy commonwealth?

Which, if either, is logically subordinate to, or a sub-species of the other? General history or salvation history? It's hardly fair to raise a question and then refuse to answer it, but unless I am very much mistaken there is no compelling Christian theological reason to solve this matter, not even perhaps to think of it in terms of either/or. There are some comforts to be drawn from

the dialectical method, the reconciliation of opposites, even if one refuses to heed its most rigid and dogmatic embodiment in the Hegelian vision of the procedure. The theologian would be wise, I think, to state the issue and its penultimate seriousness, and lay out the positions – on the one hand a God who endows *all* his human creatures with freedom and preserves his *full* creation from ultimate loss or absurdity; who, on the other, in the fulfillment of that creation as well as its radical redress in the face of evil has focused his providence in the person of Jesus Christ in whom the reign of God has come near, a reign foreshadowed, not embodied, in the precarious existence of Christian community. Beyond that the theologian would do well to commend the dialectic of the two sides to the encompassing mercy of God. A commitment to universalism concerning human destiny and a commitment to the specificity of sacred or salvation history within it are not in ultimate conflict, even if the manner of their cohesion is hidden.

The relation of sacred to profane or Christian to universal history has been enabled as a topic for inquiry in Christian reflection about history in the first place because by and large Christians have avoided two contrary extremes. On the one hand, they have refused the complete consignment of the sense of time's passage and therefore the image of the person, time's creature, to the explanatory mechanism of the development of physical nature. In this they have found the most surprising allies, from anthropologists who have refused to bend to social biology, insisting instead that the turn from natural to cultural evolution is a distinctive one, to scientists in the role of moralists, as when T.H. Huxley in his remarkable Romanes lecture, with the full amoral force of natural selection as an explanatory device in his mind, begged his audience not to allow humanity to imitate nature – one of the most passionate pleas against social Darwinism on record.[2]

On the other hand Christians have by and large refused to appropriate the passage of time simply to the transcendental structure or to the consciousness of the human being. When people die and empires collapse something more changes that a perspective that finds itself constitutive of what it observes on the historical scene and vice versa. This sophisticated yet simplistic tool for historicizing human being completely, for example in Existentialism, has been a siren song in modern theology. But its self-imposed isolation from the *natural* structures of existence hobbles that sense of the coherence of human being with the larger universe on which our sense of time as the connected passage of events depends. The Existentialist and the historicist allow us none of that, only the present as our project and all else as derivative or a mirror of it.

The extent to which Christian theologians can affirm the coexistence of sacred and profane, Christian and universal history as a single, powerful vision is probably proportional to the degree that they avoid both of those extremes.

In addition, it is probably dependent on their ability to avoid the lure of reductionist compromising middle ways, for instance the covertly or even quite overtly anthropocentric teleologies and quasi-teleologies that appropriate humanity fully to nature or vice versa – the natural and idealistic panentheisms of our day. Against such compromises too, the Christian theologian has to assert the Christian belief in providence. Though not directly manifest in extrinsic or immanent teleology of the natural process or consciousness process, God sustains his creatures, non-human as well as human, whom he has called into being, one creation in two realms, cosmos and history, the revealed unity of their administration being not the collapse of either into the other but Jesus Christ as the all-governing providence of God.

Julian Hartt on History

No theologian in our day has asserted the complex and fit unity of the divine providential government against all reductionist tendencies in theology more powerfully than Julian Hartt. I refer you here, simply as an example, to section VI and VII of Ch. XI, 'Man's Being as History' in *A Christian Critique of American Culture*.[3] In fact, my last few sentences have been no more than a slightly extended exposition of some of the things he has said in this connection.[4] And he has said them with very few allies. Only Austin Farrer comes to mind, except that he does not share Hartt's elemental concern with history as a theological topic, and with the human being as political agent. It may well be that the one theologian whose both sympathetic and antipathetic presence haunts the thinking of Julian Hartt most of all, the one who has shown many of the same interests and the same tough-minded independence, is Karl Barth.

That is another story, but in the present context, the affirmation of history as one of the realms of providential rule, it is appropriate to mention one common interest between them. Both theologians refused to be scared away from the metaphysical freight traditionally so essential in the statement of Christian doctrine, yet so strictly proscribed by the regnant fashion in academic theology from the 1930s to the 1960s, indebted as it was to both a narrower and a broader Idealistic tradition. Variously called dialectical theology, neo-orthodoxy, biblical theology, the salvation–historical school, this school placed a very heavy emphasis on what it was pleased to call existence, decision, in history. It turned out the historical existence so affirmed was no more than a circle, sometimes called a hermeneutical circle, in which the self functioned to reduce the events of the past to its own engagement with a select sketch of them, namely those depicted in the Old and New Testaments, and the change in perspective or consciousness – for that is what 'existence as historicness' really amounted to – that one underwent in connection with that engagement.

Furthermore, the designations of meaning interwoven in that stretch of the past – creation, sin, Christ, the Kingdom of God, the end of things – were heavily dependent on, perhaps even reducible to, the mode of one's engagement with or perspective on them. As for the status of these privileged events in relation to universal history, two options were open. Either the privileged events had a double status, one existential and *heilsgeschichtlich*, the other purely factual, part of a trivial, objective sequential chain with which positivist historians could deal most adequately. The other option was that one simply left the status of the relation hanging as an unknown quantity. This alternative is quite different from the view we mentioned earlier which finally commends universal and sacred history to the mercy of God in their mysterious unity, their tensed belonging-together in pre-eschatological distinction.

Both Julian Hartt and Karl Barth rejected this abbreviated salvation-historical reduction of a powerful or once powerful vision of history.[5] Hartt proposes some elements of a general theory of history consonant with the stronger, more than historicist claims he wanted to make.[6] I want to reflect on them though perhaps more for my own than his purposes. In contrast to the all-encompassing view of the person as perspective, the human being has to be seen at least in some situations as *agent*. There is no drastic but a graded distinction between historical subjecthood and historical agency. One can say that being a historical subject is to identify consciously with an antecedent community, including vicarious participation in its storied past. 'Historical agent' builds on that context; subjecthood seems to be a necessary but not sufficient condition for it. Yet it is inadequate to say that I am part subject, part agent. I am the same person and not merely a set of relations, there is no single description of my life, scanning a variety of contexts.[7]

But 'historical agent' has to do in addition with the sort of genius whom Hegel called the world-historical individual. But I take it that Hartt immediately wants to lift his hat to Hegel and say farewell as soon as Hegel makes the passions of this agent the plaything of impersonal reason or of Marxist social forces. I am not sure whether Hartt wants or even needs to plead as alternative a plasticity in the field on which actions are played out, so that one can speak of 'individuality, of self-causality and intentionality'[8] *instead* of opting for one of the several available 'larger force' explanations, Hegel's, Marx's or Freud's – in short instead of opting for the report that the various masters of suspicion render in lieu of the agent's own description.[9] Or whether, instead of pleading for an alternative in such a strong sense, one simply says that agent description, or agent-like description is of a different order of description, for which reasons, institutions and enactments count in establishing connections and sequences. It just simply isn't the same as describing the event in terms of general patterns that generate enough pressure

on human beings to become historical causes, and there is no super-description encompassing these two descriptions.

Whichever option we choose, there is thus far no reason to give up on agent or agent-like historical description, nor do we - in case we leave moot the metaphysical appeal of the first option – need to appeal to something like phenomenological theory to back up the possibility of agent description. At a certain level it simply works and nothing is a substitute for it there. Further, even though it des not easily mix with general force description, it is not at all condemned to pure conjunction of individual acts. Hartt says 'X's intention is thrown around by forces he cannot identify in advance, and he will not be able to control them perfectly once they take shape. Nevertheless X intends that these forces shall coalesce in the form of e. This is a project, not just a hope or a wish … X's intention is realized when the difficulties, the counterthrusts of circumstance, are themselves countered'.[10]

In other words, agent-description of history is the interplay of character and circumstance, the thing we call plot in fiction. We can go on from there to add other elements, such as *pattern*, i.e., the unfinished or cumulative, confused interface of human designs. On such a reading, agent-accounts can only be highly particular accounts since they cover only a limited number of contingent events or happening meaning patterns: '… event [is] a fabric of meaning overarching a quotidian world; an intentionality unifying multitudinous intendings.' Historical agent accounts are not accounts of nature, but of an extension of what Hartt, using a favorite world of his, calls the quotidian world.[11] It is as hard to get purposive agency *out* of historical description, at least of one kind, as it is to get it *into* descriptions of natural and cosmic patterns.

Discerning Providence

It seems to me that when the Christian theologian speaks about sacred history and its relation to secular, universal history, his first duty is to avoid the historicist or perspectivist reduction. Whatever his way of going about it, he is discerning a *public* pattern in which humankind is seen as united in destiny, albeit in a dialectic of sacred and profane history. I said earlier that one ought to leave the working of the dialectic to the mercy of God; I did not mean to say, however, that we ought to exempt that relation from the patterning that one regards as the equivalent of Law in the agent or agent-like description of history. On the contrary, this precisely is the heart of the difference between a perspectivist and a more nearly full-orbed view of salvation history. Here we will have to tread cautiously.

In the first place we now have to regard the whole of human history as the enactment of a complex design. Even if that design is enacted *ab extra*, it is

shaped in the form of a cumulative pattern, the fullness of which is not known at any single stage. The connective web of this narrative is neither purely random nor necessary but characterized by that fitness of sequence which is the combination of teleology and contingency.

Second, the Christian, will claim that the *character* of the pattern is not clear in history at large but rather in salvation history. To sense fragments of design and to sense a design fragmentarily are two different things. This in turn leads to two consequences: firstly, one will have to show elements of design in the description of the temporal sequence of salvation history; secondly, one will have to make room for such elements in relating secular to sacred history.

Figuration or typology is in doubly bad odor today. For one thing it is 'pre-critical', and thus superannuated as the result of a later outlook. Second, it enjoyed a brief and disastrous vogue in connection with 'biblical theology' at the end of World War II. Yet it seems to me that something like it is indispensable if we are going to give descriptive substance to the claim that history is the story of the providential governance of God the Father of Jesus Christ among humankind. Let us remind ourselves: Figures are events or patterns of meaning that are real or have an integrity in their own right and in addition foreshadow that which is to fulfill them. The line between allegory and figure or type is a wobbly one, but Erich Auerbach's suggestion still seems as good as any: In allegory, unlike figuration, the concrete sense structure gives way and becomes dissipated under the web of meanings. Figuration is also to be distinguished from prophecy, although both have a common core in connecting past and future as promise and fulfillment: Prophecy is referring a state of affairs to the future or one event to another one that fulfils it. Thus the statement in Jeremiah 31:31ff: 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah' – is obviously prophecy. Karl Barth uses the two rituals from Leviticus, one involving two birds, another two goats, and suggests that the actions in each instance and together – one a sin offering, the other a cleansing from leprosy – are a figure of a complex and in their interaction unfinished reference to the person of Jesus in the New Testament.[12] But Barth expresses a reservation unthinkable in earlier figural exegesis: In such cases as these, where figural exegesis is not an instance of the notorious *vaticinia ex eventu* on the part of the writers for which the Gospel writers get their wrists slapped by modern critics, one has to keep open the option that the actual referent, even if one can show exegetically that it points beyond the images and actions themselves, is 'a magnitude as yet unknown to us', or that there is no referent at all, 'that the Old Testament has no object, that its witness points into empty space, that there where its narratives and its sacrificial images and the blessings and woes of its

prophets point, there is nothing and thus nothing to be seen now or at any time.'[13] Or the referent is Jesus Christ.

Barth wants to build plasticity, openness or ambiguity into the future temporal thrust given with his exegesis and at the same time claim a teleological pattern between signifier and signified, or rather between story or image and referent. It is an oddly ironic and yet depth-dimensional performance. The framework is at once semiotic and epistemological or perhaps literary and historical: the story lives in its own medium or its own world so that its referent also has a purely storied status, but at the same time the story is a rendering of a real world and therefore tensed between past and future.

I suppose he would claim that the reason figurative reading in the classical and pre-critical period did no such double duty was that it didn't have to, or rather that it did the double duty without intruding the differences – for there was no such sharp distinction between the literary *sensus literalis* and a putatively factual or incorrect depiction that could be independently confirmed or disconfirmed. But, he would also claim, the procedure is really the same under the earlier condition and under the somewhat different and perhaps temporary conditions of a world picture gradually introduced since the Seventeenth Century, which may in turn give way to a new, post-modern world picture. In a later volume he pleads for a kind of biblical reading remarkably similar to a better known suggestion Paul Ricoeur made in a different context. Barth says that we had to move from a pre-critical naiveté to a critical reading of the Bible, but that if one knew how to read it at all, if one had any literary sense in effect, one had then to go on from there to a post-critical naiveté, quite the same as Ricoeur's second naiveté.

The upshot of this reflection on Barth's procedure shows the contrast to the salvation-historical school's perspectivism, with its reference to the 'mighty acts of God' which actually had no referent outside one's own interpretation of the history of Israel. Here, instead, the sacred history is a story in time, and in fact profane history would have to fit itself into it as an act of interpretation rather than the reverse – much after the fashion that Sacvan Bercovitch suggests the rhetorical formula of the jeremiad, quintessential typology, was the rhetorical device that set the terms in which Americans of an earlier day saw their secular history incorporated into sacred history.[14]

It is a procedure obviously not without risks, but there is in it a built-in resistance against the hubris of every kind of community. The content of the story provides it. The contrast to the perspectivism or biblical theology or the salvation historical school is most strikingly expressed in a definition which Auerbach sets forth:

> Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfils the first. The two poles of the figure are separate in time, but both, being real events or figures, are within time, within the stream of historical life. *Only the understanding of the two persons or events is a spiritual act …*[15]

It is a striking reversal of the usual point of view we have come to accept uncritically in theology ever since we felt we had to march in step to the vaunted 'turn to the subject' in philosophy.

Precisely because understanding the teleological connection between the events is a judgment that is at once historical, moral and, yes, esthetic, one cannot escape elements that are odd. The teleology is expressed by the temporal lapse or transition, perhaps even by the risk of being wrong in the juxtaposition. It is, in any event, highly reminiscent of some of the procedures of the old-fashioned newer criticism: the relation of images in a self-contained world, but one which, on its own terms, nevertheless subscribes to the diachronicity characteristic of narrative. On the other hand, because the pattern is a direct juxtaposition overleaping time, it has an uncanny resemblance to the structuralists' synchronic, binary juxtaposition of patterning. I cannot see any further than that: the design is cumulative yet, at least proleptically, the unity of its pattern is also manifest. That, I believe, is what the Christian theologian has to affirm about the divine providential governance of history and from there he will have to make his metaphysical connections with the divine governance of nature, including man.

Concluding Remarks

I am done, but please allow me a personal reminiscence. We had three great teachers in the theology program at Yale in the 1940s, Julian Hartt, H. Richard Niebuhr, and Robert Calhoun. I remember my second year in graduate school, 1948, when I had a tutorial with Niebuhr, who exercised a great deal of influence on many of us. We read Spinoza's *Ethics* that day, with whom Niebuhr had a natural affinity. 'Consent to being' was a phrase he liked to use. He shared with Spinoza more of a metaphysical than a moral vision. But though there was a metaphysical vision of great austerity – faith was attachment to the slayer and life-giver for his own sake, with no return favors asked – Niebuhr shied away from metaphysical speculation. And as I left that afternoon, I began to realize that this austere affirmation of existence under a God who relativized all finite gods and values and mysteriously caused us to cling to him, which was Niebuhr's Christianity, was my natural religion. It was the transforming enablement to call 'God' what had appeared to be fate. It

was a cleansing vision. For Calvinism was in my theological bloodstream, and about a third of Calvinism is determinism. After all, the natural heresy of Calvinism is Deism, a far better one than the natural heresy of Lutheranism, which is Idealism, with its identification of God and man by way of consciousness while the heavens remain empty and bereft of Deity. But I had always been persuaded that whether my natural religion was theistic or atheistic – and the two were not far apart – my Christianity, insofar as it spoke the language of the church, had to find a way of using the language of *grace*, and that Niebuhr could not help me with, for ultimately the two languages – fate and grace – were identical for him, as, I believe, they were for Spinoza.

From there I went to Julian Hartt's seminars in Philosophical Theology where I learned that a metaphysical *vision* can be turned into theology, including a theology of grace, only by way of an explicit metaphysics, a metaphysics of providence, for Christianity has a strange theology: It is neither theism plus Christology, nor – as Barth sometimes thought and I believe unwittingly tempts us to think – a reduction to Christology pure and simple, but a complex interaction of the providential action of God in Christ, the governor of nature and history.[16]

It was a complex and powerful lesson, and it paid heed to the richness and full scope of the tradition, refusing all siren calls to reductionisms on every side. Sometimes I have wanted to forget at least part of that lesson, but I have never been able to do so. I know nobody in our day who has taught it the way Julian Hartt has.

Letter to Julian N. Hartt, August 19, 1981 (YDS 2-36)

Dear Julian,

…

Last fall, just after we got into the airport, I asked you what the theme of your [Taylor] lectures was going to be and you said you were thinking of 'The End of *Heilsgeschichte*'. To my question whether 'end' meant *finis* or *telos* in this case you responded that it was a bit of both, although I gathered that *finis* was more in your mind then because you mentioned Van Harvey's *The Historian and the Believer,*[17] although you added that his criticism was a bit on the crude side. That bit of conversation stayed vividly in my mind, and when David Little called in early March about the symposium I had no difficulty in landing on a topic. I wanted to explore something of the other meaning of salvation history. Since your letter came I have looked at the manuscript and had to conclude regretfully that it can't even be put into typescript shape in the next few days, in time for your reply to YDS. But I'd like to reminisce a little about the talk. Running through my mind was a criticism of Reinhold

Niebuhr's *Faith and History* which William Dray had made at the very end of his little book, *Philosophy of History* (in the Prentice-Hall Foundations of Philosophy series).[18] He proposed that Niebuhr's view could have been, and at times was, 'that history may be meaningful after all, although we (by contrast with God) lack the discernment to see what its meaning is.' But more frequently, he said, Niebuhr seems to be saying that 'the full meaning of history is "transhistorical", without being quite willing to say that it is "nonhistorical".' I had my quibbles with what Dray makes of 'nonhistorical', but on the whole I thought the criticism was fair. Furthermore, it seemed to be of a piece with the kind of criticism that Harvey and others level against *Heilsgeschichte* as a general theological view as well as against its particular application to the seemingly everlasting Jesus of history / Christ of faith juxtaposition. And I knew that you held similar views, both from *Christian Critique* and the last two chapters of *Theological Method and Imagination*. In addition, these two volumes also made some powerful proposals about discerning providential government in the sequence of historical events, even if only partially – in other words, proposals of the sort Dray wished Niebuhr had consistently made. I proposed in my lecture that such a view of history is indeed theologically appropriate and right, but that it is a matter of seeing the destiny of human events generally in constant interaction with the history of God's people. As for the matter of 'exclusivist' or 'absolutist' Christian claims in this connection, I could not get excited about them – though in others (e.g., conversations among the world's religions) I might. One can look at it either way: The people of God are a sign of the eschatological shape of all humanity, or human history in general foreshadows the travail and glory of God's people. I suggested that affirming a partially evident providential pattern in the events of history involves a denial not only of historicist, existentialist and other 'perspectivalisms', but also of those panentheisms which reduce specific events to instances of either natural pattern or ideal generalization.

Among the conditions requisite for the affirmation of strong Christian claims about history, it seemed to me that you had stated one of the most important: An understanding of persons as historical subjects and historical agents who cannot be sublated by any of the available 'larger force' explanations. I demurred only (and slightly) at the point typical of analytical philosophers: I thought that for intelligible talk about history, and pattern in history, description in terms of agents' reasons, intentions, and enactments might be sufficient for the immediate purpose, postponing until a better day 'causal explanation' talk of every sort, whether determinist or indeterminist.

My one further plea was that in order to read off partially evident, cumulative design from historical events, the Christian cannot avoid typology; indeed, typology as a literary exercise in the interpretation of providential history is more important than the old-fashioned prophecy-fulfillment scheme

for the connection of earlier and later events. For 'prophecy fulfilled', in addition to looking troublingly like a magical view of miracle, never allowed the plea that history, while providentially governed, is nonetheless an open-ended course, whereas figural interpretation does allow precisely that conjunction. For a striking example of such an exegesis I cited Barth's *Church Dogmatics* II/2, the exegetical section in §35.2 ('The Elected and the Rejected' – I can't give you the pages, because I only have the German right here).

What one does not get in theologians like Barth is the further requisite for espying a providential pattern in history, viz. the adequation of something like the interpretative ventures of 'civil religion' to some form of biblical typology. Without that move there is no vision of the dialectic between salvation history and the history of political communities of the ordinary sort. I have always been wary of the notion of civil religion after the fashion of Bellah and Co.,[19] and David Little put some very sharp questions to me on this score last April. However, I believe a kind of reverse movement to that of Bellah, from the biblical original as constant to the civil as variable antitype is necessary. I have found useful – although sharply critical of the practice – the description of *The American Jeremiad* in American social rhetoric, in the book of that title by Sacvan Berkovitch.[20]

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1 [Frei added in the margin: 1) Sacred and Profane / Christian and Universal; 2) Apocalyptic and history; 4) Perspective vs agency/suffering character/circumstance; 3) Event vs pattern (plan, covering law, meaning, pattern).]

2 T.H. Huxley, 'Evolution and Ethics (1893)' in *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays*, Collected Essays 9 (New York: Greenwood, 1970), pp.46–116; reproduced at http://aleph0.clarku.edu/huxley/CE9/E-E.html.

3 New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

4 Ibid, p.263.

5 [Frei struck through the following paragraph: 'What enables Hartt to do so and to assert a powerful understanding of history as part of a larger picture of providential governance of the world, is a series of interwoven persuasions which expresses in the form of four components a general theory of history – a theory which is itself dialectically though not univocally related to a metaphysics in the strong sense, i.e. in the sense of trying to coordinate the meaning of 'God' or 'transcendence' into a single set of affirmations about providence.']

6 *Theological Method and Imagination* (New York: Seabury, 1977), pp.189ff.

7 [Frei also struck through the following: 'If you don't put too much stress on the technical term, you might say that one can render a variety of home-grown phenomenologies (I borrow the term from Stephen Crites) of the self in various relations to a variety of worlds or even to the same world. On the other hand, the closer one comes to thinking about historical agency, the more unsatisfactory the

very term 'phenomenology' becomes, for what one wants to describe is not a mode-of-being-in-the-world with its inescapable reference to conscious intentionality, but a transcendentally present world.']

[8] Ibid, p.196.

[9] [Frei struck through: ' … of how, say, the Civil War and its results not only came about but came to take the shape it did.']

[10] Ibid, p.198.

[11] Ibid, p.190; cf. James Childress and David Harned (eds) *Secularization and the Protestant Prospect* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), pp.159ff.

[12] CD II/2, pp.340–409.

[13] CD II/2, p.363.

[14] Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1978).

[15] Erich Auerbach, 'Figura' in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (New York: Meridian, 1959), p.43.

[16] [Frei deleted: 'The logic of the faith is a doctrine of providence. It was a powerful and complex lesson, and it has never left me, for while providence without grace is empty, grace without providence is blind.']

[17] Van A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief* (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

[18] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History*, London: Nisbet, 1949; William H. Dray, *Philosophy of History* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964).

[19] Robert N. Bellah et al (eds), *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

[20] See n.14 above.

7
God's Patience and Our Work (YDS 18-268)

In April 1986, Frei was invited to speak at a conference honoring Jürgen Moltmann and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel.[1] *He prepared a two part paper, the first on Moltmann ('To Give and to Receive'), the second on Moltmann-Wendel. At the conference itself, he changed his mind at least about the first, and wrote another paper. Here, I reproduce*

(1) some rough notes for 'God's Patience and Our Work', CPH 1986c(i);
(2) the full text of 'God's Patience and Our Work', CPH 1986c(ii);
(3) the completely revised paper, 'Reinhold Niebuhr, Where Are You Now That We Need You?', written at the conference, CPH1986c(iii) 'Comments';
(4) the full text of Frei's paper on Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel, CPH 1986c(iv).

1. Rough Notes

(1) Divine patience (also providence, even impassibility) – allows us time, in fact tells us that 'time' is real and good (in contrast to sheer eschatology).
(2) Is the Cross – the abandonment of the God who suffers in his abandonment of his Son / the suffering of Christ in all – the focus of all history? And is, therefore, the liberation of all who are suffering, the non-violent violent protest against the crucifixion of Christ in all who are politically and economically oppressed, the focus of all Christian thinking? If so, then 'critical theory', the God who is the permanently revolutionary other, the 'non-identical', is *the* clue to Christian thinking and action (Christian theory and praxis)
    (a) If so then, indeed, God has no patience, i.e., we can't know that image or motif (and then, Moltmann himself should have no room until after the eschaton for the 'meditative' instead of 'dominating' knowledge of creation of which he writes so well).[2]
    (b) If so, there is no patience in human situation? Is analogy a principle acknowledged by Moltmann? or only 'non-identity' – a dialectical move from present contradiction in human situation as well as self-contradiction / self-abandonment in God, to a future correspondence between God and us?
    (c) If so, there is no receptivity, no limited praxis or limit to praxis, only total action. Christian life is only giving, never receiving. And if that is the case, we must always say, 'Eliminate the barriers!' before we can grasp the hands of other Christians in other contexts, other situations. There can be no distinction, e.g. between issues of poverty and the

nuclear threat. Each is total and each equally near-eschatological. There can be no distinction (no Christian guidance for discriminating action in difficult contexts) between 'equality of sin, inequality of guilt' in Africa, Latin America, Philippines. One cannot be against Reagan and the Contras and against the Sandinistas.

(d) In that case, Christians must always choose between radical, revolutionary action and the status quo, and one cannot be a political liberator or social democrat on pragmatic grounds: One must be a liberationist or neo-conservative.

(3) To be a Christian is to believe, to worship, to practice, to hope – but even the latter only 'in a glass darkly' even to the extent of not tying too closely to *one* motif in our belief (the crucified God and action on behalf of abandoned), even as one would not have only patience without action.

(4) What theological doctrine is the backup for Moltmann's understanding of the movement of history and creation? A doctrine of a powerless God (a Trinity of his own kind) in answer to the theodicy question of human suffering in all history?

(a) If so, God has no power to be patient.

(b) Indeed, God seems to be the matching answer to the question of theodicy, the God who can be credible in the light of human suffering for which there can be no justification under heaven or on earth. God, that is, is not the richness of his (her) free grace in creation, redemption and ultimate fulfillment. He is, in that sense 'too thin', a God simply the other side of one need and hope.

2. To Give and To Receive[3]

I

Since this is an occasion honoring Jürgen Moltmann and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, it is fitting to start off with a text from Professor Jürgen Moltmann:

> … the more a life system is capable of bearing strain, the stronger and more capable of survival it shows itself to be. It absorbs hostile impulses and assimilates them productively, without destroying the enemy or itself. In so doing, it itself becomes richer and more flexible. For the more an open life system is able to suffer, the more it is able to learn. We therefore have to see God's inexhaustible patience and his active capacity for suffering as the root of his creative activity in history.[4]

The delicate balance of this statement is striking. Its elements are in tension, but that tension is internal to a vision of unity and coherence rather than mortal strife. Similar to one of Alexander Calder's mobiles, there are both motion and stability, a kind of dynamic order, in the description of a 'life system'. It avoids both chaos and lifeless rigidity. Above all, there is a kind of aesthetic appropriateness or convincingness (I am talking about the text, not necessarily about the 'reality' written about) in the quick transition from 'life system' to 'God' in this statement. One want to say: Yes, if one looks at this model or mobile, whether as a *work* of art or as a metaphor fusing different levels of discourse, the invocation or evocation of 'God' rightly brings to mind such living and vital qualities as patience and suffering. One is put in mind of M.H. Abram's famous book title, *The Natural Supernatural*,[5] in contrast to the physical, mechanical, or metaphysical supernatural of the Eighteenth Century, with its implication of a rigidly perfect craftsman who, it turns out, couldn't manage the orderly universe he had had in mind when he started to design, so that his work stands badly in need of a fix.

But of course it is problematic to take a passage out of the context not only of the book in which it appears but, even more, out of the context of the whole of an authorship. The sort of image evoked by the 'suffering' is a much more characteristic way for Moltmann to speak of God than 'patience'. Patience is not simply the willing, self-sacrificing undergoing of stress at the hands of another; it implies constancy, or vital and unbroken reserves of strength and steadiness, not weakness, employed in behalf and for the sake of others in the face of their waywardness. The patient person cannot be herself or himself; that is she cannot deserve the accolade, unless she does so in undisputed self-application out of self-disciplined freedom and strength. The further implication in our passage is that the patient person applies herself to another: She acts in selfless devotion out of an abundance to be shared, not out of craving or need.

My impression is that Professor Moltmann would be hesitant to speak of divine abundance without immediate reference to divine self-negation, to self-emptying or being emptied, while he would be more nearly amenable to speaking of the latter without reference to the former. (Beyond that, of course, I am sure he would also want to talk of a divine *impatience*.) But my point is that in the instance of this text, the two appear together, shaped toward each other; hence the fine, delicate balance or harmony in tension which I have mentioned.

Our obligation as Christians, if not our natural resort, is to the Bible when we ask about the living God. Patience, in the Apostle Paul's words, is a gift to be granted to us by God who is like-minded. But one of the most powerful statements in this respect is the paean of praise in Nehemiah 9:17 to God for his patience from strength: 'But thou art a God ready to forgive, gracious and

merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and didst not forsake them.' We need to exercise care when reading such a text. It does not mean that there is no other divine perfection to be appealed to, nor that we ought indiscriminately to apply it as an analogy or parable appropriate to the human scene. 'Patience' is perhaps good Christian counsel to the developed rather than the third world. Again, to accord patience primacy among virtues is perhaps, as things cultural stand, a habit to be encouraged in men but not in women.

In other words, when treated univocally across the board, moral virtues become distortions, instruments of paralysis or else irrelevant platitudes, which is not to say that they are any of these, only that their application demands the delicacy of imaginative moral artistry, both when we inquire about ourselves and analogously when we inquire about God. Moral and theological virtues have constantly to be plucked from the stony cracks of doctrinaire sloganeering.

