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Summary of
THE LORDSHIP OF GOD
AN EXAMINATION OF THE THEOLOGY OF HELMUT GOLLWITZER
by Lloyd D. Smith, B.A., B.D.

By examining the mature writings (post-1950) of a contemporary German theologian, Helmut Hans Gollwitzer, this thesis focuses on three major areas of debate in modern theology: the question of methodology, the problem of speaking of God's aseity, and the effect on Christian faith of a modern consciousness of the hiddenness of God.

Following an exhaustive list of Gollwitzer's published works and a biographical section (Chapter 1) indicating the sources of his thinking, the thesis investigates (Chapter 2) the key to an understanding of his writings, viz., his unexpressed but underlying conception of the nature and task of theology as searching, in faith, for the Messenger within and behind the proclamation of the earliest witnesses (the Bible) and then renewing this proclamation in such a way that modern man may understand who it is that encounters him in the Christ-event.

On this basis, then, the thesis examines Gollwitzer's proposed solution to the problem of how we may speak appropriately of God---God-in-himself, God-for-us and God-in-community. First it investigates (Chapter 3) Gollwitzer's criticism of Herbert Braun's existentialist theology and of Dorothee Sölle's theology of representation,

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both of which, despite illuminating insights, are regarded as having transformed methodology into ontology. Chapter 4 details Gollwitzer's proposals for a vocative, confessional theology which speaks appropriately of both God-in-himself and God-for-us by adhering to four safeguards: a) giving primary ~~exemplum~~ authority to scriptural testimony; b) speaking only as a participant in the encounter with the Wholly Other; c) not imputing an ontology to biblical statements about God; and d) on the basis of condescension and permission speaking only by an analogia relationis. God-in-community, that is, God's self-witness through the activity of his community of believers, forms an integral and important part of Gollwitzer's writings, and constitutes a subsequent chapter (Chapter 5) of this thesis, with a special reference to his reply to communism and the threat of nuclear war.

These various 'parts' of theology, like the 'aspects' of God's being, are, for Gollwitzer, a unity, and in Chapter 6 the thesis returns to this oneness of approach to comment on theology's task of proclamation in the more specific context of preaching.

Finally, in Chapter 7, while indicating the strengths and weaknesses of Gollwitzer's approach to theology, the thesis undertakes a justification of his methodology in comparison with alternative streams of contemporary theology, viz., Christian Atheism (Altizer and Hamilton), Christian Hermeneutics (Braun), and Christian Panentheism (Pittenger and Hartschorne). This leads to some brief hints as to the way forward.

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THE THEOLOGY OF
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Submitted to Glasgow University for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

1976

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Summary of
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Following an exhaustive list of Gollwitzer's published works and a biographical section (Chapter 1) indicating the sources of his thinking, the thesis investigates (Chapter 2) the key to an understanding of his writings, viz., his unexpressed but underlying conception of the nature and task of theology as searching, in faith, for the Messenger within and behind the proclamation of the earliest witnesses (the Bible) and then renewing this proclamation in such a way that modern men may understand who it is that encounters him in the Christ-event.

On this basis, then, the thesis examines Gollwitzer's proposed solution to the problem of how we may speak appropriately of God—God-in-himself, God-for-us and God-in-community. First it investigates (Chapter 3) Gollwitzer's criticism of Herbert Braun's existentialist theology and of Dorothee Sölle's theology of representation,

both of which, despite illuminating insights, are regarded as having transformed methodology into ontology. Chapter 4 details Gollwitzer's proposals for a vocative, confessional theology which speaks appropriately of both God-in-himself and God-for-us by adhering to four safeguards: a) giving primary exemplum authority to scriptural testimony; b) speaking only as a participant in the encounter with the Wholly Other; c) not imputing an ontology to biblical statements about God; and d) on the basis of condescension and permission speaking only by an analogia relationis. God-in-community, that is, God's self-witness through the activity of his community of believers, forms an integral and important part of Gollwitzer's writings, and constitutes a subsequent chapter (Chapter 5) of this thesis, with a special reference to his reply to communism and the threat of nuclear war.

These various 'parts' of theology, like the 'aspects' of God's being, are, for Gollwitzer, a unity, and in Chapter 6 the thesis returns to this oneness of approach to comment on theology's task of proclamation in the more specific context of preaching.

Finally, in Chapter 7, while indicating the strengths and weaknesses of Gollwitzer's approach to theology, the thesis undertakes a justification of his methodology in comparison with alternative streams of contemporary theology, viz., Christian Atheism (Altizer and Hamilton), Christian Hermeneutics (Braun), and Christian Panentheism (Pittenger and Hartshorne). This leads to some brief hints as to the way forward.

INTRODUCTION

The Purpose and Plan of the Thesis

In certain circles today it is considered inappropriate to choose the works of one man as the subject for a thesis. It is indeed true that to examine in detail one carefully defined area of theology seems to make a more direct contribution to the corpus of theological knowledge. It is also true that the study of one man's theology can be a disjointed and therefore difficult affair because few people work rigidly within a system, and also because the range of areas covered is so large that in the scope of one thesis none can be dealt with at great depth. As a result, the critique may appear to be either simple adulation or narrow-minded disparagement.

Similarly, to choose the theology of a living and still very active man—a man from another country as well—would seem to compound the difficulty. Full assessment becomes impossible. For whatever impact his thought might have is only just being felt.

Nevertheless, that is what I am offering in this work. Various related factors make this exception not only possible, but even desirable. These factors relate partly to the man whose thought is the subject of this thesis and partly to the present situation in theology.

At various times in the history of theology certain people have been given the gift of seeing clearly what the demands and the promise of the Word of God are for their era. Still fewer have been granted an ability to proclaim this with equal clarity. Helmut Gollwitzer is one of these rare people.

And yet he remains virtually unknown in the English-speaking world. The English translation of his experiences as a Russian prisoner of war was a best-seller when it was first published (1953). Unfortunately, the publisher has allowed this to go out of print. Similarly, a collection of sermon-meditations on Luke's account of the Passion and a collection of essays and lectures dealing with the role of the Christian in politics are also out of print. Thus, until very recently, all that remained available to the English-speaking reader was his very difficult book, The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, made even more difficult by the awkward translation.

In Gollwitzer's eulogy on the occasion of being awarded an honorary degree by Glasgow University we read:

From his chair at Bonn he has been called to Berlin University. Today that is a move towards a centre of conflict, and there he will no doubt prove himself a doughty warrior.

1

¹ "The Glasgow Herald" (Glasgow), 20 June 1957, p. 11.

Perhaps an indication that we are beginning to heed this prophetic statement is the fact that in the past few years translations of his definitive study of Marxism and of his comments after the Uppsala meeting of the World Council of Churches were published in Scotland and America.

It is the intention of this thesis to be an examination of the theology of this man. The thesis, for reasons of time and space, concentrates on the mature writings——those produced after his return from Russia in 1950. Therefore only brief background information is given about the development of his thinking prior to that. But even within this restriction the range of topics seems, at first, to be beyond the scope of a single thesis. Since 1963 Gollwitzer has been involved with Herbert Braun in a lively debate on the "God question", i.e. how Christians can speak of God and his existence. More recently, in 1967, he entered the field against certain aspects of Dorothee Sölle's attempt to describe the relationship between man and God. Throughout all this he was involved in a range of political-ethical questions. Also he remained, in these twenty years, a preacher. Any of these areas might have formed the subject for a thesis. But if they had, it would have indicated a grave misunderstanding of Gollwitzer's theology. For his talk of God existing in and for himself cannot be separated from his talk of God's existing for us. And these,

in turn, cannot be separated from the response of the Christian community, that is, from ethics, from politics, from practice. All this, of course, is bound up with proclamation—both euaggelizō and kērussō, both bāsār and gārā!. Therefore, although to expedite examination I have divided these areas of thought into separate chapters, it is the whole, the unity, which is the subject of this thesis.

Further, I would hope to serve, in a small way, international theology. Despite the existence of a large number of journals and papers, theology—especially what goes under the peculiar title of systematic or dogmatic theology, or even more peculiar, Divinity—remains a very insular subject. It takes many years before the work done in one country reaches the theologians of another. For this very reason, Helmut Gollwitzer himself could not understand why Bishop Robinson's Honest to God created such a stir in England. It said very little that was new for Germany. Therefore, by giving a survey of Gollwitzer's contributions to German theology I am also indicating some of the things that have recently come under discussion there.

These aims and hopes, of course, have affected the plan of the thesis. After a short biography indicating some of the sources of Gollwitzer's theology I have proceeded in Chapter 2 to the very key to the understanding of his thinking: the nature and task

of theology. The points developed in this chapter recur continually throughout the thesis. Gollwitzer's theology, although expressed in very diverse ways as he took the field in various debates, has a very distinct unity deriving from his approach to theology as a whole. His concept of theology determines his answer to the problem of how we are able to speak of God today and of his relationship to man. To this, then, following on the discussion of the nature and task of theology, are devoted two lengthy and somewhat involved chapters (Chapters 3 and 4). Chapter 5 deals with the role of the Christian in politics with special emphasis on the relationships to communism and to nuclear war, that is, with practical Christianity which, for Gollwitzer, is as much an integral part of theology as talk of God and his relationship to man. Indeed, this chapter must be seen as deriving directly from the earlier ones. I have returned in Chapter 6 to the unity of these parts in a discussion of preaching. Then in the final chapter are indicated both the weaknesses and the strengths of Helmut Gollwitzer's theology. This has led to certain hints as to the way forward.

List of Works by Helmut Gollwitzer

In an attempt to bring some order to this list of published works I have classified them into various categories. (a) Books: Included here are all the major works of which Helmut Gollwitzer was author or co-author. (b) Sermons: That is, published sermons and sermon collections. (c) Essays, lectures, etc.: Comprising two sections: (i) those published separately or in collections of Gollwitzer's lectures and essays; and (ii) those which appear as articles in other collections or journals. This latter section, unlike the other categories, is necessarily incomplete. Considering the volume of work Gollwitzer has produced, a complete list of all articles in journals, newspapers, etc. is impossible. Therefore I am limited here to listing those known and available to me during my time of research. (d) Editorial work: As the title suggests, this is a complete list of published works of which Helmut Gollwitzer was editor, joint-editor, or to which he has written an introduction.

(a) Books

Coena Domini. Die altlutherische Abendmahlslehre in ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit dem Calvinismus dargestellt an der lutherischen Frühorthodoxie (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1937).

Die Freude Gottes. Einführung in das Lukasevangelium (Berlin: Burckhardtthaus-Verlag, 1941).

... und führen, wohin du nicht willst. Bericht einer Gefangenschaft (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1951). ET: Unwilling Journey. A Diary from Russia, E.W. Delacour, trns., with help from Robert Fenn (London: SCM Press, 1953).

Das Vermächtnis, with Käthe Kuhn and Reinhold Schneider (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1953).

Die christliche Gemeinde in der politischen Welt (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1954).

Das Leben der Versöhnung. Bibelarbeiten am Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentag in Frankfurt, 9.-11.8.1956 (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1957), vol. 14 in the series, Biblische Studien.

Die Christen und die Atomwaffen (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1957), n°. 61 in the series, Theologische Existenz heute, Neue Folge.

Gott hat derer nicht vergessen, die im Finsternis sind gegessen (excerpt from, ... und führen, wohin du willst) (Wuppertal-Barmen: J. Kiefel, 1957).

Christlicher Glaube und atomare Waffen, with Heinrich Vogel and Fritz Heidler (Berlin: Evangelischer Verlagsanstalt, 1959), vol. 1 in the series, Evangelische Stimmen zur Zeit.

Ihr sollt mein Volk sein. 2 Bibelarbeiten, gehalten am 9. Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentag in München. With Johannes Hamel (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1959).

Das Gleichnis vom barmherzigen Samariter (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1962), vol. 34 in the series, Biblische Studien.

Die marxistische Religionskritik und der christliche Glaube (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1962), in the series, Marxismusstudien, 4. Folge. ET: The Christian Faith and the Marxist Criticism of Religion, David Cairns, trns. (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1970).

Die Existenz Gottes im Bekenntnis des Glaubens (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1963), vol. 34 in the series, Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie. ET: The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, James W. Leitch, trns. (London: SCM Press, 1965), in the series, The Library of Philosophy and Theology.

Vietnam, Israel und die Christenheit (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1967).

Von der Stellvertretung Gottes. Christlicher Glaube in der Erfahrung der Verborgtheit Gottes. Zum Gespräch mit Dorothee Sölle (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1967).

Die reichen Christen und der arme Lazarus. Die Konsequenzen von Uppsala (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1968). ET: The Rich Christians and Poor Lazarus, David Cairns, trns. (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1970).

(b) Sermons

"Wir dürfen hören ...". Predigten (München: Evangelischer Verlag A. Lempp, 1940).

Jesu Tod und Auferstehung. Nach dem Bericht des Lukas (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1941). ET: The Dying and Living Lord. Meditations on the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord, Olive Wyon, trns. (London: SCM Press, 1960).

Die wache Gemeinde. Predigt über 1. Thess. 5,1-2 (Basel: Reinhardt Verlag, 1953), in the series, Basler Predigten, Jahrgang 17, 1953, 3 July.

Nineve ist überall. Das Buch Jona in Predigten, with Theodor Jaenicke and Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt (Gelnhausen: Burckhardthaus-Verlag, 1953).

Zuspruch und Anspruch. Predigten (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1954).

... und lobten Gott. Predigten, gehalten in der Gemeinde Berlin-Dahlem 1938 bis 1940 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1962).

Gott bleibt der Erde treu. Reden über die ersten Kapitel der Bibel, with Theodor Jaenicke and Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt (Gelnhausen: Burckhardthaus-Verlag, 1963).

Unser Vater Abraham. Predigten, with Theodor Jaenicke and Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1967).

Zuspruch und Anspruch. Neue Folge... Predigten aus den Jahren 1954-1968. Mit einem Nachwort des Verfassers (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1968).

"Between Christmases", in: Master Sermon Series
(Royal Oak, Michigan: Cathedral Publishers),
vol. 1, n°. 12, December 1970, pp. 678-683.

(c) Essays, lectures, etc.

(i) Published separately:

Die Bibel und der Mensch von heute. Vertrag (Berlin:
Burckhardtthaus-Verlag, 1940), in the series,
Studienreihe der jungen Gemeinde.

Kann ein Christ Kommunist sein? (Gütersloh: Verlag
Kirche und Mann, 1951).

Zu dieser heiligen Zeit (Wuppertal-Barmen: J. Kiefel,
1956).

Keiner Wegweser zum Studium des Marxismus-Leninismus,
with Gerhard Lahmbruch (Bonn: Publikationsstelle
des Bundesministeriums für gesamtdeutsche Fragen,
1956).

Israel und wir (Berlin: Lettner-Verlag, 1958).

Jesus Christus in der Versuchung. Eine Auslegung von
Matthäus 4,1-11 (Düsseldorf: Verlag Kirche in
der Zeit, 1958).

Christ und Bürger in der Bundesrepublik. Ein Disputation
mit Eugen Gerstenmaier (Dortmund, 1960).

Forderungen der Freiheit. Aufsätze und Reden zur
politischen Ethik (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag,
1962). ET: The Demands of Freedom. Papers by
a Christian in West Germany. Selected and trns.
Robert W. Fenn, with an introduction by Paul
Oestreicher (London: SCM Press, 1965).

Gottes Offenbarung und unsere Vorstellung von Gott.
Vortrag (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1964).

Militär, Staat und Kirche. Vortrag im Rahmen einer
Abendvortragsreihe der Freien Universität Berlin
über "Bundeswehr und Staat" am 4. Dezember 1964
(Berlin: Lettner-Verlag, 1964).

Aussichten des Christentums. Vortrag (Munich: Chr.
Kaiser Verlag, 1965).

Denken und Glauben. Ein Streitgespräch, mit Wilhelm
Weischedel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1965).

Post Bultmann locutum. Eine Diskussion zwischen Professor D. Helmut Gollwitzer-Berlin und Professor D. Herbert Braun-Mainz am 13. Februar 1964 in der Johannes-Gutenberg-Universität zu Mainz am Rhein; ed. Horst Symanowski (vol. 1) and Hans-Werner Bartsch (vol. 2) (Hamburg-Bergstedt: H. Reich, 1965), 2 vols.

Der christliche Glaube zwischen östlichem und westlichem Materialismus (Tokyo: Asahi Press, 1966).

Kann man der Bibel glauben? Eine aktuelle Besinnung zum 450. Jubiläum der Reformation (Düsseldorf: Presseverband der Evangelischen Kirche im Rheinland, 1967).

(ii) Published in Journals, etc.:

In, Evangelische Theologie (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1934-):

"Amt und 'Führertum' in der Kirche", 1934, Jhg. 1, pp. 79f.

"Lutherisch, reformiert, evangelisch", 1934, Jhg. 1, pp. 307f.

"Die Bedeutung der Bekenntnisbewegung und den Bekenntnissynoden für der Kirche" 1936, Jhg. 3, pp. 234f.

"Zur Frage der Kirchengemeinschaft; Hinweise und Bedenken", with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1936, Jhg. 3, pp. 398f.

"Der Christ zwischen Ost und West", 1950, Jhg. 10, pp. 154f. ET: The Christian between East and West. Ecumenical Study Document (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1951).

"Predigt über Luk. 3,3-14", Jhg. 11, 1951, pp. 145ff.

"Gruß und Dank. Georg Merz zum 60. Geburtstag", 1952, Jhg. 11, pp. 428f.

"Theologische Gutachten über die Freigabe der Erwachsenentaufe", SH 1952, pp. 64f.

"Zu Karl Barths Brief an Zaiser", 1953, Jhg. 13, pp. 140f.

"Hinfort nicht mehr, Predigt 2. Kor. 5,15" 1954, Jhg. 14, pp. 1f.

"Die Kirchengemeinschaft in der Abendmahlsgemeinschaft", 1954, Jhg. 18, pp. 516f.

"Die Theologie im Hause der Wissenschaftler", 1958, Jhg. 18, pp. 14f.

"Die christliche Kirche und der kommunistische Atheismus", 1959, Jhg. 19, pp. 291f. ET: "The Christian Church and Communist Atheism", in: Dialogue (Minneapolis), 1968, vol. 7, N°. 1, pp. 27-33.

"Die Gestalt des Lobes Gottes in der politischen Welt der Bundesrepublik", 1960, Jhg. 20, pp. 511f.

- "Die Kirche in der deutschen Situation", 1962,
Jhg. 22, pp. 285f.
"Die Wesen der Strafe in theologische Sicht", 1964,
Jhg. 24, pp. 195f.
"Paulus und Jesus", 1965, Jhg. 25, pp. 11f.
"Zu Helmut Dee 'Vergebung der Sünde'", 1966, Jhg. 26,
pp. 652f.

In, Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, 3rd ed.

(Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1957):

- "Abendmahlsgemeinschaft", vol. I, col. 51f.
"Dehn, Günther Karl", vol. II, col. 57.
"Krieg: IV", vol. IV, col. 66f.
"Merz, Georg", vol. IV, col. 881f.
"Wehrpflicht und Kriegsdienst: I", vol. VI, col. 1556f.

