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## 4 Religion

### 1 The Question of God

Today the topic is religion. The facts of good and evil, of progress and decline, give rise to questions about the character of this universe of ours. The questions take many forms. We will attempt to find the most fundamental form by having recourse to the transcendental notions, the questions for intelligence, for reflection, and for deliberation.

First of all, questions for intelligence. One can inquire into the possibility of fruitful inquiry. By inquiry we reach intellectually satisfying answers. But one may ask, Why is it that answers that satisfy our intelligence have any relevance to knowledge of the world? Why should they? One can say, 'Well, these answers happen to work as we know from experience.' But we can put the question further: Why should they work? Could they work if the universe were not intelligible? And could it be intelligible if it did not have an intelligent ground? And so one comes to a question about God, the intelligent ground of the universe.

One can reflect on reflection. Metaphorically we speak of marshaling and weighing the evidence. What these metaphors mean I worked out in chapter 10 of *Insight*: that one is seeking a virtually unconditioned, a conditioned whose conditions happen to be fulfilled. When one marshals the evidence, one is asking whether the conditions are fulfilled. When one weighs the evidence one is asking whether the fact that the conditions are fulfilled involves the conditions. But if all our judging, all our reaching for truth, is a matter of grasping a virtually unconditioned, still, virtually unconditioned is just one case of the unconditioned. Besides the virtually unconditioned, the conditioned

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<sup>1</sup> 17 June 1970, part 1; audio may be found at 59700A0E070.

that happens to have its conditions fulfilled, there is the unconditioned that has no conditions whatever. The virtually unconditioned is a contingent being, in traditional language. The formally unconditioned, the unconditioned that has no conditions whatever, the absolute, is the necessary being. And so once again, in terms of the absolute, the unconditioned, one comes to the question of God.

One can deliberate about deliberating. Is it worthwhile to ask whether my or our goals, aims, purposes, ideals are worthwhile? Is that worthwhile? Does moral concern first come into existence with man's emergence or has the whole process of cosmogenesis, of history, of Christogenesis, its source in a moral being, a person, a lover? Is there a God who is *agapē*, as you have in the First epistle of St John? In a third way, then, the question of God arises.

These three questions can be answered negatively, and the consequences of the negative answer are worked out very effectively by Langdon Gilkey in his book, *Naming the Whirlwind*. He shows how contemporary atheism is committed to the complete contingency of everything; reality is not something intelligible, it just happens, and everything just happens. It is committed to a relativity: nothing is fixed and final, everything changes. Finally, it is committed to the absurdity of the whole: there is no ultimate value, no ultimate significance to anything.

When one puts the question in terms of the transcendental notions, one is putting it in transcultural terms. That question can be put differently with every cultural difference, but it is the same fundamental question that is arising. It can be put not only with all sorts of variations but also with aberrations. But despite the multiplicity there is always the same fundamental question. And when St Thomas, in his five ways, ends up by saying, 'And this is what everyone means by God,' you may ask, 'Well, what is that that everyone means?' If you want to reach something that everyone means, you have to move to what is transcultural, to the question of God expressed in terms of the transcendental notions. Because the question of God does arise in terms of the

transcendental notions it is something that lies within man's horizon; it is not simply outside man's ken, man's capacity of intelligible speech. It is a question that is there; and either you deny or give a negative answer with the atheist, or 'I don't know' with the agnostic, or an affirmation with the man who believes in God's existence.

The first point, then, was the question of God. Secondly, self-transcendence.

## **2 Self-transcendence**

Man achieves authenticity in self-transcendence.

One can live in a world, have a horizon, just in the measure that one is able to get beyond oneself. The first step in that self-transcendence lies in our sensitivity. By it we are related to things about us. Sensitivity, of course, is something that we share with the higher animals. But while animals live in a habitat, man lives in a universe. He does so because he asks and answers questions. In answering his questions he unifies and relates, classifies and constructs, serializes and generalizes, and builds up a view of the world as a whole.

Insofar, then, as there are questions for intelligence, man moves out of his immediate surroundings to a real world, a universe. But he goes on to ask questions for reflection. When he answers, 'Yes, this is so; no, that is not so,' he is reaching a further measure of self-transcendence. For when you say that something is so, you do not mean that that is what appears, or what you imagine, or what you think, or what seems to you, or what you are inclined to say; you go beyond all those relativities to yourself and say simply, 'It is so.' I am talking, that's so. It is a measure of self-transcendence in which you get beyond yourself to something independent of yourself, because you reach an unconditioned, a conditioned whose conditions happen to be fulfilled.