Perhaps it is suspicion of the consequences, political as well as theological, that makes Professor Moltmann move on so quickly from our passage. Remember that he is writing of the creative not the redemptive work of God. Yet even under this heading the emphasis quickly becomes one with which we are more familiar from his pen. On the next page he goes on to say:

> Through his inexhaustible capacity for suffering and readiness for suffering, God then also creates quite specific chances for liberation from isolation … It is not through supernatural interventions that God guides creation to its goal, and drives forward evolution; it is through his passion, and the opening of possibilities out of his suffering.

These words carry overtones of the more typical Moltmannian dialectic between the 'resurrection of the crucified Jesus' and 'the cross of the risen Christ',[6] applied now to the universe in general, and to God the creator.

But for a moment a different note had been struck. The first passage is, in a classic sense, a *beautiful* passage, i.e., a passage of a balance or harmony which is the fruit of life and motion, not of lifeless rigidity. To reverse my previous emphasis: In the context of *this* passage, even the divine 'suffering' looks or sounds different. When conjoined with 'God's inexhaustible patience', 'suffering' has a richer fabric and complexity, it seems to me, than it does in Moltmann's more customary, almost automatic and – how shall I put it? – almost *logical* association of God's suffering with divine self-abandonment and being abandoned. I hope I am not being unfair if I pose at least tentatively the *possibility* that the suffering that goes with patience hints at the richness of a god whose Deity is the perfection of his or her unicity through the amplitude of each of his attributes; whereas *theologically* at least the divine

suffering that goes with abandonment and being abandoned (whatever its status in support of a specific Christian *political ethic*) has much more nearly the status of an explanatory argument: Its cutting edge may not be in the first place a *theologia crucis* but a desire to resolve certain difficulties in Christian belief, especially that of theodicy, by means of a particular concept of the Trinity; the cogency of that concept in turn rests on the persuasiveness of a dialectical understanding not only of the movement of time and history but of God's self-involvement in that dialectical process.

I would like to pursue our text through one more permutation, this time the mood or disposition it evokes in the servant of God. It seems to me that what I called a moment ago the classic beauty of the passage tallies with a certain mood or stance evoked a few times in the book *God in Creation*, which, if I am not mistaken, is, though not without precedent, not a major chord in Moltmann's work up to now. It goes not only beyond the steady, almost haunted pursuit of dialectic characteristic of his writing as he traces the history of suffering human and divine and the prospect or promise of the Kingdom of God that will be both political and eternal. It goes even beyond the stance of 'play' of which he has also written. In the book *God in Creation*, he contrasts the 'dominating' knowledge characteristic of scientific civilization with another kind of knowledge:

> … *belief* in creation only arrives at the understanding of creation when it recollects the alternative forms of *meditative* knowledge. 'We know to the extent to which we love,' said Augustine. Through this form of astonished, wondering and loving knowledge, we do not appropriate things. We recognize their independence and participate in their life.[7]

Meditative, participative knowledge, the knowledge of that love which lets things be themselves and loves them for the richness which they are (rather than the universal application of the knowledge of dialectic – self-and-other positing or opposition-and-resolution positing along a diachronic and conceptual axis) is the kind of knowledge most congruent with the richness of the open and dynamic 'life systems' about which Moltmann talked in the passage I chose as a text and the God congruent with them. I am led to raise the question whether the post-metaphysical, Idealist and Historicist application of dialectic as the *single* method appropriate to historical understanding and praxis, and to their theological interpretation, may not be as 'dominating' in its sphere as pure scientism is in the understanding of physical nature. (This is not to say that dialectic may not be one appropriate element in Christian, especially modern Christian thinking.)

How ought Christians to think of God's suffering? Modern theologians of various kinds have rightly insisted that we cannot think rightly of God's love –

the prime Christian affirmation about God – unless we affirm that relatedness is of the very essence of God. And therefore, God's grace in creation, redemption and eschatological salvation come naturally and not peripherally or awkwardly to God. The Christian way of saying this is to state the doctrine of the Triune God. I believe that a meditative, participative form of affirming the unicity of the divine love as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier in a richness so abundant as to be able to share the suffering of God's creatures, is as good a route toward the Trinitarian exegesis of God in Scripture as is the dialectic of reversal, in which the crucifixion of Jesus becomes an inner- or inter-Trinitarian event of divine abandonment and being abandoned, and thereby God's suffering and the history of political suffering of oppressed human beings virtually become one and the same.

I say 'as good a route', not 'a better route'. I do not wish to decide that question. Perhaps the two can supplement each other when we think of the doctrine of the Trinity as a kind of 'rule' for reading Christianly about God in Scripture. Whether or not we can put together conceptually God's eternal and eternally rich constancy and God's making himself poor for our sakes in the gift of his Son who, though rich, became poor for our sake (that by his poverty we might become rich – 2 Cor 8:9), *both* are to be affirmed. God's suffering love is to be understood both in the light of the patience of his abiding and undisrupted rulership and grace, and in the light of his willingness in his Son to risk abandonment by undertaking – in a paraphrase of Karl Barth – the risk of a journey into a country far away from home. The doctrine of the Trinity is the rule by which we affirm both these descriptions of God and refer both of them to the same self-identification of the one and only God of love.

II

God's patience toward his creatures does not involve as logical consequence that we ought under all circumstances to exercise patience or only patience. That is not how we ought to think in relation to the divine perfections. God's patience is that aspect of his grace by which he permits and sustains his creatures in being and grants them their own span of time, limited though it be, and their own social location, which is not a universal home. This is one of the conditions of the Christian life, and it is one to which classical Christian thinkers from all traditions have drawn attention. One aspect of Christian life is an acknowledgement of every life including one's own as a gift of divine grace, and that nobody has the right to deny completely to any other individual or group their time and space. (It is difficult to reconcile the death penalty with a Christian outlook on human life and impossible to justify the consciously or unconsciously organized suppression of any group by another.)

To live christianly is to live life as a gift from God's abundance. Of course life imposes special duties, but it is first of all a gift. We have received freely ('without pay') and so we are told to give 'without pay' (Matthew 10:8). If under some circumstances 'Eucharistia', the primary Christian liturgical celebration, seems like a blasphemy of elegance, there are other conditions under which it is truly the liturgical bond of a living Christian fellowship. (One thinks of Basic Christian Communities!) But no matter under what circumstances it is performed, its institution in our midst remains a gift from and a sign of the same divine abundance that gave us Jesus Christ, in memory and anticipation of whom we celebrate.

If God's grace has in it an element of patience, then Christian life as response to that grace is in part, provisionally (no more, yet no less!) predicated on God's *having been active* in the past, both in preservation and transformation, just as he is active in the promise and anticipation of the future when the barriers, especially the political barriers, on our earth will be overcome – just as the barrier between 'this-worldliness' and the 'beyond' of Christian hope will be overcome. The past remains real in the present, just as the future likewise bears on the present. One capsule way of saying the same thing is that we live in a world both of enduring structure *and* of revolutionary transformation – and not of one without the other. We are limited both in the scope of our thought and our actions; time as well as space are our limits, even as they are our God-given gifts.

We will in that case have to think of the relation of the eternal God to time and creation as at one pre-temporal, co-temporal and post-temporal, a view which Professor Moltmann finds interesting but problematic.[8] One consequence of this view is that even if we regard God's eternity as God's time, rather than his negation of time's reality, the relation between his time and ours remains for us fragmentary, and our understanding of it analogical and parabolic. We deny neither God's gracious foreordination of humanity to salvation, nor the openness and ambiguity of Christian life in regard to the human and political present, nor yet the future reality of a saving Kingdom that remains divine *promise* rather than *program* human or divine. To be reserved about dialectical thinking as the single clue to Christian thinking is to *believe* that God's kingdom holds the human future but not to *know* how it will supersede the present; in fact, to know very little about the future for sure. To be reserved about dialectical thinking as the single procedure of Christian thinking is to be uneasy about thinking that the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are the clue to the shape of the political future.

The limits of time and space remain, and yet we have the promise of God. So these limits are real but not ultimate, either conceptually or in our common life. To be Christian is to live in hope that a missionary church, for which the North no longer predominates (its own area perhaps turning into a mission

field) may become a paradigm, a beacon among the nations for the cause of justice, mercy and human equality, without holding out the hope of universal human liberation this side of the Kingdom of God. To live Christianly is to belong to that community which affirms that hands can be extended *across* the barriers, that some of them may in fact be lowered, without any anticipated *knowledge* (in contrast to promise!) of their full removal. The promise of God is a miracle on the anticipation of a miracle rather than the fulfillment of a blueprint.

To live christianly is to live in hope in the community of a church that knows itself to be servant of God on behalf of all humanity; it is also to live realistically – with political pragmatism, if you will – in one's own social location. God in his constancy and abundance governs the world with a patience, whose worldly space this side of the eschaton borders on both the crucifixion and on the resurrection. We believe that just as Christ became poor for our sake, so the church must set forth his pattern for the nations: God's bias is in favor of the poor and the oppressed, a promise for them. Even if the whole church is not now, as it never has been, the church *of* the poor alone, no church is a true church if it is not a church *on behalf of* the poor and the oppressed. No injunction of Jesus, God's self-denying servant, is more urgent or more permanent than the saying of the last judgment, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me' (Matthew 25:40). This saying is spoken to a public and for public action, and not from or into the division of the world into private and public realms.

Not only the limited character of our historical and political existence (at once as gift and yet as limited gift received at the hands of God's abundant patience) but also its specificity make for what I have called political pragmatism or realism. I believe Karl Barth was right, that the civil community can never be more than an imperfect parable of the Christian community, itself in turn no more than a fallible and partial parable of the Kingdom of God. The greater good in the world's political arena is usually bought at the cost of some other good. Not only the shape of any given civil or political community but the duration of its policies, indeed of its very existence are subject to radical transformation and the contingencies of time, and these forces retain, so far as mortal eye can see, an element of ambiguity. Yet the hidden yeast in all of this vicissitude is the promise of the same God of love who was incarnate in Jesus and who moves the world toward unity despite itself. God's world it remains still in all its deformation. In such a world, the aim of a realism with short and middle-range goals must therefore always be that of support of the demands for a just society, in which the legitimate use of authority is to be balanced with the rights of those who are disenfranchised, and opportunities for peaceful change and redress of grievances remain a live possibility.

All of this is a plea that the church participate in political life in limited and specific ways. There seems to me to be a natural affinity though not an identity between a left-of-centre liberalism or a democratic socialism and Christian commitment – in the present stage of developed or overdeveloped Western society. Tomorrow, the affinity may be different for us in this country, and it may also be different today in other parts of the world, say, the Soviet Union, Poland, Latin America, the West Bank of the Jordan or South Africa. This is a beleaguered position which is enjoying an ever smaller strip of existence. In this country it is chiefly beset by the radical equation of neo-conservatism and super-patriotism with Christianity; in other parts of the world it is opposed by intolerance toward Christian political dissent on the part of those who implicitly or explicitly identify revolutionary political liberation as the only political option for Christians on a global scale. Those of us who hold the very mundane position of a pragmatic politics and a moderate, unscientific socialism in between these two extremes as the sanest stance for Christians to take in the developed world need all the help we can get.

Yet something can surely be said in defense of this position: Even though skeptical about any clear knowledge or program of the way in which the political future will instantiate the eschatological promise of God, those holding this position also believe that love, and justice as love's closest ally are the promise of the undisclosed future. And holding this view, they believe that this world has been, is, and will be God's world, and that God's way is best seen where pressure both toward freedom and structures of justice may be discerned. Because it is the world of the one God who both rules over and yet suffers with his creatures, these people, often politically diverse, are one in resisting the politics of Manichaeism, which believes social, economic and political history to be the arena of the fight of pure evil against pure good. Their political imperative is toward temporary accommodation between the greatest imperfect good and the lesser yet less then total evil, with the least possible bloodshed and cruelty. They will protest and resist imperialist and cruel North American interference in Latin America, and they will tentatively and provisionally support the revolutionary socialists there believing that the latter have a better cause than their reactionary opponents. Yet they will remain skeptical about the ideological pretensions of revolutionaries and the political naiveté of those among their Christian allies who support them with total commitment. They will have great admiration for those East German church people who support the socialist state conditionally, while maintaining their theological freedom with its consequent political skepticism or irony. At the same time, these mundane moderates will hear respectfully the voices of their politically more radical sisters and brothers who know far more than they themselves about suffering under poverty and injustice, and they will not seek to impose their views on them in their different social location. Instead, they

will want to be instructed by their fellow-Christians, in the developing world, for mutual instruction is one of the ways in which ecumenical conversation takes place among Christian individuals and Christian bodies. And when instructed by those who have suffered, they will follow the injunction to stand with them.

There is then a Christian life and ministry of reconciliation across present barriers, even across the political barriers that separate fellow Christians from each other. That unity-in-separation is, like the Christian life itself, given by grace first and therefore received; only in the second place is it the imperative of our own self-giving. We do not have ultimate responsibility for history. Our job is real but limited. As recipients and sharers of God's abundance we are at work without being driven to prepare the way for that ultimate revolution which God signaled in the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

We share, in Professor Moltmann's words, in an 'open life system' which is even now a life rather than death system, despite all its evil and deformation. We receive this world, our neighbors and ourselves, at the hands of God's abundance, and our first business is to receive it before we repair it. In that way our giving and even our suffering is done in the image of the God whose very suffering is the fruit of his constancy in and to himself and to his world, who rules now and will rule fully in the miraculous fullness of time.

3. Reinhold Niebuhr, Where Are You Now That We Need You?

Ladies and Gentlemen, what I have to say will bear very little resemblance to the pretentious title that I chose ('To Give and to Receive: Christian Life Across the Boundaries'). The fact of the matter is that I did write something out, but something happened on the way to the forum – that is to say, I've rarely been more sobered and fascinated by a powerful set of papers and addresses; they changed my mind. And, were I to give an actual title to what I want to say, which will be rather free-wheeling for the most part, I'm afraid, it would be in the words that my agnostic friend Van Harvey of Stanford University addressed to me over the phone just the other day: 'Reinhold Niebuhr, where are you now that we need you?'

> I want to start off just touching on a theme that is present in Professor Moltmann's theology – which remains to me one of the most searching and provocative theological enterprises of the present – something that is set forth nicely in the article by Professor Christopher Morse (I think a very fine article on Professor Moltmann) in the little folder that you were handed out.[9] Professor Moltmann's theology is Trinitarian. It has become increasingly, explicitly

> Trinitarian as he has progressed in his thinking. Let me read just a little summary. Professor Morse writes about Professor Moltmann's thought: As scripturally rendered, God the Son suffers being lost through surrender to the Father even to the point of God-forsakenness. God the Father suffers loss of being through surrendering the Son, not a loss of identity, as the ancient concept of patripassionism wrongly implied, but a loss of being God in any way other than by not sparing the Son. The Son, in distinction from the Father, suffers dying. The Father, in distinction from the Son, suffers the death of the Son. The oneness that takes place in this incarnate inseparability of suffering in the cross is therefore to be thought of not as a single mathematical unit, but as a dialectical unity of Spirit. It is this unity of mutual self-surrender proceeding from the relation of the Father and the Son that faith confesses as God the Holy Spirit, who eschatologically transforms the sufferings of the present time and of all history from being surrendered to death into being surrendered to life.

I hope Professor Moltmann will find this recognizable, at least.

The question I want to raise – and I can only do it quite cryptically – is this: What is the relation for Professor Moltmann between historical stages or epochs? – that is to say, What is the character of the motion of history? And what is the relation between the character of the motion of history and the history of the Triune God? I'm wondering if that relation and that motion seem most nearly to be the dialectic of the Spirit. I want to ask Professor Moltmann if the Spirit does not perhaps become the *fons deitatis*, the root of Godhead? I'll put it in a somewhat unfair way: A colleague of mine once said about Paul Tillich's doctrine of the Trinity that it is the only doctrine of the Trinity of which he knew in which the Father and the Son proceeded from the Holy Spirit. I want Professor Moltmann to comment on the question that, in a very different way in his theology also, it is the Spirit that is really the unity and ground of the Godhead and of the motion by which the history of God and his promise will finally be at one with the history of the world in its strange dialectical movement. The only power of God we know is the power of the Spirit, as I gather from Moltmann's book, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*. It is the Spirit that is the divine agent bound for the future. And the reason I raise this question is another question: Is the future to be created by the Spirit truly a miracle to us?

Here I want to touch on why I got disturbed in the process of the conference. There was, in this conference, a kind of touching and affecting upbeat sensibility right from the beginning, which I found enormously impressive, but also rather sobering. It was embodied very strongly in Professor Miguez Bonino's paper and also in a paper which I found, like Professor

Miguez Bonino's essay, very elegant. That was Charles McCoy's essay on the Covenant.[10] There was an upbeat quality about the promise of God, the sureness, the unbreakable promise of God, his covenantal loyalty, within which there is reason not only for work but ground for optimism, ground for the belief that liberation is not so much a miracle but a steady motion toward that kingdom – which will nonetheless come in as a miracle. And I suppose what I want to say more unequivocally is that the triumph of love must remain a miracle, it seems to me, in the light of the Gospel. I want to say that we still see in a glass darkly now, and it seems to me more darkly perhaps than I thought I heard yesterday. We see analogically, we see brokenly, and not schematically, not even in the schema of a dialectic of history, even though admittedly theologians have to be schematic.

Another way of putting the same question of the miraculousness of the promise of love and its dark reflection on this world, is that the triumph of that Spirit whose power is altogether that of love must be greater than that of two quasi-religious images that nag at me and I think perhaps at a lot of other folk, and I imagine a lot of other Christians: the images of fate and chance. Theology is different from philosophy in at least one respect; theologians reflect conceptually not on rational constructions, they reflect among other things on certain images, and in our affective religious life, these two connected cosmic images often haunt human beings, haunt me certainly. Fate is that oddly determinative power of non-being, closely associated with its opposite, that chaotic and encompassing motion of chance. Fate and chance have often been seen back to back, for example by the Greeks; and they have often been represented as the paralyzing power that governs us. That is what the Gospel is surely in struggle against, among other things. Another image like it is the image that haunts our politics today and which one must struggle against, as I think Professor Bonino expressed very clearly and admirably yesterday, namely, Manichaeism – that extraordinary sense of a cosmic fight between good and evil, which is expressed in much of the political strife of the day.[11] We must fight against it at all times. What I'm getting around to saying is that at the level of the Christian, religious imagination, the love of the Spirit must be a love that is greater than fate rather than lesser than fate or chance or Manichean dualism, a love than must not only be rhetorically powerful but powerful at a much more substantial level. And while I certainly will not say so about Professor Moltmann's thought, the triumph of love did seem to me, by implication, a rather easy triumph in this conference.

And now to translate that last remark into at least one theological issue: The triumph of love and of the Spirit of love at a cosmic level has been philosophically expressed by no one more eloquently than by the philosopher Hegel. Anybody who gets sucked into the study of Hegel hardly ever emerges out of it. There's good reason for that. But Hegel's Spirit of Love – and this is

the startling thing – was exactly equivalent to fate. It is an impersonal relational necessity that pervades the universe and finally emerges in the historical consciousness that created the image of the incarnation and of redemption. The point is that, as Karl Barth said, Hegel's God loves out of necessity: He is not free to love. Here is a God of love who is the equivalent of fate and not greater than fate. And it may well have been the case that this, which is often called the last Christian philosophy, was born out of the desperate sense that it may not be possible to find a divine love that actually triumphs over fate.

Now, I want to go on from there to raise the question, 'Is there such a thing? Is the Gospel, the promise of God, truly powerful?' I was profoundly struck by something in Charles McCoy's paper. The notion of the Covenant, it strikes me, is in all likelihood a promise of finding just that power, that greatness which is a love greater than fate. And I want to appeal here to some elements in our own American history.

The Covenant is the unconditional binding together of God, human beings and human communities, so that when the Covenant is broken the war that results becomes an internal civil war within the Covenant. The striking thing is that Covenant theology in New England, in Puritanism, was always ultimately optimistic about the triumph of divine love, but was exceedingly dark and sober about what might happen until that time. That dark and sober side of Covenant theology, often referred to by critics as the Puritan 'jeremiad' is perhaps best expressed by a little saying that was once very famous, by Professor Richard Niebuhr in *The Kingdom of God and America*[12] in which he articulated the difference between Puritan or Covenant theology, and its later liberal heritage saying of the latter that 'a God without wrath introduced man without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.' Can a theology of liberation take this or something like this tragic and ironic element into account? It has been done, even in American theology! Let me remind you of our second greatest (Jonathan Edwards was our greatest) American theologian, Abraham Lincoln. Go back, read and re-read his second inaugural address, on which I could not put my finger, unhappily, yesterday.[13] Read those soberly optimistic lines go out the undefeatability of the purposes of a just God, and the puzzling, tragic course of events through which it would be achieved. And let me remind you of the fact that this same sensibility is not simply done away with in a secular day. I was reminded of it – many of us were reminded of it in conversation the other night – when we talked about Viet Nam, about that mysterious, almost frightening sense of tragic reconciliation, evoking all kinds of painful images of blood sacrifice and blood reconciliation and blood guilt, images which are unpleasant and yet are there somehow, in which a covenant is resealed by virtue of blood spilled. Nobody wants to push that kind of thing very far, and yet it is perhaps

an inalienable aspect of a theology that is ultimately optimistic but insists very strongly on a tragic element in human history. The Washington Viet Nam war memorial is a concrete reminder of this tradition and its contemporaneity. We need go surely no further than to look at what happened during the last two days. Jefferson once said, 'When I think about slavery, I fear for my beloved country.' When I think about Libya, and what we have just done, I fear for my beloved country. The sense of hubris, the sense of macho, the fact that the more powerful an empire becomes the more insecure it becomes – if humankind is to be saved from that kind of round, it surely will take a love that can show itself at least descriptively, not by proof, but at least descriptively, to be a love that really is greater than fate, rather than simply the product of a cheerful liberationist confidence, which I am afraid was the kind of atmosphere that I found pervasive in what we were doing yesterday, despite the fact that – as you can see – I was thoroughly stimulated by all the papers and found them all actually extraordinarily powerful.

Let me mention one little thing that Professor Miguez Bonino said yesterday which I found thoroughly persuasive on the one band and yet inadequate for my religious needs on the other, when he stressed his uneasiness with the notion of political choices as 'always the lesser of two evils'. But I do wonder. Political strategy *is* touched by a sense of tragedy; in the human situation it *is* the lesser evil rather than the perfect good that we have to choose. He suggested that this minimalist notion of political good was due to the fact that human good, the goodness of human creation, was simply a residue for those who hold a pervasive doctrine of sin. That's why some Christians at any rate, especially in the first world, were adopting that notion of politics as always involving the choice of the lesser evil. There is a good deal of truth in that, but on the other hand, what I am suggesting is this: Reinhold Niebuhr was right when be said that it is the irony of history (and specifically American history) that it is the goodness of human nature that makes democracy possible; but it is the evil of human nature that makes democracy necessary.[14] It is precisely the strong remaining sin in the redeemed, the presence still of sin among the people of the Covenant and not simply of the unredeemed, that makes it necessary to say finally that all political choices, all moves toward liberation, this side of the eschaton, remain provisional, remain for the time being, remain pragmatic, yes, remain choices for a greater good, but choices for a greater good that is at the same time a lesser evil. The promise of Cod remains a miracle which now we see in a glass darkly only.

It does sound terribly negative, I'm afraid. It's really not what I meant to say. I wrote something else, but I never did like what I wrote. Let me add a word about it. The emphasis in that paper was on something I thought I found expressed in Professor Moltmann's work as a whole, but especially in his

recent book on *God and Creation* which he was kind enough to send me. I found something there which I did not often find expressed by him before, namely, the notion of the *patience* of God. Perhaps you can see that I have been trying to think about something like that also. We believe, we worship a God who is yet to be, in a certain sense. There is a not-yet of God, and in that there is an impatience of God. But it seems to me that there is also an already of God and a patience of God, and it is a patience of God that allows us human beings a kind of limited time and space, communally and individually, and it is within that space and time that individuals and empires act. And as long as the space and time of all of us are limited, mutually limited, God works through our mutual limitations. As long as that prevails, an ecumenical church is a church that has to do the work of human unity and Christian unity *across the barriers* of all our limitations. (Hence the pretentious title of my original paper, 'Christian Life Across the Barriers' – that is all I meant by it.) And as long as that is the case, a Christian political ethic, our overriding imperative in Christian political ethics, must be: 'For as much as you have done it to the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me' (Matthew 25:40). That overriding imperative remains an imperative, but it will have to he pragmatically rather than globally or liberationistically employed. And for reasons of that limitation I will say that in *my* social location I would be an ally rather than an immediate participant of Latin American liberation theology. And that is one example of the sort of thing I would ask us to take seriously. Our thinking, our political thinking is a divine imperative. There is no such thing as a Christian theology that is not a political theology, but I think our political thinking is a divine imperative that we have to follow in the given situation rather than programmatically across the board, as I think liberationist theologies tend to do.

May I leave it at that? I apologize to Professor Moltmann for having given him a paper to comment on, which I then did not read. I'm very sorry, but it's not my fault. I never disobey the prompting of the Spirit, especially when it arises out of a conference as stimulating as this.

I would like to comment now for a few minutes on the very stimulating paper of Dr. Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel, because it struck me as being not only extremely imaginative but also, as she read it and I saw the response to what she said, as also expressing something of the spirit of the conference. And I guess what I want to say here too is, 'Yes, but cool it, folks.'

4. Response to Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel

Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel writes: 'being good is no moral quality. It means our being, our existence, that is right, justified, legitimate, and full of

quality … I am good, as I am … I am created by God, I am loved, I am liberated' and, citing Mary Daly, 'we lack a culture of being.' This basic affirmation, a gift and not a demand, she finds in Christian faith. It is a resource that enables her to resist those tempting myths that offer a more obviously supportive feminist spirituality. Quite apart from the merits of various religions' offerings for the cause, this resistance is probably sound. For, as my colleague George Lindbeck says, religions are languages or cultural codes in which we are nurtured, and these languages enable us to experience rather than (reversely) religions being deep and preconceptual experiences that we then express in discursive or non-discursive symbols. When we invent or deliberately adopt our myths, what is real to us is not they themselves but the reality or experience we were perfectly well acquainted with without them. Religions force us to interpret our experience of the world toward them or in their light, not vice versa. At least at the level of the believer's *interpretation* – though not necessarily at the deeper 'reality' level or the more 'scientific' *explanatory* level, they make 'reality' *claims* on us. Now if you have a religion that does just that and at the same time leaves room for being read liberatingly rather than enslavingly (despite its own history of bad practices) then you have the best of two worlds, where other myths may offer you only one at most. I wonder from time to time if the real religious option for women's liberation may not be either Christianity (at a cost, admittedly) or else good, plain secularity – surely a solid position not to be feared or despised. (The cost of Christianity for feminism may be that its symbols are amenable only up to a point, or else – and it may actually come to the same thing – that feminism may be temporarily an important item on a Christian social agenda but may in the long run be of secondary rather than primary significance in a Christian reading of the world.)

The Christian good of women's liberation is surely just what Ms. Moltmann-Wendel suggested. May I use my own terms? Femaleness, like maleness, is one of the limited goods granted by God's grace to half or better than half of humankind. Only now is it beginning to come into its own, and it has a long way to go. But the priority of 'being' to 'doing', like that of 'receiving' to 'giving', implies the limited character and pragmatic aim of the 'doing' part of the feminist enterprise and that it should have a moderate and worldly rather than sacred status. Women's liberation is a matter of justice. (I am not at all sure of the desirability or the likely success of the endeavor to give it well nigh sacred status by suggesting that feminine and masculine attributes of sharply differing and unmixed character are part of the eternally unvarying structure of human nature. That sort of speculative world view or perspective seems to me to be Romanticism rather than Christianity.) If we say that aggressiveness is a vice in males but a virtue in females, we can surely imply no more by it than that a period of relative and welcome readjustment is

called for, not that we have discovered the secret of primordial good and evil. The richness and power of God's grace that grants the gift of self-acceptance permits, no, it enjoins a limited degree of self-assertiveness upon all of us, no more, no less.

Ms. Moltmann-Wendel is right, I believe, that once we move beyond that limit, given with our being, we are in Pelagian territory, where there are no limits to human self-assertiveness. We are all in trouble if 'I am whole' (the next step in the description of self-acceptance under God) is taken in a Pelagian sense in effect not only embracing but superceding 'I am good'. That fierce and self-assertive drive toward perfectionism leaves no room for the liberty of being justified, or receiving our being and our goodness from God's constant and abundant grace. Instead, we become whole by wholly shaping ourselves.

But in fact it turns out that Ms. Moltmann-Wendel's use of wholeness has nothing to do with Pelagian or super-Pelagian self-assertiveness. 'I am whole' in her description is perfectly compatible with 'I am good' in the sense of 'I am justified by faith'. On the contrary, where the elements of her description (in the mirror of male-imposed codes: I am too spontaneous, hysterical, emotional, etc.; but actually: I am in touch with my full bodily self and my feelings and the whole world about me) are censured in the name of justification by grace through faith, the latter truly contradicts itself. Furthermore, these elements of wholeness are in no sense 'works' of s*elf-assertiveness*; they are simply elements of *self-expression*, and the difference is vast. The first legitimately limits or illegitimately invades the space of others; the second fills out one's own. The same thing may be said of 'I am beautiful' (the last step in the description of self-acceptance under God) with its triumph over guilt and anxiety – the enemies also of justification by faith or 'I am justified.'

But now a cautionary word. The Apostle Paul tells us that not all things that are permissible are expedient. Compatibility with justification by faith does not necessarily mean, certainly not by itself, social beneficiality. Ms Moltmann-Wendel is clearly uneasy about 'I am beautiful' run riot. No narcissism, please, she insists. It is no accident, however, that the suspicion that is to be set aside immediately arises just in this context. And how does pure self-celebration smoothly turn into non-controlling neighbor love? Can one be sure that things really work so schematically, and in particular that they work harmoniously with this scheme? Narcissism is the underdevelopment or negation of the self. Is it really the female sin, as Valerie Saiving Goldstein says, and pride the male sin, as Judith Plaskow said in her fine analysis of Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr?[15] Do things divide up that neatly? Isn't, in the eyes of many commentators on present-day America, Narcissism the besetting problem of a whole range of women and men alike? And whatever else justification may be, does it really function as the psychological cure for pride?

And is self-celebration - whether individual or in the collective individuality of the 'wrap' session – the psychological cure for narcissism? Or is the 'cure' in each of these two cases perhaps part of the problem rather than its solution, whether we observe it in the individual or the social psyche?