"Eine Auffrage. Zu einem Aufsatz von Emanuel Hirsch über
'Die Lage der Theologie'", in: Theologische Blätter
(Leipzig), 1936, Jhg. 15, pp. 241f.

"Die Thüringer Deutschen Christen und die evangelische
Kirche", in: Junge Kirche (Göttingen), 1936,
Jhg. 4, pp. 833f.

"Die Abendmahlsfrage als Aufgabe kirchlicher Lehre", in:
E. Wolf, ed., Theologische Aufsätze. Karl Barth zum
50. Geburtstag (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1936).

"Christentum und Marxismus", in: Unterwegs (Berlin),
1951, vol. 1.

"Zur Auslegung von Joh. 6 bei Luther und Zwingli", in:
W. Schmauch, ed., In Memoriam Ernst Lohmeyer (Stuttgart:
Evangelisches Verlag, 1951), pp. 143-168.

"Wollen wir heute lutherisch oder reformiert sein?", in:
Joachim Beckmann and Herbert Mochalski, eds.,
Bekennende Kirche. Martin Niemöller zum 60. Geburts-
tag (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1952).

"Zur Einheit von Gesetz und Evangelium", in: Ernst Wolf,
Ch. von Kirschbaum, Rudolf Frey, eds., Antwort. Karl
Barth zum siebzigsten Geburtstag am 10. Mai 1956
(Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1956).

"Der Glaube an Jesus Christus und der sogenannte historische
Jesus", in: Helmut Ristow and Karl Matthiae, eds.,
Der historische Jesus und der kerygmatische Christus
(Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1960). ET:
"The Jesus of History and Faith in Jesus Christ",
Fr. Gabriel Hebert, s.s.m., trns., in: Theology
(London: S.P.C.K.), vol. 65, 1962, pp. 90f.

- "Die Bedeutung der Bekenntnis für die Kirche", in: Helmut Gollwitzer and Helmut Traub, eds., Hören und Handeln. Festschrift für Ernst Wolf zum 60. Geburtstag (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1962).
- "Humanism zwischen West und Ost", in: Helmut Gollwitzer, Joachim Hoppe and Ernst Wolf, eds., Zwischenstation. Festschrift für Karl Kupisch zum 60. Geburtstag (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1963).
- "The Way of Obedience", in: Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald Gregor Smith, eds., I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Käthe Gregor Smith, trns. (London: Collins, 1966), from: Begegnungen mit Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Ein Almanach (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1964).
- "The Christian in the Search for World Order and Peace", in: Z.K. Matthews, ed., Responsible Government in a Revolutionary Age (New York: Association Press, 1966).
- "Zum Tod von Benno Ohnesorg", in: Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, Was wollen die Studenten? (Berlin: Lettner-Verlag, 1967).
- "Das Gespräch des Konzils mit dem Atheismus des Ostens", in: Johann Christoph Hampe, ed., Die Autorität der Freiheit. Gegenwart des Konzils und Zukunft der Kirche im ökumenischen Disput (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1967).
- "Das Wort 'Gottes' in christlicher Theologie", in: Theologische Literaturzeitung (Berlin), Jhg. 92, 1967, col. 161f.

(d) Editorial work

- Helmut Gollwitzer, Käthe Kuhn and Reinhold Schneider, eds., Du hast mich heimgesucht bei Nacht. Abschiedsbriefe und Aufzeichnungen des Widerstandes 1933-1945 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1954). ET: Dying We Live. The final messages and records of some Germans who defied Hitler, Reinhard C. Kuhn, trns. (London: Harvill Press, 1956).
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Joint editor of Biblische Studien (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins) since 1961.

THE SOURCES OF GOLLWITZER'S THEOLOGY

Introduction

The sources of any man's theology are always very complex. It is often a relationship of factors rather than individual events themselves which affect a person's development. To isolate these and to assess their importance is difficult for the man himself. Hindsight often gives a clearer view. But even hindsight is difficult when the person is still very much alive and active. And one is wary of attributing any given effect to a particular source.

A biographical method offers itself as the most appropriate. Many factors can be introduced in the very relationships in which they touched the life of the subject. Unfortunately——and this is its drawback——biography often includes factors which tell more about the life at that time than about the intellectual or personal development of the individual. Therefore, although some of these are necessary in order to set the stage, I have kept these latter references to what I consider to be a bare minimum.

The years 1940 and 1950 mark two caesuras in Gollwitzer's life. These are not watersheds, i.e., points of radical change or even complete revolution, but pauses between a change of environment. The first period, up to his banishment from Berlin, is mainly an academic

one (although during the last few years he also worked in the Confessing Church's active resistance to Nazism). The next decade was spent as a soldier, at first active and later as a Russian prisoner of war. Following his release in 1950, Gollwitzer became a prominent voice in German theology and politics. It is here we see the results of the earlier influences. And it is mainly upon the writings of this mature period that this thesis concentrates.

Academic Biography-----1908-1940

Helmut Hans Gollwitzer was born 29 December 1908 in Pappenheim (Bavaria), one of six children of a Lutheran pastor. And this Lutheran beginning has been a characteristic of much of his subsequent development. Although in his life and writings he has always exhibited a free openness to other approaches and even argues for a softening of denominational boundaries, nevertheless his approach is Lutheran. This becomes especially apparent in his vocational attitude to social responsibility and his continuing pains to distinguish clearly between Law and Gospel. Indeed, Gollwitzer himself, in a letter to a friend, recognizes this as a basic factor in his development: "The vital influences on me were those of Barth and Luther."¹

¹ Quoted in Paul Oestreicher's introduction to: The Demands of Freedom, Robert W. Fenn, trans. (London, 1965), p. 12.

Having graduated from a high school in Augsburg he began his university studies in Munich in 1928. There he came under the influence of Georg Merz who was then chaplain to the students.² In true German fashion Gollwitzer moved from one university to another, seeking new men and their ideas. From Munich he went to Erlangen where he studied under Paul Althaus and sat his first theological examination in 1932. Perhaps Gollwitzer's interest in eucharistic theology was sparked here. Undoubtedly his already Lutheran approach to ethics was underlined by Althaus' Lutheranism.

The next step was to Jena and Friedrich Gogarten who, with Karl Barth, Eduard Thurneysen and Georg Merz, had founded the journal Zwischen den Zeiten in 1922. By this time, however, Gogarten and Barth had parted company. While at Jena, Gogarten had devoted his time to the problem of theological method. He raised a sword against the reigning idealist philosophy (e.g. Ernst Troeltsch) which, as he thought, turned theology into a rarified species of intellectual history, and against a theological orthodoxy which, he claimed, sought refuge in traditional formulae—a double-edged sword which Gollwitzer later took up and still brandishes. Theology,

² Cf. "Gruß und Dank. Georg Merz zum 60. Geburtstag", in: Evangelische Theologie (Munich) Jhg. 11, 1952, pp. 428-434; and in the article, "Merz, Georg", in: Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, 3rd ed. (Tübingen, 1957), vol. IV, col. 881f.

said Gogarten, must listen to the living Word spoken to it in the Scriptures and the preaching of the Church and it must care for this Word. This it can do by "making clear the truth claim which this Word raises in our time, against our time, against our effort to withdraw from its truth".³ This emphasis, also shared by Barth, recurs continually in Gollwitzer's theology. From Gogarten, too, Gollwitzer probably received further stimulus in two other related areas: Law and Gospel, and political ethics.

At Jena he also heard Günther Dehn, thus spurring an interest in socialism and its problems which later bore fruit in his detailed study of Marxism.

And finally at Bonn Gollwitzer heard Fritz Lieb lecturing on Russian philosophy of religion. There, too, he studied under Karl Barth to whom, in 1937, he presented his doctoral thesis: "Coena domini. Die altlutherische Abendmahlslehre in ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit dem Calvinismus dargestellt an der lutherischen Frühorthodoxie".⁴

We have had occasion already to note the influence Gollwitzer admits Barth had on him. This is indeed very deep and far-reaching. Insofar as Barth's theology could be termed a "theology of the Word of God", so could

³ Larry Shiner, The Secularization of History. An Introduction to the Theology of Friedrich Gogarten (Nashville, 1966), p. 202.

⁴ Published by Chr. Kaiser Verlag, Munich, in 1937.

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Gollwitzer's. But for both this characterizes only one, albeit major, aspect of their thought. Similarly both have presented strongly "trinitarian" theologies. Perhaps here, though, Gollwitzer is closer to Luther than to Barth. The latter clearly developed a theology with the doctrine of the Trinity in a central position. His pupil, on the other hand, has never done that in a systematic way. But it has a doctrine of the Trinity in vivo rather than in vitro. His theology fulfils Barth's intention: it is a living, on-going, pilgrim theology. The God-in-himself, the God-for-us, and the God-in-community in Christian action are not separate beings, not even separate "modes of being". These for Gollwitzer belong together. No one of them alone is God, only all three together. Thus political Christianity does not derive from theology as a footnote. It is an integral part of it without which talk of God and talk of his relationship to man would be meaningless.

While this peripatetic career was typically German, the progression of subjects he studied was not. He first studied philosophy (Hardtmann and Heidegger) and then theology (Althaus, Gogarten and Barth). This is doubly significant. It means that in his life Helmut Gollwitzer bridges the traditional gulf between philosophy and theology, a gulf probably descending from Luther's rejection of mediaeval scholasticism. It also means he is not restricted to solely theological arguments but

can use competently the resources of philosophy.⁵

During this last decade (1930-1940), Helmut Gollwitzer began his vocation as a pastor—a vocation which continued to occupy him whether he was a soldier, a prisoner, a lecturer, or a political figure. First a curacy in Munich, then a short pastorate in Vienna, and then (1934-1936) Schloßprediger to Prince Reuss in Ernstbrunn bei Wein. In 1936, by joining the Bruder-rat of the Confessing Church in Thuringia, he openly joined the opposition to Nazi rule. Therefore, the following year, he was arrested and banished from that province.

From Thuringia Gollwitzer made his way to Berlin where he was given "the 'portfolio' for theological

⁵ I say this despite Schubert M. Ogden's criticism in: The Reality of God and other Essays (London, 1967), p. 26, n. 42: "One constantly senses in his argument, as, indeed, in Braun's reply ..., a deficiency of philosophical resources, which makes clarification of the real alternatives impossible." By this Ogden really means Gollwitzer fails to us the type of analysis common in certain American and British philosophical circles—an analysis which in the end is particularly sterile and unproductive, at least in the realm of Christian theology. Gollwitzer, like Karl Barth, indeed accepts what might be called a "positivism of Christian revelation". But he does so consciously and, he would claim, in obedience to the Gospel. Ogden's criticism is legitimate only insofar as it is a statement of his own intention that such a method is, in fact, not obedient to the Gospel, but not as a critique of Gollwitzer's use of philosophical resources. It is interesting that at no point in their dialogue, Denken und Glauben (Stuttgart, 1965), does Wilhelm Weischedel accuse Gollwitzer of philosophical incompetence. On the contrary, these parallel colloquia and lectures were carried on in mutual academic respect.

education in the Prussian Council of the Confessing Church."⁶ In Berlin he began to help Martin Niemöller in the Dahlem parish-----a rather special parish, as Martin's brother wrote:

It was characteristic of "Dahlem" that one really stood for another there. On this point there is no dissent. It is so self-evident that one need not speak of it. That is proven also in the loyal service of the young friends who were closely connected with the manse on Cecilienallee. They all knew "Alexanderplatz" and "Prinz Albrecht-Straße". And they were not unknown to the Stapo. But they did not complain about their fate, about the inconveniences and annoyances which came upon them day by day. There were Hermine Hermes, the faithful secretary of the Covenant of Need, and the vicareess Christa Müller. There were Ernst Eisenhardt and Wolfgang Sass who never tired of serving. There were Franz Hildebrandt who was soon to go to England, and Helmut Gollwitzer who besides serving in the parish did valuable theological work. 7

Part of this "theological work" was lecturing in the illegal and therefore underground seminary of the Confessing Church. "As a lecturer at the Theological College of the Confessing Church in Berlin he was soon

⁶ Paul Oestreicher in: The Demands of Freedom, p. 13.

⁷ Wilhelm Niemöller, Kampf und Zeugnis der Bekennenden Kirche (Bielefeld, 1948), p. 196. Whenever possible I have used available English translations. Where none is available, as here, I have included in the text of the thesis my own translation in order to avoid the tedious and distracting alternation of English and German.

the leading light of the 'confessing community'."⁸ In the summer of 1937 Martin Niemöller was arrested. His choice for a successor was Helmut Gollwitzer.

Life in the Dahlem parish was far from easy for the Confessing Church. It was a wealthy and therefore conservative suburb of Berlin. Many people with power and influence in Nazi Germany also lived there. As Paul Oestreicher says, "To preach the Gospel here was to preach it in the jaws of hell."⁹ But like his predecessor, Gollwitzer courageously continued preaching biblical sermons "based on the statement of faith of the 1934 Synod of Barmen where the Confessing Church proclaimed that in all spheres of life, Jesus Christ, and he alone, was the final authority to whom allegiance was due."¹⁰

During this period also fell one of the most tragic events of Gollwitzer's private life. He was engaged to Fräulein Bild, the half-Jewish daughter of a famous actor. Although such a marriage (between a German and a Jew, or a 'half-Jew') had been declared illegal, it was possible to have the law waived by influential

⁸ Die marxistische Religionskritik und der christliche Glaube, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1967), frontispiece.

⁹ In: The Demands of Freedom, p. 14.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 14. For examples of this daring preaching, cf. Jesu Tod und Auferstehung (Munich, 1941); ET: The Dying and Living Lord, Olive Wyon, trans. (London, 1960).

friends. In Gollwitzer's congregation was Emmi Göring, Hermann's sister. Thus, eventually, permission for the marriage was granted. But when Göring learned from the Gestapo that Fräulein Bild was to marry Gollwitzer, the openly anti-Nazi preacher, he revoked the permission. Because of this she committed suicide.

The effect of this on Helmut Gollwitzer is difficult to assess. Undoubtedly such an encounter with anti-semitism made him aware of the desperate need for a complete reappraisal of the Christian attitude to the Jews. Equally true, he would recognize clearly that private and public, personal and political life cannot be divided. If there was any personal bitterness at this time, it certainly does not appear in his writings. On the contrary, from this period came Die Freude Gottes, Jesu Tod und Auferstehung, and ... und lobten Gott—all bearing clearly the stamp of promise, hope, joy and confidence.¹¹

Finally, it is not surprising that in 1940 this outspoken young preacher (he was only 31) should again attract the attention of the Gestapo. Therefore he was banished from Berlin and forbidden to speak or preach anywhere in Germany.

¹¹ It is only proper to mention here that later (1951) Gollwitzer married Brigitte Freudenberg, also half-Jewish, who had been Fräulein Bild's closest friend. Undoubtedly she has been a great help in the more recent battles Gollwitzer has had to face —battles which, in the main, form the subject material of this thesis.

Helmut Gollwitzer was "called up" for national service in the summer of 1940. He had agreed previously with Karl Barth that a Nazi victory would be utter disaster. Clearly, too, this was not a bellum justum. And equally clearly, to wear the uniform of Hitler's army was to be on the side of wrong. Yet what was to be achieved by refusing military service and paying with your life? This problem had often been discussed by Gollwitzer and his colleagues. But they were unable to come to any definitive answer. Thus, when on 5 December 1940 he entered the infantry barracks in Potsdam, he did not do so lightly or claiming to have the only answer——or, indeed, any answer.¹²

Once in Hitler's army, he transferred as soon as possible from a machine-gun crew to an ambulance unit.

¹² Cf. "War and the Christian Life in Our Generation", in: The Demands of Freedom, pp. 124ff.; esp. pp. 127-130. One can see in his decision to obey the conscription also a reflection of the Lutheran attitude to the state. In an attempt to follow the advice of many passages of Scripture——especially 1 Peter 2:13-17; Proverbs 24:21; Titus 3:1; and perhaps also Matthew 22:21f.——people of a Lutheran tradition see obedience to the state as a Christian duty. The proper response to a tyranny, then, is to reform it from within rather than to overthrow it entirely. Thus Gollwitzer accepted conscription where others opposed it (eg. Dietrich Bonhoeffer) and still others went into exile (eg. Karl Barth and Paul Tillich). The choice was never easy. Nor could one ascribe moral right to one side and wrong to the other.

In doing so I did not suppose that I was escaping the solid weight of guilt that rested upon my people and this army or that I could lessen my share in this guilt in any way. I did not join the ambulance unit in order to have cleaner hands than my comrades, ... but because the service of the wounded was the only one that I could perform without prejudice against it. ... To bind up the wounds amidst the slaughter is surely the business of a Christian. To that extent my work as stretcher-bearer bore some relation to the Christian witness. But it is not by any means the whole witness. 13

This transfer also moved Gollwitzer from France to the Russian front. Then, without having fired a shot, he was taken prisoner by the Russians in Czechoslovakia on 10 May 1945. Before him lay nearly five years as a prisoner of war. First at Tabor, then for a short time in a forest camp at Briansk (1946), on then to camp 27/I in Krasnogorsk (1947-1949), then in the "regime camp" at Asbestos (1949), and finally to a camp in Sverdlovsk where he had previously spent a short time while in transit from Krasnogorsk to Asbestos.

During this period Helmut Gollwitzer continued his pastoral work among the other prisoners. He also took the opportunity to study at first hand communism in its Russian manifestation. Always remaining free and open he was able to recognize its points of validity without falling victim to its error. Later, because of his time in Russia, he was regarded as an "expert" on communism.

13 Ibid., p. 129.

He, indeed, has become such an "expert", but more from careful study than from the mere fact of having spent five years under its rule.

This section of Gollwitzer's life ends with his release in December 1949 and his arrival back in what had become West Germany on 1 January 1950. He himself sees this as a "cleansing" period-----a time when God was making him one of "such people" as walk in his statutes.¹⁴

The Mature Theologian

While he was still a prisoner in Russia, Helmut Gollwitzer was offered the chair of Systematic Theology in the faculty of Evangelical Theology in the University of Bonn-----the chair which Karl Barth had been forced to vacate in 1934. Thus, after only a short rest, he took up this post in May 1950. Then in the early summer of 1957-----the year he was awarded a D.D. by the University of Glasgow-----he returned to Dahlem in Berlin to take up the newly created chair of Protestant Theology in the faculty of Arts of the Free University of Berlin, a chair he still occupies. Here he has been given a free reign in devising lectures to confront students of all faculties with the spiritual issues of this age.

¹⁴ Cf. Unwilling Journey, E.M. Delacour, trans. (London, 1956), pp. 33, 301.

Meanwhile Gollwitzer also remains a preacher----- in the University, in the Dahlem congregation, and as a guest preacher elsewhere. This close link between lecturing and preaching remains so important to him that on the occasion of his 60th birthday he refused to allow the normal Festschrift to be published, i.e., a collection of essays dedicated to him by other, usually younger theologians. Instead he published another collection of sermons.¹⁵

As a mature theologian Gollwitzer has also returned to the seminary at which he had lectured before the War. He still retains there the chair of Systematic Theology.