Still, sensitivity, understanding, judgment are only a cognitive self-transcendence. There is a real, a moral self-transcendence, and that arises on the level of

deliberation, evaluation, decision. Through such deliberation, evaluation, decision, insofar as you decide for what is truly good, for what is worthwhile, you are deciding not for what pleases you, not for what gives you pleasure, not for what gives you the minimum of pain, and so on; you are deciding something that is good in itself. Good for you no doubt, good for others too, but you are becoming a principle of benevolence and beneficence, and that is real moral self-transcendence.

The transcendental notions, then, constitute man's capacity for self-transcendence. It is because you can ask the successive questions for intelligence, for reflection, and for deliberation that you can come to know what is truly good and come to realize it.

Still, the capacity for self-transcendence is one thing and the achievement is another. What happens when man actually achieves self-transcendence or, at least, what is one way in which he achieves self-transcendence in habitual fashion? It is when he falls in love, when his being is being-in-love. That being in love has its antecedents, its causes, its conditions, its occasions. But once it occurs and as long as it lasts, it becomes the first principle; it takes over. From it proceed one's desires and fears, one's joys and sorrows, one's discernment of values, one's decisions and deeds.

Now being-in-love is of different kinds. There is the love of intimacy, of husband and wife, of parents and children. There is the love of mankind, a commitment to human welfare. There is a love of God, a love that is without restrictions: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and thy whole soul and all thy mind and all thy strength. That love is not only a command, it is also a gift. St Paul to the Romans, chapter 5, verse 5: God's love has flooded our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us. At the end of chapter 8 to the Romans, a description of that being in love: 'there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths, nothing in all

creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 8.38-39).

Corresponding, then, to the question of God, which can be derived from the transcendental notions, there is also being in love with God, which is a fulfillment of this self-transcendence to which the transcendental notions lead. Because it is a basic and an ultimate fulfilment it is accompanied by joy, a joy that will remain, that can remain despite humiliation, failure, privation, pain, betrayal, desertion; a peace: because it is fulfilment it gives peace, the peace that the world cannot give. Because it is the love of God, and the love of God involves love of one's neighbor, it moves one to promote to the best of one's ability the kingdom of God on earth. That love of God, when that is missing man is exposed to the trivialization of human living in the pursuit of fun, to the harshness of human living from the ruthless exercise of power, and to the despair of human living that results from the absurdity of a world in which there is no God.

### **3 Religious Experience**

The third topic, then, religious experience. Being in love with God as experienced has no label of God on it. It is being in love in an unrestricted fashion, with one's whole heart and soul and mind and strength, without limits, restrictions, qualifications, reservations. Because it is so unrestricted, with no reservations whatever, it is other-worldly; it is not directed to some finite object or correlative.

As our questioning for intelligence, for reflection, for deliberation is without limits, so too the fulfilment of the self-transcendence to which our questioning leads is without limits. That fulfilment is not the product of our knowing and our choosing, it dismantles and abolishes the horizon in which our knowing and choosing went on. It sets up a new horizon in which our values are transvalued and the eyes of love transform our knowing. Though it is not the product of knowing and choosing, it is a conscious

dynamic state of love, joy, peace, and it is manifested in acts of kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5.22): Paul speaking on the fruits of the Spirit, the harvest of the spirit is love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control.

Though it is conscious, we must not think that it is known. Being conscious is simply experience. Human knowing is not just experience; it is experiencing, understanding, judging. Because it is conscious yet not known, it is an experience of mystery. Because it is being in love, it is not only attractive but fascinating; to it one belongs; by it one is possessed, one is not one's own. Because that love is unmeasured it evokes awe; because it is totally self-transcending, it evokes disgust with oneself. And so one has what Rudolf Otto described as the experience of the holy, the experience of the *mysterium fascinans et tremendum*, the mystery of love and awe. It is what Paul Tillich meant by being grasped by ultimate concern, it is what Ignatius of Loyola, as interpreted by Karl Rahner, meant when he spoke of consolation without a cause. Rahner takes it as consolation with a content but without an object. It is also what you will find described endlessly in *The Cloud of Unknowing* or the book on this by William Johnston, *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing*, New York: Desclée 1967.

God's gift of his love is mediated by the world mediated by meaning. It can be expressed and manifested in that world in several ways, but it tends as one advances in the spiritual life to ever simpler manifestations, ever more fundamental manifestations. Eventually, what is mysticism? It is withdrawal from the world mediated by meaning; there are no images and there are no concepts, it is just that love in darkness.

It is consciousness on the fourth level, it is not the consciousness of the dream state, nor the consciousness of sensitivity, nor the consciousness of understanding, nor the consciousness of judging; it is consciousness that is also conscience, consciousness on the level of deliberation, evaluating, deciding. On that level it is a first principle; our

apprehension of values depends on what we love, and God's gift of his love transforms our apprehension of values; it is at the *apex animae*, the sovereign point of the soul.