In *Habits of the Heart*,[16] Robert Bellah and his colleagues wrote of the tortured limits and the self-defeating pathos not only of aggressively acquisitive individualism but even more of its clone manqué, expressive or therapeutic individualism. Are we better off for the phenomenon? Some things may be christianly legitimate without being either christianly or socially expedient, especially when taken all the way. Perhaps 'I am justified, I am good' might best sympathetically govern the other two.

Hence the following modest conclusion. Many years ago Thomas Mann, that bourgeois man and ironist of bourgeois culture who had also taken a long, hard look at human evil, wrote a critical essay with the appropriately bourgeois title 'Dostoevsky in Moderation.'[17] Less exaltedly but similarly, I would like to say: 'Feminist Theology – in Moderation.' Come to think of it, I was saying something like that also in connection with Professor Jürgen Moltmann and the Theology of Hope.

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1 Many of the contributions to the conference were published in *Love, the Foundation of Hope: The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel* ed. Frederic B. Burnham, Charles S. McCoy and M. Douglas Meeks (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

2 Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (London: SCM, 1985).

3 [Frei originally gave the title, 'To Give and to Receive: Christian Life Across the Barriers'.]

4 *God in Creation*, p.210.

5 M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York: Norton, 1971).

6 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1977), p.xvi.

7 *God in Creation*, pp.69ff.

8 *God in Creation*, p.116.

9 Christopher Morse, 'God's Promise as Presence'Cf. Christopher Morse, *The Logic of Promise in Moltmann's Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

10 Charles S. McCoy, 'God's faithfulness: Federalism and the Future of Theology' in *Love, the Foundation of Hope.*

11 Miguez Bonino, 'Authority and Hope in Feminist Theology', in *Love, the Foundation of Hope*.

12 New York: Harper and Row, 1937, p.137.

13 Abraham Lincoln, 'Second Inaugural Address March 4 1865' in Don E. Fehrenbacher (ed.), *Abraham Lincoln, Speeches and Writing*

Letters and Miscellaneous Writings, Presidential Messages and Proclamations (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1989).

[14] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1944), p.vi.

[15] Valerie Saiving, 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View', *Journal of Religion* 40.2 (April 1960), pp.100–12; Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich* (Washington DC: University Press of America, 1979).

[16] Robert N. Bellah et al (eds), *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

[17] Thomas Mann, 'Dostojewski – mit Massen (1946)' in *Schriften und Reden zur Literatur, Kunst und Philosophie* III (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1968), pp.7–20.

8
On the Thirty-Nine Articles (YDS 12-186)

Frei prepared three articles (the two reproduced here, and a third 'Of the Resurrection of Christ', published as 'How it All Began: On the Resurrection of Christ' in Anglican and Episcopal History *53.2 (June 1989), pp.139–45; reprinted in* TN*, pp. 200–6) for a book on the on the Thirty-Nine articles, to be edited by John F. Woolverton and A. Katherine Grieb (Church Hymnal Corporation). CPH 1987d, 1987f.*

Article III:
Of The Going Down Of Christ Into Hell

> As Christ died for us, and was buried, so also it is to be believed that He went down into Hell.

This article plainly is taken from the second article of the Apostles' Creed ('He descended into hell') in which, scholars believe, it was incorporated as a relatively late addition. The main outline of this creed was established in the second and third centuries, C.E. However, the inclusion of this clause probably dates from the early Middle Ages, when dramatizations of Christ's invasion of hell to liberate the spirits imprisoned there became immensely popular. Noteworthy is the fact that there was no reference yet to the descent into hell in the fourth-century Nicene Creed.

The scriptural warrants for the clause have usually been 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6, which tell of Christ's preaching to the spirits of the dead in the place of their imprisonment. Two motifs are combined in the clause: (1) Jesus' preaching to the spirits in hell for their salvation or liberation, while they were awaiting the final resurrection at the end of all times when the spirits of the dead are to be joined to their bodies once again. In this sense the clause was linked in tradition to the doctrine of purgatory, the 'intermediate' state before the final dispensation of the purged soul. (2) Jesus' ransom through his death of the souls rightfully or wrongfully held imprisoned by the devil. In this sense the emphasis of the clause was on its relation to Christ's atoning death on the cross.

Hell is not a very vivid doctrine or reality to many modern people to whom unjust and anonymous suffering, the eternal silence of the grave, or the irreversible scattering of one's own and other people's ashes after final illness and cremation are far more hellish and real. No matter. World pictures and myths change, though the dread embodied in them may not. In Christian confession what remains constant through all such changes is that all reality –

whatever its shape – imaginable and unimaginable, good and evil, is referred to Jesus, God's own Word, whose life and death on our behalf are adequate to protect us from the abyss. He is not only the representative but the inclusive human being into whose destiny we are all taken up, and as such, he is the all-embracing presence of God. 'For from him and through him and to him are all things' (Romans 11:36). In Christian confession there is no reality ungraced by Christ, no terror which he does not face on our behalf.

What is important is not that there be a real location called hell, so that someone could descend into it. Rather, Jesus Christ is so real – and therefore his cross so efficacious that he defines, undergoes, and overcomes whatever it is that is absolutely and unequivocally hellish.

Article V:
Of The Holy Ghost

> The Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one substance, majesty, and glory, with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.

Like the preceding articles, this one is taken from the creeds of the Church, specifically the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed in its Western form. In the church, beginning in the early centuries, not only was the Spirit acknowledged as coequal and one with the one God, but a certain logical structure gradually came to be recognized which differentiated conceptually between the relation of the Father to the Son ('generation') and that of the Father and the Son to the Spirit ('procession'). The intent of this differentiation was to prevent the inner-divine relations from merging, through lack of specification, into an undifferentiated non-Trinitarian monotheism in which God would be at once denuded of 'His' mysterious richness and removed beyond the meaningful worship of 'His' human creatures, whose very breath is a seal of the glory of 'His' presence. However, theologians conceded they were hard put to specify what 'procession' meant, in contrast to 'generation' for which there was at least the analogy of natural procreation. And yet, to come up hard against an absolute limit in linguistic meaning like that may not have been loss but gain in matters religious, for in concert with its opposite, linguistic (in this case biological) analogy, it is a way for technical theology to indicate in its own way what believers already know – that in the very veiledness of His majesty, 'hid from our eyes,' God is intimately accessible.

The Eastern church has steadily declined to adopt the procession of the Spirit from the Father 'and the Son' (the so-called *filioque* clause) because it appears to them to imply the less than full deity of the Spirit. It is a dispute

that seems technical to the point of artificiality at one level, and yet it involves issues of profound significance for the Christian understanding of God as full co-equality in unity.

The formal, complex identification and definition of the Holy Spirit as full Godhead came later than that of the 'Son' or 'Word'; it was worked out less explicitly and, as we have noted, it has less conceptual specificity about it. In fact, quite notoriously, the doctrine of God the Spirit has usually suffered from underemphasis in the history of Christian theology. Cranmer's own omission of reference to the Spirit in the original Forty-Two Articles of 1553 is one example among many of that neglect; Article Five was only added ten years later.

On the other hand, this neglect of the doctrine of the Godhead of the Spirit has often taken its revenge in the history of the church. It has assumed the form of an understanding of God which has been the correlate of a strong drive in religious outlook and behavior, sometimes toward a fierce, rigorous consistency but more often toward unrestrained spontaneity – a drive which in turn has often been justified by appeal to the believer's direct inspiration by an equally spontaneous God – the Spirit.

It is as though the Spirit (God as overpowering, strenuous, sometimes liberating, often unpredictable spontaneity) had completely superseded the Father (God as unitary, unfathomable Origin and Destiny of all that is and is conceivable) and the Son or word (God as rational, structured Wisdom who is also our Redeemer from all evil). But that was not intended by the tradition at large. Our uses of these three nouns in Christian worship, life and thought have rightly been designed to supplement, limit, regulate and cohere with one another. A traditional balance in doctrines says *both* that specific divine acts and gifts in Christian life and the world are appropriated to specific 'Persons' in the Triune God, but also that the external works of the Trinity are undivided, because God is One, undivided though not undifferentiated.

We know that when we use the terms 'Father' and 'Son' of both God and creatures, we do so in radically different senses. To understand that the same sharp distinction must hold in the use of the term 'Spirit,' divine and human, is not so easy a lesson to learn, because 'Spirit' is much less specific than the other two nouns. It seems to be what God and human beings have in common. But Christians must learn that the same distinction holds in this instance also, it indeed we are talking of one and the same Triune God.

Thus, the shape of our 'spirit' as Christian – faith, hope and love; insight *into* and the turn *from* worldly wisdom, from self-enclosed, enslaving sloth and arrogance; growth in grace consequent upon that turn – is the fruit of the same indivisible God now converting and sustaining us as living, present Spirit, who as Father 'made heaven and earth', and who ordered and redeemed the world and humankind as God the Son.

The zeal of Christian life is not the fruit of a spirit separate from or superseding the full and completed redemptive work of Christ. Nor is Christian zeal the result of breaking down the distinction between the divine, Holy Spirit and human – even Christian – spirituality through some direct possession, invasion or merger of the One with the other. The Apostle Paul sharply stresses the abiding distinction between divine Wisdom and Spirit and human or worldly wisdom and spirit (1 Corinthians 2:4–16), and the sharp distinctiveness in the moral consequence of the gift to us of the Spirit of God which is identical with the mind of Christ. The fruit of the Spirit is not fanatical religious self-assertion but the reversal and transformation of all previous dispositions and outlooks into those of faith, hope and love (1 Corinthians 12:27–13:13). Furthermore, he exalts those gifts of the Spirit that convert what is ordinary and humane in all of us over those that are extraordinary and confined to some of us (1 Corinthians 14:1–19; Galatians 5:22ff.)

But we must also not forget the other side of the coin: the indivisibility of the 'external works of the Trinity' (and therefore the sharp distinction between divine Spirit and human spirit) notwithstanding, the Spirit is 'very and eternal God' as *Spirit*, not as Father or Son. Thus He has the special 'appropriation' of being God's living and sustaining Presence to His people as they make their way through the world in living testimony to God's grace and goodness. The association of the words 'god' and 'spirit' goes back not only to the New Testament but also the Old Testament, the intertestamental period and, more generally, the Hellenistic world. 'God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth' (John 4:24). And clear1y the Spirit is both spontaneous, presently living freedom Himself and moves us also in the same way; He is God as our Life and Liberty (John 3:8; 6:63; 1 Corinthians 2:4; 2 Corinthians 3:17). The simple but important point to be made, then, is that the Christian life – faith, hope and love; the transformation of the ordinary, mundane and humane; the turn from self-enclosedness toward God and neighbor – is not an inhibiting, externally or internally imposed self-discipline; instead, it is identical with, indeed it is the gift of liberty in and by God the Spirit.

Most of us know what this means in the Christian life of interpersonal relations. In all their many varieties, there is nonetheless a similarity about the ways Christian people are disposed toward others, Christians and non-Christians alike; there is a quiet and nonoppressive dedication to the good of other human beings for their own sake under God. But the more orthodox, Trinitarian Christian communions have not often faced up to the fact that liberty in the Spirit also has a communal shape, both within the church and also in the Christian community's work in the world. The Christian community is a community because (and to the extent that) it is bonded by the liberating Spirit.

The cutting edge of that assertion is that the Christian community (the church militant) has been put here on earth not for self-nurture or nourishment but to exercise the painful, glorious work of reconciliation across the terrifying barriers erected all across our communal existences in this world. To be the community bonded by the liberating Spirit is first of all to embody and exhibit the Spirit in its own joint life and not only in its ecclesiastical order; but secondly and fully as significantly, it is to be a community which lives in and works with the faith that God is the God of but also beyond all nations, creeds, races, classes and interest groups. It is to live in the hope that Christians are freed to be active in the often apparently (but not truly) hopeless task of reconciliation across these barriers. This is the office of the members of this community even though it may well go against their ingrained disposition because they – like all people – are themselves members of particular groups with particular interests. But to be lifted beyond such partiality to a far, far wider compassion for all (including one's enemies) and especially those who have never met with justice, is the liberating work of that Spirit who mysteriously, invisibly, hastens us all toward the glory of His salvation – despite the appearances on all sides.

To a natural or rather secular understanding, and even to some Christian minds, it seems at best odd, at worst utterly incongruous to put together a highly technical, theological formula such as Article Five with a plea for patient labor toward mutual human understanding. But in the logic of the Christian faith nothing is more naturally congruent and coherent than saying 'do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God' (Micah 6:8) and saying 'The Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one substance, majesty, and glory, with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.'

9
Theological Hermeneutics (YDS 13-205)

This is the first lecture from a course on theological hermeneutics given in either 1976 or 1978. CPH 1976l. After some practical matters, Frei continues:

(2) Theological hermeneutics is not a unified field. One has to impose some sort of arbitrary order on many different things under one name.
(3) What are some of the component parts?
  (a) Theological hermeneutics, not general hermeneutics
  (b) Biblical hermeneutics, because that's what for a long time theological hermeneutics amounted to. Why?
  (c) General Hermeneutics; one could also say 'philosophical' hermeneutics. Even Karl Barth agreed that no special biblical hermeneutics.
(4) *Hermeneutics*:
  (a) How does one read a text? Are there any rules or principles for doing so? That's hermeneutics in an old-fashioned setting, especially in 18th-century Protestantism.
  (b) In particular, the abiding or normative meaning or sense of a text was what one was looking for. Hirsch: objectively valid interpretation.
  (c) This involved at least one kind of distinction in re Bible (presumably other texts also): (I) Information about the text and its cultural context and background (II) Reading of the text itself, as something that makes sense in its own right (but that very idea is disputed!). The latter again breaks down into two different things: (I) Meaning of words and sentences: What does it literally say there? (II) Question of 'meaning' – What is there there beyond grammatical sense? What shall I say when I want to say what it says there in other words? What is the common meaning or (sometimes) 'subject matter' between the two statements? (Remember even the formulations, the ways of conceiving issues and distinctions receive challenges constantly!)
(5) 'Saying it in other words' already introduces a very modern topic which would have been puzzling to earlier people going a long way back. Saying the same thing in different words, equivalence-talk you might say, involves an *activity* of your own. In other words, *repeating*, even if you know the grammatical and syntactical rules, is not the same as *understanding* (Barth *grants* this – others *celebrate* it.) So there is a second topic in hermeneutics, in theory of interpretation, that usually (for a variety of reasons) is thought to have a polar relation to the first.

If the first topic is that asking about *meaning* of texts, what or where is the meaning of a text, the second one is, how do we *understand*, by what process. What is it to *understand*, given the facts (1) that mere verbal reiterations aren't the same as understanding and (2) that there is some parallel between the meaning and our understanding of it, i.e., that there is a certain mystery to the text.

We have what it means in, with, and through the words, but the words aren't all that's there. And whatever else is there is cognate to, and therefore accessible to understanding. So we ask, What is it to understand?

(6) Both topics – interpretation as theory of meaning and interpretation as theory of understanding have evoked considerable skepticism on the part of some people. It is as though the two words erected into mental or intellectual constructs having their own reality certain words and related ones – ('consciousness') that make sense in many different ways, but not in that way. Have to take account of that protest. However, protesters and their opponents do have in common one thing.

(7) You may not be able to draw up general rules for interpreting texts but you are confronted with *literature*, i.e., with distinctively human works, concepts, content or 'the uniquely human,' the unique spiritual aspect of a text. This in contrast 'a science that studies the life of signs within society … showing what constitutes signs, what laws govern them.'[1] Linguistic study has its ordering principles not so much in the history of a language as 'in the logic of relation and oppositions among the signs of any given language-system at a particular time.' Robert Scholes: ' … the essence of poetry [is] in its verbal formulations as they emerge in poetic syntax.'[2]

(8) Theological hermeneutics – Bible
   (a) Perspicuity of Bible vs. need for interpretive community, tradition, teaching authority;
   (b) Unity of the Bible
   (c) Inspiration of the Bible – in three ways: Reliable information, true teachings, verbal inspiration.

(9) My own agenda:
   (a) Relative unity of canon
   (b) Narrative sense
   (c) Unity ?through Testaments

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[1] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. C. Bally and A. Sechehaye; tr. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), p.16.

[2] *Elements of Poetry* (New York: OUP, 1969), pp.18, 32.

II

Historical Investigations

10
Religious Transformation in the later Eighteenth Century (YDS 10-168/9)

The Rockwell Lectures, Rice, February 1974

Frei delivered three lectures in Rice University in 1974, which were advertised as 'Lessing and the Religious Use of Irony', 'Kant and the Transcendence of Rationalism and Religion' and 'Herder and the New Humanism'. It seems that the typescript of the first of these was later re-used in the preparation of his George F. Thomas Memorial Lecture on Lessing in 1978, and can be found amongst the drafts for that lecture (YDS 10-168/9). There is also (in YDS 13-198) a typescript that seems almost certainly to be the second lecture. Of the third, nothing survives – although it seems likely that Frei ran out of time and never delivered or even prepared it (see notes 3 and 4 below, which indicate that Frei spoke on Lessing for two nights, and that he deleted references to Herder at some stage in preparation).

The typescripts and manuscripts associated with the first lecture are in a very confusing state, although they divide into three groups, probably chronologically:

(i) a typescript with emendations, and some manuscript sheets, which together are likely to be a version of what was delivered in 1974;

(ii) more extensive manuscript additions and rewrites, which seem to be in places inconclusive, and which probably result from Frei's attempts to rewrite the material for publication (see the letter to Wayne Meeks, May 7 1974, in YDS 3-65);

(iii) an unfinished new typescript version for the George F. Thomas Memorial Lecture in 1978, incorporating sections from the earlier typescript.

Below, I begin with the first of these, then give the Kant material from YDS 13-198 which I believe followed it, then give the extensive manuscript rewrites. CPH 1974c(i) and 1974c(ii).

Lecture One: Lessing and the Religious Use of Irony

Introduction

A constant recollection of our traditions is for all of us a healthy not to say a vital matter. We remember that in Aldous Huxley's *The Brave New World*, complete control of the present and future depends either on the obliteration or the distortion of the past. None of us are ever quite sure why we want to study history, and certainly we don't want simply to repeat our traditions. But even when we are not wholly certain what the uses of history-writing are, we tend to

have a dim appreciation of our own vital concern in what the historians are arguing about. Even if we cannot put our finger on it, we know pretty well that we have a stake in the arguments of revisionist and orthodox historians about the circumstances that led to the cold war or to the concluding of the Japanese Peace Treaty or to the neutralization of Austria and to the present slowly resolving log jam in International Policy. The situation is similar with regard to what we call, sometimes rather derisively, intellectual history. Even if we do not know why we want to confirm or reject it, we have a hunch that it is worth revising, that a return to preoccupation with certain stretches of it will always add a vital dimension to our lives.

The late Lucien Goldmann, a great Marxist intellectual historian, left a kind of testament in which he made an urgent plea very similar to that of the sociologists of knowledge that came out of the Frankfurt School, for a revival of humanistic religion.[1] What he wanted was not a return to Christianity, which he thought was totally demolished in the Eighteenth Century, although for more profoundly historical and sociological reasons that the demolition squad could be aware of, but a wedding of a non-God kind of humanism, a religion of immanence rather than transcendence, with the forces of technological development. If there were no such wedding between humanism and technology, he thought, technology would devour us. He was neither the first nor the last Marxist who saw in his own creed and his own partial history-writing a bulwark of humanism against materialism. I cite him only as one example of a good many people from left to right on the political spectrum, who return again and again to the period of the Enlightenment.

What I want to do in these three lectures is to explore one relatively narrow but highly significant portion of the Enlightenment, not in order to set forth once again the fruit of its speculations, that contrast between its creed– if that is what it may be called – and what had gone before, but rather to indicate both a transformation and a continuity in the personal stance of free men who lived during this period and made significant contributions to it. For part of what I find to be the use of the past is the discovery of passionately held options in outlooks towards life, death, the world and man, on the part of men who thought of themselves as inwardly free, no matter what their external condition.[2]

There are at least three things that the[3] men we're going to talk about held in common. They were part of the German Enlightenment, they were much more conservative than their British or French counterparts, and finally, perhaps for that reason, they were not only deeply interested in religious questions but tried to utilize as much as possible of their religious past while changing it drastically. The chief figures of the British and French Enlightenment were also very much interested in religious questions, but generally they tried whether successfully or not to break with past religious

convictions. By contrast Lessing and Kant[4] tried rather to transform those past perspectives and by means of the transformation to hold on to as much as possible from the past. Rather than seeking to find new religious convictions, they sought to reinterpret or reform the old ones. It was in large part due to these efforts, and many more like them, that the slippery question of interpretation in matters religious became so important. Cardinal Newman was to discover three generations after these men lived that in a time of rapid change it is very difficult to judge what constitutes a reasonable and natural development in a cultural and religious organism and what is instead a foreign and cancerous growth within it. Where does interpretation or reinterpretation become a means for grafting foreign ideas on to what has been inherited and where is it merely a permissible extension of a heritage into modern times and conditions?

All three of our figures were optimists in their cultural outlook, even though not necessarily in their personal hopes. They were about the task of reinterpretation, let the chips fall where they might. Good was in any case bound to be the result.

Lessing's Life and Work

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was born in 1729, the son of a learned and quite orthodox Lutheran pastor. In 1746 he matriculated at the University of Leipzig and in accordance with his father's wishes began the study of theology.

Even then Lessing, who was to become the greatest dramatist and most learned critic of his period in Germany, indicated quite clearly that he thought the technical study of theology dry as dust, that he would devote himself to the study of literature. His love of the theater dates at least from this period in his life. But even then he already had a passionate interest in religious and theological questions quite in contrast to the academic study of philosophy and theology, which was to accompany him all his life. This was, of course, not surprising. He lived in a cultural world in which there really was no other way, no matter what one's particular religious convictions, for giving expression to one's profoundest concerns and one's outlook on the world except in the inherited theological forms.

His parents, disquieted by his worldly interests, brought him home for a period of three months. After that he returned to Leipzig as a student of medicine and philology. Once again literature and the theatre got into his blood. After a brief stay toward the end of 1748 he went to Berlin, the Mecca of enlightened thought in the narrow ambience of German culture, and stayed there with brief interruptions until 1755. During this period he worked as a critic, composed what is generally regarded as the first German bourgeois tragedy, *Miss Sarah Sampson*,[5] and collaborated in publishing ventures with

the leading progressive literary editor in Berlin, Friedrich Nicolai, and in researches into the philosophy of aesthetic sensibility with the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. After some rather restless years, spent among other places in Breslau and then as drama critic in Hamburg, he settled down in 1770 as librarian to the Duke of Brunswick in the small town of Wolfenbüttel. He died in February 1781.

Lessing's career was an instance of a vocation sought by many a German writer in his day, a kind of search with which we are all too familiar in our own day. He wanted to be an independent writer. The usual ways of winning one's bread as a writer did not appeal to him. There were two and both were an assault on his integrity and his liberty. In Germany in particular there was the career of the University Professor, the scholar who finally makes it to full professorship and tenure, and then there was the position of a courtier, as the literate member or one of the literate members of one of the infinitely many heavily constricted and stifling, tiny little German courts with their provincial outlook and their tyrannical atmosphere. Wilhelm Dilthey remarks that the position at court without administrative responsibility, such as Goethe was to have, always proved devastating for the scholar and the poet.[6] But not only were there no other jobs for a man like Lessing, there was no other cultural context for a writer with his critical, theological, scholarly and dramaturgic interests. There was really no independent community to give him support. Lessing was a pioneer as an independent writer.

Writing for Moral Action

He wrote for moral action, and that is really the one theme I have. Most of what he wrote has the sharp edge of reform on it. His prose style is more modern that that of the philosophers and even some of the literary writers who come soon after him. It has a quality that is at once lucid and conversational. In theological controversy his similes are extraordinarily skilful and as commonplace as they are striking; his interior dialogue – a favorite medium – crisp, blunt, to the point. It is the language of a man at home in his linguistic world; no ambiguities for him! It would be too much to say that his writings were didactic, but unquestionably his arguments (and much of his prose writing is argumentation!) is designed to instruct, and the instruction is practical. He writes for action, and not primarily for vague and speculative theory, although unlike British and French 'Enlighteners' he preserves a strong interest in metaphysical speculation. When he writes about theory it is in the service of shaping a personal stance.

His dramas, especially the comedy *Minna von Barnhelm*,[7] serve the same purpose, and he had already said the same things to the public, in *Laokoon* and elsewhere.[8] Georg Lukács, Peter Demetz and others have taught me to see

Minna's striking rejection of theoretical or formal codes because they get in the way of concrete and practical human behavior.[9] The play, taken one way, is a bit of pedagogy setting forth a paradigm case of a man's rescue from stilted moral theory by his fiancée's lively, warm and very personal humanity. Lessing's characters take on the kind of everyday concreteness and realism which Diderot had proclaimed as one of the goals of writing for the theater. (Lessing translated some of Diderot's essays,[10] as part of his angry rejection of Gottsched, the Wolffian critic and ruling taste-setter in the universities. [11])

Aesthetic Theory and the Primacy of Action

Lessing's aesthetic theory supported the same primacy of action or life-stance over metaphysical inquiry. The German critic Johann Winckelmann,[12] in a study of Laocoon, the statue in the Vatican Museum which depicted the death through strangulation of the Trojan priest and his two sons, by two snakes, had pointed out the fact that despite the terrible pain, there is no violent distortion in the facial expression of Laocoon. His explanation for the fact is that the artist gave expression here to the perfection of Greek wisdom that suffering is to be borne with dignity, self-control and strength of soul. It is the artist's duty to render the perfection and not the natural expression of man's nature. Violent facial distortion is not a fit expression of the Greek ideal of the proper bearing under acute suffering. To this explanation Lessing says no. He does agree with Winckelmann's observation that Laocoon's face does not give vent to violent pain but he disagrees with Winckelmann why this is so. The Greeks were as violent and as exhibitionist about their suffering as anyone else. Lessing seeks a more universal cause:

> The Master worked toward the highest possible beauty under the assumed circumstances of bodily pain. It was impossible to combine the latter in all its distorting violence with the former. And so he had to tone it down; he had to soften the shriek into a sigh: not because shrieking betrays an ignoble soul but because it distorts the face in a repellent manner.[13]

If this is the classical ideal of the visual arts Lessing agrees with it. He is not happy with what he claims is the modern ambition to imitate the whole of visible nature, of which what is beautiful is only a very small part.[14]

Lessing eventually concludes that the limitations of literature and the visual arts are such as to make them fit for the depiction of two quite different aspects of things, and the scaling down of the statue's facial expression is an instance of the particular limitation inherent in the visual arts' *essential* or proper ideal of depicting beauty. Visual artists works with figures and colors in space; but the writer works with articulated sounds in time. The visual artist

can express only objects which exist side by side, the poet only those that follow upon one another. Bodies with their visual characteristics are the proper objects of painting. On the other hand, 'objects which follow upon one another are in general called action. Hence actions are the actual object of poetry.'[15] The painter can imitate actions but only indirectly through the depiction of bodies, and since the painter can only depict a single moment of an action he must choose the most pregnant one which makes what goes before and comes after most nearly intelligible. As imitative skill, painting can express ugliness; as a fine art it does not wish to.[16]

It is evident that Lessing, without wanting to do so, denigrates the visual arts, at least to some extent, and that he does so by elevating them to a lofty position on the pedestal of beauty. Violence is a matter of action and properly portrayed by the sequence in which it is involved. The elevating denigration of painting and the priority of literary art sunders the harmony or analogy between them which eighteenth-century commentators had asserted in the phrase *ut pictura poesis*.[17] That was one of Lessing's primary aims in the essay. For Lessing, literature is itself action as well as the portrayal of action. The truly poetic expression of human life is the portrayal of true human character in the great sweep of its most powerful passions and the ways they are acted out. And if literature is itself to be action and not only the depiction of action, its central core is drama, enacted narration. Drama and dramaturgy for the sake of the reform, nay the birth of German theater is Lessing's aim: and reform of the theater was part of the education and reform of German life. He had powerful ambitions.

Drama and the Primacy of Action

Lessing's drama was realistic because like Diderot he believed in presenting the real mix and confusion of human motivations and actions. But it was not realistic in the way that a Marxist would think of it, because even though he was very much aware of cultural and political conditions limiting and even entering into human relations, as he indicated not only in *Emilia Galotti*, but in *Ernst und Falk*, his dialogues about Freemasonry, he did not finally present social structure and the historical forces that lie behind them as the motivating power that drives human beings to do and suffer the things they are engaged in. Class structure was not what typified character.[18] Character was finally a basic, as it were irreducible manifestation of humanity, no matter to how large an extent one's religion, country, climate, etc. influenced it, and dramatic portrayal was one of the ways in which one both showed forth and helped to redirect the pivot of the inevitably active outlet of human beings; Lessing was a reformer. His ideal was so to depict and redirect human passions, actions and relations as to call upon the greatest possible degree of direct, unhampered human relations reducing social barriers between people as much as possible.[19]

The task of the reformer, especially the enlightened critical reformer (intellectual and indeed scholarly but in no sense academic or specialized and alienated in the way the academic specialist of reforming tendencies is apt to be in our day) was to enlighten and thus to liberate. It was to reshape not only the active directions that the passions were to take but the theory that was to guide that reshaping.

To state a theory was in his view not to program an action but to articulate it. And in his day that was bound to involve a new discovery of the right theoretical religious context for the appropriate religious moral shaping of action and passion. Not that he was not interested in philosophical and religious speculation. He was, but it was an interest which was designed for and therefore subordinate to practice. Because he was in the richest and fullest sense a pedagogue of human character in society his theorizing took on a plastic rather than a rigid mold. In his day it was simply inescapable that the articulation of the theoretical context for reform would be in religious terms.

He needed plasticity in religious theory to fit the new shaping of humane passion and character. Therefore the rigidities and dogmas of any and every creed, because it was conceived apart from social and personal life, would be insufficient for life. Just as Lessing could not be content with inherited Lutheran orthodoxies whether of a more dogmatic or more pietistic kind, so he would feel restless with the similarly dogmatic rationalist creed of his friends and companions, specially those in Berlin.

If a person of rational and lucid turn of mind finds difficulty in explaining his views to the contrasting dogmatic positions of his day, he may well resort to irony as a means of self-expression. Irony was his instrument against every vapid and dogmatic enthusiasm, against hypocrisy and lofty elevated claims in the face of the actual ignorance of man concerning his ultimate surroundings. It was also a way of covering his tracks from the pursuit of the ever present censor who was on the lookout for disturbing religious opinions in that narrow atmosphere. In the last analysis it may well have been most of all the means to hold in balance contrary or contradictory convictions for which he could not find a full and final resolution, and a conscious or unconscious reservation about the ability to state linguistically what one really believes and, even if one can, a restless dissatisfaction about stating one's beliefs in any final way in the language of abstract concepts or theory.