But he is a pastor not only in the Dahlem parish. He also remains open to his students-----a practice which, although fairly common in English-speaking universities, is almost non-existent in Germany. Thus he has broken the image of the German professor who is remote and unavailable.

Similarly, Gollwitzer has not clung to the academic immunity of his chair. He has gone into the streets of Berlin speaking at rallies and joining in protest demonstrations. But he has done so with calm, scholarly arguments, not the ranting dogmatism of most protests in this country (despite the fact that Bavarians are nick-named "Germany's hot-heads").

¹⁵ Zuspruch und Anspruch. Neue Folge. Predigten aus den Jahren 1954-1968. Mit einem Nachwort des Verfassers (Munich, 1968).

Again in 1962 Helmut Gollwitzer was nominated to be Karl Barth's successor, this time to the chair of Systematic Theology at Basel. For this honour he was willing to leave Berlin. But in Switzerland such appointments involve not only the university, but also the municipality and the canton. Gollwitzer's nomination aroused a heated debate in the Swiss newspapers, with the conservative ones speaking out against the appointment of a "near-communist" professor. In the end, with no reference to his ability, the Minister of Education for the canton vetoed Gollwitzer's appointment on 19 March 1962.

What better way to end this section than with Ernst Wolf's tribute in Evangelische Theologie on the occasion of Gollwitzer's 60th birthday:

With the end of this year, on the 29th December, HELMUT GOLLWITZER will have completed his 60th year of life. Through the decades since he studied theology and since the beginning of the church struggle his has been a life surpassingly moved to work and strife, joy and pain, friendship and argument, help and ~~-----~~necessarily-----protest, moved to pastoral service, liberating preaching and manifold teaching and writing; a very rich life of rare intensity-----even as a prisoner of war-----and a life which ever again displayed self-sacrificing participation in the lives and troubles of others and in the ordering and shaping of the institutional realm of human existence in society. ... May Helmut Gollwitzer also in the future retain what is promised by today's text from Psalm 34:6: "Every face turned to him grows brighter and is never ashamed."

16

Excursus: The Problem of Style

Just as Helmut Gollwitzer displays many diverse talents——preacher, pastor, academic, political revolutionary——,so, too, he writes in many diverse styles. Paul Oestreicher's understatement aptly characterizes his strictly academic, theological writings: "Indeed when he is entirely thrown back on the mind, he is as capable of falling prey to academic obscurity as any professional theologian, or at any rate as apt to fall victim to the linguistic maze of German syntax."¹⁷

On the other hand, his lectures, although dealing with subjects of equal difficulty, have a directness of style which makes them more readily understandable. Because most were delivered to university audiences, they contain, of course, many technical terms which are the philosopher's stock in trade. But most sentences are simple and direct. There is no piling of one subordinate clause upon another.

Finally, Gollwitzer's preaching, like Karl Barth's, is utterly different from his academic writing. The content is still the same. But the style flows and rises joyfully and confidently like a Psalm. Although constantly presenting to his hearers the demands of the Word of God, Gollwitzer never uses the "pulpit-pounding", "fire and brimstone" style of the American evangelists. Instead there is a joyful serenity in his sermons reflecting the promise and the present fulfilment of that promise which is equally the content of the Gospel.

¹⁷ Paul Oestreicher, in: The Demands of Freedom, p. 8.

Introduction

The starting point for an understanding of Helmut Gollwitzer's works must be a delineation of his approach to theology. To begin elsewhere leads to the pitfall of asking questions which he is not attempting to answer and speaking in a language completely foreign to his writings. On the other hand, once this step has been understood and accepted the remainder follows fairly easily.

The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith.

Gollwitzer's work best known to English-speaking theologians, is a scathing attack on Herbert Braun's existentialist approach. But it is not just a polemic. "Gollwitzer makes his negative criticism of Braun's theology against the background of his own positive view".¹ He intends his book "to point to the true hermeneutic task of theology".² Thus, as I will show in a later chapter, he develops in his book a vocative or confessional theology as an alternative to the existentialist way of speaking 'indirectly' of God—the only alternative, he claims, which remains true to the task of theology.

¹ Heinz Zahrnt, The Question of God, R.A. Wilson, trns. (London, 1969), p. 277.

² The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, James W. Leitch, trns. (London, 1965), p. 11.

Similarly, his rejection of Dorothee Sölle's position³ is based on his own positive view of the nature and task of theology. Indeed, this is true of all his books which at first appear either polemical or political, as well as those which are more theological or philosophical in nature. For ethics, in Gollwitzer's theology, is not subsequent to theology, does not follow as a result of theology. It is an integral part of theology. So, too, preaching cannot be regarded apart from his theology as a whole. Although not explicitly formulated in them, Gollwitzer's concept of theology determines his approach in his sermons.

Thus, to establish his concept of theology is vital for an understanding of his other work. But to do this is as difficult as it is essential. Gollwitzer nowhere stops to fully explain this background to his position. He shows where and why it differs from whatever position he is attacking, but he does not present it systematically. Therefore, the researcher must glean the relevant material from what he does say and then systematise it himself. A pertinent question would then be: Is this systematisation fair to Gollwitzer? How much of it does Gollwitzer actually presuppose and how much has been imposed by the

³ Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, Christlicher Glaube in der Erfahrung der Verborgenheit Gottes. Zum Gespräch mit Dorothee Sölle, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1968); in reply to: Dorothee Sölle, Christ the Representative, David Lewis, trans. (London, 1967).

researcher's own systematic?

One further preliminary remark: Theology here, and for Gollwitzer, means specifically Christian theology. And, as will be seen later, I might go a step further and say it means Protestant Christian theology. For Gollwitzer is a Protestant theologian, "and besides that", according to Wilhelm Weischedel, "a warlike Barthian".⁴ I make this observation, which at first seems so self-evident that it need not be mentioned, because of its converse. When Gollwitzer says the task or method of theology——specifically Christian theology——is such-and-such, he implies that those involved in other activities are not doing Christian theology, although they may call themselves Christian theologians. That is not to say that such other activities are not necessary, useful and valid within their scope, but merely that they are not within the category of Christian theology. This negative judgment points once again to the importance of examining Gollwitzer's concept of theology, i.e. Christian theology. For the only way one can refute his judgments on other attempts at theology is to show where and why he is mistaken at this point.

This negative judgment, although unavoidable, is unfortunate for Gollwitzer's works. It sounds so absolute and perhaps impertinent that it immediately raises the hackles of those who think otherwise. Dialogue then

⁴ With Wilhelm Weischedel, Denken und Glauben. Ein Streitgespräch, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, 1965), p. 14.

becomes impossible. For the dividing wall of partition between orthodoxy and heresy has been raised, even though these words may be spurned. At the same time one wonders what effect this has on his discussion with Marxists and with his students. Could not the Marxists accuse him of a dogmatism similar to that of which he accuses them? Could his students find here any real discussion or merely a disguised authoritarianism? And yet he remains one of Europe's leaders in the Christian-Marxist dialogue, and students have always found him ready to listen to them. Perhaps it is because they respect his honesty in not abandoning what he considers are basic Christian principles.

In so far as it is possible to delineate major sections within this chapter, I shall deal first with the task and subject of theology and then with its method and nature. To be sure, this is not a clear-cut division. For the whole subject is the concern, not its many inter-related parts. But some division is necessary for practical understanding.

The Task and Subject of Theology

Task

The task of theology for Gollwitzer arises out of two things: 1. the claim of the Christian message "to be able to unite into one faith distant generations notwithstanding their differences, and to be able to be transmitted in substantial identity from generation to generation

notwithstanding every historical break";⁵ and; 2. the situation facing the church today. Part of this——an important part——is the contemporary world-view.

Not only has the natural explanation of the phenomena of external nature become unavoidable, creating a deep chasm from both a pre-scientific world-view and a magical relation to the world, now even psychological events are no longer traced back to supra-mundane, heavenly or demonic influences but are phenomena which come under sociological and psychological analysis, i.e. from the beginning they are subordinate to the judgment of the merely-human. That holds for the psychological events to which the biblical proclamation corresponds, thus for the experiences of the prophets and the apostles 6

But also a factor here are the various debates and dialogues in which Christians find themselves today, e.g. the Marxist-Christian dialogue, the recently revived debate between theology and philosophy (too quickly characterised as a confrontation between faith and disbelief, theism and atheism), as well as the manifold involvements in politics, society and economics.

From these background factors correspondingly arise two major aspects of the task of theology——but two inter-related aspects with an hermeneutic character. To state them briefly and together,

⁵ Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, p. 16.

⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

we are not confronted by the alternative, either as men of an atheistic age to transform ourselves back artificially into men of a theistic one and thus (which is the same thing) to accept without translation texts from an age whose world-view had theistic premises, or to translate them into atheistic terms. Rather, our task is, that as men of an atheistic age we, too, should hear the message of the self-revelation and sovereignty of the true and real Lord which was delivered to an age that thought in theistic ... terms and that we should translate and pass on that message to the man of this atheistic age in such a way that he remains himself, that he and the message about him can neither be confused with the ancient gods nor with the modern brand of godlessness. 7

It is generally accepted that ancient man had what might be called a 'sacral world-view'. Behind the events of nature and inter-human history operated a complex of divine and demonic influences. To a certain extent biblical man also shared this attitude. Although more and more he recognized YHWH as supreme over the other spiritual forces, the principalities and powers still remained potent. Today, however, because of the desacralizing effect of the biblical doctrine of creation we no longer think this way.⁸ All of nature, and man himself, is secular and open to examination. We are no longer at the mercy of capricious spiritual powers. At any rate, we no longer believe such powers to be in con-

⁷ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, pp. 122-123.

⁸ Cf. Langdon Gilkey, Maker of Heaven and Earth. A Study of the Christian Doctrine of Creation (New York, 1965), esp. ch. 5, pp. 117ff.

trol. Indeed, for many today, "God" is an unnecessary metaphysical hypothesis. What, then, in this situation, is the task of Christian theology? Must we abandon our present world-view and blindly accept the theistic one of the Bible? Or must we reproduce the essential teaching of the Bible in our atheistic terms, i.e. erase the theism of the Bible? The former would make us untrue to ourselves and we would cease to be modern men. The latter, on the other hand, is unfaithful to the biblical witness. Instead, we must remain true both to our modern experience and knowledge and to the testimony of the biblical writers.⁹ Theology, then, must hear this message and pass it on to others without sacrificing the distinctive elements of either the Bible or the modern consciousness.

Or more explicitly, with regard to the church's claim that faith and proclamation are the same today as in apostolic times, theology has to ask about the criteria of the identity of this message.¹⁰ For modern man theology

⁹ Here we meet a method which recurs throughout Gollwitzer's works. The true way, that is, the method indicated in his own writings, is to affirm both the transcendental and the immanent at the same time, both God and man. This is the method neither of dialectic nor of paradox. For in the former the two poles interact and are dissolved in the solution, the new way. And in the latter the two poles strain against each other like opposites. In Gollwitzer's method, however, both poles must be affirmed together—they are not opposites but complementary factors of the whole truth. Nor can they be dissolved into something new. The essential nature of each must be retained.

¹⁰ Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, p. 16.

theology must give an "expository presentation of the Christian message."¹¹ Or again, the task of theology "is the determination of the standard for distinguishing between 'shell and kernel'".¹² And more particularly, in relation to the social, political and economic responsibility of the church, theology has a special task:

The oft expressed intention that religion and politics are to be separated and that the church must not get mixed up in politics was false and impracticable from the very beginning. ... The problem which must always be solved afresh is not whether this responsibility exists, but only how it should be seen legitimately and how not.

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In seeking to solve this problem "theology ... must always be prepared firmly and uncompromisingly to say Yes and No."¹⁴

Thus theology is to be the tool of the church, is to supply the church with the material it needs to carry out its task of proclaiming "the will of God, as made known in the biblical message, in relation to the actual situation existing at a particular time."¹⁵ The church is to proclaim and theology is to guarantee that what it proclaims is the same as what it receives from the apostles and

¹¹ From Gollwitzer's introduction to: Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics. A Selection, G.W. Bromiley, trns. and ed. (New York, 1962), p. 3.

¹² Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, p. 58.

¹³ Vietnam, Israel und die Christenheit, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1968), pp. 8-9.

¹⁴ Church Dogmatics. A Selection, p. 7.

¹⁵ The Demands of Freedom, Robert W. Fenn, trns. (London, 1965), p. 40.

prophets.

Herein lies a further aspect of the task of theology: to be the church's judge and critic, i.e. "theological thinking tests the statements of the church's proclamation by the message given to her, and to do that must always first extract this message from the proclamation statements in order to measure these for their suitability to the proclamation they are charged with".¹⁶ In a negative way this aspect of theology's task is applicable in the face of Marxist criticism of religion. "Theology as a self-examination on the part of the Church will first have to distinguish what is valid in this criticism of religion from what is out of place, inadequate and false."¹⁷

Finally, theology has a special task with regard to reason or philosophy. Indeed, Gollwitzer devoted a whole series of parallel lectures and colloquia with Wilhelm Weischedel in 1963/1964 to a discussion of this relationship. And his major position throughout was this:

The ambition not to be taken in by mere affirmations certainly should be shared by every man, even the theologian and the believer. And in a people for whom a "frenzy of faith" led to a most evil fate, education in critical questioning and warning against all light credulity will be most important. Thus the theologian will have to show how the Gospel's summons to faith in God differs from a summons to light credulity which is taken in by every

¹⁶ Denken und Glauben, p. 42.

¹⁷ The Christian Faith and The Marxist Criticism of Religion, David Cairns, trans. (Edinburgh, 1970), p. 150.

Or more positively: "Faith cannot avoid being ... confused, but must resist it. The theological interpretation of biblical theism is one of the things that serve to that end."¹⁹

Subject

Before turning to the methods implicit in and appropriate to the tasks of theology conceived in this way, a few remarks on the subject matter of theology are in order.

Etymologically, theology (theos - logos) ought to be the science or study of God. And at first Gollwitzer seems to say that. "That [theology] must speak of [God and his action within history] is an obligation laid on it by its texts."²⁰ But speaking of God and studying God are two very different things. Theology must, in its service to the church's proclamation, speak about God. Indeed, because of the many usages of this vocable today "it is imperative that Christian theology should again make the word 'God' unambiguous, i.e. that it should determine precisely in what sense it is used in Christian proclamation."²¹ "The central task of theology is, after all,

¹⁸ Denken und Glauben, p. 44.

¹⁹ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 43.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 54.

²¹ Gottes Offenbarung und unsere Vorstellung von Gott, 3rd ed. (Munich, 1965), p. 8.

to make clear what Christian proclamation means by this word, how in its mouth this word gains a particularity deeply distinguishing it from other usages, wherein this particularity exists, how Christian proclamation is capable of such particular talk of God and what it points to with it."²²

But theology can never have God as its subject, its matter for study, because it does not possess God, it does not have God at its disposal, in its control. God does not 'exist' in the same sense as a table exists. There is no tangibly existent God. In this the existentialist approach is correct. Such objective language is inappropriate when applied to God. God can never be the subject matter of theology. Rather, the 'living God' of the prophetic-apostolic proclamation is he who reveals himself as Lord, even of theology.

Similarly, faith and revelation, as gifts of God's grace, cannot be subjects of theology. No one can have faith as a possession. No one can demand revelation as a right. God reveals himself and God gives faith: this we can acknowledge, confess and proclaim. But he also hides himself. And we can lose faith. Therefore, with the Psalmist we pray, "God, ... do not banish me from your presence, do not deprive me of your holy spirit"

²² "Nachwort zur Diskussion mit Herbert Braun", in: Hans-Werner Bartsch, ed., Post Bultmann locutum, vol. II (Hamburg, 1965), p. 28.

(Psalm 51:11).²³ And at Confirmation we pray over the candidates, "Establish them in faith", then at the Eucharist we repeatedly pray that God may assist us with his grace so "that we may continue in that holy fellowship" "which is the blessed company of all faithful people".²⁴

"Rather, the subject matter of theology is the church's proclamation, and the task of theology, its contribution to the permanently necessary reformation, is to improve this proclamation."²⁵ And not just the present-day proclamation of the church; for that would give theology no standard of judgment or means of improvement. Instead, its subject must be primarily the Christian message contained in the prophetic-apostolic proclamation and secondarily the ongoing proclamation of this message by the church. Thus to a large degree proclamation is both the subject and the task of theology.

Therefore, to the extent that the church must speak of God and that this proclamation is theology's subject, theology may be called a science or study of God. It must make statements about God and his relation to man. But it makes these statements on the basis of God's disclosure of himself in his Son, in the scriptures, and in the on-

²³ As in: Alexander Jones, ed., The Jerusalem Bible, Reader's Edition (London, 1968).

²⁴ The Church of South India, The Book of Common Worship (London, 1964), pp. 129, 19.

²⁵ Denken und Glauben, p. 41.

going proclamation of the church. Similarly, because the church proclaims this self-revelation of God and his gift of faith, theology by examining this proclamation is a science or study of revelation and faith. But it must always be remembered that it can never have God, faith or revelation at its disposal, as objects of scientific study.

To the humility of theology ... belongs the knowledge that it never controls its subject. The subject of theology is not just God but God in his revelation, and his revelation is present only in the message which the church brings to men. This ongoing message is the real theme which theology presupposes as the basis of its own existence and on which it reflects. 26

To carry this one step further, then, theology, in so far as it is a new translation and proclamation of this Christian message, can be the subject of theology. Like the scriptures which are its primary subject, theology is a place of "practical attestation" to the "concrete, incursive act of God in the course of the world's life".²⁷ Therefore, just as it examines the present-day witness of the church, it must examine its own attestation and prove it by the norm of scripture. In other words, theology must be self-critical. "For this reason there is no question which can be raised in the face of the Christian message which the theologian has not to take seriously,

²⁶ Church Dogmatics. A Selection, p. 4.

²⁷ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 54.

to take up and to think through".²⁸

Excursus: Theology and Science

Between a presentation of the task and subject matter of theology and a discussion of the method(s) appropriate to Christian theology belong some remarks regarding the question of whether or not theology is a science and of the relationship of theology to the sciences.

Answering this requires some statement of the nature of theology. Following the above delineation of its task, theology

resembles a science such as medicine which likewise is not responsible for the natural given things of the body but for its perception of them and their use. If theology takes up, for example, the philosopher's question, how in fact can revelation and faith be possible, then it places in question the possibility that church and faith exist in our midst just as little as medicine in its research places in question the possibility that man has a body. After all, there is a difference between asking about a possibility without knowing of its reality and proceeding from a reality to ask about its possibility. In the former situation is found, for instance, an inventor in whose mind there is not yet an existent reality and who asks how he shall make it possible. In the latter situation is found the positive scientist who asks how an existing reality has become possible. In this manner the theologian asks about the possibility of faith, church, revelation, and these questions he ... passes on to the Christian message to see how it answers them.

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²⁸ Denken und Glauben, p. 41.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 42-43.

Thus, to this extent, theology is more like a science than an art.

Determining Gollwitzer's position at this point is made more difficult by the fact that he writes in German. "Wissenschaft" includes a broader spectrum than does "science". We might do better to create a new cognate in English: "wisdom-ship". This "wisdom-ship", then, would include all branches of learning and investigation which follow a method of systematic observation of their particular subject matter, abstraction of general principles which are then tested by predicting on their basis and comparing this prediction with further observed data. It can be seen, then, that in the observation-abstraction aspect theology shares a common methodology with "wisdom-ship", including the natural and social sciences.