Theology in the phase of theory – you have the differentiation of consciousness into common sense and theory – speaks about that being in love with God as sanctifying grace, as an entitative habit, absolutely supernatural, radicated in the essence of the soul, from which proceed habits, supernatural habits of faith, hope, and charity, which are received in the potencies. Theology in the phase of interiority, when you have a differentiation of common sense, theory, and interiority, speaks of being in love, as distinct from acts of loving. That being in love is equivalent, in terms of interiority, to what sanctifying grace is in terms of theory. That being in love stands to acts of loving as God the Father, who is named *ho theos* in the New Testament – normally *ho theos* in the New Testament means God the Father – and as God the Father is love as being in love and the Holy Ghost is *to pneuma* as proceeding love; it stands to acts of love, then, as the Father does to the Holy Spirit.

#### **4 Expressions of Religious Experience**

Fourthly, there are expressions of religious experience. There is the spontaneous expression of religious experience. It manifests itself in love, joy, peace, acts of kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control. But there is also a more reflective expression of religious experience, because insofar as religious experience is concerned, one is concerned with the *mysterium fascinans et tremendum*, with the mystery of love and awe.

This reflective expression varies enormously with the stages of meaning. Early language rests on insight into sensible presentations and representations. To have any expression, any definition, any precise consciousness of religious experience, it has to be projected into the imaginary field or the sensible field, and so you have the hierophanies:

the sacred trees and groves and hills, mountains and valleys, and so on, all the endless things that Mircea Eliade has investigated so relentlessly.

Insofar as religious experiences are simply discrete, you have the gods of the moment. Insofar as they are recognized to have a family resemblance to one another, you will have something like Shintoism, where you have 800,000 divinities. Insofar as they are related to a place, you will have the god of the place, the god of Bethel, in the Old Testament. Insofar as they are the experiences of a single person you will have the god of Jacob, the god of Laban. Insofar as it is the god of the group, you have the god of Israel and the gods of the Gentiles.

In an essay, 'The History of Religions as a Preparation for the Cooperation of Religions,' in *The History of Religions*, edited by M. Eliade and J. Kitagawa, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959, Friedrich Heiler says that in the world religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrian Mazdaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism) there are seven common features. Now this statement of seven has to be qualified by what we are going to say later about religious expression as dialectical, its manifestation as dialectical, because man's self-transcendence is a tension between the self as transcending and the self as transcended. Anything that belongs to religion can be contradicted; with any statement you make about religion you can find religious instances of the opposite. But these seven, somehow or someway are found in the world religions.

First of all, there is a transcendent reality. Secondly, though transcendent that reality is immanent in our hearts; it is conceived as supreme beauty, truth, righteousness, goodness; it is conceived as love, mercy, compassion; it is reached through repentance, self-denial, prayer; through love of one's neighbor, even of one's enemies; and through the love of God, so that bliss is knowledge of God and union with him.

Now these seven can be seen to follow from what I have described as the mystery of love and awe, the state of being in love with God. If you are in love, you are in love with someone; and if your love is unrestricted that one must be transcendent. Still, you



are in love and so you experience, you are possessed, you are owned, you are not your own; and so that reality also is immanent in human hearts. It is self-transcending and, consequently, it is the turn of our transcendental movement towards the intelligible, the true, the real, the good, and, consequently it has to be supreme in intelligibility, truth, righteousness, goodness.

It comes to us as a gift of love, and so it is associated with love, mercy, compassion. Because it is self-transcending, it is repentance; it is rejecting all that is self-centered; it is repentance; it is self-denial, because it is self-transcending; and prayer, because one is in love with that object and prayer is raising the mind and heart to God. It is love of one's neighbor, because love overflows: love me, love my dog. Finally, because it is love of God, it is satisfaction; because it is love of a mystery, is conscious without a known object, an immediately known object, it is a desire for knowledge and for union.

## **5 Religious Development Dialectical**

However, religious development is dialectical. Self-transcendence is a tension between the self as transcending and the self as transcendent. So human authenticity is a withdrawal from unauthenticity; human insight is a withdrawal from oversight; human understanding is a withdrawal from misunderstanding; human truth is a withdrawal from mistakes and errors; human moral development is a repentance for one's sins; and genuine religion is an escape from the traps of religious aberration.

I have said that because one is in love one is in love with someone. But there are religions, such as Buddhism, and schools of asceticism and mysticisms (and that is what Buddhism is to a great extent) for which, because the experience is with a content and yet without an object, because it is out of this world, it can be spoken of as nothing.