In the words of one of his most famous sayings:

> If God held all truth in his right hand and in his left the everlasting striving after truth, with the risk that I should always and everlastingly be mistaken, and said to me 'Choose!' in humility I would pick the left hand and say, 'Father grant me that: Absolute truth is for thee alone.'[20]

Irony was his way of applying this utterly seriously meant cautionary note not only to others but to himself. I do not say that this is the secret but deliberate intention motivating his use of irony. I simply say that whatever his motivations irony worked to this effect for him.

Lessing and Christian Orthodoxy

We see him most typically at work in the opening salvo of what was undoubtedly a deliberately planned campaign against Christian Orthodoxy which he began after he became librarian at Wolfenbüttel. He published over a period of years a series of fragments from the posthumous writing of a Deist scholar Hermann Samuel Reimarus, a huge, vigorously anti-Christian tract entitled *Apology for the Rational Worshippers of God*.[21] Its polemical cutting edge would not have been new in England or France by that time; but in Germany, despite considerable knowledge of English and French Deistic literature, it still aroused extraordinary excitement.

Reimarus' argument is very simply that the notion of a special or privileged revelation from God in the history of the Jewish people, Jesus and the earliest Christian church is self-contradictory and irrational as a theoretical argument. Beyond that, since that belief rests on an historical claim, the strength of that claim must be tested by historical evidence. The question then is: How reliable are the facts reported in the Bible? In this respect Reimarus was a good anti-Protestant Protestant, for he took it that the strength of Christian claims is as solid and certainly no stronger than the claim of the Bible to factual reliability. The sum of the Christian matter for him was the symbiosis of historical facts and the infallible authority of the Bible.

The whole project comes to a climax of course in its argument about the crucial miracle, the one that was the center of all religious agitation in the Eighteenth Century, the Resurrection of Jesus. And in the last of the fragments which Lessing was able to publish Reimarus claims that the whole thing is a hoax and a spiritual power grab on the part of the disciples who by twisting the doctrine of the Messiah into something it had never been intended to be in Jewish belief turned Jesus into the Son of God. They did this by claiming falsely that he had risen and made themselves the executors of His Testament and the authoritative representatives of His Divine Power. The outcry against this philippic on the part of the theological establishment was of course immense.

Why did Lessing get himself into this fierce argument? Why did he not stick, as his chief antagonist, chief pastor Johann Melchior Goeze (1717–1786) in Hamburg sarcastically urged him, to library and theater?[22] Especially since he shared Reimarus' views only to the extent of Reimarus' attack on miracle and the authority and inerrancy of the Bible. He knew perfectly well what he

was getting into. But given the fact that he was intensely serious about the moral education of human beings toward an ideal for which mutual respect for each other's humanity was the only fixed guide, he was bound to come in conflict with those for whom an authoritative religious creed put all those who did not agree in the wrong and made them that much less human.

Protestant Religion

Revelation in History

The creed that Lessing attacks had as its focus a particular style of outlook on life, death and destiny in which the absolute authority of the Bible went hand in hand with its absolute accuracy as a factual report of past events, particularly those which were regarded as the crucial happenings in history through which God revealed himself. Much of this reportage formed into one long historical sequence from creation to the end of the world, but even though the Old Testament, especially the reliability of the reports about creation and the flight of the children of Israel from Egypt was regarded as highly significant, the heart and center of the issue of the reliability of the Bible was the Resurrection of Jesus reported in the Gospel stories of the New Testament.

With the affirmation of a unique Divine self-revelation in history, both more sharply affirmed and more vigorously doubted as a specific factual datum by eighteenth-century thinkers than by those who had gone before, went two other beliefs that seemed vital to religious outlooks, or at least to religious theory.

Natural Theology

The first of these was a natural theology, so called because the right use of human reason could arrive at it without the aid of the Bible or special revelation. It was an affirmation of an intelligent and at the same time good God who governed the world and men's affairs by disposing of them at once providentially through the orderly concatenation of natural causes and through the free will of men. Natural theologians affirmed, against what they regarded as the sinister fatalism of Spinoza, that the universe was not governed by an inevitable sequence of efficient causes which turned both men and nature alike into nothing but machines in motion. Rather, the Almighty has in the infinite outreach of his omnipotence and goodness created the best of all possible worlds. He is enhancing it steadily by shaping all things individually and together towards the ultimate purpose of implementing the greatest possible happiness among sentient creatures, especially mankind. And in the case of man, this governance is exercised through man's own free will, Divine purpose working itself out through human intelligence and purposeful activity. One

way this natural theology was theory, another way it was a pervasive mood, especially among middle range or school intellectuals.

Protestant Sensibility

Much more profound as a religious perspective was a third aspect of the tradition which went more with the formal creed of biblical authority. Protestant religion was a deeply ingrained sensibility in Germany, more profound than the theological articulation in which it worked itself out. The very reverence for the Bible of which we have talked was due to the conviction that it was a guide, indispensable and vital, to shape one's life by. It not only proclaimed but effected in the human heart the religion it proclaimed. By reading it properly with a repentant and humble heart, one found how attached one had become to life in this world and worn down by it's cares, how craven, distorted and selfish the affections in which one held one's nearest and dearest, how focused on ones self all one's thoughts and endeavors, even those that were seemingly most unselfish. By reading the Bible, furthermore, one found out – especially in the letters of Paul the Apostle – that the endeavor to transcend oneself, to gain freedom from these vices, only succeeded in miring one more deeply in them. Salvation lay not so much in the release of one's affections to full joy in eternal life and in other human beings, but in the prior realization that the heart was moved to sheer gratitude because it was touched from without, by God himself. Without our effort, without our work, without our changing, we were forgiven our sins and as a result our affections might be changed and flow freely. It was Jesus on the Cross who was substituted for man's sins; and in that event God justified sinful mankind in his own sight. Man's status was changed, before his affection was remolded, and only so could it be remolded.

There were those for whom this Gospel was an ardent religion of the heart. But there were others who were profoundly ill at ease with such direct appeal to the heart which led to the most intimate religious and emotional sharing among people. They were uneasy with the urgency with which those who had been saved worked over those who had apparently not. For these more restrained folk, the affection of the heart had to be guided and restrained by the affirmation of belief if it was not to be near-fanaticism. But whether it was the heart or the head that made the affirmations, they were in actual belief or articulation very much the same.

The Christian religion in its classical Protestant form was among other things a profound search for the integration of personality; and it is easy to see why a free spirit like Lessing who rejected the historical fact claims of the religion felt much more ambivalent about the guidance for human sensibility that went along with these fact and belief claims.

Lessing's Stance

Given these three aspects to the tradition he wanted to reform, given his commitment to reshaping moral passions and actions, given his ironic ambiguity, how did he go about the fight he had so deliberately started?[23] Friend and foe were forever startled by his disconcerting skill at covering his own tracks. What did he really believe? When he praised religious orthodoxy about which he was much more ambiguous than about the fact claims of its creed, was it merely a sop, a deliberately misleading compliment? Did he take views of religious truths, long and passionately held by traditionalists, declare publicly that he wanted to uphold them, and did he then go on to interpret them in such a way that their integrity disappeared?

Esoteric and Exoteric

Or perhaps less reprehensible but still painful, did he believe, as scholars have generally held he did, that there is an exoteric and an esoteric truth about any and all religion? If that was the case one could on the one hand claim that he was after all sincere about everything he said and on the other hand that the things he declared about religion he like any man of intelligence would expect his fellow intellectuals to take in some non-literal fashion. For public purposes and for the masses one said one thing, for private purposes and in reality one held another view. And yet one's integrity was not violated because the public symbol is the conveyor of the private truth to those who cannot yet see it in its essence and unadorned.

Such suggestions not only turned Lessing and his views of religion into an unwarranted romantic or idealistic philosophy which was to come a generation later. Further, they at once assert and question his sincerity, and in fact the more they asserted the more questionable it really becomes. But in matters of this sort motivation and integrity are hardly precise and locatable quantities. It is quite conceivable that Lessing could not state unambiguously what he believed at the level of theoretical explanation, especially with regard to the relationship between Christianity and a universal religious truth greater than Christianity. In that case his irony was not a polemical instrument simply nor one to help him cover his own tracks but the appropriate means of stating a reservation[24] that was built into any theoretical statement about religion, any dogma as an assertion of belief, any philosophical proposition as a statement.

Letter and Spirit

The Bible does not make religious convictions true, rather genuine religious convictions show us what is meaningful within the Bible and how to sift out what is merely archaic and historical within scripture from what is religious. In short the letter is not the spirit and the Bible is not religion. Consequently

objections to the letter and to the Bible are not also objections to the spirit and to religion. For the Bible obviously contains more than is essential to religion, and it is a mere hypothesis to assert that it must be equally infallible in this excess of matter.

In order to oppose Goeze's position by an historical argument of his own, Lessing takes a further step. He sets up a counter hypothesis to that of the Bible's historical infallibility. He argues that the Christian religion was there before the Bible existed, and in effect it involved not only a personal life stance towards God and neighbors but a certain belief or rule of faith concerning what must be asserted about God, man and salvation. These things and more, that historical 'excess of matter' of which he has just spoken, came after some time to be embodied in the New Testament.

> If there was a period in which it (i.e., Christianity) had already spread far and in which it had gained many souls, and when, nevertheless, not a letter of that which has come down to us had yet been written down, then it must also be possible that everything which the evangelists and apostles wrote could have been lost, and yet that the religion which they taught would have continued.[25]

This is an argument which Catholics had always asserted against Protestant affirmations of biblical authority, but it can also be used for another purpose than that of affirming the supremacy of the church's teaching tradition. And Lessing does indeed use it for that other purpose. To show that the Bible is not infallible does not demonstrate that the apostolic tradition that precedes and succeeds the Bible is. It may simply show that there is a peculiarly religious meaningfulness, in contrast to a literal and historically final truth, to what first the tradition and then the Bible had taught.

> The religion is not true because the evangelists and apostles taught it; but they taught it because it is true. The written tradition must be interpreted by its inward truth and no written traditions can give the religion any inward truth if it has none.[26]

The Reinterpretation of Dogma

But if Lessing in this way defends a matrix of truth within historical Christianity which is far from coinciding with its actual literal and historical confines, this does not mean that he takes the dogmas detached from historical authority and finality and then accepts them at face value. He does not really tell us here just what the essence of Christianity is which he accepts as religiously meaningful or true. A few years later at the end of his life, in 1780, he was indeed to make an attempt to reinterpret the dogmas, for example that

of the Trinity and that of The Only Begotten Son.[27] But his reinterpretation was an almost casual speculative, 'what if we can see it this way' affair.

A few years earlier, in a short dialogue written in 1777, he makes the distinction, so common to rationalists, between the dogmas and the moral teaching of Christianity, obviously affirming the latter while suspending judgment at best about the former. 'For the dogmas of the Christian religion are one thing, practical Christianity which it affirms to be founded upon these dogmas is another.'[28] He goes on to ask if only that love is true Christian love which is founded upon the Christian dogmas, And the implied answer is obvious: No it is not.

And yet he never asserts that this is indeed the essence of Christianity. He was not simplistic. At other times he could join 'the dogmas' and 'practical Christianity,' opposing them both to revelation in history, etc. He knew that all moral sanctions in a religious context must have some reference to religious beliefs; he also knew that religious morals were dependent on wellsprings of motivation and affection greater than those of disinterested altruistic uprightness, although this in no sense deprecated the latter in favor of the former. He simply did not tell us what he thought the essence of Christianity was, at least not in the sense in which essence meant continuing religious meaningfulness or truth.

All we know is that in contrast to Reimarus, Lessing denied that it is the essence of Christianity to identify salvation with the acceptance of historical revelation, that is to say the revelation circumscribed by the history reported in the Bible. That is the teaching of certain dogmatic, ill-instructed Christian handbooks but not the teaching of Christ, not even, he says, the general teaching of the church.

For or Against Positive Religion?

Of the three aspects of Protestant Christianity (i.e., unique Divine self-revelation in history, natural theology, and the deeply ingrained Protestant religious sensibility) Lessing was firmly, and with bitter polemical antagonism, opposed to the first; mildly but rather prolifically opposed to the second; and ambiguous with regard to the third. And yet in the long run it is his attitude towards the third that became the most important. For if he was a reformer for whom reinterpretation in religious outlook was of ultimate importance, it was the sensibility represented by the third outlook that he wanted to reinterpret and therefore at once to leave behind and yet to appropriate in his search for something new and better in basic perspective on life, death, destiny, man and society.

Taken one way his fight against miraculous revelation through historical events was performed in the service of detaching the religion behind the supposed miraculous fact claims from those very claims, in order to let the

religion stand on its own feet. But taken another way it was evident that he also felt that in fighting the miracle-in-history belief grounded in the authority of the biblical accounts, he was also fighting the religion of the heart or dogmas of belief for which these supposed biblical facts were said to be the evidence. But in this latter respect precisely one has to return to his ironic stance and procedure. For the ambiguity of his stand on Lutheran piety and dogma was not only a matter of strategy, the ambiguity was clearly part of his outlook. Certain it was that he could not literally take it for his own religion. But whether it was to be cast out together with the historical miracles or be transformed was a matter he never made clear. And undoubtedly it was not much clearer to himself than to others; for his posthumously published last little tract on religion, *The Education of the Human Race*, hovers between telling us that the traditional or positive religions (specifically Christianity, the child of Judaism) are simply to be transcended into a new and final universal religion, and telling us that the continue to play a role even in the realization of any more ultimate religion than themselves. The process and aim of historical time casts an uncertain light on the question whether the positive religions are anachronisms or indispensable for the realization of a religion greater than themselves.

It is much the same in the parable of the rings.[29] There we have three religions (rather than two, as in *Education*) and, unlike in *Education*, they are not ranged in chronological sequence so that one takes up where the other leaves off. But in the parable also it is unclear whether or not each positive religion is capable in its own right of containing and manifesting the universal faith which is the goal of the whole religious quest of mankind.

This ambiguity about positive religion, so unlike the thought of the more radical French and British rationalists about religion, almost forces those acquainted with what happened after him in German culture to turn their heads towards Hegel, in whose thought also every historical stage in human culture and thought was to be overcome or transcended, but for who this transcendence also meant as it did for Lessing an abiding maintenance of that stage in all that came after it (*Aufhebung*). So then Lessing's detachment of the meaning of the Christian religion from its basis in historical claims founded on the authority was no mere maneuver to save himself from the censorship or from the scriptures of conservative state authorities. Nor was his ambivalence about the abiding meaning of that religion within the ambience of true universal religion an evasion of an honest choice.

The Place of Explanatory Theory

Reimarus's writings had contained a bitter attack on the claims of Christianity to a final and insuperable proof, based on an ultimate revelation contained in specific historical events authoritatively guaranteed by the accuracy and

inspiredness of the Bible. In contrast to Reimarus's own position, Lessing asserts that none of the arguments Reimarus set forth need affect the simple Christian adversely. For religion is not a matter of the validity of propositions explaining the universe and demonstrating the truth of their explanations. Religion is a matter of inward conviction and healing power in life.

But how do this man's hypotheses, explanations, and proofs affect the Christian? For him it is simply a fact – the Christianity which he feels to be true and in which he feels blessed. When the paralytic feels the beneficial shocks of the electric spark, does it worry him whether Nollet or Franklin or neither of them is right? Who cares about the right explanatory theory, i.e., about knowledge and faith in religion, provided the religion does the right things to human passions, affections and activities?

But Lessing was not consistent or at ease in saying that. For one thing he cared very much if a wrong explanatory theory came along. The doctrine of revelation through facts in history and the authority and inerrancy of the Bible was one such theory. It was not only factually wrong and philosophically absurd but religiously counter-productive. It led to a religious authoritarianism and religious slavery rather than to a reform of the human heart in accordance with inner freedom. It was a nefarious theory because it encouraged the passivity of the heart and thus toadied to the highest and yet most dangerous aspects of Protestant Piety: Reliance on a source outside ourselves to make us inwardly whole in the absence of a capacity on our own to do so. Factual revelation and scriptural authority were the very best, potentially most effective means of corrupting, caricaturing Protestant piety of all pieties. Inward surrender to God, reliance on him– which meant a great deal to Lessing – must not become the surrender of one's newly awakened inward freedom.[30]

But this, secondly, meant that he was not at all sure that he could affirm the inward piety of Protestantism, though it is far better than its protective, outer theory. Lessing finally did not pronounce on the place of positive religions in the quest toward universal religious truth. When Nathan is summoned before the Sultan to tell him which of the three religions, Muslim, Christian, or Jewish, is the true one, each excluding belief in the others, he silently ponders his own perspective. 'To be a hard-shell Jew won't do at all. But not to be a Jew at all will do still less.' Lessing never quite shed that dilemma, even though he was looking forward to the day when others could. But even further, he never resolved the question if the best of the traditional piety is worthy of preservation, because he believed in its gentle inwardness, its mending of the divided heart by surrender to God instead of to self, but disbelieved in what he saw as the inevitable other side of this piety: its terrible provincialism, its craven self-subordination to political and religious authority, its stifling of both inner and outer freedom.

Finally, Lessing cared about some kind of explanatory theory to account for religious phenomena because, unlike Ludwig Feuerbach two generations later, he did not believe that reasons in religion were simply the same thing as motives for behaving religiously. He did not wish to sever head and heart completely. Therefore he needed some sort of theory of God and the world, but the point is – only a tentative, provisional sort of theory. Whereas he insisted on a relation between religion and theology, he was tentative, ambiguous about the kind of theology one might want, the kind of doctrine of God, of history, of immortality.

He had a priority scheme: Doctrine or speculation, explanatory belief-theory was secondary, instrumental to right practice and to the kind of theory which was pedagogy because it reshaped disposition and practice. He needed above all a theory which would aid practice, a proper statement to reshape practice and he needed to inculcate what he stated: He must be a pedagogue for whom the theory was at the same time the training in its own practice! And speculation could provide none of this!

The Development of Religion

In the controversy with Goeze, Lessing also expressed two other views in partial disagreement with Reimarus, which later became commonplaces. But they were new in his day.

(1) If the essence of the aspect of religiousness in Christianity is indeed far broader than the historical religion that goes by that name, and if the latter appears first at a certain time and place in history, then man's religion as such is not the same 'natural religion' in all times and places. Rather, religion has a long, gradually developing history of its own. The universal religion in other words grows gradually out of the more primitive individual religions, as mankind itself grows. For God can only reveal as much of himself as man's state at a given historical point allows him to apprehend.

(2) Secondly, if the Christian scriptures are the product in writing of this historical process when it has reached a certain point, and if furthermore they were a natural product of certain fallible men whose religion was there before they wrote the book, then the book ought to be read with the same eyes and by the same canons of meaning and criticism as we read any other book. This allows him to deny Reimarus's argument that the story of the Resurrection is not only untrue but actually a deliberate falsification. But the grounds on which he does so are not by any means the infallibility of the Bible, but rather its fallibility. Granted the discrepancies between the various strands of Resurrection narrative, Lessing observes that the writers and the witnesses to the Resurrection are not the same, and that even contradictions among the witnesses would not necessarily be testimony to the untruth of the event itself. The conclusion leads him into a more general investigation of the historical

and literary sources from which the Gospels as we have them now in their final form had originated: He was one of the originators and first practitioners of New Testament source criticism. He contrasted John with the Synoptics, and traced the latter back to a common Aramaic source containing immediate reminiscences of the Apostles, preserved by the original Jewish-Christian community.

Christianity in general and the Bible in particular were thus reinterpreted, and the reinterpretation meant that the meaningfulness of the religion and the origin of the book both had to be naturally rather than miraculously explained.

(1) In the case of the religion, that natural meaning was actually a gradually developing natural process, which was as such identical with the Divine Revelation. Revelation thus came in his view to be identical with the gradual developing pedagogy of the human race through history toward the goal of virtue done for its own sake.

(2) In the case of the book (the Bible) the natural process simply precludes appeal to revelation, inspiration or miracle. The Bible is neither more nor less inspired than other serious texts; its inspiration is confined to its religious and not its historical content. The inspiration is identical with the spiritual outreach of the author.

On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power

Thus far then the reinterpretation, ambiguous as it is, of the religion of dogma or of the heart – the devout and traditional Protestantism of the period. We keep aside for the moment the other two aspects of his struggle with religion, the historical fact claim, with which he has already dealt, and the speculative theory of a natural theology. Both by the ardor of his attack on Protestant traditionalism, and his constant recurrence to the question of its reinterpretation he testifies to the importance of the topic. And so indeed theologians and other commentators have treated what he had to say on the subject. They have given it a kind of intrinsic, not to say technical valuation.

As for his attack on miracles and the factual infallibility and authority of the Bible, in all of which he agrees with Reimarus, his method is devastating– and always ironical. He always argues hypothetically and on his opponents' grounds, never quite disclosing what he himself holds. Lessing's best known theological work is a little missive entitled *On the Proof of The Spirit and of Power,* written in response to a cleric who had argued against Reimarus, has been taken as something of a classical statement of the problem of trying to relate historical reports and arguments drawn from them to claims of religious beliefs and existential faith.[31] And so it is. But much of it states only issues, not necessarily the way Lessing himself thinks about them all. He says in effect that not only are past reports of miracle very doubtful to those of us who have never seen any with our own eyes, but it is a category error to base

metaphysical religious doctrine, one's salvation or belief in the intrinsic truth of the religious teachings of Christ, on historical events even if they are factually true.

So what if Christ was resurrected in fact – a possibility he had conceded earlier. Even then, 'Accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason' – a saying that has become famous. Just because a man has been raised from the dead does not mean that the divine nature is divided into Father and Son, and that my salvation depends on believing this.

This has been taken by theologians as a summary of the ongoing problem that one meets with if he tries to relate the destiny and teaching of the Jesus of history as reported in the Bible to the Christ of faith confessed by Christian Orthodoxy and moderate liberalism. (For necessary truths of reason, read 'faith decision some generations later' – in that form it became the pioneering statement of the 'faith – history' problem.) But most observers are agreed that Lessing's statement of the problem is confusing and difficult at best. And secondly, it is not as important as it appears at first glance in regard to what Lessing himself believed. In that respect, what is most interesting about it is precisely its illustration of Lessing's tactical procedure. He points out difficulties in his opponents' positions, and is quite reserved about his own belief. Thus the sentence that we have quoted in no way implies that Lessing himself equated doctrines and religious truths with 'necessary truths of reason'. No doubt there were issues of the relation between faith and history, between Christology and historical criticism to be resolved, but their juxtaposition in this fashion (accidental truths of history versus necessary truths of reason) is more a consequence of his opponents' adoption of Leibnizian school categories than of his own thoughts.

It was Leibniz who had first drawn a sharp distinction between truths or facts which we know only from experience and which are related to each other always accidentally, so that another or even the contrary factual result may be thought without contradiction, and truths of reason which are based on the principle of identity and non-contradiction so that here the contrary of an inference from the first position cannot be thought without self-contradiction. There is little evidence to indicate one way or the other what Lessing himself thought of this particular distinction as appropriate or inappropriate to the way one should state the relationship between man's historical experience and his religious convictions. It was his opponents who thought in these categories, as he rightly divined, who had to face the issue he had put before them – not he himself.[32]

Lessing and Neology

The man before whom he put this uncomfortable dilemma of combining apples and oranges into one was not, like Pastor Goeze, a rigidly orthodox theologian

but a liberal, a man who belonged to the middle of the road faction: a Neologian. Lessing was most antagonistic toward them. Perhaps they threatened him because they undertook the very job he himself tried to accomplish, but did it in a way which he thinks lacks integrity. The liberal Christian theology of his day asserted the factuality of an historical revelation, and affirmed that it is the basis on which Christian belief must rest. But it denied the literal inspiration of the Bible, it denied for the most part but not consistently that Revelation was demonstrated through physical miracles, and it asserted that the chief dogmas of tradition Christianity, derived from Revelation, may also be shown to be supportable by reason. These Neologians affirmed revelation but denied the factual inerrancy and thus the absolute authority of the Bible, and asserted that far from being accepted historically, it should be rationally interpreted.

The result of this type of interpretation, Lessing thought, had neither the integrity of the old religion nor the integrity of sound philosophizing. In the name of the reinterpretation of Revelation, the Neologians had emptied Revelation of all distinctive content, proclaiming a fact that communicated no truth of any religious sort whatever. We recall that for Lessing the strength of orthodoxy was that it did communicate a significant complex of beliefs and sensibility by means of the factual historical claims involved in the authority and factual inerrancy of the Bible. But to insist on the authority of the Bible and on a revelation, and then sever from those the very content that had supplied their religious justification was to do something far worse than orthodoxy. Neology meant the evacuation of doctrine in the name of supposed interpretation.

Lessing himself was walking an exceedingly delicate line between interpretation and evacuation of the contents of the religious tradition. Why should he claim to have succeeded where the Neologians failed? True enough, he had cut the Gordian knot between historical revelation and the meaningfulness of the Protestant tradition on which they were hung. But this does not man that once one gets past that issue into the inquiry of the meaning of the doctrines of the tradition his options were better than that of the Neologian. He might be fully as guilty of reinterpretation to the point of evacuation of the meaning of doctrine as he had said the Neologians were. There is little use in trying to set up criteria for what is right or permissible reinterpretation of an original concept and what goes beyond the recognizable limits. The task has always been notoriously difficult.

The evacuative procedure of the Neologians was usually the simple appeal that a particular tenet, concept or claim, for example that there is an everlasting hell, did not belong to the essence of traditional faith. That is why Lessing thought that finally they had very little left except a purely natural religion and one historical fact which they called Revelation but which revealed nothing

new but reiterated in a particular historical form the very religious ideas that were contained in natural religion. Instead, if we take the matter of eternal punishment, he believed that eternity, both heaven and hell, are states in which the progress of growth and purification begun on this earth is continued, and that neither of them is therefore an absolute, a static condition which totally and forever excluded its opposite. Very good, one may say, but the reinterpretation itself is simply an extension of a reasonable assumption or perspective upon the world in which God and history conspire to extend temporal educational processed for mankind past death and into an open future that embraces time and what we ordinarily pleased to call eternity. There is no warrant for this from either the complex of orthodox dogmas or the rule of faith which Lessing ordinarily thinks of as normatively constituting the Christian tradition. Why should he not be accused just as much as the Neologians of going beyond the limits of interpretation into evacuation or innovation?

To try to shed light on that matter we return to our earlier suggestion that his basic stance was that of a reformer who wrote for action rather than for purposes of speculation or meditation. No doubt he believed that there really were genuinely religious issues, issues of what people ought to believe in order to search genuinely after ultimate truth.

Dramatic Pedagogy

The Primacy of Pedagogy

Fundamentally Lessing wanted to shape the direction of human passions into action and the personal and social interactions of human beings towards humaneness, freedom and the greatest possible mutual tolerance. The three plays of his mature years indicate such concerns, especially the climactic *Nathan the Wise*, and as we suggested earlier, so does the aesthetic-literary theory which he formulated in *Laokoon* in 1766. And if anything this vision of a new human landscape moved Lessing with increasing consistency in the last decade of his life. In its service his reflection, philosophical, theological, aesthetic, literary, all played their role. But they were all subservient to the use of language as instrument in the modification of human behavior and disposition, both in personal and social intercourse. In this sense all the theory was an aspect of practice. Theory was primarily pedagogy.

Because disposition and behavior were described in theological language in his day, he was bound to do so too. Revelation and justification by faith were realities in the sensibility of German people in the Eighteenth Century, terms which described at once realities of the human disposition and realities of what was believed to be the real world. Lessing's task was to take the religious content he discerned in these terms and transpose it into a new

behavior pattern, a pattern in which activity rather than passivity would be the characteristic of true humanity. The sensibility corresponding to the notion of justification by faith alone in effect gave way in his mind to an inner surrender to the unknown, ultimately benevolent force of destiny. The obverse side of this is the love one has for one's neighbor. The notion of historical revelation gave way to the idea that this force of destiny is active in and through mankind's ongoing endeavor to become more and more fully human, more and more fully virtuous.

> Reason wants to be exercised on spiritual objects, if it is to attain its complete enlightenment and to bring about that purity of heart which enables us to love virtue for its own sake.[33]

This is the aim of the education of the human race. This is the ultimate context into which religious terminology must become transposed. It is the context which supplies the meaning of theological language and provides the bridge from its earlier usage to its new and future usage. This final aim of an context for human activity is the ground on which one may claim that even though a traditional conception gives way to a new one in religion, the new is a reinterpretation of the old, and not like that of rationalists or Neologians an evacuation of the old. For, in fact, whether those who were using the language of traditional Christian religion knew it or not, that language, because it was at all times immersed in the ongoing education of mankind, tended towards this reshaping throughout the ages during which it was used. Life is pedagogy, history is pedagogy – and therefore all theory must be a servant to pedagogy and pedagogy in turn must evoke on a small scale what life and history do macrocosmically.[34]

From Theory to Drama

Lessing's pedagogical theory itself merged into the evocation of practice. Like all ambitious and subtle theories that are not merely expository of a state of affairs, its aim was to induce or evoke the change and the aim that it described. Quite self-consciously Lessing, at the climax of his bitter quarrel with Goeze when he had been forbidden by ducal decree to pursue his polemics in writing any further, climaxed the statement of his cause in the dramatic form of a verse play, *Nathan the Wise*, which set forth the liberated stance that was his goal. The tone and the form were just as important as the vision it was to evoke, indeed that vision was nothing without its invocation through blank verse and character portrayal, at once solemn and affecting, yet suited to the matter-of-fact, a prose poem celebrating the universal human family.

When he had written to his friends in Berlin that he was at work on it as a prolongation of his quarrel with Goeze, his brother Karl replied for all of them

with a worried note. They feared a continued use of the weapon of irony, indeed its conversion to downright sarcasm. Lessing had quite the opposite in mind. 'It will be anything but a satirical work designed to leave the battleground with derisive laughter,' he wrote back. He said that on the contrary 'It will be as affecting a work as I have ever written.'[35] There was no room now for sardonic humor or sarcasm, nor for the irony, the indirectness with which Lessing had fought his way through battles with theological orthodoxy and liberalism, the irony that allows him his ambiguity about Christianity and its reinterpretation. He did not have to resort to those apt but at the same time exasperating and not always precise parables and metaphors he had inflicted on his infuriated opponents. He no longer fought his opponents on their own grounds while hiding his own true opinions. In the play he could leave irony behind as a means of communication, because drama is action– not merely depiction – and in action there is no ambiguity, not even the ambiguity he so frequently found both appropriate and inescapable in theoretical and speculative statement.