How, then, can Feuerbach, Engels and Marx flatly contradict this? How can it be said, for instance, by G. Klaus in Jesuiten, Gott, Materie, "that religion hinders the investigator in the consistent pursuit of his inquiries"?³⁰ Or how can a modern Moscow newspaper say "religion 'moulds in believers a non-scientific outlook'" and "'the influence of religion prevents them from fully showing their creative forces'"?³¹

The freedom of science is not threatened
——so long as it rightly understands
itself——by theology, but principally
by scientism, by the superstition which
makes a world-view out of modern science,

³⁰ The Christian Faith and the Marxist Criticism of Religion, p. 159; referring to: G. Klaus, pp. 85, 87f., 166, 248.

³¹ Quoted from "Leninskoye Znamya", in "The Scotsman" (Edinburgh), November 22, 1969, p. 9.

and uses it as a quarry for the building of world pictures allegedly demanded by science. ... Rightly understood, theology opens the way unconditionally to every investigation of fact. Faith in the Creator is actually an affirmation of things as they are, and is opposed to all well-meaning misrepresentation or taboo. ... The scientific attitude is not incompatible with Christian faith, but with the superstitious faith in science

32

The conflict between science and theology, presumed to exist by some philosophers and scientists, is seen to be non-existent by those with a correct understanding of both science and theology. Only a theology which rejects the validity of any means of observation or interpretation but its own, or which seeks to go beyond its own legitimate field will come into conflict with science. And only a science which rejects any method of knowing except empiricism, or which seeks to turn itself into a substitute religion will come into conflict with Christian theology.

If, then, theology resembles a science and, at any rate, does not stand in opposition to the sciences, is it a science itself? Under the broad definition of "Wissenschaft" theology is undoubtedly a science. But in the more normal sphere of language the answer is not so clear.

Theology indeed participates in the other sciences, has a nexus with them, uses them, welcomes them in its own sphere, inasmuch as here also, for

32 The Christian Faith and the Marxist Criticism of Religion,
pp. 159-160.

example, philosophy and history in the strict sense are studied. It is certainly not really "a" science, but (in this sense resembling medicine), a sphere in which different sciences are united by their service of a determinate purpose, the critical self-examination of the church in relation to the correspondence between its actual achievement and its task. Thus interwoven with the universal life of science, theology must justify the responsibility given thereby to it for this life by ... not misleading the other sciences into unreality through dogmatic prejudices and restrictions, but by showing itself positively interested in a free investigation which is limited by no law save that of the knowledge of its subject
... It protests by its existence even more strongly than the mental sciences against the establishment of a concept of science which is merely copied from the model of the natural sciences 33

The Method and Nature of Theology

Implicit in what has been said about its task and subject matter are very definite concepts of the methods proper to Christian theology. Indeed, "theology must justify the responsibility given to it ... by not failing to develop methods suited to its special subject".³⁴ As we have already said, the task of theology is two-fold:
1. "to show how what we receive from the apostles and prophets ever still stands before us";³⁵ and: 2. "the

³³ Ibid., pp. 157-159.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 158.

³⁵ Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, p. 47.

continual critical comparison of the factual proclamation of the church with this prophetic-apostolic proclamation so that the Gospel contained in the latter is not changed by adaptation to human wisdom or shortened by being gauged to human wisdom, rather so that, as Paul says, 'every thought is our prisoner, captured to be brought into obedience to Christ' (2 Corinthians 10:5)."³⁶

We see here how closely theology "is bound to a text, to the text which the church has recognized and acknowledged as the Canon, i.e., the standard, the normative, basic and exemplary form for the continuing delivery of its message, in other words to the Bible."³⁷ Within this text theology must hear the message which it is its task to translate. By this text it must continually judge the ongoing proclamation of the church.

Why does Christian theology presuppose these particular texts? The plural is necessary because

the Bible ... is ... a library with diverse books and voices, a choir, however not homophonic but polyphonic, and often enough dissonant. "The" biblical message threatens at closer examination to break up into the diverse messages of the Old and New Testament, of old, middle and late Judaism of the pre-Christian era, of Paul, of John, of the synoptics, etc. ... The unity does not lie at hand. "The" message must first be sought in and behind "these" messages, in and behind their historical forms. This is

³⁶ Ibid., p. 57.

³⁷ Church Dogmatics, A Selection, p. 5.

Why does Christian theology not examine these texts alongside other ones? What makes them unique? "That is a thing [theology] must give a reason for, and can give no other reason for than by testifying to the uniqueness of the message contained in these texts as a uniqueness far surpassing any other kind of historical individuality."³⁹ It is not theology's task to do more than this. It does not have to justify or establish its subject. Rather, it accepts it as something given. Thus theology

is derived from "preliminary decisions" or things given beforehand by which it is first set in motion: it presupposes the church, the event of this certain faith, confession and proclamation without which it would be unnecessary and impossible. If things did not stand just so with this specific faith——namely that it is tied to an historical event, that it should be transmitted in understandable human words, that it is *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking insight),——then there also would be no theology in the specifically Christian sense and no distinction between theology and philosophy.

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To some this answer must seem inadequate and perhaps circular. A particular historical event evoked faith [evoked faith] among a group of people who in turn began to proclaim this event and their faith to others. This

³⁸ Denken und Glauben, p. 7.

³⁹ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 54.

⁴⁰ Denken und Glauben, p. 42.

growing community eventually recorded its impressions of that historical event and some examples of its own proclamation. And now the theologian who wishes to fulfil his critical function is told by the modern descendant of that early community that the criteria must be these self-produced accounts. But this is not truly circular —at least no more so than to say an ornithologist must study birds. It lies in the realm of tautology or definition.

One might then ask: Why accept this definition rather than any other? There is no simple answer to this. Perhaps the only thing that can be said is that the task described above as being that of theology has been undertaken by people in the past, including Helmut Gollwitzer, and in all likelihood will be undertaken by others in the future. If one does not call it Christian theology then another name will have to be found. It is that task, however, which Gollwitzer has undertaken and therefore he can be judged only on the degree to which he has fulfilled it and no other.⁴¹

Excursus: Theological Circle

Statements like those above, or like:

"At this point theological work as such is a

⁴¹ This answer, admittedly, has evaded the question and the matter will have to be faced again later, especially in Chapter 7. However, it is sufficient for the moment and allows us to continue in our examination of Gollwitzer's thought.

piece of practical attestation",⁴² raise the question of the 'theological circle', the question of who can do theology. By such remarks Gollwitzer seems to draw the 'circle' very narrowly and exclusively. On the other hand, however, in his debate with Wilhelm Weischedel he says theology's task is to "direct questions to the Christian message and hear the questions this message directs to us."⁴³ This means that anyone can do theology who decides "in a serious way to address ones own questions to this message and to recognize oneself as being addressed by the questions of this message."⁴⁴ But this is not as simple as it sounds. For asking questions of this message and being questioned by it is not like going to some law-book or the Delphic Oracle. There is no tangible authority, not the Pope, not some church council, not some theologian, not even—or perhaps, especially not—the Bible.

We have "the" message in no other way than by interpreting its forms, the statements of the messenger. ... Therefore, to be able to ask questions (befragen) of it we must first ascertain (erfragen) it, seek it, by attempting to hear and understand the messenger to whom they commonly refer

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Yet even this, the primary task of theology, is within the realm of everyones ability. Faith is not a primary requirement for hearing the

⁴² The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 54.

⁴³ Denken und Glauben, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

message. Rather, this message, which is a declaration of faith, evokes faith.

The message which exists before faith and which evokes faith does not become audible among us in any other way than in the declaration of faith. ... And we understand it not by stepping out of our modern historical existence and reciting things from the past unchanged, but by hearing it as spoken to us and by taking it up into our existence 46

From what has been said it can be seen that "Theology is a human work, I can plan to do theology."⁴⁷ That cannot be said of faith! This means, then, that no 'theological circle' can be drawn with regard to who can do theology. It is a general human possibility. The 'circle', however, can and must be drawn with regard to the task and methods appropriate to Christian theology.

Here Gollwitzer has attempted to open the 'theological circle' to include all persons. The only condition is that one decides "in a serious way to address ones own questions to this message and to recognize oneself as being addressed by the questions of this message."⁴⁸ However, to do this one must indeed first accept that the Messenger, who brings and is himself this message, is able to answer our most radical questions of life and to most radically place our lives in question. Surely this can mean nothing other than that we trust him so completely that we place, indeed risk our whole being in his hands. But Gollwitzer says later

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

that "'Credere in' means to stake ones whole existence on the friendship and ability of another, to grant complete credit of confidence in another."⁴⁹ Thus he, in fact, wishes to retain some form of 'theological circle' although he seems, on the surface, to abandon it. Indeed, a statement made two years earlier still stands unchanged: "This encounter can be assessed only in actu, i.e. our assessment is at once always that of participants or of outsiders, that of those who 'know what they are doing' and what they have to do with, or that of those who 'know not what they do' and thus misjudge what they have to do with."⁵⁰ In other words, complete objectivity or detachment, even if possible elsewhere, is impossible here. The great truth of existentialist theology is the recognition that "even the Old and New Testaments did not speak in a detached way of God in himself but always spoke, together with God, also of man. ... One cannot in the biblical sense speak neutrally of God but always only existentially, or else one has not spoken of him."⁵¹ The allusion to St. Luke 23:34, then, means that those who attempt to remain detached do not know that by doing so they make it impossible to fulfil their intentions, i.e. to speak properly of God, or even of man. Therefore, they so 'object-ify' (idol-ise) God that the statement, "There is no God", becomes both possible and necessary. The Christian would agree with this judgment on such an 'objective'

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 77.

⁵⁰ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 126.

⁵¹ Gottes Offenbarung und unsere Vorstellung von Gott, p. 18.

God. The kerygmatic nature of the biblical texts, especially the New Testament texts, confirms this need for assessment in actu. "In reality I can only speak of God in such a way that at the same time I stand before him; for every word which I speak about him is at the same time a confession about myself, about the judgment and the grace which, standing before him, I receive from him."⁵²

Closely related here is a limitation used by almost all writers in this tradition. To do theology one must undertake "in a serious way to address ones own questions to this message and to recognize oneself as being addressed by the questions of this message."⁵³ This phrase, "in ernsthafter Weise" is never defined by Gollwitzer. Yet it seems to be a key phrase in the sentence. Without a doubt it is a restrictive phrase. The person who uses the Bible in general, and the life of Jesus in particular, as rules and examples for living has not "in ernsthafter Weise" put his questions to the Gospel nor let himself be questioned by it. His understanding of the message is too superficial. But what about Wilhelm Weischedel's concept of philosophy?

Philosophy's basic way of looking at things now is the aspect of questioning. Philosophizing materializes as questioning about reality. And certainly philosophical questioning, understood more accurately, has the character of radical questioning.⁵⁴

If the philosopher turned to the texts forming the subject matter of theology and subjected them to "radical questioning", would he be

⁵² Ibid., p. 19.

⁵³ Denken und Glauben, p. 6 (my italics).

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 87.

doing theology? Apparently not, because he is not ready to accept the answer the message gives him since the "radical" nature of his questioning causes him to question even the answer. Gollwitzer's "in ernsthafter Weise" thus seems to include a faith-commitment to the God of that message. In other words, he in fact narrows the 'theological circle' by requiring faith as a precondition for doing theology.

To conclude this excursus, then, theology is certainly a human act, and, because through grace faith is for all persons, it can be undertaken by anyone, the only condition being his response to the Gospel. But this remains a matter of grace, not works. Hence our prayer "that our schools of theology may be homes of faith".⁵⁵ This also means that, like any other human activity, it is not within my control

whether it is good theology, thus
whether my work is successful. ...
Whether our work turns out well
depends upon grace—that seems to
me to be one of the most difficult
Christian statements about life to
dispute.

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The Method and Nature of Theology (continued)

In an attempt to delineate what methods are appropriate to Christian theology it is easier at the start to note some that are inappropriate. We have mentioned many times theology's task of exposition, interpretation,

⁵⁵ The Anglican Church of Canada, The Book of Common Prayer (Cambridge, 1959), p. 45.

⁵⁶ Denken und Glauben, p. 39.

translation. But all methods of interpretation are not equally appropriate. Interpretation must not be practised in such a way that Jesus is separated from the Word, the man from the message. If this separation is made it would mean that "it is not that Jesus is this word, but that he brings it. Hence its historical character, which is what distinguishes it from a general truth, derives mainly from the fact that it comes as address, but not from the fact that in it Jesus himself encounters us as the grace of God."⁵⁷

Here we are dealing with the difference between the methods of philosophy and theology. In a somewhat oversimplified way this could be expressed as follows:

Philosophical thought is a priori,
transcendental thought; behind the
reality of the individual being it
asks about its universal conditions
of possibility Theological
thought is a posteriori thought: it
looks at a certain reality and
interprets it, thus is exegetical
thought. 58

This is a reflection of theology's nature as a scientia practica. It does not have to describe "self-existent facts, eg. the plans and accomplishments of a self-existent Supreme Being, but it has to help to see that the proclamation aims straight at faith and does not transform itself into instruction on supramundane facts,

⁵⁷ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 21, n. 1.

⁵⁸ Denken und Glauben, p. 65.

nor into propaganda for a world view; it is a question precisely of distinguishing the Gospel as a message of life from any world-view or any doctrinal system."⁵⁹

In other words, this means that Why-questions are inappropriate in theology. Every Why-question directed at theology's subject receives the same answer——inconceivable to the outsider but fully sufficient for the believer——: "it hath pleased God", or in modern translations, "God wanted", "God chose" (Isaiah 53:10; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Colossians 1:19; et al.). Rather, theology must ask What- and How-questions; "it does not abstractly consider the possibility of faith and salvation but enquires about the meaning of the Christ-story contained in the title of the Gospel and how far the Christ-story reveals the possibility of man's faith and salvation."⁶⁰

In order to express this more accurately we must distinguish carefully among Infragestellen, Fragen and Infragegestelltwerden.⁶¹ Infragestellen (lit. "placing in question") is a form of questioning in which the person asking the questions judges or assesses the subject or partner being placed in question. It concerns my judgment about something or someone. Similarly, with Fragen (lit.

⁵⁹ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 21, n. 1.

⁶⁰ Denken und Glauben, p. 199.

⁶¹ This is based on Gollwitzer's remarks in: Denken und Glauben, pp. 66-67.

"asking") I am directing questions to a partner. While Infragestellen refers to the type of questioning practised in the positive sciences, Fragen refers to such petitions as: "Yahweh, how long will you be?" (Psalm 6:3) and: "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" (Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46)——questioning which calls for help in the void. But whereas I pronounce the answer in Infragestellen, in Fragen I can only wait for an answer that lies outwith me. Whereas Infragestellen is an expression of my power, Fragen is an expression of my impotence.

Thirdly, Infragegestelltwerden (lit. "being placed in question") is an expression of "questionableness" (Fraglichkeit). In this I speak not the question but the answer. In this it resembles Infragestellen where I utter both question and answer. But with Infragegestelltwerden the answer comes not out of my knowledge——as with Infragestellen——but out of the questioner's unveiling of my true being. This is most radical as the sinner's experience of God's judgment. Whenever this is experienced most radically——"My whole being trembles before you, your rulings fill me with fear" (Psalm 119:120)——it excludes the possibility of reversing the situations and placing God in question (Infragestellen).

Thus, in Christian theology, questioning of the type Infragestellen is inappropriate. It is restricted to Fragen and Infragegestelltwerden, where God is the active partner providing either the answer or the question and

is not merely the subject of our investigation.

Secondly, speaking negatively still, "the apologetic search for questions to be answered by God"⁶² is not a method appropriate to Christian theology. This is not to place in question the correlation between our questions and the Gospel's answer, between our needs and the Gospel's promise and message of fulfilment. An answer which does not correspond to a question is no real answer. And a promise or message of fulfilment which does not satisfy a need gives no real hope.

Rather the question is only whether and how far this correlation may be shown sufficiently extra- and pre-theologically, whether the Gospel only brings the answer or whether it does not also change the question, or at least widen and sharpen it. If question and answer are arranged in such a way that the question can already be ascertained apart from and before the Gospel and can be developed sufficiently without hearing the Gospel, but the Gospel only has to bring the answer to this already established question, then there exists a great danger that what the Gospel has to bring is determined by this previously established question; it dictates and the Gospel has to obey—or more clearly: man dictates and God has to obey. 63

⁶² Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, p. 24.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 28-29.

Excursus: The Place of Apologetics

Christian Apologetics is not completely rejected. Rather, Christianity will have to acknowledge the weakness of traditional apologetic methods. Apologetics is necessary, if by this word the task is meant of going beyond the positive exposition of the meaning of the statements of Christian faith, to a polemical rejection of the appeal of Marxism to so-called contradictions between Christian faith and modern science, to challenge the validity of the opponent's arguments, and so on. 64

Thus apologetics is involved in both the positive (expository) and negative (polemical) aspects of the task of Christian theology. But thereby it must also use only those methods appropriate to theology.

However, the question might now be raised, does it remain apologetics, or is it just absorbed into, say, exegetical theology. The type of apologetics which carefully analyses sociologically, psychologically, economically, or by any extra-biblical means whatsoever, the needs of man and then builds on these stones an apologetic for Christian faith or a supposed way to faith, —that type of apologetics is not absorbed, it is abolished. So also is the type of apologetics which endeavours to make Christian faith "acceptable" to modern man, perhaps translating it into atheistic or abstract or unhistorical terms. Both these methods make the Gospel subordinate to human capabilities. But the Gospel comes from without. It is not the product but the solution of our needs. Therefore

this message is not for us to control or manipulate, but to accept and proclaim. Indeed, what I am saying does absorb apologetics into an exegetical and vocative theology. Yet this is not a lessening of its possibilities for effect. Rather, it is a widening and strengthening. For it allows the Messenger who is also the subject of the message to make the only effective defence——self-revelation.

There has been, however, another form of apologetics in the history of Christian theology. Perhaps the best, or at least clearest examples of this are St. Thomas Aquinas' "ways" of demonstrating the existence of God. Instead of building on man's needs or possibilities of comprehension, these arguments begin by affirming something which seems obvious to all people, and then proceeds from there to demonstrate God's necessary existence. For example, briefly, modern positivist science presupposes that the events and objects it studies are orderly. Only on this basis could it go on to presume that its experiments and observations are repeatable. If there is an order, then, the universe is not the result of chance or accident, i.e. order implies an Orderer. The Orderer is God. There are many variations of this argument and of the related ones based on the events of "motion", "cause", etc. But, even if we accept Charles Hartshorne's argument⁶⁵

⁶⁵ In a paper he delivered to the Divinity Colloquium on the evening of 25 October 1967 at the College Club Extension of Glasgow University.

of the validity of the a priori demonstrations of God's existence, we cannot accept that they have proved the existence of the biblical God. First, there is no logical reason for equating this Prime Mover, this Orderer, with the God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ. On the contrary, secondly, there are two good reasons for rejecting such an equation: (a) Such a summum ens or metaphysical God would be an abstract, unaddressable Being incapable of the personal relationship with man to which the prophets and apostles unanimously bear witness. (b) Even by calling this metaphysical God the summum bonum we have not justified any equation with the biblical God. For in the New Testament terminology this summum bonum is still part of the created order and is called ho satanas (Satan) or ho theos tou aionos toutou (the Prince of this world). God remains above even this power as Lord of lords and King of kings.