Then, you can have the transcendence overemphasized, and then God the Father of all becomes remote, withdrawn, irrelevant to human living. Or you can have the immanence overemphasized, and then God is conceived as the universal process of which we are a part. (See F.M. Bergounioux and J. Goetz, *Prehistoric and Primitive Religions*, Faith and Fact Books 146, London: Burns and Oates, 1965, pp. 82-91. It is an essay by Goetz who is a professor at the Gregorian.)

The love of God is an actuation of our capacity for self-transcendence. But the supreme truth, beauty, goodness, reality, can be rather vague; the love part is easier to understand and can be reinforced by the erotic, the sexual, the orgiastic. Christopher Dawson once remarked that Christianity took sex out of religion. Because it is a mystery not only of love but also of awe it can turn to the demonic, to exultant destructiveness. So what is proper to religion can also be turned to its opposite, or as Augustine put it: *corruptio optimi pessima*, the corruption of what is best is the worst.

## 6 The Word

By the word I understand any expression of religious meaning or religious value. It can be intersubjective, artistic, symbolic, linguistic, or incarnate. I missed that one yesterday. Incarnate meaning is a meaning you associate with a person. To say that a person is an Iscariot, you mean that he is a traitor; to say that he is a Benedict Arnold, you mean he is a traitor. People's lives or people's deeds or great achievements, a Marathon, Bunker Hill, and so on, they incarnate meanings. So religious expression can be in any of these modes, but language is the most precise and explicit, and so it is a principal means of religious expression.

By the word, religion enters the world enters the world mediated by meaning. It endows that world with an ultimate meaning and value. Within the context of that world, religion comes to understand itself, its role, its task, its significance. There is, then, a

twofold word. There is the prior word that God speaks to us, not in the world mediated by meaning, but in the immediacy of the mystery of love and awe. And there is also the outwardly spoken word that is historically conditioned, that has to adapt to changes of place and time. The prior word is the fulfilment of our capacity for self-transcendence, but it manifests itself differently in different cultures, different places, different times. Still, fundamentally, it is ever the same; it is something transcultural; it is the invariant in religion; it is something that is found not only among Christians. God gives all men sufficient grace for salvation, according to Christian doctrine. And what grace would be sufficient grace for salvation besides that gift of charity?

One must not conclude, however, because there is a twofold word, the inner and the outer, one must not conclude that the outer word is incidental, secondary. We can see this best from an analogy. If a man and a woman loved each other yet never avowed their mutual love, they are not yet really in love. There is not yet the mutual self-surrender and self-donation that is the reality of being in love with someone else. The word does not simply manifest the reality that already exists, it is constitutive of the interpersonal character of being in love, it pertains to it. On that topic, there is a very brief remark by Antoine Vergote in a symposium, Enrico Castelli's edition of *L'Hermeneutique de la liberté religieuse*. It is Vergote's discussion, 'La liberté religieuse comme pouvoir de symbolization,' and he makes a remark about Bultmann, that for Bultmann the word is just the actuation of the *Vorverständnis*, the prior understanding; and he says the word is constitutive and it is not merely an actuation of something that exists prior, it is constitutive, and constitutive of the interpersonal dimension.

In ordinary experience, the mystery of love and awe is not objectified, people have it and they don't know they have it. It is within subjectivity as a vector, an undertow, a fateful call and commitment to a dreaded holiness. Perhaps, after years of spiritual striving, it can become obvious enough to awaken attention, wonder, inquiry. If that happens, there is need of the accumulated wisdom of a tradition, the word of

fellowship from those that share the gift. Today, when the feeling becomes clear enough to excite attention in people, they feel that they ought to see a psychiatrist. And so they need this word from others who know more about it, who have had it earlier. There is the need of the word of the Gospel, that God has first loved us. The Gospel, the Christian Gospel, is above all the celebration from all angles of God's gift of his love.

The word, then, is personal. *Cor ad cor loquitur*, Newman's motto. It is powerful: the preacher utters what is congruent with the gift that people have or long for. It is social: it gathers together the scattered sheep. It is historical: it has to find its place in the context of worlds mediated by meaning.

With regard to these worlds mediated by meaning, one has to be broadminded and tolerant, not exclusive; not pumping for the Jews or the Greeks, but able to understand both, able to understand the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and also to understand the need for the God of the philosophers too, because you have to move into the world mediated by meaning. But while the theologian, ideally, has to be at home in the world of common sense and theory and interiority and transcendence, he mustn't expect everyone else to be equally at home, and he must be able to talk to people who are only in the world of common sense, or common sense and transcendence, or common sense and theory, and so on, according to all the various combinations. In that sense, there has to be a pluralism in a contemporary theology. The same thing is not going to be meaningful to everyone. You have to be able to preach the gospel to all nations and to all classes in every nation. Consequently, you need this ability to move from one world to another, to transpose from one world to another.