Lessing is the only theologian or anti-theologian who feels impelled to state his position in fiction. He cannot do otherwise. All his theoretical statements are in per force defective, inherently defective. Thus all his speculations, his natural theology, if that is not too misleading a way to describe

have the dart-like and momentary character, the ambiguity which is so reminiscent of his ironic twists.

The ambiguous, tentative and provisional character of his speculative thoughts is perhaps most evident when he employs speculation in the service of his pedagogical theory of history charting the course of the education of the mind of the whole human race. For example, he says that just as the New Testament supplanted the authority of the Old, so now the authority of reason must supplant that of the New. And that requires among other things a rational reinterpretation of some of the speculative dogmas derived from the New Testament or the ancient Christian rule of faith. Lessing at once casts a backward glance at those doctrines and a forward glance at the shape they are about to assume in the future, always of course in the service of the education of the human race.

> The development of revealed truths into truths of reason is absolutely necessary, if the human race is to be assisted by them. When they were revealed they were certainly not truths of reason, but they were revealed in order to become such.[36]

In this vein he defends the appropriateness of theological or philosophical speculation as one means for bringing the human heart through the exercise of reason to its highest aim, a love of virtue for its own sake. Speculation thus has no intrinsic but instrumental value. It exists for the reform of passion, action and human relation. In the service of such education Lessing is willing to make ambiguous and tentative stabs of speculative reinterpretation.[37] In each of the four brief instances he takes, the doctrine of the Trinity, of an eternal son of God, of original sin, and of the Son's satisfying atonement, the form is the same. 'How if …' he asks and then goes on to delineate briefly and tentatively a suggestion converting the doctrine into a form of natural theology. But obviously he has little stake in the specific fate of his reinterpretation.

A doctrine like a picture can only catch one historical moment of articulation at a time. It can neither induce nor plot the line of continuity of an action. Speculation is useful if it provide service for action and for pedagogy toward action. It has a certain fitness, balance, harmony or coherence like that of a work of art. In a letter to his brother Karl, Lessing writes about the old Christian tradition and all its doctrines of grace, sacraments, salvation, justification by faith, Trinity, atonement and so on and so on.

> We are agreed that the old religious system is false, but I cannot share your conviction that it is a patchwork of bunglers and half philosophers. I know of nothing in the world in which human sagacity has been better displayed and cultivated.

Nor does Lessing necessarily deny truth value to speculative philosophical systems about the relationship between God, man and the universe. He does not take refuge, as romantic philosophers of religion will do a few decades after him, in suggestions that speculation is simply a form of symbolizing our attitudes toward the unknown. Rather than that he will say about philosophical concepts of God, 'I perhaps do not so much err as that my language is insufficient for my ideas.'[38]

In regard to traditional religious doctrine he sometimes asserts their beauty and yet their falsity. At other times he asserts that in their case in contrast to that of philosophical speculations one may distinguish, not between literal and symbolical sense, but between exoteric and esoteric meaning. There is a certain overlap between these two senses and the progress of the human mind. What was once appropriately enough esoteric is now exoteric, and similarly the true but now esoteric sense will some day coincide with its exoteric meaning. For example an eternal hell, an absolute rigid and eternal state of continuing retributive punishment at the end of mortal time was once the exact or esoteric meaning of that doctrine. But now it is only the popular, exoteric sense, the esoteric being a continual education process after death in which there is as much chance for character development as there was before, and in which the state of either reward or punishment is neither unmixed nor eternally fixed. But some day even this now esoteric sense may become exoteric.[39] And so on toward ever greater mutual coincidence of the two kinds of meaning. In this particular doctrine, as Lessing speculatively and tentatively envisages it, the single true meaning may eventually be that every man is reincarnated again and again so that all the stages of mankind's historical progress from primitive to perfect spiritual growth may be recapitulated in his own life. He typically puts it in question form, and asks, 'Why should I not come back as often as I am capable of acquiring new knowledge, new skills?'[40] and in the face of those who object that this hypothesis would mean a huge loss of time he asks rhetorically and in a way that expresses the whole triumphal view which he seems to hold firmly even though he can only articulate it hypothetically and tentatively in this particular speculation: 'And what have I to lose? Is not the whole of eternity mine?' The doctrine is tentative, but that does not preclude its being true or beautiful, or even a sound, helpful implicate of the pedagogy of mankind.

Nonetheless it is no more than a projection of a provisional sort, whether exoterically or esoterically understood.[41] Religious theory cannot render an account of action in sequence of time. It can do so no more than visual arts can render physically the sequence of action. It is a construct in mental space[42] that catches a specific moment in time, softening all the rough edges, the incompleteness of thought and the paradoxes of reality into the beauty of the system and philosophical coherence. Into that moment speculative theory

gathers as much of what comes before and after as possible in order to present it as fully as can be, but that fact does not overcome its momentariness, the distinction in principle between system on the one hand, and thought as pedagogy toward action and reform on the other.

The logic of this distinction, imported from *Laokoon*, might take us even further. If the hypothesis is apt and the parallel applicable, even the didactic statement of reform, the statement of the reaffirmation and progress of the human race in its collective education which we call history, can not be as fitting as the actual depiction in literary form of a section of that story. Only the poet or rather the dramatist can properly set forth action and transition in time. And thus also he rather than the religious polemicist is the proper reformer of man's state.

Nathan the Wise

In this way then Nathan the Wise becomes the perfect expression, the climax of Lessing's work. It is not a lecture clothed in theatre form,[43] but the merger of moral didacticism and fiction in which the interplay of action and character is indispensable and not a substitutable means for reshaping the reader or spectator into conformity with the lesson.[44] It is then, I think, no exaggeration to say that Nathan, the pseudonym, is a better spokesman for Lessing than Lessing himself. Only in that persona can Lessing say what he really wants to about persuasion to proper disposition and action, and only as that persona has he a certain autonomy from the author so that he can enact and speak fictively the truth on these matters without falling prey to the author's own ambiguities and ironies. In the more appropriate medium he tells us what the poet himself as philosopher can only state at second hand, the positive vision toward which all the religious polemic tended and which in principle was prevented from expressing properly, in the form of theological or any other theoretical statement.

Nathan the Wise is taken from medieval historical legend and its center, the parable of the three rings is from a story in Boccaccio's *Decameron*.[45] In Lessing's hands the story becomes the celebration of the discovery of the family of humanity under the symbolism of the mutual rediscovery of the members of the same blood family. The plot is basically simple, though complex in execution. Set in the days of the Crusades it brings together the large-hearted Muslim Sultan Saladin in Jerusalem, the scrupulously fair, generous and humane Jewish merchant Nathan, and a Christian Knight Templar. The Templar rescues Nathan's daughter from the flames engulfing his house during his absence. The knight himself owes his life to a special act of mercy on Saladin's part that stays the sword of execution because the Templar unaccountably reminds him of his long since dead brother. Through the machinations of the companion of Nathan's daughter, Recha, it is

discovered that Recha is actually a Christian girl whom Nathan adopted in her infancy, the daughter of a friend who was brought to his door by the servant of a knight, her father, who was to die in battle soon afterwards. To Nathan she seemed a gift from a merciful providence, the full force of whose inscrutable, terrifying side he had just experienced when Christian warriors killed his wife and seven growing sons.

Nathan's adoption of the girl exposes him to possible Christian persecution because he has brought up a presumably baptized child in the Jewish faith and thus endangered her eternal salvation. The volatile knight, eager to marry her, and angry at what he interprets as Nathan's refusal of the plan, moves toward conspiring with the authoritarian, rigid and intriguing Patriarch of Jerusalem to plot Nathan's downfall. The Patriarch is a figure obviously patterned after Pastor Goeze. Fortunately the plot comes to nothing as Nathan finds out not only that the Templar is the Son of Saladin's brother by a German noblewoman but that Recha is his sister. The family is reunited – Christian and Muslim at once – with the wise Jew as their spiritual guardian and the instrument of their mutual recovery.

Into this awkward trifle, Lessing pours a comic drama of glorious proportions, its center resting on the parable of the three rings. The external shape of the work was blank verse, a bold means, admirably suited to achieve the effect of moving reader or listener so that he would, as Lessing's friend, Elise Reimarus testified, waver between tears and laughter. Nathan is an instance of the sentimental, middle-class comedy, deeply influenced by Diderot's proposals to turn comedy into the realistic depiction of the mix of virtues and vices evident in private life and in the well-ordered and structured moral universe of bourgeois family existence. The play never allows any doubt about what is right and wrong in this universe, and even though it was for Lessing in his day a bold undertaking, it could be done in the confident assurance that his natural audience would share his vision of human benevolence, even though some of them might be startled to see a Jew as its social embodiment, a Christian minister its antithesis. The German Enlightenment was more conservative than the French, though even there the tribute to the Jew would have been unusual. The Enlightenment was not nearly as enlightened about the Jews, especially those who had a strong sense of their tradition, as its reputation would have us believe.

Nathan as Pedagogue

The vision of human benevolence, unhindered by all the particular conditions of origin and social surrounding, is precisely what Lessing sets before his audience – and yet on an intimate rather than a grandiose scale. Nathan is no universal hero, dramatically elevated above the status of the ordinary citizen, shown forth in the broadest sweep, in the intersection of public circumstances

with moral destiny. Nothing of the sort! He is a merchant engaged in his trade, with a proper yet not inordinate respect for money and profit, a tender, responsible, obviously authoritative yet rationally persuasive pater familias, and a man of largesse and self-respect who is capable of realistic human friendship because he respects others and tolerates their foibles, even as he appraises them and their motives with shrewd and detached insight and a degree of calculation about the consequences of his interaction with them. He is the middle-class human being prior to its fabled disintegration through self-hatred at the hands of Sigmund Freud.

The greatness of the play is the way in which its tone and sharply etched, realistic characters suit the modest, private setting, and the astonishing suitability of all these things with their modest proportions to the play's didactic aim, the vision of humanity as a spiritual family in which friendship, freely given and freely accepted, is a stronger bond than blood ties and especially – by implication – those cultural allegiances, whether religious or political, that usually insist on our unconditional loyalty.

There is a striking and crucial scene in which a lay brother now in the Patriarch's employ, reveals himself to Nathan as the servant who brought Recha to his door. It is a perilous moment for Nathan who stands to lose not only his daughter but his own life through the Patriarch's machinations. The lay brother is privy to his own secret as well as the Patriarch's intrigue. What, he asks, has become of the girl? – adding that, as far as he is concerned, nobody need ever know what happened back there. Nathan responds cautiously, and the lay brother simply appeals to his confidence. 'Trust me, Nathan!' Finally, there is nothing else to be done. It's not the only time Lessing resorts to this simple device, the direct appeal and the other person's name called out. When the personal risks are high, no personal security can be guaranteed, and one simply pleads with another for a radical change in outlook that involves a surrender to the risk and joy of the highest and most intimate level of personal relationship, be it that of friendship or of love.[46] At an equally crucial moment Minna von Barnhelm had appealed to her sullen fiancée: 'Look at me, Tellheim! What are you thinking about? Don't you hear me?' She was calling him back from the loftiest of conventional feelings, his rumination over his honor and his pain over the unjust damage to his reputation during wartime service in the army of a foreign state. Back to the immediate, personal relationship.

Nathan of all men is the right one to whom to make this appeal. He confesses to the lay brother not only the terrible fate of his wife and sons, of which he had never spoken to anyone, but his inmost thoughts about the ways of providence. That act allows him willingly to surrender to her natural kin the only person since then who has sustained his life and his capacity for love.[47]

The vision of the play, then, is the growth of the historical universe into a familial community of love. It is an utterly, utterly pre-Marxist, un-Marxian analysis of the structure of history and of historical movement. Well, so be it – there are times when naïveté is wiser than even the soberest realistic analysis.

The wisdom of the play's wiseman, Lessing's pseudonym, persona and spokesman, climaxes in the parable of the three rings: Not a smooth, unconflicted figure, he is always aware of his precarious status as a Jew but in the face of it, in the face of a terrible blow, he carries on as though in the hands of providence. A wise man, his wisdom in harmony with his merchant's life and his benevolence, his faith in providence is balanced by the reservation of ignorance ('I would pick the left hand and say, 'Father grant me that: Absolute truth is for thee alone.') He knows that benevolence is the heart of all true religion. Which of the three brothers loves the others most? If none, the true ring has been lost.

But that much said, the rest is not superfluous: the history by which we receive our positive faith from the forebears is not despised – the 'grounds' may not be the same. The future is not simply one in which we now know that the judge of a 'thousand thousand' years later will do away with the differences. And Nathan himself, though a human being before being a Jew (Did we choose our forebears?), and having brought Recha up in a religion of reason rather than a specific creed, is by no means no-longer-a-Jew. He is in mid passage between *Stockjude* and pure natural religion (cf. Moses Mendelssohn). The positive external exists for the sake of the universal and inward. But let us not be *Schwärmer*, enthusiasts, in simple-mindedly envisioning the abolition of the positive.

It is no accident that these three things go together. 1) the direct, face-to-face persuasion to personal trust; 2) inward surrender to the ways of an inscrutable providence (shall we say the final, unalienated acceptance of the ambiguous world of nature and society in which we live and move and have our being? a world that meets us here in the form of an unexpected neighbor?) 3) The free human being's practice of that surrender to providence in the bestowal of human affection regardless of all the divisions imposed on us by our differing conditions in nature and society. All theoretical explanation of man and the universe is useful to the extent that it aids in the formation of our being, all religion likewise.

Every particular religion will be judged good to the extent that it conduces and does not hinder this shape of life and belief, evil to the degree that it makes its own finality the indispensable condition of this shape of life and belief. In this day and time when we have no universal religion, do not even know when it will grow out of the particular religious traditions, when we are in transition demanding a new active humane stance, that religion is truest whose inward

sensibilities, moral sanctions and traditional doctrines may most easily be reshaped, reinterpreted in such way as to motivate the new, free human being whose freedom is his common humanity with all those with whom destiny casts him into a common world. By that standard every positive religion must be judged a dubious case. Each as a whole together with its various parts calls for that ambiguous stance, that irony at which Lessing was so expert in his treatment of Protestant Christianity. And yet each allows that non-ironic but highly ambiguous, theoretical reshaping into a universal religion that Lessing gives us in the portrait of religions he titles *The Education of the Human Race*. But each as a whole, and all three of them together stand forth unambiguously as fit if humble servants in the depiction of action toward an unknown future under the providence of God.

Lecture Two: Kant and the Transcendence of Rationalism and Religion

Introduction

Lessing dedicated himself to the reform of religion. So did Immanuel Kant – among many other things that he did. Lessing sought a reinterpretation of religious practice, of what it was and how to go about it, insofar as religious practice was at once the broadest and the most intimate field of human endeavor – the two ends of the spectrum of human life where man was most fully human. So did Kant. He sought to articulate a philosophy of religion that did not simply analyze religious concepts but asked what were right or useful religious concepts, right or useful religious practices – and how one used them properly. Much like Lessing, Kant was a reformer for practical purposes, not simply for belief theory, of traditional Protestant religion. Unlike British and French Rationalists, but like Lessing, he wanted to interpret or reinterpret Christianity.

In a nutshell, Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* was written to indicate how men might be converted; what the logic, the rationale of conversion is; and what it means to lead one's life in the community of the converted.[48] In the process Kant discovered among many other things that ordinary speech was inadequate to express certain facts or structures of human life, but unlike Lessing he did not have drama to help him express what conceptual descriptive language lacked. Instead he trenched, and trenched hard, upon a symbolic use of language that was to become the domain of Romantic thinkers who came after him – yet he himself did not cross the barrier that Herder crossed between two kinds of language-use, conceptual and expressive.

Like Lessing, again, he found speculative theory defective for the articulation of ultimate truth. But whereas this defect led Lessing to treat such theory qualifiedly, to apply it tenuously and ambiguously, and only in the service of pedagogy, Kant judged speculative theory altogether unfit though inevitable as an instrument for the discovery of true belief and true religious practice. And yet he could not abandon it: because it was the completion of man's reason.

God before Kant

Kant's philosophy is frequently described as the apex of rationalist thought. He set himself the task of discovering the *limits* of human reasoning, and he

came up with some very definite answers, among them that our ideating processes (he called the tracing out of this process 'transcendental dialectic') exceeded our knowledge, so that there are certain ideas which we are bound to form but of which we can never have any knowledge. Now these ideas, which he called the ideas of pure reason or transcendental ideas, are three in number – God, the world and the self. It is important that before Kant these ideas had made sense in a certain way, but that for him they made sense in another way.

In a nutshell, you could say that these ideas were the topics of traditional metaphysics. Generally speaking they were either given to a kind of non-sensible apprehension or as ideas i.e. grasped directly by the mind, rather than the sense, or else they were *inferred* from sense data, the sensible experience from which we derive all our actual information. This was true especially o the idea of God, the ultimately real being, the intelligent mind who governs the universe. In either case the ideas were genuinely informative.

Note one detail in this way of treating the concept of God: Whatever we intuit or infer, even the very highest possible reality will come to us in a certain unity. Whether or not there is a being corresponding to the notion or concept of 'God', we can *think* the notion coherently. There is a certain fitness between the way we think, our conception, and the object of our thought, so that as thought-object at any rate it makes sense. Our thinking is a unitary process and hence – even with possible internal inconsistencies – the notion of God is one notion, even if it should turn out that the definable class 'Deity' has no members or a number of them, just as 'unicorn' is one notion, and 'man' is one notion. Perhaps one can reverse the procedure and say, just as there are unitary intellectual entities or objects, so our thinking about them takes place by means of unitary concepts. At any rate – there (p.4) is a real congruence or isomorphism between ideas or thought-contents and intellection.

Now this may be either obvious, abstract, or both. I mention it because with Kant it begins to become a very questionable assumption. And thereby hangs half of our story.

Kant and Reason

Kant wanted to investigate our reasoning capacity with extreme rigor. He was a rationalist par excellence. First, against certain skeptics about reason he wanted to show in what the *possibility* of reasoning consisted. That is to say, unlike David Hume he believed that if your philosophy failed to explain the reliability of scientific procedure, especially the reliability of the law of cause and effect, it was so much the worse not for science but for your philosophy. Science worked, it was an actual (though not limitlessly applicable) use of explanation. The proper exercise of philosophizing is to explain the possibility from the actuality, i.e., to give an account of the necessary capacity to reason

which will account for its actuality rather than explain why it doesn't really work as well as it seems, why science isn't really reliable.

If the first task of philosophy is to show the possibility, the second is to show the *limits* of the same kind of reasoning, i.e., that kind of which science and common sense are paradigm cases, the kind of reasoning that helps provide you with informative and reliable knowledge of the external world, including your own and others' psycho-physical organisms. Kant called this kind of reasoning 'understanding', and wanted to pinpoint the limits of its applicability or capacity.

Kant and Moral Action

In the third place he wanted to investigate the various different *uses* we make of our reasoning capacity, and which of them are so basic that we cannot explain them as functions of another use of what was for him admittedly the same reasoning capacity. He came up with two or three irreducibly different, though not necessarily unlinked forms of reason. The concept of 'judgment' is the link between the various uses.

Kant thought that there are three powers or 'faculties' of the mind of distinctively human being. The first is the *cognitive*, which is the instrument for gaining informative knowledge of the natural world. The second is the faculty or power of *feeling* pleasure or displeasure, the third that of *desire*. *Reason*, i.e., critical analysis, must be brought to bear on all three of these capacities, what their proper arenas are, and how to order each both internally and with regard to the other two.

The first of them allows us, as we have said, to know the natural world, its order, an order in which all data of experience are linked by natural, necessary causes. The second one is less important for our purposes. The capacity to feel pleasure and displeasure can be rationally analyzed into the power to make judgments of an aesthetic sort – when we organize our feelings under the principles of the beautiful and the sublime – and the power to make judgments of purposiveness, as when we think of nature as unified through an intelligence that is the ground of its empirical laws.

The third capacity is very important to Kant himself. The capacity of desire can be rationally analyzed into the power of natural inclination to quest after happiness, but here one encounters a universal principle of morality which legislates that while happiness is a perfectly natural desire it has to be adjusted to another and greater principle, that of virtue. Man has the capacity to do his duty, and to do one's duty is to be truly free and virtuous. We are not enslaved to our natural desires.

In other words, our desires and our moral capacity force us to live in a domain where our reasoning is employed in a way wholly different from its

employment in the natural sense-data world. In that world, the self itself becomes one of the sense data behaving in accordance with the laws of natural causality. About the self-in-the-natural-world, Kant has some interesting things to say, among them that we have no knowledge, within our experience of the natural world, of a permanent, unified Ego underneath the changing, diversified consciousness that we are within this world. The point is now that what we cannot *know* in the context of our experience of the natural world we must *assume* because we are bound to *enact* it in the world of desire and duty.

We are here in a totally different world of discourse, in the domain of a totally different functioning of our rational capacities. For whereas in the natural world the self is likely to be completely determined by natural necessity, in the domain of moral discourse and behavior, we are bound to be free, even though there is no natural explanation for it. Kant did not believe that you could demonstrate a metaphysically arranged gap or element of indeterminacy or randomness in the behavior pattern of selves as beings in nature which would allow you to infer that they are free. As for the status vis-à-vis nature of the self, the thinking subject or substantial soul, he reiterated again and again that it was a necessary presupposition – 'transcendental unity of apperception' – 'I think' – but could not become an object of informative knowledge at all. Combine that belief with his further argument that you can prove both that everything happens in accordance with the laws of nature, and its antithesis, that some things in the world come about by free causation or spontaneously, and it is obvious that the free soul is nothing more than a confused question in the rational analysis of what we can informatively know about the natural world in which we are ingredient. Kant separates discourse or the use of reason about the self in the world of sensible experience totally and completely from the use of reasoning about the self in the supersensible world, the world of moral action, where there is a law of our own being which commands us unconditionally to do our duty.

This is a law of the whole field of moral action, and thus a law of our own being insofar as we are part of that field. Thus it is a law at once given to us – we as it were enter into it every time we make a choice, whenever we act morally – but also a law we give to ourselves. To say we are free is to say we are unconditionally bound to obey the moral law as one we give to ourselves. This law assumes the form of an absolute imperative. We are bound to obey it, even if in fact we never do, because it is the law of our own being. The total unity of *Wille* and *Willkür*, of rational law and unbound spontaneity: a long tradition, but the latter now reaches for dominance in a way that has perhaps few precedents. If we are to be free, the imperative must come to us detached from our desire with its end- or goal-oriented quest. The imperative must say to us, 'If you want to achieve such-and-such you must do so-and-so.' It must say to us unconditionally, 'Thou oughtst,' and with that 'ought' goes the

morally logical implication that an ought given to us by ourselves rather than by eternal authority is one we not only must but can follow. The man may be perfectly right who said that there is no such thing as a good conscience, that having a conscience at all is to have a bad conscience; Kant would not necessarily object to that. But he would think it absurd to use 'conscience' in a way that would speak of it as unfree or enslaved. No matter how close to strangulation our freedom, to be human is to have a vestige of it, because that is our inalienable nature, our moral definition.

Virtue then is not the right form of the automatic pursuit of happiness or sound aims, but obedience to duty, acting from good intention or conscience. The singularity and greatness of man is that the good man can detach himself from that quest as a functioning moral agent, even though in itself, in its proper place, there is nothing wrong with the desire for happiness. Moreover, the voice of duty, the categorial imperative is never the form our desire takes. In that case we would not be free but simply follow our natural determination when we obey conscience. Virtue, doing one's duty for duty's sake, is freedom from determination only when it is heterogeneous from desire. Thus, there is a distance in principle, though not necessarily enmity between will and inclination, between obedience to the moral law and the actual content of desire.

The Unity of the Moral Universe

One is forced to ask the questions: If the domain of moral discourse, the moral use of reasoning, is to have any unity at all, have we not to think of this unity as overcoming the tension or heterogeneity of two opposites:
1) the heterogeneity in principle between conscience and desire? And
2) between virtue and happiness?
If not, isn't the universe of moral discourse at loggerheads with itself and thus morally absurd? Now, many thinkers after Kant were content to say, yes that would indeed be to affirm the irrationality of morality in the world of discourse about human action, and that is *in fact* the way it is – irrational.

Not so Kant: He said that the unadjusted heterogeneity between conscience and desire, virtue and happiness, would indeed make the moral universe irrational, but whenever we act morally we act in the rational moral faith (not in the knowledge) that there is a unitary, rational and not absurd moral domain – even when as observers or analysts we don't believe any such thing. Moral intention/action has its own logic, its own rationale, as to what kind of universe it inhabits.

In that universe the harmony between conscience and desire, virtue and happiness is implemented in an unending progress toward the ideal condition, fulfilled in what Kant calls a postulate of practical reason, immortality, and in a

being in whom the harmony of happiness with virtue/morality is grounded – God, the Holy Will.

We observe that morality does not presuppose religion: A man does not need the idea of God to recognize his duty; and the ultimate motive of moral action is duty for duty's sake, not obedience to the commands of God.[49] But we also observe that morality inevitably leads to religion, because that is the only way in which the moral and natural orders can be harmonized, the moral law harmonized with the actually existing hum-drum, not to say corrupt world of everyday events and limitations.

Let us stress once more that the 'world' we have been speaking about is the environment or nexus in which moral agents are drawn together by their acts. It is well to remember that 'world' here has to an extent the meaning of 'life world', to borrow a famous term of Husserl's. Not only is it not the natural world, it is not even the world of the agent as his actions become ingredient in public consequences. One really has to speak here of an ideal world of pure motives and pure thoughts and decisions in interpersonal affairs, if one talks of the agent's world in Kant's thought. The reason for stressing the fact is that Kant, when talking about freedom, has an extremely limited field in mind, both in terms of action and in terms of human knowledge. His suggestion is that the *agent*-self, the noumenal self, is never an object of observation or knowledge. The self observed and known, whether by ourselves or another, is always the self already entered into a network of external relations, and therefore of imperfection. The agent's self-knowledge and knowledge of others as pure agent selves is not so much private as virtually non-existent. And indeed, then, moral agency is not really ever an instance of the use of reason as understanding, but reason as action, as inward action and decision. How this comes about, and what its implications are, are topics we turn to now.

The Transcendental Ideas

We spoke of the *possibility*, the *limits* and the *uses* of rational capacities. Let us turn back to the use of reason as understanding or informative knowledge. Kant's great revolution in epistemology involved a very simple step: He purchased certainty of knowledge at the price of certainty of the status of the object of knowledge. All human knowledge involves the input of sensible or perceptual content and the form imprinted on it by the human intellect. All knowledge then is indirect, we never have the object of knowledge *directly* at hand to grasp. His successors nagged that fact to and fro bitterly seeking for some one instance of certain knowledge which is direct to the spontaneously ordering intellect. Some of them claimed that self-knowledge is an instance of that sort, viz., not that of the empirically given self but of the noumenal self which is not individuated because individuation is the result of embodiment

and sense experience, i.e., ingredience in phenomena. Thus the one certain and direct grasp that knowledge has is for Fichte not the self but selfhood, pure agency (in Kant's terms) logically prior to a specific self. That notion practically boggles the mind, but it could be – if certain limitations are removed – a consequence of Kant's soberest thoughts.

Again, recall that the *fact* of informative knowledge is utterly dependent for Kant on something being presented to the senses and the intellect. But the orderly, reliable shape of that knowledge is due to the intellect's forms of sensibility and understanding, the forms of space and time on the one hand, and categories of the understanding – quantity, quality, relation and modality under which all empirically given contents must be arranged. These forms and categories are certain and universal, we can rely on their always being appropriate and gaining us a common, public world of observation. But they are not derived from the observed world. They are logically independent of it. They are *a priori* conditions of all experience.

They work well when applied to empirical contents. But the human mind is more ambitious than that and seeks to apply them so as to unify all knowledge. Hence it inevitably creates the three unifying transcendental ideas (Self, World, and God) which are *neither* given as empirical data *nor* yet directly presented, like empirical data but non-sensibly and therefore purely intellectually, to the intellect. Their status is therefore that they are really *heuristic ideals for completing human knowledge and rounding it off in a perfect but absolutely impossible way.* Their status is neither empirical, nor transcendent (Wolff!) but *transcendental.*

For the human knower cognitive form is transcendental, it has nothing to do with experience, it is an *a priori* structure of universal and completely rational categories. The human intellect employs these transcendental structures spontaneously. Kant does not believe in the passivity of the intellect before the senses, as the British Empiricists did. But the intellect cannot provide its own material, hence is bound to piecemeal operation. It can never complete its knowledge, it can never see why any instance of informative knowledge should be *here* and *now*, or how it fits into a total complex of given things. In short there cannot be a deductive system of a positive knowledge of the world. But there *can* be a system of the coherence of rational operations, their possibility, limits and uses, provided these are never confused with what we discover in the world, provided the reasoner, the transcendental self, is never confused with the world of data, not even with himself within that world. Knower and known, subject and object, perspective and content can never be systematically unified; to think a thing is never the same as for that thing to be, even in the case of the self; they belong together, but they can never be shown to be the same thing, either by putting self and objects into the same empirical scheme, or by transferring objects into the self's transcendental status.

God

Kant then is in the situation of having to have a concept of God but interestingly enough having to claim that this concept of God performs a purely regulative function for thinking, providing the ideal of an absolutely unconditioned unity, but having to insist also that this thought has no bearing on reality one way or the other. The reality of God is not subject to proof.

We cannot deal with Kant's treatment of the traditional proofs for the existence of God, but there is an interesting observation to be made: though Kant thinks that one cannot *prove* that an absolutely necessary being – in contrast to all of us who exist contingently – exists; though Kant thinks one cannot *prove* that a most real being exists, though Kant thinks one cannot *prove* that there is a first cause of all that is, and that he is not only the intelligent and wise world author but its moral governor as well – he has no doubt whatsoever that these are the appropriate *conceptions* of God – whether he exists or not.

But the point now is to recall that the determinate or in-formed object was only one side of the correlation of subject and object in the situation of informative knowledge. The other side, irreducibly other, was the spontaneous, form-bestowing or determining subject. This subject, because it can by definition never make the transition to the conditions of appearance whether as knower or as agent, but must remain inscrutably transcendental and spontaneous, is itself never given, never determinate but always *determining*. Identity as an intellectual subject can never become one of the 'determinate attributes' characterizing the concept of God as unconditioned determinateness qualifying an object.