Therefore, without a doubt, Gollwitzer is correct in saying that there can be no "way" built by means of Christian apologetics from man to God. God is always both the initiator and the perfecter. And yet, does it not seriously limit him to say he cannot use this method to help prepare persons for more direct, though still mediated, self-revelation? Surely the Lord of creation is also Lord of apologetics!

Also, the Christian message is to be proclaimed and passed on to modern man in human language conditioned by our modern historical situation. To do this adequately requires an understanding both of the Gospel message and of the modern situation. This Gollwitzer recognizes and does not deny. Indeed, as we shall see later, a large section of his develop-

ment of a vocative theology is devoted to the use of language. But perhaps this aspect of "correspondence" is not emphasized enough.

The Method and Nature of Theology (continued)

Turning now to a positive statement of the method appropriate to theology's subject we are confronted by a circle, a dilemma, a paradox: "the gospel is the answer to a life-question; relevant, fully satisfying answer, but the question only arises through the proclamation of the answer."⁶⁶ Once again we meet Gollwitzer's paradox-dialectic methodology, but here in a most illuminating way. The Gospel brings both the question and the answer. In other words, the Gospel determines all the terms of reference. For if we obtained the question from anywhere else, the answer could come only in terms dictated by that source. This leads to some of the characteristic elements of Gollwitzer's theology, elements which we will encounter in more detail later. But to note briefly two of them here: 1. What do we mean when we use the vocable "God"? Asked in this way, a form of historical-etymological research would supply the only legitimate answer. Yet, as informative as this might be it would contain nothing of the Gospel. On the other

⁶⁶ The Christian Faith and the Marxist Criticism of Religion,
p. 162.

hand, the Gospel asks this in terms of "Who is YHWH?", and provides the only sufficient answer in terms of a particular Heilsgeschichte-----namely, that of Israel and Jesus Christ. 2. Similarly, when we approach the problems of political action it is possible to analyse the situation in terms of economics, or balance of power, or general social benefit, etc. And each of these methods would indicate a course of action to fulfil its particular aims. But no matter how much information can be gained by these analyses-----and they are indeed valuable in clarifying the situation-----the Christian ultimately must use another standard. For he is, in the end, not subject to the principalities and powers of this world. His goal is the promise announced and initiated in the Gospel: fellowship with God. By this standard he must make his decisions.

The task of theology, as we have said repeatedly, is partly to determine the message, the Gospel, within the biblical proclamation and the ongoing proclamation of the church. But this

can only be solved theologically, i.e. by examining the biblical message, but not in such a way that the momentary consciousness of the age is the decisive factor. Where it so happens that "we" "today" can no longer take over anything of the Christian tradition the theologian, instead of joining in without consideration, will be particularly cautious, afraid of replacing the biblical norm by that of the consciousness of the age, and will

This does not imply a literalist or fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible. All the available means of literary and historical criticism must be used to find the message and the Messenger within this proclamation whose form was influenced as much by the consciousness of that age as the theologian's re-presentation will be by that of today. We have had occasion already to note this difference of world-views. Biblical men thought in "theistic" ways and, of course, reflected this in the way they expressed this message and this encounter with the Messenger. We think differently today—"atheistically", "secularly", "technologically", etc. And yet, if the Gospel is truly "relevant" and "fully satisfying" today in awakening the question of life in us and providing the answer to it, then it must be still capable of being proclaimed, and that means being proclaimed in the modes of thought of contemporary man. Since world-views are constantly changing, even if only slowly, one of the tasks of theology is to hear the Gospel contained, perhaps even hidden, in the old ways of thinking, and then to translate it into terms understandable to modern man without destroying either the Gospel or modern man's consciousness of his age. Hence the need for ongoing, pilgrim theology.

Nor does it mean that the theologian must ignore analyses of what modern man can understand and what he

needs. How can he? He is himself a contemporary man. These analyses and his own self-examination will serve to point him to his task of interpretation and of mediating understanding. At the same time, there is an advantage in this new and changed capability of understanding. Just as in the positive sciences a new way of looking at something gives new insights as to its nature, so, too, our modern capabilities give us the opportunity of a fresh and new understanding of the Gospel. Yet this in itself should never satisfy the Christian theologian. He should never be content merely with what he can understand now. For like past insights those of modern man will be partial and one-sided. Christian theology, then, must strive to exceed these limits of consciousness. "Like each individual person, so too the individual generations of the church have been able to appropriate the biblical message always only in selection. For that very reason there exists the opportunity for each individual and each generation to discover it anew. ... But a theology which is conscious of its task will always reach out beyond the one-sidedness and partiality of such a selection to the limit, to what has not yet been appropriated."⁶⁸

One final word——perhaps a word of warning——in this section: As we have already said, in fulfilling its

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 58.

task theology must speak of God. But,

Speaking of God never occurs in God's absence, not even at a time when we lament God's absence. Speaking of God means: speaking of him who already always listens; it means: speaking in God's presence. His hearing is immediately his judgment, his Yes or his No to what we dare to say about him, his judgment on our talk but also his judgment on our silence.

69

In the few pages here devoted to a statement of Gollwitzer's concept of the methods appropriate to Christian theology it has been impossible to be exhaustive. We have said that theology must be biblical in a double way—the biblical proclamation is the norm for judging and the source of the church's proclamation; and the Bible also provides the example of the way proclamation must be continued. How this is practised in speaking of God in himself, in speaking of God-for-us and our relationship to him, in speaking of our political life with God (politics and ethics) is the concern of the remainder of this thesis.

69 Gottes Offenbarung und unsere Vorstellung von Gott, p. 6.

Introduction

Although God is not the subject matter of theology, yet, because the proclamation of the Bible and the church -----the true subject matter of Christian theology-----speaks of an encounter and a relationship with YHWH, theology must speak of God. But, as indicated in the previous chapter, not all means of doing this are equally appropriate. Therefore Gollwitzer's writings include polemics directed against ways of speaking of God which he considers to be inappropriate.

The first of these began as "a brief skirmish with Herbert Braun's lecture on the problems of a theology of the New Testament"¹ and grew from there into one of his most important books.² This is, to date, "the most comprehensive argument with existentialist theology".³ But it is not totally negative. Gollwitzer also attempts a statement of an alternative vocative or confessional

¹ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, James W. Leitch, trans. (London, 1965), p. 10. Cf. H. Braun, Gesammelte Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt (Tübingen, 1962), pp. 243-309.

² The original "skirmish" is contained mainly in: The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, Part 1, ch. 2, pp. 35-39; and Part 2, ch. 1, pp. 81-97.

³ Heinz Zahrnt, The Question of God, R.A. Wilson, trans. (London, 1969), p. 276.

theology. His aim is "to point to the true hermeneutic task of theology";⁴ or, in other words, to answer the question of "what it means to be permitted to converse with 'God' as an 'entity' in such a way that God still remains God."⁵ The underlying question throughout is: What does it mean to say "God is"? Or more correctly: In what way are we able to say "God is"?

More recently, Gollwitzer intends his book, Von der Stellvertretung Gottes (Munich, 1967), to be a debate with the type of "post-theistic" theology sketched in Dorothee Sölle's Stellvertretung——Ein Kapitel Theologie nach dem 'Tode Gottes' (1956).⁶ But once again, Gollwitzer attempts to develop an alternative position, to give his own solution to the problem of "Christian Faith in the Experience of God's Concealment".⁷

Both of these criticisms and positive statements are based on what has been developed in the previous chapter. They are practical extensions of the theory sketched there. That background they have in common. But for the sake of examination, I will deal with them separately. Then, in the next chapter, I shall concentrate more positively on Gollwitzer's own answer to the question of how Christian faith can appropriately speak of God.

⁴ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 11.

⁵ Ibid., p. 168.

⁶ ET: Christ the Representative, David Lewis, trns. (London, 1967).

⁷ Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1968), subtitle.

Gollwitzer and Existentialist Theology

The overriding concern of the early church was to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in its time—and to interpret it to contemporary men so that they too would understand its implications and obligations for themselves. And this has remained its task throughout the ages. But in the past century and a half this has taken on a new form. Previously it meant pointing to the reality of the "living God" over against the "dumb gods" of a pagan but theistic world. Now, however, the proclamation is carried on against an "atheistic" background.

What caused this change of world-view is not important here. But it is significant that this new attitude prevails. Man now lives in an environment of the Cartesian definition of "object".⁸ The advance of science has made every man in the western world aware of the "objectivity", the "thing-ness", of the world about him.

Against this background widely different theologies agree that one cannot talk of God as "existing" in the sense that a concrete object exists. God is not a "thing-like" object at our disposal for examination and judgment. How, then, can the Christian speak of God? In what way are we to understand and translate the Bible which seems

⁸ This influence has been general in the West. In England and America this has been sharpened by Positivism. However, this did not reach Germany to any great extent and is therefore not mentioned in Gollwitzer's works.

to refer to God "objectively"?

All existentialist interpretations "have in common the understanding of the New Testament texts as confession and address, not as objective information about facts of a historical and metaphysical kind which have an existence of their own. They examine the texts to discover the self-understanding that expresses itself in them."⁹ To put that another way: Although the New Testament writers make what appear to be factual statements about God and his actions, modern criticism shows these to be instead statements about themselves and their own reactions. Their statements about God, claim the existentialists, are really statements of their new self-understanding.

It is at this point that Gollwitzer accuses Bultmann, whom he has chosen as a leading example of an existential theologian, of "imprecise terminology and inexact logic".¹⁰ According to Bultmann, speaking of God must be "an expression of our existence".¹¹ If words are given their normal meaning, such a statement ought to lead one to stop speaking of God and to make statements only about man's experiences. To say, as Bultmann does, that "speaking of God ... is only possible as talk of

⁹ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 52.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 16.

¹¹ Rudolf Bultmann, Faith and Understanding, Robert W. Funk, ed., Louise Pettibone Smith, trns. (London, 1969), vol. I, p. 60.

ourselves",¹² implies that "God" is only a term signifying one facet or mode of our existence.

But such a conclusion is not reached by Bultmann. He wants to take seriously the "encounter" between God and man as an "encounter" between "different" beings. He "has no wish to speak of God otherwise than as the One who 'is different and encounters'".¹³ Thus he says, "God is outside me in so far as he encounters me—and that, too, transforming me in my existence."¹⁴

That is an imprecise and ambiguous use of language. For it allows for the possibility of resolving God's existence into the event of the encounter. A more precise wording, to avoid this ambiguity, must run: "I know God's being outside me and thus God's reality only in so far as he encounters me transforming my existence."¹⁵ That says nothing of God, but simply expresses an epistemology.

Bultmann compounds his imprecision with illogicality. He does not carry out a "logically consistent existentializing of the assertions of faith."¹⁶

He stands between revelational theology and philosophy, between the existential interpretation as a theological method

12 Ibid., p. 61.

13 The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 24.

14 Quoted by Hermann Sauter, in: Hans-Werner Bartsch, ed., Kerygma und Mythos (Hamburg, 1952), vol. II, p. 55.

15 The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 34.

16 Ibid., p. 35.

to the end of working out the proper interpretation of biblical texts and the existentialist interpretation as a transformation of the Bible's assertions into assertions of man's self-understanding without God's revelation, and thus with the loss of the real object of the Bible----- between theological and atheistic exposition of the Bible.

17

Thus both his position as an existentialist theologian and his position as a theologian of revelation are weakened. And yet, this saves him from falling into the pit which opens before the wholly logical existentialist. This is perhaps his greatness-----that he realizes the limitations of existentialism as a method in Christian theology.

Bultmann faces a dilemma: On the one hand he wishes to avoid speaking "objectively" of God, and on the other hand he wants to give importance to "encounter", which implies objectivity on both sides of the encounter. But, like Gollwitzer, he is unwilling to let go of either pole of this dilemma. However, one of his pupils, Herbert Braun, has not been so scrupulous. He avoids the dilemma completely by "consistently pursuing the one possibility of existentialist interpretation."¹⁸ But this means the

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 35. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to give a complete analysis of Braun's position. His writings are very difficult to understand and in style resemble poetic speech rather than closely logical theology. Nevertheless, some representation must be made of this important and long-standing debate between Gollwitzer and Braun. The latter's position is most clearly presented in: Gesammelte

end of theology. The dilemma has been avoided by completely dropping the one side of it—the theological.

At the end of his essay 'Vom Verstehen des Neuen Testamentes' [Braun] informs us delightedly that ... he has succeeded in managing without the word 'God'. ... But on closer examination it transpires that Braun also manages without all the things that are there connected with that word: without Word and act of God in any serious sense of the term, without revelation and faith in a Lord who encounters us in concrete ways. ... God [becomes for him] a transcendental 'Whence of all my being upheld and all my doings', ... which is merely the expression of a relation felt in the experience itself. 19

This is reflected in the dissolution of the subject-object dilemma.

The rejected subject-object pattern is 'transcended by falling back on its one pole—the human existence

Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt (Tübingen, 1962), and in his contributions to: Post Bultmann locutum, 2 vols. (Hamburg-Bergstedt, 1965). To these I have attempted to remain true. Gollwitzer's counter-position can be found mainly in: The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, and in his replies in: Post Bultmann locutum. This latter work, a transcript of a debate Braun and Gollwitzer held in the Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, on 13 February 1964, indicates clearly that despite their basic differences, these men can say some very similar things. Indeed, the major difference lies in the meaning each gives to the vocable God, as Gollwitzer himself recognizes: "With the question about what is meant by the word 'God' in the last sentence of Braun's theses the discussion had, for me, reached its kernel." (vol. II, p. 28.)

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 37-38; cf. H. Braun, Gesammelte Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt, pp. 297-298.

into whose potentialities there is taken up everything that in the old, now improperly applied terms, was once said of the real relation to God as the Other. ... The encounter with the call of God ... becomes an experience in which it is solely the encounter with the call that matters, whereas the Caller is swallowed up in darkness and the biblical concepts, though they are surely all relational concepts, are given a new interpretation as descriptions of an attitude which in reality now only moves between man and his fellow man, but not (or only verbally) between man and God. Faith in God is turned into believingness of existence, into a believing attitude. 20

Commonly, existentialist theology attempts to abandon anthropomorphic language by substituting an abstract phrase for the word "God". But this attempt is doomed to failure from the start. For "all language is derived from the things in which man has a part."²¹ The application of meanings to groups of sounds is an arbitrary human process. And the meanings themselves come from man's own experience. This is no less true for the abstract phrases adopted by Braun. For example, the "Whence of all my being upheld" draws on human experience no less than does describing God as "him who ultimately upholds me". Both employ an anthropomorphic concept——upholding——and apply it by analogy in an ultimate way to God. In this sense all language is anthropomorphic. The antithesis is between abstract and concrete, not between abstract and anthropomorphic.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 50, 63-64.

²¹ Ibid., p. 149.

This preference for abstract terms is used also with the aim of "decoding" the New Testament so that modern man, meaning modern atheistic man, can understand it and thereby feel compelled to renounce his atheism. "Let us describe as an atheist, in keeping with his own definition of himself, the man who confesses that, since as a modern man he can no longer reckon 'naively with the existence of a deity', he keeps resolutely to the sphere of this world and abandons every use of the word 'God', that indeed he denies that anything at all can be made of this word once we have left behind us the speculative presuppositions of earlier times".²² To this man all Braun can say is, "The atheist misses man".²³ The atheist misjudges man: It is indeed difficult to understand how Braun can say this at all. For the view of humanity upon which he bases his approach to the New Testament is precisely the same as that of the atheist. To suggest, then, that the atheist ought to take up theism, a theism which has just been proved dispensible, is totally inconsistent. Without a doubt, the atheist would be more in order if he demanded that Braun give up his last few fragments of outworn mythology.

Thus, Braun's further doubt whether there can be any

²² Ibid., p. 94.

²³ H. Braun, "The Problem of a New Testament Theology", Jack Sanders, trns., in: Robert W. Funk, ed., The Bultmann School of Biblical Interpretation: New Directions? (New York, 1965), p. 183.

such thing as an atheist is equally illogical.

i /
On his lips the question ... has no longer any admissible meaning. For it means nothing but: whether there is any such thing as a man who, however corrupted his relation to other men may be, does not also share in the experience of being protected and claimed by fellowmen-----and this no atheist will deny, yet without for that reason seeing any ground to give 24 up his atheism.

More to the point would be the question whether, given the extreme existentialist approach, there can be any such thing as a theologian.

Although Gollwitzer quite ruthlessly discards this approach he does not fail to see its values.

That for many texts, even within the New Testament, this method of examination can be appropriate and fruitful, is not to be denied It is not a case of the permissibility and appropriateness of such an approach, which can be denied only by a theologically erroneous fundamentalism, but it is a question of its being made absolute. ... Existentialist interpretation, as long as it seeks to be theological, can regard itself 25 only as a means, not as an end.

This is a point made by many writers. Christian theology, when it is being true to the Gospel, must not tie itself to any one philosophy. It must certainly be willing and able to use the hermeneutic and logical tools of philosophy, and to recognize where philosophy has made valid insights, but never to become completely identified with

24 The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 95.

25 Ibid., pp. 53, 57.

one philosophical system. Of course, some systems of philosophy must be rejected as absolutely inappropriate to Christian theology. For example, the extreme forms of logical positivism with their presupposed epistemology deny validity or reality or even meaning to statements such as those which the Christian must make about God, faith, etc. Similarly, language analysis, although very helpful in determining what "word game" is being used and thus pointing, by way of clarification, to its differences from other "word games", is itself sterile in the field of theology. While, on the one hand, Christian theology will find little use for such philosophies as these, it can, on the other hand, gain valuable insights by using other, more compatible ones. Nevertheless, it must subject whatever system it uses to the standard of the biblical witness to the God-encounter. They must remain the tools, the servants, of the message and the Messenger being proclaimed.

Behind this is the concern to do justice to the biblical witness to the Lordship of God. Braun is quite right to say: "Those who confuse assent to the metaphysic contained in the New Testament with the addressibility, or even with the faith, of man are adopting a well-intentioned apologetic position which denies the Word of God its sovereign power to deal freely and unconditionally with men."²⁶ What Braun fails to recognize

²⁶ Ibid., p. 41; quoting: H. Braun, Gesammelte Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt, p. 291.

is that this judgment applies to every formulation of the Christian faith, including his own. Insofar as it is absolutized, "dogmatized", any statement of the Christian faith has limited the Lordship of God.

In the existentialist approach-----particularly in its most consistently developed form, but also inherent in it from the start-----there exists the danger of severely limiting the ways God can reveal himself to man. Thus, for it "God can ... only become perceptible in his function of serving men's interest in authenticity."²⁷ How does this happen? It derives from the fact that, following Bultmann, this approach claims to be able to determine the nature of man's existence without reference to God or the Gospel, but by philosophy.²⁸ Man, then, is one who seeks his own authenticity. But this means that the function of the Word of God which encounters him is determined a priori. Its purpose is to help man to a fuller self-understanding, a more authentic existence.