It is well at this point to recall our early point that before Kant, when spontaneous ideation was thought to mesh perfectly with informative metaphysical concept, it was thought that the concepts could be grasped by the intellect coherently, and therefore in unitary form. What has happened in Kant is that this unity is gone. We have no warrant for conceiving in one unitary notion the activity of thinking and the absolutely determinate content of thought.

We cannot even draw an analogy in this respect speculatively from ourselves to God, because Kant has made it absolutely clear that the unity of the empirical self with the noumenal self can never be given in experience. Thus, then, God, in whom this heterogeneity between determinate objectivity and indeterminate, spontaneous subjectivity is raised to the absolute degree, must be grasped in two concepts between which there can be no unity: he is the unconditioned ground of all intellectual moral and physical structure, and he is equally the ground of all spontaneous intellectual activity.

Kant is fascinated by some of this speculative play: there is no indication that he ever said, Some of this is invalid as a concept, because one part cannot be combined with the other.

1) He didn't stress the spontaneous side – though there are indications that it was fascinating, and threatening.

2) He didn't really have to worry because conception and reality were far enough apart that he could select where he wanted to join them, and this turned out to be only in the moral realm.

3) He had a *critical* system, not a *metaphysical* one. That is to say, when you traced out necessary ideal projections of human thought, you didn't deal with the unity of reality, but only with the unity of conception. You could not show the unity of reality. Hence Kant *did not have to* do so. Given his proclamation of the limitations of human reason, he could claim that you need two aspects, contrary or at least unadjusted, in the notion of God, just as you could not show that perceptual content and conceptual form had a systematic unitary explanation or ground in which they inhered in a manner transparent to human reason.

Nonetheless, Kant had skirted an abyss, especially in the form that the conception of God as subject takes in the first Critique: Intellectual intuition, which, he says, we cannot even conceive since we are absolutely confined to sensible intuition. But we can think why we cannot think it. The absolute meshing of receptiveness with spontaneity, the embrace of the former by the latter, is mesmerizing. Where to know is to determine totally, to intuit is to intuit intellectually, i.e., spontaneously so that in knowing, what you know is not only immediately present but the act of thinking the object is identical with determining its shape![50]

Additions to the Lecture on Lessing

This substantial addition was marked for insertion in the final part of the section titled 'Drama and the Primacy of Action' above. See note 19.

Character was, for Lessing, finally a basic, as it were irreducible manifestation of humanity – no matter how much it was influenced by religion, country, social structures, climate, etc. Not that Lessing was a believer in free will. Lessing was quite explicitly a determinist. But the point is that his determinism was metaphysical (the exact argument he didn't state) and a metaphysical determinism is a convenient thing for its very ultimacy, its direct cause-effect connection between the most microscopic occurrence and what is ultimate and infinite, allows all sorts of *practical, intermediate indeterminacies* – cultural, moral and pedagogical, even though no *ultimate, theoretical* plasticity in the universe. The irreducibility of character as the determinant of action, the effective indeterminacy of any specific, intermediate, cultural environment, the priority he placed on the practical – on action and on a theory explanatory of and conducive to action, the integration of passion and affection with virtuous action that he sought for in the realm of practice – all of these together were nicely designed to make him a *reformer*. And his reforming ideal was to depict and through depiction redirect human passions, actions and relations. Direct, human relations in society, unhampered by social barriers were the guiding vision for reform, and unforgettable is its universality, its exclusion of virtually nobody – neither the aristocrat nor the servant nor the simple religious believer whom Goethe will call 'the beautiful soul'. It was a passionate elevation of humanity, in which drama was a teaching instrument and religion and philosophy were challenged an invited to serve the same cause as drama – a typical Enlightenment view, but raised to heights of extraordinary consistency. Others claimed, rightly or wrongly, to belong to the party of humanity: Lessing embodied it. Not for him Hume's all but basic distinction of all mankind into those like himself on the one hand and 'the vulgar' on the other.

I want to suggest, drawing on nineteenth-century commentators like Wilhelm Dilthey and Eduard Zeller, that for Lessing the essence of man is action. 'The vocation of man' (a great mid-eighteenth-century German phrase, used by Johann Spalding and later made famous by Fichte) 'is neither speculation, nor artistic vision, but praxis' to quote Dilthey.[51] And that is also the first and last word (though not those in between) about Lessing's views on religion. But Zeller, in a kind of classic oversimplification distorted the case, when he said that Lessing equated religion with morality. "The essence of

religion, the ultimate purpose of all religious activity, lies ... in its moral effect.'[52] No, one has to say: Lessing is not Kant. What is left out in this claim is first of all the significant religious bearing of metaphysical speculation for Lessing, which is not *simply* moral in its impact.

But more than that, the comment ignores that what is practical, the vision of the true person, includes for Lessing – more than for many Enlightenment figures – respect for and integration of the inward person, passions and affections, into the vision of the human being. Precisely this fact makes reformation and reinterpretation in religion a task to which drama is no stranger. Lessing's polemical drive against various wings of religious traditionalism and modernism therefore climaxed quite naturally in a dramatic prose poem, which is at once a restatement of the previous theological argument and a positive statement of what he believes to be a truly religious disposition and life. Genuine religion and the truly religious life are rightly depicted poetically – for poetry alone, rather than *either* the visual arts *or* sheer didactic, conceptual language, is appropriate to setting forth action in time. Hence *Nathan* not *Education* is the truly, most precisely fitting statement of Lessing on religion. So it was neither mood nor propagandistic hope but strictest consistency in aesthetic, moral and religious principle when Lessing wrote to his brother that he hoped the play would be as affecting a piece as he had ever written.[53]

Turning from the manner of depiction to the depicted content, one has to say similarly that true religion is a form of act: In conceptual, systematic or theoretical language one may state its individual elements and belief claims and argue for or against fixed positions. But religion, precisely by its interpretation of virtuous rational action with sensibility, and their second-order reinforcement through speculation, is itself a practical act or artful (in the sense of *künstlerisch*, not *künstlich*, artistic, not artificial) practice.

Hence Lessing's sympathies in religion are for his age and polemical engagement extraordinarily broad. And, to the doctrinaire Enlightenment figures, and the later commentators, his sympathies and his antagonisms have alike often been unexpected. Thus it is most striking that Nathan, the hero of the play, the paradigm of enlightened and sophisticated religious wisdom, should find kinship and sympathy and a kind of instructive understanding for what he is about among two of its simplest religiously naive characters. Striking, and certainly incredible for anyone coming from the British and French Enlightenment. 'Pietism', the beautiful soul, was for Lessing a universal phenomenon, admirable in a Muslim dervish as in a Catholic friar, ambiguous only when turned toward fanaticism by combination with the formal, final and exclusive beliefs of an orthodoxy, as in the case of Daja. Nathan can confide his hearts story to the simple, pious friar as to nobody else: 'To simple piety alone I'll tell … It alone can understand the deeds true God-

devoted man can force himself to do.'[54] But the other side of the coin is the same simplicity *gone awry*, as when Nathan's adopted daughter Recha describes Daja:

> She's a Christian, and she must torment for love – is one of those fanatics who think they know the universal way, the one true way to God. And feel impelled to guide into that way each soul who's missed it. Nor can they indeed do otherwise. For *if* it's true that this alone's the right way, how can they look on with calmness as their friends go other ways which lead them to destruction everlasting.[55]

The pious affection, the sensibility is the same, but the difference is here it is integrated into a dogmatism tyrannizing over the affections, rather than humanism ennobling or freeing them. She loves for the sake of a dogma, a God of dogmatic exclusiveness and she enlists the great teacher of love in that cause rather than the cause of love itself.

I spoke of the primacy of the practical, in religion as in the related inquiry into the vocation of man. Speculation, far more than consideration of human sensibility, took a humble, distinctly second place to virtue and right sentiment.

In his later days, he makes speculative proposals as if he were a forerunner of Vaihinger's 'as if' philosophy. They are largely in the service of reinterpretation or reformation of practical wisdom; rob the notion of revelation of its miraculous, one time occurrence character, turn it into an historical process merging into and largely indistinguishable from the human community's immanently or naturally developing religious mind, call it *The Education of the Human Race*, and no speculative doctrinal element need simply be discarded. Like the revelation they supposedly represent at the conceptual level, notions like the Trinity, the substitutionary atonement of Jesus' death on the cross, original sin[56] become tentative, temporary, natural religious sign-posts – in the service of humanity's achievement of the virtuous life for its own sake, rather than for the sake of a future reward.[57]

There is another lengthy insert, which seems to have been intended to replace part of the insert just given.

Certainly, Lessing was against Supernaturalist orthodoxy, if that position meant resting the truths of Christianity on the inerrancy of the Bible and claiming the backing of evidence and internal biblical consistency for this belief. 'Orthodoxists' he called the supporters of this position, insisting (at least in public) that there is a difference between them and the truly orthodox,

who hold the content without the systematic justification of it on supposedly rational or evidential grounds.

Among the orthodox there was one group, in his day not quite as distinct as one or two generations earlier, for whom he felt a semi-outsider's sympathy. These were the pietists. To the extent that they held to the inerrancy and direct supernatural inspiration of the Scripture, he would have had to condemn them also. But in fact there was a difference, of which he was aware, between the claims to the historical inerrancy of the Bible and to its inspiration. The latter involved a direct religious bond between the mystical or spiritual meaning of the words, over and above their literal meaning, and the heart of the believer. This did not disturb him, though his sympathy for it would have been reserved. What bothered him most was the claim to the historical and dogmatic inerrancy of the Bible. One can, he said, believe Christianity (though what kind remained ambiguous) without the supporting evidence of miracles. One could even conceivable believe the resurrection of Christ (a belief he thought not wholly absurd, at least for one stage of religious development) *despite* the discrepancies within and between the different New Testament reports. What one cannot do, he thought, is to believe this miracle *on the basis* of an argument that the biblical reports are really in harmony and therefore without human error.

On this technical point he agreed with the great unnamed German deist, H.S. Reimarus, whose *Apology* he published as the Wolfenbüttel *Fragments*.[58] It is the opening wedge into a much wider and more significant agreement. But on the other hand, Lessing also distanced himself from Reimarus in significant ways. He agreed with him that a specific and immediate supernatural historical *revelation*, based on supposed facts, guaranteed by an inerrant Scripture is incredible. It is incredible, even if it is of a lofty character, to say nothing of the purported facts and content of a supposed revelation that are provincial and primitive. And he agrees of course with Reimarus in his passionate protest against the anti-rational authoritarianism and the exclusive truth claims involved in the orthodox stand.

Lessing's defense of these portions of Reimarus came to set the topic for theological argument in his own day – against Johann Melchus Goeze, chief pastor of the church of St. Catherine in Hamburg – and for generations thereafter. Even before Goeze intervened in the argument, Lessing had written a short essay 'On the Proof of the Spirit and Power',[59] which set forth the issues: not only are miracles merely historical proofs which fail to convince the present day observer, but even if they were to be convincing, they are totally heterogeneous from the metaphysical religious truths they are supposed to support. 'Accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason.' Ever since then, this essay – on Lessing's own admission, one of his most sloppily written – has been cited as setting the crucial issues on

the thorny question of relating critical-historical judgments to judgments of faith concerning theologically significant facts, especially the question of the status of the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth in the Christian religion. Hegel, David Friedrich Strauss and Kierkegaard among them agreed that Lessing had stated the basic problem of faith versus history in this essay.

It was a pity that Lessing influenced theological thought in no other way, because what he had to say about religion was far more complex and important than this essay would indicate. On the other hand, it is worth indicating why the influence was so great. For while its immediate target was the 'orthodoxist' position, Lessing and Reimarus had in fact also managed to score a substantial hit on the position of the liberal or mediating theologians of his day, the so-called 'Neologians', If anything, he had an even greater contempt for them than for the outrightly conservative view. The enlightened theology of the day had a jaundiced view of miracle, but held to a supernatural revelation as a historical fact nonetheless. The Neologians were beginning to accept the stirrings of biblical criticism but (Johann Salomo Semler![60]) held to the reliability of central and religiously indispensable biblical facts. The *content* of revelation, they held, is the same in positive or exemplary form, as natural reason has known in any case: *God, morality and a future life*. (Mendelssohn![61]) 'What', Lessing asked sarcastically, 'is a revelation that reveals nothing?' 'With orthodoxy … one knew more or less

'What does the Christian care for the learned theologian's hypotheses, explanations and demonstrations? For him it is simply there, the Christianity which he feels as so true, in which he feels so blessed. When the paralytic experiences the beneficial shocks of the electric spark, what does he care whether Nollet or Franklin or either of them is right.'

> In short, the letter is not the Spirit, the Bible is not religion. Consequently, objections against letter and Bible are not objections against the spirit of religion. For the Bible evidently contains more than belongs to religion; and it is a mere hypothesis that is must be equally infallible in this 'more'. Christianity existed before evangelists and apostles had written … no matter how much depends on these writings, it is impossible that the whole truth of religion rests on them … The religion is not true because the evangelists and apostles taught; they taught it because it is true. The written traditions have to be explained from their inner truth, and all the written traditions cannot give to it an inner truth it does not have. This then, should be the general reply to a large part of these fragments …[63]

Ludwig Feuerbach was to say sixty years later that religion is a matter of the heart, not of the head. For Feuerbach that was to involve a drastic reinterpretation or demythologization of all cerebral religious assertions. Lessing was more conservative, not as thoroughgoing in his demythologizing, but I want to emphasize again that for him too religion was a matter of the will and heart. The religious educator's task was therefore that of broadening the heart's ambience, weaning it away from its narrow moorings. As for religious theory – the head's part in religion – it was secondary, not unimportant but secondary, with the one exception we have noted. It was to be reshaped also, but reformation or reinterpretation in this case was in the service of the prior, practical reformation.

Religious theory – theology if you must, is therefore in the first place theory for or explanatory *of* a practice, or theory just sufficient to *justify* the right practices, and only secondarily speculative or theological theory, theory for its own sake.[64]

Comparative rational analyses are always problematical, but we all know that social and political conditions in Germany in the second half of the Eighteenth Century were far more narrow and provincial than in England and France, the struggle of the middle class for power a more isolated and often far more inner-directed affair. And the spiritual or intellectual expression of that narrowness, that tyranny, was the far greater weight of conservative, in this case Protestant, traditionalism in Germany than in the other countries.

Wilhelm Dilthey, in what after more than 100 years is still one of the finest essays on Lessing, rightly said:

> A new life feeling bore up Lessing and strove for full expression in his works … But the German public of his time was stuffed so full with theoretical views based on theoretical systems and religious doctrines; ethics, theology and philosophical Enlightenment has so penetrated every pore of the nation that this new life-feeling, if it was not, as in Klopstadt, to agree with all these prejudices and thus become completely narrowly confined, had to argue its case with the theoretical bases of the dominant world-view.[65]

One couldn't simply break with the past! There was no working out of a *Lebens-* or *Weltansschauung* without a position toward traditional religion. Nay, worse: Even if one liberated oneself from it, one did so in terms, in thought and feeling patterns, molded by this context and conflict.[66]

I believe he would have found it impossible if the systematic, doctrinal, or speculative element either in religion or in his own outlook had been primary for him. But given the primacy of the practical, reform and reinterpretation were possible.

Especially among the Pietists one could admire a certain inward single-mindedness, a full commitment of the affections, and a harmony between that and a devoted, virtuous and charitable outward life. What they lack in worldly culture they made up in complete lack of duplicity and detachment from all glorying in the worldly tasks which they have to perform – even though they perform them with the utmost conscientiousness and lack of rebelliousness, even when they restrict the natural scope of the heart. And, typical of Lessing, they come from various religions. The dervish Al-Hafi in *Nathan the Wise* belongs to this brotherhood, but so does the Christian friar in the same play. When Nathan discloses for the first time the great secret of his past, he tells it to the friar: 'To pious simple piety above all I'll tell.' Why? 'It alone can understand the deeds true God-devoted man can force himself to do.'[67] But the other side of this coin is Daja, the nurse, who exhibits the ambiguity of this same piety, the desperate need to reform it when it is left in the hands of the old authoritarian and exclusive dogmatism which tyrannizes over the heart, the affections instead of humanizing, freeing and ennobling them.[68]

Other fragments:

Lessing remained a faithful pupil of the popular philosophy of the German Enlightenment his whole life. Small wonder. The chief spokesman of that

philosophy was Lessing's own dearest friend Moses Mendelssohn, and its cutting edge was to transform the speculative rationalism of the rediscovered Leibniz, Leibniz without Christian Wolff, or metaphysical passion, into a practical rationalism, into a description of *artige Mensch*, the 'pleasing' or 'agreeable' human being. We would not be going awry, I think, were we to recall more classical expressions and translate 'harmonious' or 'well-balanced' individual, provided we did not have too exalted a vision in mind. He is the Leibnizian monad who is the mirror of the whole universe, and even if windowless? He incorporates the whole universe in himself. Because he is a human being, his reason gives him not merely a sensate or confused but a clear albeit miniature representation of the whole. *Petits perceptions* as Leibniz called them, constitute our being and our membership of God's harmonious universe. Clear knowledge gives the highest pleasure and meaning to life.

The achievement of later popular philosophy is to convert Leibniz's thought of man's delight from a metaphysical to a moral content, that is to say to combine the eudaemonsitic principle (happiness is the end of man) with the love of man or *virtue*. Only Kant was to reject the convergence in the moral life at least for this earth. In the popular philosophy of the later Enlightenment, particularly for Mendelssohn, man's vocation or determination, his striving for perfection is this conjunction. To accomplish it one employs philosophy, the harbinger and trainer of the proper disposition. 'The philosopher achieves the highest happiness and the highest perfection, if he philosophizes not from delight in what is true but out of friendship for man.' Leibniz's central engagements, metaphysical and speculative, became peripheral interesting only 'to the extent that they serve to understand man's true obligations and inclinations.'[69]

Lessing revered Leibniz, he echoed his speculative interests on many occasions and he particularly admired Leibniz's ability to see entrenched, contrary views as partial or implicit expressions of one great truth, each with its own little truth. But in another sense he also followed Leibniz at second-hand, because he adopted the popular philosophical conversion of Leibniz's philosophy into life wisdom, 'into the ideal of the pleasing, i.e. the sensitive and cultivated human being who from inmost necessity dedicates himself to his own perfection and that of his fellow men.'[70] But of course, Lessing, as we noted, was a pupil of this philosophy on his own terms. He struck fire from this flint. Lessing could follow the popular philosophy by urging mortal men to turn within, rather than to what is above them and unknown to them, but nonetheless could indulge in Leibnizian metaphysical speculations when he thought it proper. Was he therefore a *Gelegenheitdenker*, a man who thought about the problem of the moment alone, as he has often been called? Not necessarily, nor however was he a system-maker with a coherent theory. (H.E.

Allison exaggerates the degree to which Lessing held a self-conscious, consistent Leibnizian philosophy of religion, of universal truth.)[71]

He struck flint from the turn of popular philosophy of concern with the constitution of man, but this did not mean that he shared its bland, stiff vision of the *artige Mensch*. On the contrary, with his frequent antagonism toward the French stage (Diderot excepted), he saw its suppression of the natural and tempestuous emotions by a conventional stiff-upper-lip correctness, as an example of the shallowness of this ideal.[72] For Lessing, man's perfection, on the contrary, is the complete natural interpenetration of reason and sensibility.

Much of his latest and greatest drama serves to set forth – and so to teach – this moral ideal, to indicate the way it comes into being in real life, real history, for real human beings under real-life conditions. Moral improvement is one of the chief aims of poesy, (so he said, and it is surely true of his drama and his dramaturgy: I am *not* even trying to argue for or against Wolff's controverted thesis that in his *dramaturgy* Lessing separates poetry and morality completely.[73] And surely, moral improvement is also the content as well as the aim of genuine religion.[74] But moral improvement has a most unKantian relation to the well-springs of action, the disposition or the affections. We are indeed to *love* virtue for its own sake[75] rather than for the sake of an eternal reward. But one may suspect that 'love' is as important as the virtue loved, in a rich, full-orbed sense. One must never forget that the climactic expression of Lessing's combat with religious traditionalism and rigidity came in the form most natural to him, drama, and furthermore that he designed it not only to teach what a truly religious man is like, and what real religion is – but to do so in the most affecting manner possible.[76]

Lessing was a pedagogue of the most comprehensive style. His mission was to educate his fellow Germans. To educate was to give priority to the shaping of human beings. This priority of the practical was *not* to be achieved at the price of ignoring sensibility. What emerges from Lessing's reflections is a picture of rightly oriented human being as a richly endowed, increasingly free social being, agent and patient, living alertly in the world of his contemporary social and private relations, his reach extending to all humanity. He is kin to all that is human. He governs himself morally – the main use to which one's reason is to be put – but without any impairment of the depth and immediacy of the passions or the affections. Furthermore, the rightly oriented person, in whom rational virtue and the affections nourish each other, is also a person for whom there is no sense of distance, of disruptive chasm between his inner and his outer, social life – an important point in the Germany of that day. Such a person is perhaps not always guileless but he is basically at ease in his intercourse with others, governed by his concrete altruistic concerns rather than

rigid moral codes, philosophical or religious, liberal or conservative. He is a person at once of principle and yet flexible.

Such a generalized, abstract and prosaic description is probably not fair to Lessing the dramatist perhaps not even to Lessing the critic or the religious and philosophical thinker.

Yet it is pertinent, especially when one has to consider his very ambivalent writings about religion, where on is often more certain of what he is *Against* than what he is *for*, where one often cannot be sure whether he speaks *exoterically* or *esoterically* – or for that matter whether the two are related – and where one frequently wonders where the cutting edge of irony really lands, where one asks oneself how much of what he says in the midst of polemical exchange is meant straightforwardly and how much is ridicule, tongue-in-cheek, after the fashion of earlier fighters against orthodox establishments in England and France. Especially when he seems to argue in favor of Christianity insisting that he is arguing only against the *arguments* in its favor, not against the thing itself. The reader wonders where the real Lessing is, or whether he really had a fixed position.

Certainly he was against Supernaturalist orthodoxy if that meant resting the truth of Christianity on the inerrancy of the Bible and claiming the backing of credible historical evidence for this belief. Certainly he was, if anything, even more contemptuous about neology, the mediating, liberal theology of the day which insisted that there was a supernatural historical revelation but argued that the fact is philosophically defensible and its content intelligible to ordinary reason. But on the other side it *seems* in any case that he had almost equally grave reservations about the customary reduction of Christianity to a completely natural religion for which specific, positive religious tradition is nothing but the error of superstition. Similarly, he was at least publicly hesitant about the rational faculty as the only organ for the exercise of religious sensibility.

'The more crisply,' he said on one occasion, 'the one man wanted to prove Christianity to me, the more doubtful I became. The more enthusiastically and triumphantly another wanted to trample it altogether under foot, the more inclined I felt to keep it alive at least in my heart.'[77]

Whatever we may note in his drama, his positively as well as polemically directed writings on religion are sheer pedagogy, not to say moral edification. He also had other interests in mind he wrote on religion. But one of my themes is the priority of the practical in his religious writing.

Now I believe Eduard Zeller exaggerated considerably when, in a great essay written over a hundred years ago, he understood Lessing to equate religion with morality, as though Lessing were Kant.[78] There was much more

than that to Lessing's views on matters religious. 1) In the first place, he engaged restlessly and constantly a priority ordering between practical religiousness and matters of speculative or theoretical ultimate religious truth claims. 2) He had a strong sense that even as practice religion affects more than moral outlook and action, it affects the most intimate inner disposition and sensibility. Indeed, it is the tandem relation between these two things, morality and the affections, related to but not reducible to morality, that makes for a proper balance in religion. 3) Finally, the previous consideration led to a third: Lessing was, after all, dramaturgist first, and not a systematic philosopher or theologian. The very relations between morality and sensibility, between morality and religion, and those between practical and theoretical elements in the religious outlook are bound to arouse one's curiosity about possible material relations, as well as structural parallels between Lessing's aesthetics, his dramaturgy, his drama on the one hand and his religious views on the other.

So far as my modest knowledge goes, in the avalanche of work on him surprisingly little has been said on this matter, especially on what I have called the structural parallels (please don't read too much high-powered modern theory into that phrase) between art and religion. As a preliminary first stab, I want to talk about one small aspect of this matter – Lessing's theory in Laocoon and his views on religion.

I said that Zeller oversimplified the relation of morality and religion. Nonetheless, I wanted also to say that there is a high priority of the practical in the aim of Lessing's writing on religion, as Dilthey rightly said.[79]

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1 Lucien Goldmann, *The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the Pensées of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine*, tr. Philip Thody (London: Routledge, 1964).

2 [Added as a manuscript note on the typescript: 'Enlightenment is man's escape from his self-inflicted immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to make use of one's own understanding without someone else's tutelage. This is self-inflicted when its cause is not a lack of understanding but of the resoluteness and courage to make use of it without another's tutelage. Sapere aude! Have the courage to use your own reason. Enlightenment = courage = freedom within.']

3 [The typescript originally read '*three* men'; the change may indicate that Frei never reacher Herder. See also the next note.]

4 [The typescript originally read: 'Lessing, Herder and Kant' here. See previous note.]

5 Lessing, *Sara; Minna von Barnhelm: Two Plays*, tr. E. Bell and A. Meech (Barth: Absolute, 1990); a German text is reproduced at http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/lessing/sampson/sampson.htm.

6 Dilthey, 'Gotthold Ephraim Lessing' in *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung: Lessing, Goethe, Novalis, Hölderlin*, 10th edition (Leipzig: Teubner, 1929), pp.17–174.

[7] See note 5 above, or note 8 or 33 below; a German text is available at http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/lessing/minna/minna.htm.

[8] Lessing, *Laocöon, Nathan the Wise, Minna von Barnhelm*, ed. W.A. Steel (London: Dent, 1930); a German text is available at http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/lessing/laokoon/laokoon.htm.

[9] For Demetz, see notes 18 and 33 below; for Lukács, see his *The Historical Novel*, tr. H. and S. Mitchell (London: Merlin, 1962).

[10] [Denis Diderot (1713–1784), French dramatist.] Lessing, 'Das Theater des Herrn Diderot aus dem Franzosischen' (1759–60), in *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: Werke und Briefe* 5/1: *Werke 1760–1766*, ed. W. Barner et al (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985).

[11] [Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700–1766).]

[12] [Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768).] Wincklmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werle in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (1755); German text (1756 2nd edition) available at http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/winckelm/nachahm/ nachahm.htm.

[13] Lessing, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Paul Rilla (Berlin: Aufbau, 1954–8), vol.2, p.217.

[14] [Struck out in the margin: 'He is going to be corrected by them, of whom Kant is the last (Shaftesbury, Brooke, etc., precede him.) – The sublime as aesthetic ideal and attraction, in addition to the beautiful).']

[15] Lessing, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol.2, p.281.

[16] Ibid, p.322.

[17] Horace, *Ars Poetica* 11.361.

[18] Lessing, *Emilia Galotti*, in *Nathan the Wise, Minna von Barhelm, and*

the developing setting of somebody's specific story than in the abstract frozen cross-section of a conceptual system. We may not be wrong in suggesting that there is a certain parallel between the function of the visual arts and the function of abstract statement in religious theory. A belief didactically set forth is a painting or representation in the medium of mental space. Sitting right and beautiful in itself it may have a hint of the fluidity and sequence of what comes before and after in the actual action of life but it cannot be its proper expression. That is left for literature, the depiction of life in time, the expression of passion and action. Thus Nathan the wise man in the play that bears his name may well set forth Lessing's convictions together with their ambiguities better than Lessing can do himself when he states them in the language of theology and philosophy. The latter, given the inappropriateness of the medium, gives only the illusion and not the substance of precision. Precision and reality of conviction lie in the fiction, the language of literature, not in the language of conception. Lessing's irony fits the distance between dramatic and theoretical expression.']

[24] [The remainder of the sentence originally read: '…with regard to the fitness of philosophical theory to express what only literature could express really concretely and precisely.']

[25] Lessing, 'Vorrede des Herausgebers', *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger. Noch ein Fragment des Wolfenbüttelschen Ungenannten*; German text available at http://homes.rhein-zeitung.de/~ahipler/kritik/lessing5.htm.

[26] Ibid.

[27] *The Education of the Human Race*. See in *Nathan the Wise, Minna von Barhelm, and Other Plays and Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, pp.334ff; English text also available at http://www.fordham.edu/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?108915,11837; German text available at http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/lessing/erziehng/erziehng.htm.

[28] Lessing, 'The Testament of John' in *Lessing's Theological Writings*, tr. H. Chadwick, Library of Modern Religious Thought (London: A&C Black, 1956), p.60.

[29] In *Nathan the Wise*. See *Nathan the Wise, Minna von Barhelm, and Other Plays and Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz; German text available at http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/lessing/nathan/nathan.htm.

[30] [Added in the margin: '(Kant!) (Lessing here one of the greatest challenges to modern theology?)']

[31] *Nathan the Wise, Minna von Barhelm, and Other Plays and Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, pp.309–313 or *Lessing's Theological Writings*, tr. H. Chadwick, pp.51–6.

[32] [Added in the margin: 'Jesus of history – Christ of faith; historical critical judgments – faith judgments ever since.']

[33] *The Education of the Human Race*, paragraph 80.

[34] [This last sentence replaced: 'Reinterpretation of a religious view of reality and of the religiously articulated springs of human disposition action were bound to be the way in which Lessing formulated his pedagogical theory.']

[35] Lessing, 'Briefe an Karl Lessing, 20 Oct 1778' in *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: Werke und Briefe* 12: *Briefe von und an Lessing 1776–1781*, ed. W. Barner et al (Frankfurt a/M: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985), p.200.

[36] *The Education of the Human Race*, paragraph 76.

[37] Compare paragraphs 73–75.

[38] Ibid, paragraph 73.

[39] [Added in the margin: 'How important for preaching office this hope: see Strauss, conclusion to *Life of Jesus*.']

[40] *The Education of the Human Race*, paragraph 90.

[41] [This phrase replaces the sentence: 'Right now esoteric and exoteric meaning, speculative religious theory and what is true, as well as its bearing on the reform of mankind in its quest for true humanity have to maintain their ambiguous relation; they do not coincide.']

[42] [The sentence originally began: 'Speculative theory maintains its ambiguity, its provisional character, its tension between exoteric and esoteric meaning because it is no more (though of course no less) than a construct in mental space…']

[43] [The remainder of this sentence is a replacement for: '…but the perfect wedding of reflective theory and the pedagogical evocation of reforming activity, the merging of morals with the fiction of historical action and character. Thus certain transitions in time, for example Nathan's hesitation as to whether he was still a Jew or not – so indicative of Lessing's own ambiguous attitude toward the abiding usefulness or lack thereof of positive religion to the coming universal religion – can be dramatically represented as unities in transition, in a way in which they cannot be theoretically stated.']

[44] [Added in margin: 'How typical of the Eighteenth Century, and how marvelous!']

[45] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, day 1, tale 3; see http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/dweb.shtml.

[46] [Added in the margin: 'Good Lord, it sounds like Bultmann preaching!']

[47] [The typescript ends at this point, but there are, included with the George F. Thomas materials in YDS 10-169 some isolated manuscript pages which I think form the continuation and ending of the lecture.]

[48] Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of mere Reason*, ed. A.W. Wood and G. Di Giovanni (Cambridge: CUP, 1999).

[49] Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy 6: Modern Philosophy from the French Enlightenment to Kant* (London: Burns and Oates, 1960), II, p.135.

[50] [The manuscript then degenerates into a collection of notes, and finishes half way down the page: '1801 "Intellectual intuition" (Man included in Godhood); (1) Which shall overcome which concept? Not much question – Subject tends to

embrace object; the objective descriptions of God are symbols of God as subject; (2) New language needed, new conception; (2) [sic] 'Faustianism': man as virtually unlimited creator of his own world, especially his cultural world, out of that which he finds 'accidentally' given to him. The merging of divine and human in intelligent creativity; (3) It was the dry rationalist who had skirted, come close to the abyss beyond rationalism. Symbolism and Religious Conception in *Religion within Limits*.']

[51] Wilhelm Dilthey, 'Gotthold Ephraim Lessing', p.147. See note 6 above.

[52] Eduard Zeller, *Vorträge und Abhandlungen geschichtlichen Inhalts* (Leipzig: Fues, 1865), p.325.

[53] Peter Demetz, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: Nathan der Weise* (Frankfurt a.M./Berlin: Ullstein, 1966), p.325.

[54] *Nathan the Wise*, IV.7.

[55] Ibid, IV.4, 139.

[56] *The Education of the Human Race*, paragraphs 73–76.

[57] [The manuscript degenerates into notes at this point: 'There is one exception to this tentative character of speculative religious ideas: The idea of Providence or God. Yet not easy to determine: A. (1) Against personal deity of arbitrary revealed kind; (2) Against designing craftsman deity of the mechanical universe of natural religion; (3) Against materialism like that of d'Holbach; (4) No trace of Hume's agnosticism about the nature of the ultimate cause. B. For (1) Pantheism – both Spinoza and Leibniz; (2) Immanence of the divine within the world; (3) Causal determinism yet intelligent harmony; (4) Theodicy – acceptance, but also [*The remainder of this note is difficult to read*]. C. (1) Here [i.e. providence] speculation – not as in Trinity etc. – [is] immediately linked to the affection and to the virtuous, truly human life. (2) How – no real answer. I suspect he'd suggest no need for one: here theory should recede, this is simply and irreducibly the way the religious person talks – and no explanatory theory is adequate to or a substitute for the use of that language as a form of life: (*Nathan*, Act IV, Scene 1, 118). But apart from this one instance – God's determining providence – all speculation is secondary for Lessing.']

[58] See note 21 above.

[59] Lessing, 'On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power' in *Lessing's Theological Writings*, tr. H. Chadwick, pp.51–56.

[60] [Johann Salomo Semler (1725–91), church historian and biblical critic.]

[61] [Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), Jewish philosopher.]

[62] [Christoph Friedrich Nicolai (1733–1811), Enlightenment writer.]

[63] 'Vorrede des Herausgebers'; see note 25 above.

[64] [Deleted at this point: 'And with that we return to our earlier theme: the priority of the practical for Lessing but also the drastic independent evaluation he gave to that ??? of popular philosophy: rational moral virtue and the passions were his concern

and the philosophy of religion was the concrete, social stage for a ??? to give embodiment to that informing ??? Rational, moral virtue was his concern and so was its fusion with the passions or affections, morality and passion were bonded together. Nature, he suggests at one point (6, 387) in the second conversation of Ernst and Falk, has made man for happiness in society, and all sure passions and needs lead us in that direction. And the fulfilment of that natural aim is the unification of people in that humanity which is theirs when they see each other united as equals, simply as human beings, regardless of nation, and especially of class (6, 39?) This, of course, is also the ideal of the Freemasons and rests, as Lessing puts it, "not on external connections which degenerate so easily into bourgeois arrangements, but on the feeling of mutually sympathising spirits." (6, 406)'.]

[65] Dilthey, 'Gotthold Ephraim Lessing', p.85. See note 6 above.

[66] [Marked for deletion: 'Now with regard to that dishonest revelation and philosophy called Neology, it was easy enough to know what disposition to make. And to the extent that orthodoxy and Neology had a family resemblance, the fight against orthodoxy was also easy. But it was tougher, internally tougher, to the extent that orthodoxy and pietism, inner non-philosophically grounded faith and piety, resembled each other. To gain a stance toward this outlook or combination of outlooks, Enlightenment rationalism simply would not do. For it could only abolish them root and branch, intellectually as well as dispositionally. And Lessing wanted rather to reform or reinterpret – in the direction of his human ideal – than abolish this or these aspects of the tradition.']

[67] *Nathan the Wise* IV.7.

[68] *Nathan the Wise* V.4, 139–40.

[69] Hans Wolff, *Die Weltanschauung der deutschen Aufklärung in geschichtlicher Entwicklung* (Berne: A. Francke, 1949), p.202. Chapter X is a brilliant exposition of the 'popular philosophy of the later Enlightenment'.

[70] Ibid, p.203.

[71] H.E. Allison, *Lessing and the Enlightenment* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1966), pp.121–35.

[72] Lessing, *Laokoon*; see note 8 above.

[73] Wolff, *Die Weltanschauung*, pp.219ff.

[74] Cf. *The Education of the Human Race*, paragraphs 79–85.

[75] Ibid, paragraph 80.

[76] See Demetz, *Nathan der Weise.*

[77] [This extract stops in mid-page, though Frei added in the margin: 'Faith – historical-critical judgments about Bible. Too bad that this is how the issue got posed by Lessing–Reimarus, and Goeze. For it determined theological discussion thereafter. Also gave notion about what Lessing's chief contributions to the theological discussion were. (Wasn't *Nathan* read in light of *Proof from Spirit and*

Power, rather than independently or vice versa?): On this people like Hegel, Strauss, Kierkegaard agreed. But there is no sign that it was that drastic in its own right (apart from reforming religion) for Lessing – As a matter of fact 'necessary truths of reason' is not necessarily the status of religious truth for him, but only its status in a Leibnizian orthodox context such as his opponents have.']

[78] Eduard Zeller, *Vorträge und Abhandlungen geschichtlichen Inhalts*, p.325: 'The essence of religion, the ultimate purpose of all religious activity, lies … in its moral effect.' (See note 52 above.) See also references to the discussion in H.E. Allision, *Lessing and the Enlightenment*, p.181, n.61.

[79] Dilthey, *Dichtung und Erlebnis*, p.147.

11
Herder (YDS 18-271)

In 1974, Frei gave the Rockwell Lectures at Rice University, and planned to speak on Lessing, Kant, and Herder. He may never have reached the lecture on Herder, but some of what he planned to say might well be revealed by these lecture notes from courses he gave in 1973 (CPH 1973b) and 1974 (CPH 1974l)

Lecture on Herder, Feb 26 1973

1. Lecture (on Wed, Feb 21) taken from my Herder section in *Eclipse*; left over: 'Realistic spirit' (simple, childlike naiveté, depiction of immediacy of life) in biblical writings, rather than mythological quality (down to the very semantics!)
   (a) Denial of rationalism, i.e. allegory and accommodation.
   (b) Denial that meaning of texts = factual claim of miraculous nature (To that extent at one with Lessing). Yet at same time insistent that no Christianity without these facts. The meaning of these stories is the gradually developing realistic spirit evident in them.
   (c) 'Humanly is the Bible to be understood, for it is a book written by human beings for human beings.' It is to be understood 'from the Spirit of its time'. He wants to woo you into the atmosphere of every text. Hartlich and Sachs, 57:[1] 'Herder wants to return to the original naiveté of the Bible, appropriate it completely and live within it as one lives within a poetic work. He does not want to be tempted either by the question of the factuality of what is narrated there nor by the question of the necessary reshaping of the temporally conditioned biblical meaning (truth).'
2. His anger reserved for the critical stance. Frustrated because finally he knows he can't leap out of his time, out of his *no longer* naive, direct, realistic apprehension of texts, works, reality – and yet this is precisely what he wants to do! ('History, not categories, is the focus of poetic analysis'[2]) (Don't know in detail his view of Schiller's *Naive and Sentimental* (Geoffrey Sammons: 'Sentimentive') *Poetry.*[3] (He started a letter to Schiller on the subject.) Poetry not to be divided by genre so much as by the kind of sensibility. Hence the genres tend to merge) but he (unlike Goethe) demonstrates the dilemma.
3. (a) Violent anti-Kantianism is in part due to his (unsystematic, unscientific) affirmation that through our experience – inward, outward – we are in touch with the real world. (He relied on Hamann's[4]

reading of the 1st Critique and hoped – like Hamann – to show that sensibility and understanding, intuition and concept are united in language.)

(b) Like Goethe, he was passionately anti-mechanist, anti-Newtonian at the same time as he respected most profoundly the element of 'closed efficient system of the world' which the physicist took as his explanatory structure. An entelechy, of a certain organic development in which a primitive life, life-unity, and active force pervades and grows through the universe: this Herder learned from Leibniz and Goethe[5] especially at the time of the *Ideen* (Reflections).[6] It was after the publication of the first part of the *Ideen* that Goethe discovered the intermaxillary bone: man as a total organism, not in individual details, related to the animals – and yet higher than they. Nature and history, for Goethe and Herder both, to be understood genetically: Everything (including understanding) in motion (history!) (for this, Lessing wanted to and could find no adequate conceptual expression!) 'Goethe viewed nature after the analogy of spirit and history. Herder tried to demonstrate the justification of this way of viewing nature by making it retrospectively the key also for understanding human history.'[7] (Modify that in Herder's case!)

(c) But experience goes further than the 'real' world as it appears directly – yet not beyond that 'real' world into a super-world of 'real' intellective (in contrast to experiential) knowledge: Dogmatism (Wolff, Leibniz, Spinoza) must be drastically modified (in face of 'Criticism'), and here Spinoza proved useful, though within limits.

(d) One of the most important elements in the development of German religious thought from Herder through Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, is the rejection of the 'Creator God'. This is the most direct expression of the breakthrough of a certain kind of intellectual spirituality into the open area beyond the confines of ecclesiastical piety. (More important positively for their religion than the view of historical revelation in Jesus Christ.) This breakthrough not simply a matter of conceptual change but of sensibility. This is not clearly expressed in Herder and will be in Fichte one way, Schelling the other way, but it's there.

(e) God not to be thought of as specific, determinate being who is distinct from and hence related externally to the world, whose substance and attributes would have to be conceived in analogy to created, intelligent being in the world; Spinoza's monism serves him to claim the immanence of God, the steady presence of spiritual life-force (God = Spirit from here on in) to natural and spiritual being. God not a cause that, having caused, allows a discrete, contingently independent self-life to the effect. But the total immanence also serves to stress the total

otherness/infinity of God. No analogy between eternity and time, God and finite being, such as doctrine of creation in and with time had claimed.[8] 'The Bible always speaks of God as a present, living active being, alive in all his works, active in each individual work, even in the smallest concern of one life … Indeed this is the only way to ascertain God, to grasp him and bring him to the attention of others, in short it is the basis of all religion on earth.'[9]

(f) The monism of Spinoza only served to affirm the immanence of God: While Herder denied individual personhood to the divine, and externally set final causes, the whole of the universe is a living organism, spiritual and natural, so that God not infinite substance with extension one of its attributes. 'Herder is the first German thinker to try to conceive naturalism as a moment of truth within an evolutionary world system, and to make the place of humanity, the noblest and highest organic system on earth, as the decisive basis of all higher ideal truth. God is the primeval force that penetrates this organism in infinite individual expressions.'[10]

(g) But also in a certain qualitative order, and by means of certain immutable laws: the chaotic, the evil, the partial is always subordinate to and means for the realization of what is harmonious, good, whole. Even war has changed, developed from a wild, chaotic, passionate expression to an art in control by individuals: the art of war in part consumes war itself. (Intense dislike of power, the state, Hobbes, contract, etc.)

(h) From there Herder swung to the analogy of the spiritual, i.e. the immortality of spirit growing as a climactic reality out of the increasing perfection of inorganic nature which is the fit basis for life (even as pre-formed life), organic life and nature as the chrysalis of man's unique cultural and historical existence. Immortality the climax of it all. Anti-rationalist (but affinity to Rousseau) (1) in the notion of ascending, developing order of reality and (2) in the way this is to be apprehended – the senses, reasoning, and imagination all together – empathy, sense for unique manifestations. Kant – same beliefs (Rationalists usually believed in immortality) but not by analogy from order of visible experience. (Divine transcendence and immanence, unresolved in Herder, seen as a problem in Hegel etc., where person 'anthropomorphism' a moment in the Absolute.)

New Lecture on Herder, October 10, 1974

New lecture beginning Herder as linguistic-cultural theorist: Language as clue to him and to difference between Romantics like him and Rationalists like Lessing.

(1) Herder connected origin of language and origin of poetry – both intimately connected. Not only is poetry akin to the essence, if not itself the essence of language, but it is so because it is close to the *origin* of language. The preoccupation with origins has two aspects (a) persistence of the nature of anything, especially its true nature, within later developments; (b) a kind of purity not equaled thereafter – primitivism of a sort, albeit modified because the earliest stage also excelled in other respects.

(2) Almost at random one picks among his writings and the same cluster of themes emerges. E.g., from the mid-seventies 'Fragment about the finest contribution of a young genius to the treasures of poetic art.'[11] Back to the original living source! Use technical aids and concepts, divisions into genres (Lowth![12]) only as tools, not as real, built-in characteristics.

(3) His prize essay (late 1770)[13] one of his most successful achievements, according to Rudolf Haym.[14] There had been about two views of language. Theological-orthodox and enlightenment-rationalistic. (a) Language comes about by divine instruction. (b) Languages come about by deliberate invention and conventional agreement. But in addition (c) Condillac (remnants of Cartesian view of animal as machine) origin of language a natural product of our 'sensing machinery'.[15] Sounds naturally given off as a result of sensation, these responded to in similar fashion, and thus speech develops. Origin of language neither divine nor human but animal nature.[16] Also anti-Enlightenment. Agrees with Condillac that origin natural, but disagrees that it presupposes some sort of society (But Rousseau leaves undecided whether (organized) *languages* presuppose society or vice versa. But long time lapse between language in state of nature and this state.) People need speech in order to think. From cry of nature (in need of help in emergency) it develops through gesturing into the art of audible, articulated signs, at first each object having a particular name without reference to genus and species. Reversing rationalists, he says that general ideas can come into the mind only with the aid of words.) Against these three hypotheses, Herder grounds speech in the specifically spiritual nature of man, in what distinguishes us from the animals.[17] (What we have here is an early example of that humanism so distinctive of German philosophy, albeit still with a vigorous endeavor – as with early Schelling – to see man as a unique development in, and connected with, nature as driving force.)

(4) Haym says that here, as everywhere, he tries to mediate French–English naturalism on the one hand and rationalistic German philosophy (Leibniz–Wolff) on the other. Here it means working out theory of languages as a natural–spiritual datum.

(5) Unlike animals, man has no natural, instinctual mode of communication. Man, in contrast to animals, has a universal – not a narrow – *Wirkungskreis*: connected to this is a necessity, not present in the immediate artfulness required for animal's artful scope, for free *Besinnung*, loosed from immediate object, or *Verstand*, *Vernunft* – his favorite term is *Besonnenheit* – reflexiveness (We can pretty well say self-consciousness! Unlike Schleiermacher self-consciousness and speech directly, not indirectly connected.)

(6) *Besonnenheit* pervades / governs his *whole* nature; it is not a specific 'super-added' power. By means of it, characteristics of external world are separated out, marked inwardly, and become inwardly and outwardly expressed. Mixed with expressionist theory is obviously depictive or sign theory – words are signs naming things. The two, one should say, are mixed: What is important is (a) their coincidence by virtue of the grounding of both in man's *inwardness and consciousness*; (b) the employment of this theory of origins and nature of language for the explanation of man as language – and hence culture-bearer, not for the sake of language theory in its own right. ('The first mark of reflectiveness was the soul's word and with that language was invented. Each thing is noted internally, begets an internal denotating, characterizing word and all human language as a collection of such … Language would have had to come about even if man had been isolated without society. It's due to the distinctiveness of human nature. Even unspoken, language would have existed. It was the agreement of the human soul with itself.')

(7) The characteristic or chief sense which aids language in developing as inward and outward word is *not* sight but *sound*. The world of objects is first communicated to *hearing* and the first word book of the world is collected from the world's sounds. But 'The sounding world appears to sensuous man as living and acting; her personifies nature. What was originally verb becomes noun, and noun again becomes distinguished by gender or sex. Woven into the beginnings of language are the beginnings of mythology and poetry.'[18] The first language was nothing but a collection of poetic elements, a 'wordbook of the soul which was at the same time mythology and a marvelous epic report of the actions and speeches of all beings – a constant fabulation done with passion and interest.'

(8) For (a) feeling and relation to outside as well as for (b) the interrelation between various senses, *hearing or sound* is the crucial mediating sense.

Sense of touch too momentary, sense of sight too confusing – a constant simultaneity or side-by-side of many, many things: Hearing on the other hand is best organized, allows orderly successiveness to the soul. (Lessing's *Laokoon*!) At the base of all senses is feeling, and feeling expresses itself naturally and immediately in sound.

(9) Development of language: (a) Language and reflectiveness mutually supportive into an orderly whole. (Like Schleiermacher precedent *seems* to go to inwardness interior character.) (b) Language is never an individual but a social development because man is social. (c) Language conditioned by the necessary division of the race into differing cultures according to different climates and modes of life. (d) Nonetheless, developments of language in accordance with a higher plan, a unitary development of all mankind, a chain of a many-faceted unitary *Bildung*.

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[1] C. Hartlich, and W. Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes in der modernen Bibelwissenschaft* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1952).

[2] Rudolf Haym, *Herder nach seinem Leben und seinen Werken* (Berlin: Aufbau 1880), II, p.683.

[3] Schiller, *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795–96).

[4] [Johann Georg Hamann (1739–1788), theologian and philosopher.]

[5] Haym, *Herder*, pp.231.

[6] Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–1791).

[7] Haym, *Herder*, p.235.

[8] Herder, *Gott: Einige Gespräche* (Gotha: Ettinger, 1787).

[9] Herder, *Briefe, das Studium der Theologie betrefend* (1784) in *Johann Gottfried Herder Werke* 9/1 *Theologische Schriften*, ed. G. Arnold et al (Frankfurt a/M: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1985–2000), pp.424–5.

[10] Emanuel Hirsch, *Geschicte der neuern evangelischen Theologie* IV (Güttersloh, 1952), p.219; cf. Herder, *Gott*, pp.104ff.

[11] Herder, *Sämmtliche Werke,* ed. Berhard Suphan, 9 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1877–1913(, pp. 541f.

[12] [Robert Lowth (1710–1787), author of *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*.]

[13] Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (Berlin, 1772); German text available at http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/herder/sprache/sprache.html.

[14] Haym, *Herder* I, pp.430f.

[15] Etienne Bonnot, Abbé de Condillac (1714–1780), *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances*; a text is available at http://visualiseur.bnf.fr/Visualiseur?Destination=Gallica&O=NUMM-87990.

[16] For third hypothesis, cf. Rousseau's Second Discourse 'On the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men' in *The First and Second Discourses*, ed. R.D. Masters (New York: St. Martin's, 1964), pp.119ff.

[17] See his critique of Rousseau, *Sämmtliche Werke* 5, p.20.

[18] Haym, *Herder*, pp.433ff.

12
The Formation of German Religious Thought in the Passage from Enlightenment to Romanticism RS371b (YDS 13-199)

I produce here Frei's notes on Lessing and Kant. Lessing was a key figure in Frei's historical work in the 1970s, and appears (alongside Kant and Herder) as one of the subjects of the Rockwell Lectures in 1974, and as the sole subject of the George F. Thomas memorial lecture in 1978. Kant is even more important for Frei, who returned again and again to Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, finding that much of the structure of modern theology was already established in its pages. The course certainly ran until 1981, and the notes include a 1981 exam paper, but Frei may have written the lectures considerably earlier. CPH 1981a.*

1. Lessing

[Frei begins with a paraphrase of Lessing's *Proof of the Spirit and of Power*.[1]]

The Promise-fulfillment scheme: if I can't experience it myself but have to take the word of others, what use is it? It's the same with miracles. (Contra the mediating theologians, as much as contra (non-Pietistic) orthodoxy.) If I had lived at the time of Christ – fine; or if I experience miracles done by believing Christians, and experience prophecy-fulfillment *now* – fine. I would have subjugated my reason to him, or to claims like those made in his name, gladly.

I. The arguments are those of Hume, concerning tailoring belief to fit the evidence. But something is different. There is an emphasis on the *present* and on the time interval that Hume doesn't have: Now is when I want to be in the presence of such proofs. One mustn't forget (1) that Lessing was himself (like Goethe!) a pietist believer once, and that he prefers this with its orthodox rather than Rationalist leanings always to the brittle, intellectualistic and dishonest compromises of the Neologians; and (2) that he's talking about proof of spirit and power, i.e. of a here-and-now inward strength that gives *certitude*, not simply a weighing of evidence for and against the facts. And that's where the gulf or time interval becomes so important: Past so inexorably a dimension I cannot experience, a past occasion cannot be immediately, inwardly-certainly present to me: *Reports* of prophecies fulfilled, of miracles done, are not the same as prophecies fulfilled and miracles done. 'Those … done before my

eyes work immediately … the others are supposed to work through a medium which robs them of all power.'

II. Now what about the certainty (certitude? – I don't think so) of historical reports, i.e. probability statements, on the basis of which I am supposed to believe that something extraordinary has happened? Here Lessing switches from stress on how one becomes inwardly convinced to how likely an unusual fact, i.e. a miracle, is – This now is much more in the spirit of Hume. But Lessing's reply is not the conventional one, historical reports of miracles have a low probability value. Of course he believes that and with it – since the two were connected for him – belief that Jesus is Son of God also goes away. But this is not exactly what he stresses. He stresses that 'no historical truth can be demonstrated' and therefore 'nothing can be demonstrated by means of historical truths' (i.e. facts). What we have here in large part is the distinction between truths of reason and truths of fact drawn by Leibniz and Wolff. You recall that for them these were two distinct but coordinate, harmoniously related objective realms, each real in its own right, with the non-physical realm guaranteeing the orderliness, the intelligibility of the realm in which causal efficacy (sufficient reason) rules. You recall also that it is the personal God in whom freedom for factual occurrence and change, sheer rational coherence (principle of contradiction, envisagement of what is rationally possible) are united. Hence the ability of the two realms to be coordinated.

Philosophically this is going to fall apart through Kant who will find the coincidence of these two realms a *given* in singular occurrences, but not known apart from such occurrences. And *no* metaphysical conclusions can be drawn from their coincidence because (1) we do not know the individual physical fact in itself, to say nothing of the full concatenation of facts, from which we could reason to the reason for this fact being here and now; and (2) the limits of the other realm are that it operates only as a series of forms and categories in relation to occurrences presented to it – and not as an independently 'real' realm in its own right.

Theologically, here is Lessing knocking the same scheme just as hard as he can. You are *not* he, tells us, going to be able to indicate, short of God himself – and he's not available as an ordinary fact, at least not like Jesus ought to be – that you can account for the occurrence and character of historical fact in such a way that you can thereby also indicate its relation to the realm of necessary, purely rational truth. Now if you say that Jesus is the Son of God, then no matter how much miraculous evidence you cite, that evidence has nothing to do with this supposed status of his, for *that* is a claim of a logically and metaphysically different order. 'If I have no historical objections to the claim that Christ raised a dead man, do I therefore have to hold it to be true that God has a Son who is of the same essence as he? If I have no historical objection to

the claim that this Christ himself was raised from the dead, do I therefore have to hold it to be true that this resurrected Christ was the Son of God?' You cannot conceive historical occurrence and metaphysical being together in one concept.

III. Suppose Christ did miracles and taught that we have to believe him to be the Messiah, the reasons for accepting or rejecting these things are *quite* different from the grounds on which I accept other kinds of teachings that he set forth. That they were set forth in connection with, indeed by means of miracles, has nothing to do with their validity. The *Glaubenslehren* of the Christian religion are one thing, the practical (moral) elements based on them a wholly different thing.

Typical of the period (Semler,[2] whom Lessing disliked and vice versa; Karl Aner[3]) the difference between religion and theology, religion the permanent and true element, theological expression the variance. This among *Rationalists*, and not pietists! Schleiermacher by no means the first to make this basic distinction. Lessing made it and extended it to the Bible: Its inner meaning – the building itself – remains, even if the 'scaffolding,' or the 'architects' plans, are lost. Against Goeze he says, 'Even if one is unable to answer the objections which reason raises against the Bible, nonetheless the religion (of the Bible) remains undisturbed in the hearts of those Christians who have gained an inner feeling of its essential truths.'[4]

Again, 'The Bible contains more than belongs to religion', there was religion before there was 'Bible'. 'No matter how much depends on these writings, it is impossible that the whole truth of the Christian religion rests on them' 'The Religion is not true because evangelists and Apostles taught it but they taught it because it is true. The written traditions must be explained from their inner truths, and if there is no inner truth, they can't provide it.'

2. Kant

Why is it that everyone regards this philosopher as so vitally important for Protestant theology? If true in general, is it true in Christology also?

(1) The fundamental impact of Kant – as I see it – is the way he rescued the human being from his loss of a role, his loss of a status in the universe at large. (Badly put. Man could not suffer loss – eighteenth- and nineteenth-century people convinced of it, hence applauded Kant for showing how man *not* a loser in universe even when it begins to look that way.) Recall that up to now the self had been ingredient in the universe of objective things or substances. The soul was as real as the body – if one believed in

the soul at all – and the self–body–soul was the link between immaterial reality and the material world in the order of reality.

(2) We have said nothing about second critique so far – moral man;
(3) Nor have we touched on the problem of 'history' for Kant, i.e., the extent to which he paralleled Lessing – But let's postpone these and other issues. Let us note the formal features of this remarkable book.

(1) Kant wants to trace the process of conversion, and he wants to do it by indicating a point of genuine change in – well in what? In ideality, i.e. in the realm of ends echoing in history? – But that's a remote reality because 'ought' and 'is' always remain in tension. Let's say at any rate in the individual. Now that's fascinating problem in itself because it involves description of a sort which later comes to be called 'dialectical'.
(2) Kant also wants to make sense out of religion – and we note an odd combination here: (a) the Bible's content (unified canon!) (b) Religion as a human state – the referent of statements about God must be man (c) Religion a not only descriptive but normative objective state of affairs – true religion.
(3) The seat of evil in the rational will, i.e. freedom of choice in an irreducible way: Not sensuality but the deliberate superordination of sensual maxim over rational maxim. Presupposition or ground of freedom? – itself: this is subject–agent who cannot be known.
(4) The moral order = (a) good nature and inexplicably (b) actual evil over which we cannot help ourselves. Yet it cannot be hereditary (traducionist) and not historically originated. It must be prior to time and experience, presupposed in them – 'transcendental' factor. (Where then location of change? Not primarily in sensate experience, obviously.) Hence we are responsible for evil but cannot help sinning. R. Niebuhr: sinning inevitable but not necessary.[5] Thou oughtst therefore thou canst abide.

The change lies in the noumenal realm of the self. Justification lies for Kant in divine bridging of the distance between new intention and actual execution! But the change must be (1) in us: duty to good abides, waiting on God's help = sin of lassitude (2) Yet must be conceived or represented as *extraneous* because we cannot conceive or think the process of change from before and after. Hence *we* do, but must represent our doing as substitution for us by Son of God holding 'before' and 'after' change together.

The passage marked for deletion ends here.

Clearly the framework of questions and problems is one that represents a change from what we have seen hitherto, though to some extent prepared for in Lessing.

Special source of insight, awareness or knowledge which cannot be translated directly into metaphysical or general knowledge: It is not information about reality. Hence it is quite as much descriptive about an *a priori* human situation as it is normative or truth-claiming. The latter indeed has to be left in position of risk or question.

The move may be made in at least two ways.

(1) Kant himself: Practical reason, distinct from theoretical reason is the source and sanction for religion. There is no special *a priori* or transcendental religious function either in the human being or in the structure of knowing in which all human beings necessarily participate.

(2) Schleiermacher, Tillich and many others: There is a primordial, pre-cognitive, i.e. pre-knowing, pre-relationship-to-specific-objects awareness that does not reduce to metaphysics or to morality. This awareness constitutes the relationship. I *am* my unitary awareness. Man = consciousness. (How about what I've called 'ontology'? That's more difficult to establish. In both Schleiermacher and Tillich there seems to be a more *direct* relation of this primordial awareness to ontology than to metaphysics or morality – but even so (a) the two are not identical; nor (b) is there a denial of relation between awareness and morality, though metaphysics is another question.)

Question is about relation of *both* (1) and (2) to Christology. For *both* the question of the category change that bothered Locke fleetingly: Christ is due to failure on our part to be consistent monotheists, worship rightly, and live right moral life. In other words, sin – but not hereditary original sin and full condemnation, was presupposition. But the question made him uneasy for a moment: What has *historic faith* got to do with this? So he accentuated (a) the fact that we were unable to help ourselves (b) the benefit derived from Christ (c) the external evidence that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. All this Kant does too – at the *representational* level; but he cannot get beyond its allegorical status, if it is to happen genuinely *to us*. Kant cannot get an historical ('positive') answer to a moral non-historical question. As for the other possibility, from position (1), i.e. Schleiermacher and Tillich, re Christology of *person* rather than *work* of Christ, this is *out* for Kant as it was for Locke. Neither metaphysics, nor ontology, nor primordial awareness but morality = sin only led to Christology. Hence no Christ as crown of creation, no Christ = undisrupted self-awareness in relation to God. But even in this position, category confusion remains: for the primordial is different from, logically (ontologically?) prior to historical, so that 'ideal' in fact cannot enter history.