In a second way the existentialist approach limits God's sovereignty: "The question whether what is said of this God of Christian faith is demythologizable ... can only be decided falsely if without closer examination Christian theism is equated with extra-Christian, and thus the same thing happens the other way round as was

²⁷ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁸ Cf. H.-W. Bartsch, ed., Kerygma und Mythos, vol. II, p. 194; vol. I, pp. 34ff.; and Bultmann, Glauben und Verstehen, vol. I, pp. 305ff.

done by the early fathers when they identified classical monotheism with that of the Bible."²⁹ Gabriel Vahanian also expressed this need to distinguish between God and the gods when he wrote that,

from the Biblical point of view the demarcation line is not between the sacred and the profane or between the religious and the secular——let alone between one world-view and another, or between theism and atheism The line is between God and the idol 30

To forget this distinction, or to develop a theology as if the God witnessed to in the Bible were one species of the genus "god" along with the gods of pantheism, henotheism, polytheism, etc., and the Absolute Being of metaphysics, is to deny him sovereignty in this realm. He is different, for he is Lord even of the dumb gods, the ba'alim.

Thus, even as an hermeneutic tool the existentialist approach has certain built-in weaknesses which make it unsatisfactory for Christian theology unless it is carefully balanced with valid insights gained from an equally inappropriate transcendentalism. Again there is a need for a paradox-dialectical method. Christian theology needs the strong points of both sides. In other words, we must not discard the valid insights of existentialism.

²⁹ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 40. Cf. on this: Kornelius H. Miskotte, Als de Goden zwijgen (Amsterdam, 1956); ET: When the Gods Are Silent, John W. Doberstein, trans. (London, 1967).

³⁰ G. Vahanian, No Other God (New York, 1966), p. 9.

Rather, what is necessary is "to define the bounds of theological existentialist interpretation".³¹ Thus, one must distinguish between "the programme of existentialist interpretation as a theological one" and "a general programme of demythologizing which, being guided by a modern concept of objective reality, can understand the gods and the stories of the gods only as objectifications of other things of existentialist significance, and subsumes in that also the biblical witness to God."³² Making this distinction is part of what it means to take the Bible seriously (in ernsthafter Weise).

We have seen that the existentialist approach can either be "a methodological precept which is occasioned by the state of the texts and justified by them", or one "founded ... on a general ontology of existence, of which it then becomes the consequence and expression, and to which everyone who adopts the method is bound."³³ The latter has already been rejected as inadequate.

Now, then, can this be used as an hermeneutic tool? What are its limits? "The methodological precept aims to distinguish between intention and statement, between what is really meant and its representational form."³⁴ That is, it endeavours to separate what is said from the way it is

³¹ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 60.

³² Ibid., pp. 60f.

³³ Ibid., p. 109.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 110.

said, the kernel from the shell. It ought, therefore, to "explain" the texts, make them "understandable".

The meaning of these two terms must first be cleared of all ambiguity. Braun has "explained" the word "God" by showing that what it refers to is not "God" but "a transcendental 'Whence of all my being upheld and all my doings'".³⁵ This, however, is "correction" not "explanation". "I thought it was the function of an explanation to render it evident that the something in question was this definite thing, so that the explanation took away the obscurity but not the object."³⁶

A similar ambiguity is encountered in the word "understand". The existentialist approach——and this is the trap into which Bishop John Robinson falls in Honest to God——"makes too much of an effort to make Christianity acceptable."³⁷ Understanding is not attained by erasing all the peculiarities of the object in order to show it is similar to what we already know. Rather, understanding is knowing the object in all its peculiarity. That is the task laid before all theology——dogmatics as well as

³⁵ Ibid., p. 38; quoting: Braun, op. cit., p. 298.

³⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie, trns. (Princeton, 1941), p. 196. Braun's formula, "God is within this event" (Post Bultmann locutum, vol. I, pp. 11, 29), does not make his position any more tenable. "God" is still dissolved into the event of hearing and accepting him, he is "explained away".

³⁷ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 252.

exegesis:

Exegesis has not to endeavour to bring the reader to see what he can 'make of' the statements of the text, and to trim them to that end secundum hominem recipientem, but although it does have to show where they touch the life of the hearer today, yet at the same time it has to give a clearcut picture of them precisely in their foreign-ness, so that there arises an encounter, perhaps even a conflict, between the hearer and the text's message which had not so far come within his range and is at first not yet accessible to him. 38

How, then, can we assure a proper approach? What must our safeguards be? That will be part of the content of the next chapter. But first we must examine another inappropriate way of speaking of God, of the relationship between God and man.

Gollwitzer and a Theology of Representation

This second inappropriate way of speaking of God is represented by Dorothee Sölle's book, Stellvertretung-----
Ein Kapitel Theologie nach dem 'Tode Gottes' (1956)³⁹
She presents in this book a novel approach to Christian theology in the twentieth century. It is also very appealing, bringing to light many valid insights. This novelty and appeal is enhanced by her straightforward,

³⁸ Ibid., p. 122.

³⁹ ET: Christ the Representative, David Lewis, trans. (London, 1967).

readable style. All this, of course, makes any criticism of her work difficult and complex. For these reasons, then, I shall begin by summarizing her book briefly, yet in some detail. Then the examination of Gollwitzer's criticism which follows will be more readily understood.

A Theology of Representation

Both Sölle and Gollwitzer live as thinking people of the modern world——both are "contemporary". Although their approaches to it are different, they share this twentieth century environment and want to face it honestly. What is this common environment, this modern setting?

Dorothee Sölle, following Nietzsche and others, calls it "the death of God", or more precisely "the experience of the death of God". It is difficult to determine exactly what she means by this. On occasion this slogan, "the death of God", is meant to indicate some alteration in God's mode of existence. If God has changed, then man's experience of God will now be different. Thus, "Any direct surrender to God, such as the saints of the great religions exemplify, is no longer possible for us in this post-theistic age. For us God is not directly present."⁴⁰ But more often, and more accurately, she regards this as a change in human experience caused by scientific and technological progress and the spread of a critical consciousness throughout society. The areas

⁴⁰ Christ the Representative, p. 132.

where God is needed as an explanatory factor have all been eroded. "The phrase 'the death of God' is meant to give theological expression to these changed psychosocial conditions."⁴¹

This phrase, "the death of God", is meant to express not only the experience of God's absence, but also of his ineffectiveness. This, according to Sölle, is an especially painful experience today. We have experienced Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Vietnam and Little Rock. After these, how can we praise God who governs everything so wonderfully that we cannot see his hand in it? In other words: God "has not finished his work."⁴² He has left some of his work undone. Thus, he needs to be represented. For without someone to do what he has left undone, without someone to fulfil his promise, "we should have to 'sack' the God who does not show up, who has left us."⁴³

In this milieu Sölle has attempted a new start in theology based on a re-appraisal of the concept of representation (Stellvertretung). "Representative" is not itself a new Christological term. Although commonly used in classical soteriology it has been neglected of late.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 12.

⁴² Lindemann, Rademann and Kuhlmann, in an open letter to "Der Spiegel", July 18, 1966, p. 90; quoted in: Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, p. 162. A translation of this very moving letter can be found in: S. Paul Schilling, God in an Age of Atheism (Nashville, 1969), pp. 13-14.

⁴³ Christ the Representative, p. 132.

Of course, to make use of a concept so rich in significance a careful analysis of its possible meanings and implications must be executed. And Sölle devotes an early chapter to such an analysis.

But she has already made an earlier presupposition. "This concept [representation] can only be used to describe the work of Jesus if it is firmly rooted in human relationships in society—in other words, only if it matches a universal phenomenon in our world as well."⁴⁴ This is her starting point. And her chosen method is a dialectic which mediates the experience "of the death of God and that of the life of Christ" "into a new unity, into a 'theology after the death of God'."⁴⁵

One aspect of this modern setting, which is expressed theologically by the phrase "the death of God", concerns Sölle throughout: the personal identity crisis. On the one hand, man feels a compelling need for personal identity. This is expressed in "the bourgeois idealist thesis that the individual is irreplaceable".⁴⁶ But every day, on the other hand, his experience negates this. The technology which gave us mass production and interchangeability of parts has begun to have a social effect. Replaceability has invaded also the human sphere. When we quit a job or retire we are replaced by another. Computers and machines

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 134.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 43.

are able to do many things faster and more efficiently than human workers. Now, then, can man gain the sought-after personal identity, irreplaceability?

In the past this was guaranteed by God. No matter what happened in the world each person was irreplaceable, an unique individual to God. But the modern "experience of the death of God" has made this impossible. Several alternatives have been suggested at various times----- society, vocation, love, fatherland, art, etc. But, in the end, none of these has proved sufficient. Indeed, the identity-crisis, the feeling of replaceability, has taken on ultimate proportions. We are torn on the dilemma of needing to feel irreplaceable but sensing at the same time our replaceability.

Dorothee Sölle sees in the concept of representation, as distinct from replacement, a way out of the dilemma. But this distinction between representation and replacement must be very carefully maintained. Representation means assuming conditional responsibility for the person represented for a limited period of time. Replacement, on the other hand, is complete, unconditional and permanent substitution. To fail to maintain this distinction leads, in the end, to substitution and replacement. To guarantee someones personal identity, his irreplaceability, one must represent him, not substitute for him.

The determinative conditions for representation, then, are personality and temporality,⁴⁷ and its characteristics

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 56, 102.

are identification, dependence and provisionality. Identification must be twofold: identification of the representative with the one represented, otherwise the one represented would be depersonalized and thus replaced; and identification of the one represented with the representative, otherwise the latter's action and suffering would be wasted, would be for nothing. Dependence must also be reciprocal: you are always irreplaceable for someone (the dative case cannot be ignored); but the representative must also gain the consent of the one represented or else he reduces him to a "thing", that is, he is dependent upon his consent. Provisionality: The purpose of representation is to guarantee personal identity, irreplaceability, by holding the person's place open for him while he is absent, so that in the future he can return to it. Therefore, representation must be provisional, temporary, incomplete.

All this Sölle has gained from a loyalty to the general experience of modern man and from an analysis of the concept of "representation". But she maintains a double loyalty. Therefore, she also turns to the New Testament to find the distinctively Christian elements of representation: "historicality, universalization, voluntariness, and suffering".⁴⁸ This part of her analysis, however, is very soon laid aside. In applying the concept of "representation" to Christ she divides her discussion

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 68.

into two sections: "Christ—Our Representative Before God";⁴⁹ and "Christ—God's Representative Among Men".⁵⁰ And within both of these she has three sections dealing with his provisionality, his identification, and his dependence. In other words, she returns to the three characteristics of representation discovered by an examination of the concept and ignores the work done in her chapter on "Representation in the New Testament".⁵¹

Our Representative Before God: If we understand Christ's provisionality rightly, contends Sölle, it will help in our continuing dialogue with Judaism. Thus redemption ought to be conceived not as "a perfectionistic once-for-all event but an unceasing process. ... A final Christ—the replacement who perfectly and completely secures for us the reconciling grace of God—vanishes."⁵² And in his place appears a Christ who represents us only incompletely and temporarily.

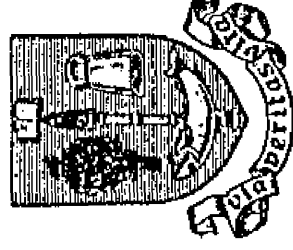
The pattern chosen by Sölle to describe Christ's identification is that of the teacher, and the "yardstick for measuring the degree of identification in a given case

⁴⁹ Ibid., chs. 16-19, pp. 107-129.

⁵⁰ Ibid., chs. 20-22, pp. 130-149.

⁵¹ Ibid., ch. 9, pp. 67-71. To her credit Sölle does not do this blindly. Rather, she proposes at the start (p. 16) that "readers not already trained in theology can simply skip" the part of the book containing this chapter. Therefore, she must regard it as merely theological superstructure which may be ignored safely.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 108, 109.



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[is] the teacher's attitude to punishment."⁵³ The purpose of punishment is not expiation nor satisfaction, but rehabilitation. In other words, it is a personal transaction in which the identification between the two partners is so complete that the one meting out the punishment suffers from it just as much as the one being punished. But this identification does not abolish the distance between Christ and those he represents, a distance emphasized by his provisionality. Rather it is a relation "of identity in non-identity, of 'one-ness in separate-ness' as the young Hegel formulated it."⁵⁴

Provisionality and identification are bound up with dependence—Christ's dependence on us, on our assent. Only in this way can his suffering be 'for us'. Nor is this just a once-for-all dependence. Rather, he continues to put himself at risk. Such a "doctrine of Christ's continuing, representative suffering" can be denied, claims Sölle, only by those "who see the resurrection ... as God's final victory over his enemies and not simply an anticipatory sign of hope."⁵⁵

God's Representative Among Men: This aspect of Christ's representation has never been developed as completely as the former. Also, it is this aspect which most needs development in the light of the "experience of the

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 117-118.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 122.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 125.

death of God". For an "absent God" needs a representative. Therefore, Sölle is careful not to omit this aspect in her development of a theology of representation.

Christ's representation of God, like his representation of us, is provisional. He is not replacing a dead God, but representing a living God. And he does this by guaranteeing God's future by "running ahead of him", reaching man on his behalf before he is able to. The image, then, that Sölle uses here is that of the "fore-runner". Christ does this as one who identifies himself with this absent God. Indeed, Sölle claims that this fact "is the only possible ground for believing in God today."⁵⁶ However, this section is very confused and confusing, beginning, as it does, by stating that "Identification is a relation between those who are differentiated"⁵⁷ and going on to assert: "In Christ God himself left the immediacy of heaven, abandoned the security of home, for ever."⁵⁸ Thus, she abandons her principle of provisionality by ascribing to Christ an identification "for ever", and she forsakes her concept of identification as a relationship between differentiated individuals by confessing at once the divinity of Christ and the humanity of God. Likewise, she revises the characteristic of dependence as she proceeds. At the outset dependence involved the acceptance

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 139-140 (my italics).

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 137.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 141.

or rejection by the one being represented. How, then, is Christ dependent upon God's acceptance or rejection? Sölle spurns the traditional answer that the resurrection was a sign of God's acceptance and prefers instead: "He depends upon God by depending upon us and living by our decisions. But that is to say that God depends on us".⁵⁹ It seems, then, that dependence involves the acceptance or rejection not of the one being represented, but of those to whom he is being represented.

All this Dorothee Sölle imbues with an appeal for action. The corollary of Christ's provisionality is our discipleship. It means that the company of believers must eventually take up the future held open for us by Christ and assume responsibility for the world. Similarly, it means that "Christ ... is present implicitly whenever a man acts or suffers in God's stead."⁶⁰ His identification with us and with God makes possible now our representation of God. "We, too, can now play God for one another."⁶¹ And that, she claims, we should begin doing now, at last.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 144.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 134.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 142.

Gollwitzer's Critique

In his criticism of Dorothee Sölle's book, Helmut Gollwitzer does not make the mistake of one-sidedly affirming or denying all that she says. Indeed, he takes great pains to show the value as well as the error in her approach. His re-presentation of her argument in his own words,⁶² in fact, avoids many of the self-contradictions present in her essay and retained in my summary above. Thus, an examination of his criticism cannot be divided neatly into sections dealing with agreement and disagreement separately. The extent of the agreement is always limited by some disagreement, and likewise, the areas of disagreement are tempered by points of agreement.

Before beginning this examination, however, it should be noted again that Gollwitzer, like Sölle, also writes against this background experience of "the ghastly massacres of our century".⁶³ His concern here has led to many books and tracts which will be considered in a later chapter. But already a basic difference is apparent. For Gollwitzer affirms that it is against this very background that Christians hear and proclaim the gospel, "very much challenged by this situation, by their own situation, by God's concealment, by his impotence, by his apparent absence---in and despite this challenge and against it they hear the gospel 'that the kingdom of God appeared in

⁶² Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, pp. 48-53, 103.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 142.

Christ', and cling fast to it."⁶⁴ Sölle began by analysing man's need and the concept of representation and only then turned to the gospel to see if she could make it fit. Gollwitzer tries to work the other way round: to begin with the gospel and then see how it challenges man. This basic difference of approach underlies all the specific points of disagreement and pervades even the areas of agreement.

It is true, Gollwitzer admits, that Dorothee Sölle gives us an honest report of the way a contemporary person can hear the gospel, how Christ can still speak today. She tries to be loyal to the two experiences of the "death of God" and the "life of Christ". "This book is a report of this attempt at loyalty and at mediating these contrary experiences 'into a new unity'; in that lies its sincerity and its significance."⁶⁵ She does not try to write a timeless sort of theology, but recognizes that she speaks "as a contemporary person whose first presupposition is contemporaneity. ... It is this very fact that makes her book ... more honest and significant than the studious attempts of many theologians to adapt the gospel to contemporary wording."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 116.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 13; citing: Christ the Representative, p. 13⁴.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 20-21.

But the extent of the agreement must be noted carefully. In reporting the questions and problems and experiences confronting contemporary man, Sölle has done what every Christian must do. "Since the church is a community of modern men and since, as contemporary men, they owe their contemporaries a witness in modern language ..., therefore, they are not permitted to renounce their contemporaneity but must confess to it and practise it."⁶⁷ It is this contemporaneity (Zeitgenossenschaft) for which Sölle's book is praised. However, merely to be contemporary is not enough. Indeed, this is to ignore the other side, the experience of the "life of Christ". The difference between Christians and their contemporaries is that "they [the Christians] nevertheless still stand in persistent hearing of the message and thus their thought and their life is itself the exemplary place of this message's encounter with modern man."⁶⁸ This does not mean seeing what they can make of the gospel in the light of modern experience. Such a capitulation before "modernism" does justice neither to the modern experience nor to the gospel message. Properly, as Sölle herself intends, the two should be "present simultaneously to join battle as to what is real."⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 55.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

⁶⁹ Christ the Representative, p. 134; cf. also: Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, p. 148.

We have here, as I mentioned briefly above, the crux of the matter, their basic methodological difference. Sölle begins with the human question about how to attain personal identity, irreplaceability. She makes an analysis of the concept of representation in human terms. On the basis of this she concludes: "Incompleteness constitutes the mode of [Christ's] being for us."⁷⁰ Then, in her final section, she develops a christology in the light of these criteria. Therefore, she condemns those whose "thought does not move from below upwards, from the anthropological reality to the christological event", accusing them of using strange methods "requiring of theology prior acts of specific belief".⁷¹

Gollwitzer's criticism, then, is to the point. For it is undoubtedly true that Sölle "strives to elevate man's condition of need purely phenomenologically in order to make Christ universally intelligible as the answer to the question of the human situation."⁷² In other words, she wants to see what she can still make of the gospel in the light of modern thought. The dangers of this methodology become clear when one examines it in relationship to the Lordship of God. Any methodology which begins with an independent analysis of the human situation and then seeks the gospel's answer to it has

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 106.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 94.