Result of both (1) and (2): A) 'History' status now highly ambiguous – does it belong to realm of phenomenal, objective heteronomous series, or is it part of man's very being = subject. Re. nature no question that the former is

true, but history something else again. B) The ambiguous status of finitude = evil.

Kant: Religion within Limits

(1) Had touched on three things I simply want to mention:
   (a) Dialectic as concrete thinking which is an apprehension, recapitulation and actual shaping of the reality apprehended.
   (b) Ambiguity of place of history: Does it describe subject–self perspective (realm) or phenomenal realm, that of sense experience? Kant said latter, his successors ambiguous.
   (c) Subject–self = practical reason = agent: Is willing the same as reasoning, or is reasoning a comment on agency? Kant ambiguous. The matter is important because we are dealing with unitary or whole self in different perspectives. Self is not simply a substance like other realities in the world but a slant on the world.

(2) Now the point is of course that what Kant posits – for many reasons – is that *this* self, this unitary perspective on the world, the *whole* self, is split against itself. Hence the beginning of Christology (= *work* of Christ) theory of all subsequent theology worth speaking of, until present time, takes its departure from this point, the unitary self split against itself which must become one.

(3) That split, clearly non-historical or pre-historical in Kant, is *ambiguously* historical in his successors. In any case the simple historical starting point of a one-time beginning of sin, which Locke still had, is now *out*, just as objective God, who creates at one point in and with time is out for German Idealists – what about one-time occurrence of salvation?[6] Apart from that, Locke's structure is still there: You begin with a problem involving an experience of
   (I) responsibility and
   (II) inability to measure up. There is, in other words
   (III) hiatus between actual and right states of affairs (Locke: loss of right state of affairs is that of bliss and immortality, due to sin. In other words, insuperable split or tension is not, at least not simply in man but in an 'objective' state of affairs beyond man's internality. There is a similar Christological schema here but a different view and sensibility of the self and experience) which is inescapable and yet our own doing (R. Niebuhr: Sin is inevitable but not necessary).[7]
   (IV) God's justice, and the coincidence between his justice and goodness or mercy, must remain untouched by this hiatus between is and ought, between our being responsible and our being unable to deal

with the evil for which we are responsible: 'You ought, therefore you can' remains rule in principle, but between ought and can there is an enormous gulf. And cognate to that gulf is the gulf between ideal world and phenomenal world.

(V) The presupposition for this complex dialectic within self, split of whole self, unity as well as total duality between ought and can is freedom and apprehension of freedom as a state of affairs for which no further reason can be given. (Quote Kant on irreducibility of derivation of freedom.) In effect of course, this means for Kant and in a different way for his successors

(VI) the thing I called special insight last time, as a state of affairs distinct from ordinary knowledge and from metaphysics as an item in the same realm of discourse as knowledge of sense data: Dualism between metaphysics and morality / religion involves positing freedom as an ultimate item on the moral / religious side.

(VII) The split of self involves then a free, unaccountable reordering of the maxims in their priority. Everything else can be put into an intelligible structure, this cannot. Why the *Willkür* chooses as it does, in contravention of the moral law, it is impossible to tell. ' … The source of evil cannot lie in an object determining the will through inclination, nor yet in a natural impulse; it can lie only in a rule made by the will for the use of its freedom, i.e., in a maxim … When we say, then, Man is by nature good, or Man is by nature evil, this means only that there is in him an ultimate ground (inscrutable to us) of the adoption of good maxims or evil maxims …'[8]

(4) The split must be healed in such a way that it can be shown that it takes place in the self, i.e., where it counts, where I am aware of (– no!) or rather apprehend the ground of the split to occur. Hence the problem of *continuity* of man under nature and under *grace* a basic issue. Hence the job of reconciliation must be autonomous, i.e., I must not be temporally eliminated. It must be organic or internal. There can be nor externally imputed righteousness *to me* which is not at the same time *my* righteousness, a decisive change in the pre-experienced, preexperientiable ground of the self.

(5) The work of reconciliation, which is that of changing the radically evil self back to the good self which it *is*, is certainly that of a radical change in maxims and therefore of moral agency. At same time, however, it is a matter of rational insight into the 'moral law as a sufficient incentive of the will'.[9] The moral law comes to the will with the force of an unconditioned imperative. But it also comes to reason as the idea embodying the perfect, rational structure which theoretic reason can only know as a regulative idea, not as actually informing, constitutive one. Reconciliation, to the

extent that it involves putting before us a rational, archetypal idea(l) as effective and good, is a rational transaction: The work of reconciliation is that of one for whom (A) his archetypal self and his works are one and the same – unity of person and work of Redeemer; (B) insight and change are finally the same – revelation and redemption are one (C) in the appropriation imputed and appropriated faith, rational apprehension and moral turn must be the same or at least continuous.

(6) One of the most important aspects of the work of reconciliation is the fact of the continuity which we mentioned a few moments ago. The labor of actual improvement, i.e., of visible change, is only appearance. As connection with the real action, the source of change is only tenuous or shadowy. It's almost as if the visible realm – political, ecclesial, habitual-overt or empirical-ethical is a mythical realm. Again, that's of course what both Schleiermacher and Hegel faulted him for most severely. Rational, intelligible structure may be in nature as phenomenal realm, but not in history or society as phenomenal. Here one has to go back of what appears to the source of incentives, the direct interplay of moral law and *Wille* = *Willkür*.

For God the two, inner change and full outer reform may be seen as one; hence he judges the good as already accomplished, even though it is only potentially so. In other words, even if God imputes righteousness to us he does so in view of foreknows as our actual becoming righteousness. *But there is an act of God's foreknowing, judging us righteous, which coincides with our own doing or insight*, and that is the act of change in our deepest self – the change in freedom, i.e., in the order of incentive: Here what God does and what we do coincides. At this point we can look at what takes place, the 'moment' or the inner act of change = not a temporal moment or act – with the eyes of God.

(7) Now it is important to remember what Kant said in Preface to second edition: You don't need to understand my system to understand what I'm saying here. I would suggest that what we have in this book is a description or rendering of change, rather than something like a critique, i.e., an inquiry into the transcendental ground or possibility of the change. What actually *is* changing, and what is structure or descriptive logic of the process – because concrete processes are notoriously difficult to explain, but not always so difficult to describe.

Still, there is also the fact that even if you merely want to give a description rather than an explanation, you've got to have a kind of thinking that's not like most: you've got to show that something is at point A or at rest, and then you've got to indicate that now it's at point B or totally changed in location without indication of intermediate locations. Suppose your problem is that of the moral self, and like Kant you don't

have a notion of self-substance but self as rational agent: You can't claim gradual modification of the attributes or predicates of the unchanging substance. You want to speak of *total change*, total conversion at the non-static, non-substantial core of the self. But you also want to speak of continuity. It is the same self, not two, through the change.

Did Kant have available to him the instrument that could describe this process? His successors, at least some of them, thought they did – Hegel par excellence. We described dialectic last time as concrete forward-moving thought, imitating and even shaping the process itself that it describes. It is an instrument that moves through the lapse of time, just as change itself does. Kant himself had denied the application of dialectic to anything concrete in the practice of pure reason. It is perhaps a different matter in the exercise of practical reason. But in any case, in *this* instance – religion – Kant wants to show something exceedingly difficult – a process, viz., the process off conversion even though he's mistrustful of dialectic here too 1) concretely–descriptively[10] and 2) *in a manner indirectly because as though seen with the eyes of God – yet not!*[11]

(8) The notion of a Son of God who is the ideal of a humanity pleasing to God corresponds to that of a man having originated sin. Represented as though in time it is in fact not a temporal notion, the good principle is as it were incarnate in our reason, and its archetype is to be found there: to think of it as united to flesh and blood is to eliminate the possibility of a man who mirrors it being an example, an image of the archetype; He would be a mere moral automaton. (a) Morally, then, 'incarnation; can only have an allegorical meaning (b) Naturally, an incarnation is of course nonsense: For *miracles* are as inconceivable in regard to intelligible as to historical and as to physical being: 'they are events in the world, the operating laws of whose causes are, and must remain, absolutely unknown to us'.[12]

(9) We are of course, in temporal representation either of the intelligible moral ideal as historical *or* in the notion of a substitutionary, satisfying atonement, in the realm of *allegory* this fact allows *person and work* to merge together. Literally the two become one in our appropriation of the moral ideal – pure conformity to the moral law – in inward fact: (a) at point of 'creation' and (b) at point of actual turning from evil to good within.

Allegory: either intentionally or unintentionally the true meaning of a story is the idea to which it points, personification of ideals and ideal entities: it is truth-or-meaning content represented in story form (But – said others – we can show that Biblical authors did not *intend* to allegorize. Who cares, says Kant). Yet what Kant is doing is *rendering* or describing (a) not only an *idea* but a *process*, and (b) describing something which is really *intelligible as such* but yet cannot be directly described. The process of conversion is *that* because it is a process.

[1] Lessing, 'On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power' in *Lessing's Theological Writings*, tr. H. Chadwick, Library of Modern Religious Thought (London: A&C Black, 1956), pp.51–56.

[2] See above, p.158.

[3] Aner, *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit* (Halle, 1929).

[4] Herder, *Sämmtliche Werke,* ed. Berhard Suphan, 5 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1877–1913), p.271.

[5] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Scribners, 1949).

[6] [In margin, crossed through: '(3) Split can't be healed forcibly, plastered over – the job must be organic, i.e., internal, i.e., autonomous. (4) Work of Christ point of view, but because reason = morality, therefore work of Christ = person of Christ.']

[7] See note 5 above.

[8] Immanuel Kant, *Religions Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, tr. T.M. Greene and H.H. Hudson (New York: Harper, 1960), p.17.

[9] [In the margin: 'Work and person of Christ one and same because moral agency and reason one and the same.']

[10] Ibid, p.46.

[11] Ibid, pp.60–61.

[12] Ibid, p.81.

13
Contemporary Christian Thought RS23a (YDS 13-197)

These lectures are dated 'Tuesday October 24th' and 'Thursday November 16th', which places them in either 1972 or 1978. The former lecture, although it is little more than a set of headings, shows Frei's approaching his later analysis of Barth's as one who 'conceptually redescribes' Christian faith. The latter lecture is interesting primarily for its reflections on the nature of predication in talk about God. CPH 1972a.

Barth

(2) Focus on later Barth: (a) Distinctiveness of Biblical Christian concepts ('exclusivism' is what Lindbeck calls it) (b) yet universally intelligible – everybody in principle Christian! – Yet faith before understanding

(3) Back of that obviously three convictions

(a) Christian concepts distinctive – biblical. (Someone after class raised question of unity and Christological unity of Bible.)

(b) Revelation as an event absolutely crucial, and a *cognitive* event at that. Illumination or insight and analysis of meaning must coincide.

(c) But we cannot show how that's possible, i.e. *how* the two can coincide: Barth sticks to analysis of meaning as though faith, i.e. Revelation, had already taken place: Predestination

(d) You cannot show *possibility*, because it is explained from same ground as actual event (Holy Spirit). Barth *not* apologetic – no 'natural theology', no anthropological contact point for 'faith', no notion of faith (and therefore revelation) as universal pre- special revelation situation. Unlike H. Richard Niebuhr and Tillich!

(4) Doesn't that force him into giving up one side of his earlier position, i.e. doesn't it force him into authoritarian orthodoxy? You've got to believe a set of assertions about salvation, whether or not you've got or become a question? Barth's answer to that, after his 'turn', is that there is no universal logical pattern or explanation of how people become Christian (or non-Christian for that matter). To try to show how has been the trouble of modern theology. No, you don't believe except existentially. But all you can do is to suggest that the ground of existential turn (Holy Spirit) and the objective meaning of Christian concepts have one and the same source. How the two come together, how insight and conceptual analysis join not possible for theology, except as though already happened.

(5) Hence categories or concepts like 'revelation', 'faith', 'sin', 'man' have no non-Christian cognate for Barth, unlike Tillich, H. Richard Niebuhr. They are general *qua* Christian.[1] The two things undertaken jointly. The upshot of *both* analyses is that the Church is *going to be* and *should be* distinct from world – its exclusiveness serves the world well; indeed it may be the justification for the Church. (He recognizes the contradictory attitude – culturally relevant religion – disinterested obedience to, faith in, truth.)

(6) This was also the struggle of K. Barth, the person most clearly concerned with the integrity of Christian concepts and the distinctiveness of Christianity.

(a) 'Man must be overcome'

(b) But it's through the question-and-answer situation![2] The point is, is there a description of the cultural, human situation.[3]

(c) As ministers … [4]

(d) The *technical* expression for Barth's affirmation of orthodoxy (without its dogmatic/scholastic objectivity) is 'Word of God' in Bible and preaching: very Protestant indeed!

(e) Where does insight become *true*, not false *therapy*? Where is the invisible joint of human, questioning self-projection meeting divine answer? Where does human word (biblical, sermon) become divine Word? Where is the *analogy* of 'Word made flesh' by which we can believe that 'Word was made flesh'?

(f) Revelation – (i) divine word (ii) informative communication (iii) personal insight

(g) Schleiermacher – teacher of transcendence (givenness of divine with our inner constitution: 'Wholly other' is our native climate 'beyond our life in bodily nature and culture); Harnack much less of a worry because history or the path of culture isn't the path of the divine for Barth.[5]

(h) Faith = the paradox of *not* understanding, *not* knowing the union of transcendence and immanence

II. (1) How utterly different at first blush Tillich and H. Richard Niebuhr's theologizing.[6] But there may be things in common with Barth.

(a) The fear of reducing 'faith' to a dogmatic–intellectual assertion rather than a total stance of whole man. Barth shares this but they fear he's surrendered to the reduction.

(b) The priority of *cognitive* (though not informative knowledge) concepts as central Christian concepts even if (Hick's chief two distinctions) propositional view of revelation and faith rejected in favor of something eventful / existential / co-presence (grasp – insighted — being grasped: Analogy to I-Thou relation)

(2) (a) But beyond that – sharp differences about the basic Christian concepts. Though they are distinctive, they are grounded in or have contact with a general structure of analysis of human being.
(b) This analysis is also insight and does so *not* on the basis of a special scheme (psychoanalysis, existential phenomenology) but of appeal to common experience: We all know what it is to be ultimately concerned. Just take fact seriously and analyze implications and what it does not imply.[7]

Barth on 'God'

(1) God's *activity* and *effectiveness* the subject or object of theological description (= liberal view: God not in himself but in relation to us, i.e. as he affects us; descriptions of him = descriptions of relation to him=descriptions of ourselves as affected by him).

Answer: If God reveals self, then we know him only *within* the revelation and what he reveals, *but* he does not reveal self unless reveals *self*. Hence describe *him* in his activities. Describe neither (a) Him apart from his activities, 'in himself' = metaphysics, natural knowledge of God (b) Not him at all but only his relation to, action upon us.

(2) The subject of theological description is thus God as the absolutely distinctive subject of and in his activities or qualities or perfections. No matter what may *in fact* be the case, the logic (informal) of the notion of God is *not* that one tries to imagine love (e.g.), or transcendence = freedom (e.g.) as a concept in its own right, by itself, and then ask if there is a subject (*one* who loves, is free) to whom to attribute or of whom to predicate the quality. No! God not = love or power in the absolute degree (= Hitler's hypostatizing, mentally and existentially). Rather, (i) subject and predicate not accidentally related (substance back of attribute) so that they are in principle separate nor (ii) subject and predicate not merged so that subject disappears into predicate (Feuerbach) but subject is the unique way of holding together being and governing the attributes. This *the meaning* of 'God' for Barth. Is there a verifiable *reality* to correspond to it? (i) In any case, whether or

revealed). But (i) is he not then subject to necessity of revealing, communicating self? (ii) isn't liberalism then better when it backs of from metaphysical description altogether and says, never mind what's true of God in himself, we know him only as related to us – e.g., void, enemy, companion, making no claim that the transition takes place in him rather than us – all we know is that *the relation* changes? Barth's answer: God's very Being to Act or to Reveal himself is not a matter of *necessary relations to creature* because it is in the first place confined or fulfilled rather than in need. He is in fact related within himself, to himself: God is *free* toward his creation because his being is, prior to and apart from his act upon those other than himself, already Being-in-Act, Being-in-*specific*-Act-or-Relation. From God's revelation *ad extra* one infers the ground of its possibility, the actuality of God's Relatedness to himself – Trinity.

(4) God's being is an event, a motion intrinsic to himself, i.e., a self-grounded or self-moved event, an act, a coherence of 'nature' and 'spirit' (Bodied and purposive activity) as a *specific unity* of the two: they are held together, they don't flow together – Again: 'person', but purely-self-moved Person, one whose specific actuality is identical with his enactment.

(5) It is his Being to be a specific act that is of a specific kind, viz. community – love.

(6) God's aseity – freedom, self-determinedness, freedom to be himself (in relation also, because in himself in relation first – Trinity) Freedom of God from all 'external determinations'.

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[1] Barth, *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings*, tr. E.M. Delacour and S. Godman; ed. R.G. Smith (London: SCM, 1954), pp.6, 7–10, also 210–11.

[2] Ibid, pp.190–203.

[3] In the margin, Frei added: '(1) Dialectic; (2) Understanding (pp.24, 29); – Transcendence between orthodoxy and scepticism – The integrity, the meaning of central Christian concepts = self-negation of human cultural content.)'

[4] Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (London: Hodder, 1928), p.185.

[5] Heinz Zahrnt, *The Question of God: Protestant Theology in the Twentieth Century*, tr. R.A. Wilson (London: Collins, 1969), p.18.

[6] See ibid, p.295; note the contrast with Barth on one side, Ogden, Kaufman, Gilkey – and Flew? – on the other.

[7] Paul Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper, 1957), pp.32ff, 74ff. [Frei adds at this point, in the margin: 'Revelation = 1) cognitively grasped, therefore cognitive act; 2) An historical event or a truth indissolubly tried to an historical event; 3) A present-occurrence (in Nineteenth Century, not in Eighteenth when presence and self-consciousness not a problem. For Tillich and H. Richard Niebuhr a problem here to be solved. Not so for Barth: (a) the technical issue is covered by the Trinity; (b) it would be an anthropological grounding of theology, hence both

prejudicial and also relying on certain notions as if they were eternal (revelation = self-conscious notion of man, hence I-Thou or presence notion of revelation).']

III

Reviews and Book Notes

14
Review of Wendelgard von Staden's *Darkness over the Valley: Growing Up in Nazi Germany* (YDS 10-166)

I have been unable to discover whether this review, written in about 1981, has been published. This draft degenerates into notes at the end, but before that it is a connected and polished piece of writing. CPH ?1981d.

Wendelgard von Staden's *Darkness Over The Valley: Growing Up in Nazi Germany* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1981) is a memento of those terrible years that struck at the lives of millions and millions of Europeans with the power of an elemental force. They were like and earthquake that distorted the landscape in the twinkling of an eye and opened up a huge chasm between the years 'before' and 'after'.

In a different way the same could be said and has been said about the First World War in personal retrospect. The social memory of the British in particular has never got over the ghastly slaughter, the decimation of the whole generation of the young men who died between 1914 and 1918. With them, as Paul Fussell told us in *The Great War and Modern Memory*,[1] died innocence, the redeeming power of personal sacrifice, the personal force of patriotism. The very character of the language as an instrument of social and literary communication came to be changed. Admittedly, there is something almost artificial, if not fallacious about trying to compare the quality of the personal memory reflecting on the first and second wars. And yet one comes across some differences again and again. There was the sense of unbelieving surprise in 1914. 'Can you tell me how this came about?' the German Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg asked a visitor at the time. Nothing like that in 1939. Von Staden can write:

> Slowly and relentlessly the war approached. The tension increased from crisis to crisis, and the expectation that something irrevocable would happen hung over us like a storm cloud. Thus when the war finally did start, it brought almost a feeling of relief. Even Frau Firebs?, my co-worker in the onion fields, put down her pitchfork suddenly one day and surmised: 'It would be better if they started the war now. It'll come anyway.'

There is no need to touch on the contrast between elevated jubilation in 1914 and the depressed weariness of 1939, in every participant country conflagrations. William Shirer and others have testified how amazed they were by the lack of jubilation in the heavily indoctrinated Nazi capital even after the rapid victory in the Polish campaign that Fall.

But in so much of the personal literature there is one noticeable thread distinctive of the second war, that of having been touched by an almost personal evil, the malevolence of a daemonic will that had the power of unleashing fury but had no staying power, that could destroy but never build. The image of the *bad dream* is a recurrent one, and therefore also of incredulity at the events and at oneself in them, the sense of having to come to terms with them, but also the sense of tentativeness - because it simply doesn't make sense. One can't explain, but one must come to terms. We have the image of the bad dream at least once in Von Staden's book, in the words of a Catholic priest from whom the author's mother seeks comfort during the latter months of the war:

I didn't believe him as he explained quietly that we would put these times behind us like a bad dream and that afterwards the world would be a different place.

And yet in retrospect she writes as though to confirm just what she didn't believe at the time. He turned out to have been right. It *was* a bad dream; it was the conversion of nightmare into reality, and after six years it was over as suddenly as it had started. Everything had been changed, but it had all been done by a force that had simply evaporated. There was, you will recall, nobody in Germany after 1945 who had *ever* been a Nazi. I knew exactly one man who admitted it, and it was startling.

The force of the present book, which has stirred up considerable attention in the author's native land, is that it evokes the seductive power of that dream, its penetration into, its intermingling with the daily round of ordinary life and the gradual realization of the horror of the captivity once the evil had taken firm hold of reality and nothing could be done. It is an astonishingly successful evocation, done with great verbal and pictorial economy and precision, of the way mammoth events and small-scale personal life converged to form the same world, so that there was not even an escape from public into a private sphere. And finally, it is a memorial to the author's mother who, even though herself mesmerized by the force of that repellent and yet magnetic dream, and even though herself regarding it as having something of the quality of fatedness, nonetheless refused to be paralyzed *morally* by it. And because of that refusal, the book is a personal testimony to the always all-but-lost and yet enduring strength of humaneness in the presence of evil. To see something ghastly

coming with all too great a clarity and yet to defy it not so much on political as on moral grounds, is one way to be truly human.

The author, Wendelgard von Staden, whose husband was to become ambassador to the U.S. between 1973 and '79 and who had a diplomatic career in her own right, was born in 1925. Her parents owned a small farm not far from Stuttgart. They were, in a word, impoverished aristocracy who had to work the land with their own hands. They were deeply in debt, and the mother would get up at 4.30am to drive to market and sell their vegetables. The consciousness of class structure and social differentiation is at once present and yet not important. They were nobles, but they worked like ordinary, poor farmers and lived among them. They were on the land, in a firmly traditional small rural setting, yet the city and the bureaucratic organization that made Germany such a formidable power were only minutes away. It was, in a way then, a family that embodied or at least was in touch with much of the variety of the German population except the industrial proletariat - not typical (who is?) but something of a social microcosm nonetheless. Except in one respect: her father's brother was Konstantin von Neurath, one of those conservatives who had agreed to join the Nazi government in 1933 and was Hitler's foreign minister until 1937, and later became governor of occupied Bohemia and Moravia and was sentenced to a long prison term at the Nuremberg trials.

Early life was poor, yet idyllic: the depiction has those overtones of rural romanticism and closeness to land, village and tradition that has played so heavy a part in the ideology of the German past and certainly in the ideology of the German past which the Nazis exploited: One can almost sense the devotion to the soil, though indeed not to the myth embodied in the Nazi slogan 'Blood and Soil'. This heady mixture is vividly portrayed in an early chapter which English speaking readers may find slightly off-putting. She describes the youth culture of the 1920s and early 30s whose romanticism was so successfully co-opted by the Nazis. Those hiking organizations with their guitars and their German mythology and their mournful songs were ideal grist for the Hitler Youth Organization, a stupendously successful bureaucratic and political invention of enormous importance in building the Nazi war machine. In a conversation I had with Mrs von Staden about the translation, her very first question was whether it conveyed the spirit of those poems and songs, with their curious Wagnerian infatuation with mourning and death. And indeed the spirit of that folk ideology, mixed with the image of soldiers riding away toward death and the slow sweet sadness of it all, that mood of mesmerizing, dream-like unreality, was the most difficult to convey – though the capable translator did her best. But it is easy to see why it was so important to the author. For if one senses *that*, one can also understand how she could as a young girl go to hear the Führer speak in Stuttgart and be absolutely frozen into speechlessness by the figure with the almost fluorescent blue eyes, gazing

at something far away which no-one else could see, and how she, a twelve-year-old, could swear in her heart that she would die for the Führer if that is what he wanted.

One is struck, in the description of this as in virtually every other small vignette, by the extraordinary and extraordinarily effective linguistic economy of the book. It takes very few strokes of the pen to render with powerful vividness and, one judges, faithfulness, a scene or the nub of a conversation; and in every case there is that startling and persuasive coincidence of the small-scale intimate report and its simultaneously paradigmatic character: Two weeping girls, their heads shaved, are led through jeering crowds, the placards on their backs reading, I slept with a Jewish pig, and one remembers endless scenes like it from every side of the conflict, together with the social forces and conflicts, the transiences?. In the preface to the English edition, the author stressed that she had not written a novel or a short story but simply an account – a report. The verbal economy goes hand in hand with what, for want of a better expression, I can only call a lowering of the special voice, a deliberate self-removal of the author's guiding hand. There is nothing impersonal in this book, nothing that is not strained through her personal experience, and yet her style and mood combine to force the reader to be directly engaged with the texture of the described persons and events. A friend of mine aptly said on reading the book that, 'this seemingly straightforward "documentary" style masks a fine literary sensibility'. It is perhaps a paradox, but it is nonetheless the case that the form of the book forces on into a personal engagement with its substance precisely by the powerful understatement of the interior life that underwent these experiences. It was perhaps for that reason that the editor of the major German publication *Die Zeit*, a contemporary of the author now in her mid-fifties, said that no other book evoked the atmosphere of that time so vividly, or the ordinary German's experience of it so reliably.

It is well to remember that millions of non-Nazi Germans greeted the advent of Hitler to power as a time of national renewal, that to an extent - reluctantly, temporarily and confusedly – even the author's strong, politically conscious, Social Democratic mother is caught up in the appeal of it. But then one sees with the curious mixture of inevitability and persuasiveness of a tragic drama how the seeds of evil flower, how the romantic illusions are dispelled – the dawning recognition that the dream had been a nightmare all along. It is striking that there is not a word about the Jews until well into the book, but then, when the moment of recognition comes, it comes with the sense that this was the heart of the matter all along, even though one had not seen it or seen it only fragmentarily in a variety of separate instances up till then. But now the whole of Nazism is laid bare and is of a piece. In his last book, on the SS, Albert Speer details some of the internal conflicts of the organization, especially the cold-blooded arguments whether the policy of racial

extermination was to be carried out consistently or whether able-bodied Jews were at least temporarily to be used for slave labor. Von Staden describes how, after her return to the family farm in 1944, part of the land is expropriated - a hidden valley on which, after a rocket factory has been started on adjacent territory, a 'special camp' is constructed. In what will for most readers be the climactic part of the book, the family discovers the meaning of the term 'special camp'. They have been ordered to supply some beans and straw to the camp, and the mother had said that since they didn't have enough workers, some of the prisoners would have to come and collect the stuff.

There is a terrible scene in which Mrs. von Neurath orders potatoes to be cooked for the prisoners and they, in crazed starvation, fight each other for the contents of the boiling pot that had been spilled on the ground. 'They are Jews,' says one of the guards, 'subhumans. You can see that for yourself.'

The rescue of the prisoners – Jews, but others also – becomes an obsession with the mother and she plots, at once unsuccessfully and at considerable risk to herself, not only how to supply them but how to save them from the SS once the inevitable retreat from the advancing allied armies will set in.

It is perhaps something of a betrayal of a commentator's job simply to summarize the book he is supposed to introduce, but in this case it is inevitable, since the sheer, stark descriptive power of the book is its strength together with the fact that it is utterly bereft of all individual or collective self-glorification, excuse-making or even explanation, and of all inquiry into the subtleties, terror and ambiguity of one's own internal reaction. Description is all, yet only because the passion of moral accuracy controls the whole and all the details.

We are witnessing a whole raft of such remembrances published right now, by people in their fifties and sixties. Not that there has not been a steady trickle of them right along, but in the last few years it seems to have widened into a river. Why now, one asks? Is it in part that this is the time when enough psychic distance has been gained? So that one can now confront better than before the fact that one *must* come to terms with the chasm between before that time and since then, the chasm made so specially deep by the dream-like absurd quality of those days that demand an accounting even or especially if it is true that one cannot find an adequate explanation?

And what part does guilt play? Will we ever know – survivors guilt is after all a notorious phenomenon. Yet I think that in this case this latter type of question may finally be fruitless.[2]

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[1] Oxford: OUP, 1975.

[2] After this, the manuscript dissolves into notes.

15
Notes on Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (YDS 13-199)

Frei first read Auerbach's Mimesis *in about 1962, but nothing else in the YDS archive comes from so early, and it may well be that these notes were made on a subsequent reading. After six pages of quotes and paraphrases, Frei finishes with this comment. CPH ?1981b.*

The temptation here is to do what James Barr has criticized so devastatingly. Since differences in writing appear to be radical, 1) trace them back to differences between Greek and Hebrew mind and 2) Argue for the uniqueness of biblical–literary usage of genres. Neither appropriate, though 2) more tempting than 1). As for 1) that is precisely the temptation of the phenomenologist, which Auerbach has avoided – connecting any particular form or style of writing with a theory of the development of human consciousness through history. Thus his most natural ally, if he were connecting his outlook with a theory of history or of cognition referring to 'historical consciousness' or the historical force ('self' – end of self – not self theory of cognition) would be to go with Hegel, to be historicist. But he does not; there is no 'spirit' as there was for Hegel and Baur, unifying all single movements of style and form by making them aspects of itself. There is no deepening of innocence divested of itself and returning enriched into subjectivity or self-consciousness with depth, to itself from its self-loss in objectivity. There is no comparative study of literary representation and that which is represented by such representation, or that of which literary representation is the representation – Auerbach may well be post-Kantian in his epistemology but realistic in his theory of interpretation. 2) Temptation of 'uniqueness' is more severe, but Auerbach argues that what we have here is actually no single, describable genre, but a mixture of things and a mixture of styles.