⁷² Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, p. 65.

determined already beforehand what the gospel can bring. This means, then, that Sölle, by employing such a method, has not in fact been loyal to both the experience of the "death of God" and the experience of the "life of Christ" as was her intention, but has made the latter subservient to the former. Or, to put this even more accurately, she abolishes the Gospel and returns to the Law.

Indeed, a fatum is always Law, and if a theology begins with Law, then, in the end, nothing can come from it other than Law. The fatum says: "We are no longer able . . . , we are no longer able . . . ", and enumerates what men of an earlier age ~~—supposedly—~~were still capable of but which is impossible for us today; the resulting Law says: "We must . . . , we must . . . ", and enumerates what we must do 73

Secondly, Gollwitzer admits that much of Sölle's background analysis is useful and necessary. She makes a fundamental distinction between irreplaceability and unrepresentability. The individual, feeling as though he is at present replaceable, gains a future irreplaceability because he is representable. "In the differentiation of these two . . . lies an achievement of Sölle's analysis which is not to be forgotten."⁷⁴ Also, her section on the "Problem of Punishment" (chapter 17-b), though incomplete, is a fruitful piece of work. "It is to be acknowledged very highly that the authoress works out her

⁷³ Ibid., p. 144.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 26.

example of a post-theistic theology precisely in the doctrine of reconciliation which is so neglected by modern theology and in doing so contributes, e.g. a very useful analysis of the notion of punishment, a concept so often used unthinkingly by theologians."⁷⁵

However, the basic error in Sölle's methodology noted above affects the content of her analysis. "For the very reason that already in her anthropological analysis she makes the preliminary decision concerning the content of the answer, this analysis cannot develop freely."⁷⁶ For example, her strict distinction between "representative" and "replacement", drawn from her analysis of man's quest for identity, prevents a development free from pre-judgment. Representation must have as characteristics, she argued, identification, dependence and provisionality. But she presumed that the consent of the one represented, on which the representative depends, must temporally precede the representative act. Thus, her arguments "betray an astonishing forgetfulness of the reformation problematic regarding the notion of consent (assensus)."⁷⁷ She did not take seriously—that is, in a way which would have an effect on her thinking—the Pauline anthropology which sees man as "dead in sin" (cf. Ephesians 2:1,5;

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 66.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 29.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 31.

Colossians 2:13) and incapable of prior consent. Subsequent consent is both possible and necessary. Otherwise representation indeed becomes replacement. But in Sölle's analysis, "our small ability to co-operate, which is really the gracious permission of him who does not need us, becomes the replacement for divine action——replacement even though called 'representation'."78

Similarly, from her analysis Dorothee Sölle concluded that one criterion of true representation was that it must be temporally transient. This leads her to see Jesus as a teacher, a pioneer, a forerunner——exemplum——and to affirm an inclusive, as opposed to an exclusive, doctrine of reconciliation. Thereby she confused replacement of persons and replacing action. The aim of true representation is to gain time for the person represented, who at present is incapable, so that in this acquired future he will be capable. But, for example, in the case of a battle against a superior enemy this can only be done by defeating the enemy on his behalf——an action which he then does not have to repeat for himself. Thus, "representation of the person can also include replacing action. It depends upon the fact that the relationship of persons is not a matter of replacing, but not that the action is not a matter of replacing."79 In other words, the true criterion of representation is not Sölle's temporal-transience but

78 Ibid., pp. 109-110.

79 Ibid., p. 37.

whether or not it establishes personal community so that by means of this lop-sided community the ability of the one gains time for life for the other despite his inability. Since she errs here, she then makes "no distinction between what Christ does so that through him we, too, can do it some day, and what he does but we can never do and never will be able to do, and, thanks to his action, also never need to be able to do."⁸⁰ Reconciliation belongs to this latter category. It is replacing action, not replacement of persons.

Thirdly, there are a few places where the two writers agree on their interpretation of the biblical message. The most important of these is their christological approach. Sölle's new emphasis in her notion of representation——namely, that Christ represents God in his absence——"is positively enlightening because it spot-lights how faith and Christ belong together In the midst of God's invisibility and distance Christ guarantees that he becomes the basis of our faith without which we could no longer hope in God".⁸¹ Gollwitzer also supports Sölle's many statements to the effect that God depends on men and their witness to be alive for other men.

At that point it is most certainly true that precisely according to the New Testament also God's existence in the world does not bypass men. In an

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 67f.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 66.

alarming way he lays his cause in men's hands. . . . So we are told already in the New Testament. One cannot say it sharply, one-sidedly enough.

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Yet much of what Sölle says seems to Gollwitzer to be untrue to the New Testament witness. She reverses the biblical emphasis. "For D. Sölle, that representation by Christ around which past theological thought circled, representation at God's judgment, has been hidden by her interest in another representation: in God's being represented by Jesus Christ in a time of his obscurity and remoteness."⁸³ In so doing, she makes some remarks which are actually contrary to the tenor of the New Testament. For instance, she writes: "Because God does not intervene to establish his cause, Christ appears in his place."⁸⁴ "The antithesis is clear; for the New Testament says precisely the reverse: that in Christ's appearing God intervenes to establish his cause."⁸⁵

Fourthly, and closely related to their at least partial agreement regarding New Testament interpretation, Gollwitzer and Sölle are at one in their demand for an active, witnessing company of believers. If the message of the gospel means anything at all, it is a call to costly discipleship.

⁸² Ibid., p. 129.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 47; cf. also, p. 64.

⁸⁴ Christ the Representative, p. 137.

⁸⁵ Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, p. 103 (my italics).

We should speak of Christ in his being-for-us in such a way that we do not cease but finally begin to do something for him, i.e. for our fellowman. Or more accurately and in an older but in no way antiquated language: The comfort of the gospel should no longer drown out the demand, the pacifying element the motivating one 86

This, too, is a limited agreement. Sölle is correct in basing this demand for action on the fact that God uses men to effect his cause in the world. But she errs in limiting God's activity to this human activity.

It is readily said today that "God can come to pass between men among those 'who have done it to me'". He can do that, thanks be to God! But——thanks be to God!——he is not limited to that. ... The tautology between God and the event of inter-human love abolishes the gospel of God's love. 87

Finally, Gollwitzer accuses Dorothee Sölle of being unclear in many places. Who is Christ and how is he able to do what is claimed of him? And related to this, what does she mean when she uses the vocable "God"? Is Christ's resurrection a transitory stage——an anticipatory sign——or is it the fulfilment? What does she mean by "directness" when she says a "direct relationship to God" is no longer possible? These, however, are generally no more than inconsistencies in Sölle's argument. To go

86 Ibid., p. 23.

87 Ibid., p. 147; quoting: D. Sölle, "Theologie nach dem Tode Gottes", Merkur, 1964, p. 1117.

into them in detail would add nothing to what we have learned already. The root difference is one of method and approach. And it is time now to turn, in the next chapter, to Gollwitzer's own attempt to speak of God appropriately.

"GOD TALK": APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE ABOUT GOD

Safeguards for Appropriate Language about God

In the last chapter we presented two inappropriate ways of speaking of God and indicated Helmut Gollwitzer's criticism of them. The simplest solution to this problem of talking about God would seem to remain silent. But our silence is judged even as our speech. Christian proclamation must speak of God. How, then, can we assure a proper approach? What must our safeguards be?

Gollwitzer suggests a four-fold answer here:

1. "The definitions must not be dictated by any modern consciousness set up as norm . . . , but must be demanded by the biblical proclamation of God itself and bring out its intention."¹ This point has been in the background of all his criticism of both the consistent existentialist position and the post-theistic theology of Dorothee Sölle. The Christian theologian must always remain true to "what the Bible says"—not in form, but in content. Here is where both Braun and Sölle failed, despite their good intentions. By means of an existentialist understanding of the text, or through the concept of representation, their aim was to demythologize the gospel, to change the form into one more understandable to modern man. But they

¹ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, James W. Leitch, trns. (London, 1965), p. 124.

absolutized their techniques so that the content, too, was altered. Their criterion for judging what was to be excised was the consciousness of modern man which, they claimed, could no longer accept or presume the existence of a deity. Acceptance of such a criterion at once brings them under Luther's condemnation: "Definiunt verbum non secundum dicentem Deum, sed secundum recipientem hominem".²

This is the major and basic safeguard or criterion for appropriate talk of God. The other three which follow are derived from the application of this one. Therefore, it is important that we consider this one more carefully before moving on.

The first difficulty to be countered is an epistemological one. This proposed method requires the two-fold presupposition that God exists apart from our experience of his action, and that this God is witnessed to in the Bible.³ But how can we know that? To answer that we can know it only by faith hardly seems adequate because it has not explained the necessity for accepting such unverifiable. Edward J. Machle gives us a clue to a sufficient answer in an article, "How is Heresy False?".⁴ He distin-

² Ibid., p. 122; quoting: M. Luther, WA T. 3, 670.18.

³ This objection is raised by H. Braun; cf. "Gottes Existenz und meine Geschichtlichkeit im Neuen Testament. Eine Antwort an H. Gollwitzer", in: Zeit und Geschichte. Dankgabe an Rudolf Bultmann zum 80. Geburtstag (Tübingen, 1964), pp. 399ff.

⁴ In: Studies in Religion—Sciences Religieuses (Toronto), vol. 1, N°. 3, Winter 1971, pp. 226ff.

guishes between "theologically true" (T-true) and "analytically true". In heresy we have to do with statements which are not-T-true rather than ones which are not-true. The latter would include statements of apostasy or unbelief. The heretic, on the other hand, still believes, albeit falsely according to the magisterium of the community which talks about life in terms of this belief. "On this account, the basic statements of a faith, like 'God exists', ... cannot be T-true since to declare them false would not be heresy ... but would be apostasy or unbelief."⁵ Rather, such statements are analytically true. They are the constitutive tautologies behind subsequent T-true statements. If, then, we apply this sort of analysis to the question of appropriate or inappropriate language about God we have a clue to the solution of this first objection. For Gollwitzer, propositions such as: "God exists apart from my experience of his existing" and "The Bible witnesses to this God", are constitutive tautologies. They are not T-true, that is, they cannot be verified by comparing them with any prior knowledge, because there is no prior knowledge. By the same token they are also not not-T-true. The question as to why one ought to accept these particular constitutive tautologies rather than any others cannot be answered except in a circular way. This, however,

⁵ Ibid., p. 231.

ceases to be a serious objection for the same is true of every constitutive tautology. This means, then, that the Braun-Gollwitzer debate will never be solved until the one abandons his own and accepts the others constitutive tautologies.

Having accepted Gollwitzer's constitutive tautologies, one is confronted still with a second difficulty of an hermeneutic nature. Gollwitzer's intention is to seek the essence of the gospel message behind the external form of the scriptural proclamation so that it may challenge modern man's experience. In doing this we are to use all the hermeneutic tools available today. But we must avoid using the modern consciousness as a criterion for determining the gospel message. However, the question which must be asked is: Is this really possible? After all, the way we look at things in some measure determines what we see. For instance, we might draw an analogy with an unusual situation in photography. The subject to be photographed is concealed in a cubicle with curtains on all four sides for walls. The photographer, of course, has a choice of films and methods. With an ordinary film and front-lighting he would see only the curtains of the cubicle. Using back-lighting with this same film he could photograph the silhouette cast as a shadow on the curtain. But with x-ray or infra-red film he would gain a much more accurate picture of his subject behind those curtains. The point is, though, that the method used determined to a large extent what he saw. Similarly, in biblical

hermeneutics the method or tool we choose has an effect on the message we find. How can we be sure we are not thus imposing human values on the gospel message? As unsatisfactory as it may at first sound, the answer is that we cannot be sure, but must strive in the direction of objectivity by comparing the results of as many methods of interpretation as possible, recognizing throughout the ultimate inadequacy of our methods to deal with the subject matter at hand. To these problems we will have to return in Chapter 7.

2. On the basis of this first safeguard of appropriate talk of God, then, we can move on to derive the other three. What the Bible witnesses to is an encounter between God and man——"an encounter which is not identical to any other kind of encounter"——"an encounter with One who in relation to self, world and [our] fellow men is 'Non-identical', and thus to that extent in actual fact 'Wholly Other'."⁶ In relation to this encounter——and this is the great truth of existentialist theology——we always react as either participants or outsiders. The outsider can assess the encounter sociologically, psychologically or phenomenologically. But only the participant has any real understanding of what he has to do with. The encounter cannot be assessed correctly from a distance but only in actu. The question whether God exists is not

⁶ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, pp. 124f.

is not within the realm of theology. Speaking as a participant the theologian asks, simply, how he can speak of God's existence, or what it means when he says "God is!" I suspect that, to a large extent, this is really what Braun intends as well, although he expresses it somewhat imprecisely. If Braun's expression, echoing Tolstoy, — "Where love is, there is God also" — is taken at face value, then Gollwitzer's criticism has some point. However, Braun may simply be emphasizing, in an epigrammatic way,⁷ the fact that we only come to know God through experiencing his action in our encounters with other people. That is not unlike what Gollwitzer himself says: "He who encounters us here is the One whose existence can be disputed only apart from the encounter, only in the form of misjudgment".⁸ If this is the case, at this point their argument is verbal, not substantial; they differ on emphasis, not content.⁹ We shall see later in this chapter, however, that there is a real disagreement on Braun's preference for "impersonal" language.

3. The third safeguard of appropriate language about God relates to philosophy. We must note

the highly important limitation which
the Bible's talk of God imposes on

⁷ This style is more apparent in the German: "Wo Lieben geschieht, geschieht Gott".

⁸ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 126.

⁹ This, too, may be stated epigrammatically: Braun is concerned about how man can speak about God; Gollwitzer about how man may speak about God.

itself in order to remain appropriate
... . It does not take the step to
an ontology of God. And thus none 10
must be imputed to it either.

This is an argument from silence, i.e., it draws a conclusion from what is not said, and alone would be suspect. Yet, it is a consistent derivation from the first safeguard and also preserves in our theology the concept of God's Lordship. We have already noted in the last chapter how becoming enslaved to a philosophy, and thereby to an ontology, defines God in such a way that he can no longer be the Lord. The "living God" is reduced to a concept explaining human experience. By not limiting ourselves to such an ontology—and today that also means rescuing theology from its union with St. Augustine's neo-platonism, St. Thomas Aquinas' Aristotelianism, and all the other philosophical accretions—i.e., by refusing to speak "objectively" of God in an improper and limiting way, we make

clear in what a radical sense the
titles 'Lord' and 'living God' apply
to him with whom we have here to do.
He is indisposable, i.e. we 'have'
him in no other way than in the reaction
of faith and obedience which is demanded
and made possible by what he says to us 11
in promise and command.

Once again, it will be noted, Gollwitzer and Braun sound remarkably similar. But their emphases and purposes

10 The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 128.

11 Ibid., p. 130.

remain different. Braun, as explained earlier, wishes to stress the fact that our knowledge of God is limited to our experience of his action. Although in places he seems to deny God's existence apart from these events of love in which we encounter him, his general attitude is one of agnosticism, i.e. we just cannot know of God's existence previous to or independent of our experience of his action. Gollwitzer, on the other hand, wishes to affirm most emphatically the independent existence of this "wholly other" God and only then ask how we may speak of him. The quotation above, therefore, has a different purpose from Braun's similar remarks. By it Gollwitzer means to present the fact that we cannot define God rationally or conceive of him speculatively. Even those parts of the New Testament which Braun claims reflect such an "objectification" of God by first-century theistic man, by his own argument do not, in fact, do that. They are examples of speaking of God in the only way possible: through the response of faith and obedience.

4. Finally, all this "can be adequately understood only when we always also bear in mind that it is said on the ground of permission and promise and on the ground of condescension."¹² This point is neglected by much of modern theology. The assumption is made in so many places today, and is shared by Herbert Braun and Dorothee Sölle,

¹² Ibid., p. 139.

that man, by his own power, is able to discover God and say something about him. But this ignores completely the fact, brought to light by existentialist theologians, that "what the Bible says is wholly and solely response—— response to a preceding concrete and contingent experience of being called, in which it is only when this happens that the Caller is first known for what he is."¹³ This Caller is none other than the non-identical, wholly other, living God, the Lord.

In the light of these conditions, then, how can we speak of the existence of God? What do we mean when we say "God exists"?

It is important to emphasize once again that "there is no point in prohibiting specifically the use of such concepts as 'existence' and 'reality' with reference to God."¹⁴ If we were able to distinguish between concepts as in themselves adequate or inadequate for application to God, then such a prohibition might have been in order. But upon application to God, he becomes their subject and determiner. Concepts gain, for the first time, their full and true meaning. Thus, it is our part to "reflect on the transformation which takes place in the concept of existence when God becomes its subject."¹⁵

¹³ Ibid., pp. 139-140.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 204.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 204. One is tempted to argue that by this same principle Gollwitzer ought not to have ruled out Sölle's and Braun's methods as inappropriate for theology. And superficially this appears to be an

But, it is objected, these terms, "existence" and "reality"——and, incidentally, also "encounter", so favoured by Bultmann and Braun!——are human concepts. And it has been argued already that if we are being faithful to the biblical witness we cannot define God in human or rational concepts. This is certainly true and must be retained as one of the safeguards of appropriate language about God. But it is a safeguard and not, in itself, totally adequate as a definition of how we must or must not speak of God. The safeguards, like the methods, also must not be absolutized in such a way that they determine a priori how God can encounter us and how we may speak of that encounter. Once again, we have an example of Gollwitzer's use of paradox-dialectic. God is wholly other, transcendent, beyond man's conception. Nevertheless he condescends to be spoken of by man, he is immanent. The great miracle of condescension, of course, is the incarnation, the reality of which we must, in remaining true to the biblical witness, affirm. And on the basis of this miracle we are able to say that "human ways of speaking can correspond to him."¹⁶ Thus, our talk of God is legitimate but needs to be accompanied by explanations of what we do not mean as well as what we do mean. We must show the limits of correspondence.

inconsistency in his argument. However, he has not ruled out their methods per se, but their absolutizing of their methods so that they altered the gospel.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 151 (my italics).

Excursus: Analogical Talk of God

We must pause here to make a few remarks about the use of analogy in theology. The problem facing us, simply, is this: As humans we are limited to using human words and concepts. Yet we wish also to speak of God appropriately, i.e. in such a way that we lose sight of neither his transcendence nor his immanence. Thus, we must apply our human words to this wholly other subject. What happens to them then? "If our words mean exactly the same thing when applied to God and to creatures, then God's transcendence is eliminated On the other hand, if our words bear an altogether different meaning when applied to God, then God's immanence is obscured".¹⁷

Thus, when applied to God our words must be transformed but not given a completely new meaning. In this transformation we are not to play an arbitrary game with our words. Therefore, a suitability or constancy of use must be presupposed. There must be some clear connection between the old and the new meanings. Or, in John Macquarrie's words, "whatever terminology may be employed, we seem driven to something very like the problem that has been traditionally considered under the heading of analogy."¹⁸ If this is so central to Christian talk of God, it means our task is one of closer definition.

Language is forever changing. Words gain

¹⁷ Battista Mondin, S.S., The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology (The Hague, 1963), p. 174.

¹⁸ God Talk (London, 1967), p. 212.

new meanings in different ages and locales. Similarly, they can have different meanings when applied to different objects. But, if the transformation that occurs when human words are applied to God is not to be arbitrary, and if they are still to mediate understanding, then there must be some continuity or similitude between uses. This does not mean a continuity relating to the whole of the meaning previously attached to the word. Rather, it is a limited continuity, perhaps comprising only a single factor. Thus, there is both continuity and discontinuity, similitude and dissimilitude.

Transformed human words apply to God's acts in his revelation and not in his being. They denote only his action in history, that is, his action in reaching out and taking us into communion with himself. These are real acts in secular history and therefore within the scope of human words. "Analogy thus exists only on the ground of God's descent into humanity, not as analogia entis, but as analogia relationis (Barth)."¹⁹ That is to say, the two usages have a functional rather than a structural similarity. For example, commonly in the Bible and in Christian thought God is designated "Father". This does not mean he is ontologically our father. Rather, as we experience his action we recognize a similarity with the action of a good human father. By an analogy of relation, then, we call God "Father", meaning that this wholly other acts in a fatherly way. This understanding should be applied to all the doctrinal statements of God's attributes (Lord,

¹⁹ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 185.

Shepherd, Creator, etc.)——and, indeed, even to the predicative "God". They do not refer to his being but represent appropriate analogical ways of speaking about him on the basis of our experience of his action. At the ontological level there is no point of similarity. We have to do with a wholly other. The link, the point of similarity which makes the analogy legitimate and the language understandable is God's action which is within our experience and similar to other action we have experienced.²⁰

Gollwitzer then goes on to distinguish between comparison and analogy, an important distinction for Christian theology. "It is ... a qualitatively different analogy when it is said that Yahweh roars like a lion (Hos. 11:10) or comforts like a mother (Isa. 66:13), and when it is said that he reveals himself as our Lord, Father, King, Judge, etc."²¹ In fact, this distinction is the one we have repeatedly made, the distinction between moving from the human level to the divine or from the divine to the human. "'Like' characterizes the comparison which we ourselves make: it is a form of expression which is meant to make what is strange to us conceivable through the medium of what is known."²² It is a very different thing, however,

²⁰ I anticipate here the comment that this sounds remarkably like something Herbert Braun might say. And there is superficial justification for the comment. However, if we accept my earlier suspicion that Braun does not intend to limit God's being to human experience of his action, we are still faced with the fact that he claims the similarity is to be seen from the human side, not the divine. Thus, he uses comparison rather than analogy, as explained in the next paragraph.

²¹ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, pp. 190-191.

²² Ibid., p. 191.

when in his condescension God himself confronts us in such a way that we remain persons, but become persons in communion with him. "Where it is a case of comparisons, the impropriety [of human language] predominates; where the confession is meant to express the encounter with God himself, that is, where we mean to confess that he confronts us as such and such, there it is precisely the propriety of these expressions that will have to be maintained."²³ In this way we can speak of God not in definition but in confession.

Therefore, when we say "God exists", existence is not understood in the sense of existence as known to us from ourselves and the world about us. He does not belong to the list of what is, not even at the head of it as the 'highest Being', the summum ens. ²⁴

To speak of God as possessing human qualities and characteristics merely pressed to an ideal or ultimate degree is either to make an ontological distinction not justified by the usual sense of the language, or to fail to make an ontological distinction necessitated by God's self-revelation of his nature in his condescension and witnessed to by the Bible. This latter distinction between the Creator and the created, between the Judge and the judged, between the Redeemer and the redeemed, in short, between God and everything else, must be maintained. This is the consistent witness of the Bible from the creation narratives to the apocalyptic writings of the Day of YHWH. On the other hand,

²³ Ibid., p. 195.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 204.

the former case, it is the weakness of the "proofs" of natural theology—the cosmological and teleological arguments in particular—that they attempt to make such a necessary ontological distinction, but cannot do it logically. To argue back from something in this world may lead, indeed, to an underlying principle of motivation—still part of the created order——, but it cannot "prove" the existence of the God of the Bible who is Creator in a radical sense and not just Prime Mover, First Cause, etc. To function as they intend, these "proofs" are dependent upon this ontological distinction being made. For they all argue the impossibility of an infinite regress. You must come eventually, they declare, to One whose being is different from all that we know here, for example, One who is moved by no other mover. The ontological distinction is necessary to avoid the question of who created the creator, but it is not contained in the experience of the earlier part of the argument nor in the logical structure of the opening statements. We can speak of God's existence only because he himself, as the One who is ontologically other, condescends to act in a way that we can experience and such that, by a functional analogy, we may speak in the form of confession.

The existentialist approach also wants to say that we must make an ontological distinction, that we cannot speak of God existing if we mean by that being "thing-like" and "given". In this it has grasped an essential truth. But still it fails, and does so for two reasons. First, it accepts this ontological distinction for the wrong reason. Instead of deriving it from the biblical witness, existentialist theology gains this insight from modern, human philosophy. This,

in itself, would not be critical if the principle so derived were applied in faithfulness to the Bible. Thus, second, it fails because it absolutizes the principle. Instead of taking it at its face value, the consistently existentialist approach (Braun) makes it say that since we do not mean existence in this one sense we cannot apply the word to God at all. Thus, the distinction is dissolved and we speak, not of God, but only of man. In other words, this negative safeguard is not balanced with a positive one. The inadequacy of "is" propositions is noted without, at the same time, recognizing the necessity of "is" propositions and the possibility of "is" propositions of analogy because of God's condescension.

A Vocative Theology

We turn now to the positive side. From what has been said thus far it becomes obvious how Christian theology must proceed. We must first determine the biblical teaching regarding God and his encounter with men. This is the standard for all our talk of this relationship.

At the outset we examine the proclamation of biblical men spoken in deepest terror and in highest joy. With that a standard is established: the reality of which they speak is such that one can speak of it only in such perplexity. Anyone who speaks of it in a different way speaks of something different. 25

²⁵ Gottes Offenbarung und unsere Vorstellung von Gott,
3rd ed. (Munich, 1965), p. 7.

As dogmatic and objectionable as this may sound to some, it is nevertheless vital to appropriate talk of God. After all, it is nothing more than a positive statement of the first safeguard mentioned above and of one of the constitutive tautologies of Gollwitzer's concept of Christian theology. It's strength lies also in the corrective it provides both for Braun's existentialist theology and for Sölle's "post-theism". On the basis of the biblical witness to God's encounter with man we can correct existentialism and show how it is possible to speak of God's existence without detriment either to man's limited abilities of conception or to God's transcendental/immanent nature. Similarly, on the basis of a biblical anthropology we can correct "representative theology" and show how the concept of "representative" can be used legitimately.

Who is "God" in the Bible?

Fidelity to the biblical witness compels us to maintain a distinction between YHWH and the gods, and a similar distinction between YHWH and the abstract god of metaphysics.²⁶ Besides the gods of the nations there existed for ancient man innumerable known and unknown divinities whom one had to take care not to offend. Also,

²⁶ Gollwitzer admits in this his indebtedness to : Kornelius H. Miskotte, Als de Goden zwijgen (Amsterdam, 1956); ET: When the Gods are Silent, John W. Doberstein, trans. (London, 1967).

behind and above these gods there stood some ultimate power or being determining the fate of them and of man. "This 'besides' and 'behind' and 'above' do not apply to YHWH".²⁷ Nor can YHWH be equated with the demythologized, impersonal ultimate power of metaphysics, the god of the philosophers. Even Paul Tillich's "Ultimate Concern" is not adequate to represent the biblical God. For such a power is unaddressable. But "the great deed of Israel is ... that it pointed out that this God can be addressed by man in reality".²⁸ Or, to underline this important double distinction again and somewhat more positively:

He [YHWH] is distinguished from the gods by the fact that for him there is no "besides", "behind" and "above" to take the last word from him; he is distinguished from what is above and behind the gods by the fact that he can make himself audible and addressable Said briefly ...: to him is suitable the absoluteness not due to the gods and the personality not be-
fitting the god of metaphysics. 29

Indeed, of all the various available ways of speaking of God, the best, according to the biblical witness, is the personal, because God "in his condescension addresses man as man, because he addresses him as man, and because in so doing he takes man up into communion with himself, and

²⁷ Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1968), p. 84.

²⁸ Martin Buber, "Spinoza, Sabbatai, and the Baal-Shem", in: The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism, Maurice Friedman, ed., and trans. (New York, 1960), p. 91.

²⁹ Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, pp. 93-94.

thus makes himself Thou for man and man Thou for him."³⁰

Excursus: What Does the Vocabule "God" Mean?

It is not just Christian theology which uses the vocabule "God". "In reality, as we all know, the vocabule god is a word of the whole world, used round the world, long before the appearance of Christ and the Bible, in the religions, by the philosophers and poets, and even in most thoughtless ways of speaking."³¹ Because of such a great diversity of application the word has lost any distinctive meaning. And it seems to be impossible to come to any lowest common denominator, to any minimal agreement as to its meaning. Even a general agreement that the use of this vocabule indicates a belief that the world must have a creator is no longer possible. "Instead of that we have recognized faith in the Creator as something specifically biblical and, on the other hand, the causal proof of God as a claim translated from Christianity into the language of general reason, a claim which is by no means self-evident and universal."³²

A semantic study is of some value in this attempt at clarification. What is the word god originally? It is not a name but a predicative noun, a title, a designation of function like the words king, lord, father, shepherd, etc. That is the original usage of the word god in Hebrew and Semitic, in Greek,

³⁰ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 186.

³¹ "Das Wort 'Gott' in christlicher Theologie", in: Ernst Sommerlath, ed., Theologische Literaturzeitung (Berlin), Jhg. 92, March 1967, col. 163.

³² Ibid., col. 164.

This predicate, then, can be applied to anything which is divine. In other words, to whomever or whatever theion is suitable, that thing or person is theos. To understand this predicative noun theos, we must ask about what is theion. This can be expressed fairly simply:

either theion is used in the general sense, in which case it means the superiority considered here by human standards. ... Or we understand theion not only according to its form but in the sense of content The theion, the divine, is what man strives after, what he asks for and what helps him. It is either the power of realization ... , or it is also the moral good. 34

Through the linguistic history of this vocable —we need not go into detail here—polytheism gave way to various forms of monotheism. Thus theos became, eventually, "the Principle of the world, the Ground of the world, unchangeable and remaining the same eternally, the real Being, the summum ens."³⁵ In other words, there was a move from the personal, polytheistic use of the predicative theos, to an impersonal, monotheistic-pantheistic (panentheistic?) application. That is to say, this classical demythologization also involved a depersonalization.

The same thing could be said of Herbert Braun's demythologization. Any talk of divine action is mythological to him and must, therefore, be abandoned. No longer can we say, "God is love" (1 John 4:8), or even "God loved the world" (John 3:16), but only "where love is, there God is also."³⁶

33 Ibid., col. 164.

34 Ibid., col. 164.

35 Ibid., col. 165.

36 Ibid., col. 167.

In that sense, then, Braun's talk of God is not biblical, not Christian, for it is not personal.

Who is "God" in the Bible? (continued)

What, then, becomes of this predicative noun "God" when used of this totaliter aliter witnessed to in the Bible? It is immediately stripped of all determinations of meaning or content derived from other sources. "Determinations of content can no longer be gained from the concept of god itself, but only from the events of that history in which YHWH acts."³⁷ The similarity with Herbert Braun's writings can be seen once again here. Although, as pointed out several times already, it is a verbal similarity and not a similarity of intention. But this sentence is not aimed, this time, at Braun. Gollwitzer has just completed a linguistic study of the word "god". As in this thesis, it was done to show the transformation of meaning which takes place when YHWH becomes its subject. However, a branch of linguistic analysis philosophy sets out to determine the meaning of words by a study of the way they are used. Indeed, in a simplified form, this is what Dorothee Sölle has done for the vocable "representation". If we use these terms of the living God of the Bible with exactly the same meaning as that determined by linguistic analysis, then we have sacrificed God's "otherness", his

³⁷ Ibid., col. 172.

transcendence. Following our first safeguard of appropriate language about God we must examine the biblical witness to God's encounter with man and ask of it who God is.

When Moses asked for God's name——which in the ancient Semitic world, because of their theology of the name, meant asking who he was——he answered, "I Am Who I Am", or, "I Will Be Who I Will Be" (Exodus 3:14). As this is changed to the third person "He is!" in the grammar of speaking about God it becomes, in the Hebrew of the Old Testament, YHWH. Whatever this name is, and scholars still have not fully determined this, it is at least a promise, an eschatological word. Only on the basis of this promise can theology speak of God. Hence its confessional, vocative nature. But what does promise imply?

Three things are referred to here. (a) "The promise means ... that he with whom we have to do here never submits to the past and to the availability of already existing concepts but always encounters us as the new, the still to be first perceived".³⁸ Thus YHWH always meets us in self-definition. However, this is not a giving of himself in such a way that we can have a hold on him. The giving of the Name in this cryptic way is also a rebuke to Moses, and so also to Israel and all humanity. YHWH is the "unpossessable, un-implorable and unrepresentable Speaker from inaccessibility" who "stands in place of the gods of the

³⁸ Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, p. 75.

nations".³⁹ This demands of us an attitude of trust and obedience with no guarantees to One whom we must not define or represent in our own terms. The Promiser is, thus, also the Commander.⁴⁰

(b) Secondly, "The promise also means ... that he with whom we have to do here will ever and again come to help and assist."⁴¹ YHWH's coming, his self-giving in the promise of his name, "I will be there", his self-definition is not a past event known only to the prophets and apostles. Rather, once having made this promise he will not back away from it. Thus, the "experience of the death of God" has to do not with YHWH, but with the man who no longer receives the promise. It is not the "experience of the death of God" but the "death of the experience of God".

(c) "Beyond that, it [the promise] also means ... that he with whom we have to do here will bring to fulfillment Israel, and with Israel humanity, the whole world."⁴² For the Bible this is never just perfection of life, never just a Utopian dream.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 84.

⁴⁰ This transformation of promise into obedience to a command is also noted by Jürgen Moltmann and expressed well using the Latin roots. Thus, promise (promissio) leads to mission (missio). Cf. Moltmann, Theology of Hope, James W. Leitch, trns. (London, 1967), p. 224.

⁴¹ Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, p. 75.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 75-76.

Here God lives among men. He will make his home among them; they shall be his people, and he will be their God; his name is God-with-them. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there will be no more death, and no more mourning or sadness. The world of the past has gone. (Revelation 21:3-4)

Perfection of life is secondary to life with God. The promise given in the Name means that God has come so near to those who receive his promise that their attention is turned away from the gifts to the Giver. This self-giving of the Promiser is the basis for Christian life and hope, for the relationship of man to God. But once again the limit must be retained: this self-giving of the Promiser is not such that we have him at our beck and call. Rather, it establishes a relationship in which he calls us. "His self-revelation is not a self-giving into acquaintance and availability, but the permission for living community with him, the Hidden One."⁴³ In other words, YHWH remains Lord of the encounter and the relationship which he enables. But by the fact of his condescension to make this possible he truly becomes the "living God" "because the man to whom he allows it can stand in a living, personal, human relation to him."⁴⁴ That is not to say, "God is a person", but that he allows men to enter into a personal relationship with him.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 85.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 85.

A further result of the biblical emphasis on fulfilment as the self-giving of the Promiser concerns theological methodology and can be included here as a footnote to and reminder of that chapter. The promise is not just the fulfilment of our needs, but we gain new understanding and perception from the promise. That means, "then the objection that such and such is 'no longer possible' for us in our present age can no longer be offered from beforehand as a decisive objection. What is possible and not possible is determined by the promise."⁴⁵

So far we have been concerned with an Old Testament witness to God's encounter with man—the giving of the Name. What happens in the New Testament to the promise included in that Name? Here the original intention of the Covenant with Israel is finally realized: the election, formerly of a nation (Israel), is now extended also to the heathens, that is, to all mankind. The basis for this universalization is the new character of fulfilment. "If in the Old Testament promise the First and the Last had promised community with himself as the only place where real life exists, then in Jesus Christ this has been made visible in the world."⁴⁶ The nearness to himself into which YHWH draws men is now even more intimate. And this implies a new way of working: The pneuma theou (Spirit of

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 83.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 87-88.

God) "no longer hovers over the addressed and chosen man demanding and decreeing, but works in him".⁴⁷ This, then, is the distinction between the time ante Christum natum and the time post Christum natum: not that faith has become automatic, but that a new, Spirit-wrought fulfilment begins now.

Here we see again Gollwitzer's consistent paradox-dialectic method as it parallels the biblical witness. The fulfilment proclaimed in the New Testament is both a once-for-all event and an ongoing process. As a once-for-all event——perfectum——it is a present reality. Reconciliation has been accomplished and is ours now. The life which man was given by God at creation, which is available only from the Promiser, which also man forfeited by wanting it from elsewhere——even from himself——, this life has been restored to him. God has, in Jesus Christ, once again established his permanent——permanent from his side though still destructible from ours——community with men. In this is our joy and hope. But it is also an ongoing process, a "not-yet-fulfilled" fulfilment. And we must maintain both side of this in our conception.

Accomplished is the reconciliation;
not yet accomplished is the redemption.
Fulfilled is the promise of "I will be
there" even to the ultimate, now first
indicated consequence of the radical,
self-sacrificing identification of the
Promiser with his man; not fulfilled

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 89.

is the promise of the results of
this fulfilment for the world
situation

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In other words, even though we live in the age of fulfilment we must still wait. The final fulfilment is yet to come. Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the promised "I will be there" of the divine name (YHWH) and the messianic name (Emmanuel), the perfectly present salvation; but he is also the hope in the ultimate fulfilment of the consequences of this already fulfilled promise.

One will note immediately that there is a great similarity here with what Jürgen Moltmann has written in Theology of Hope. Moltmann, drawing on A. Oepke's article in Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, interprets the parousia of Christ not as the return of one who has departed, but as a "presence, yet not a presence which is past tomorrow, but a presence which must be awaited today and tomorrow."⁴⁹ The question is raised, then, of what we are waiting for, of what the future holds. "The Christian expectation is directed to no other than the Christ who has come, but it expects something new from him, something that has not yet happened so far: it awaits the fulfilment of the promised righteousness of God in all things, the fulfilment of the resurrection of the dead that is promised in his resurrection, the fulfilment of

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 117.

⁴⁹ Theology of Hope, p. 227.

the lordship of the crucified over all things that is promised in his exaltation."⁵⁰ Moltmann, however, seems to lack anything corresponding to the presence of the Promiser. He calls for this pilgrimage or exodus but the only guidance he can see is this future hope and vision. Thus, he has dissolved the completed, once-for-all pole in favour of the future, yet-to-be-fulfilled pole.

Fulfilment, of course, does not mean that faith asks no more questions. Indeed, there is one which it must ask, along with unbelief:

Is it really so? Has the world and
have we a Lord, this Lord? Are we
really so judged, so laden with gifts,
so threatened and so blessed? 51

By asking this, faith has not ceased to be faith. It is not a question of doubt in the sense of unbelief (although unbelief also asks this same question).⁵² Faith cannot "possess" God like a datum. It can never be certain in that sense but must be renewed ever again. And for this renewal it must always return to the Word that encountered it in the first place, to Jesus Christ.

That he [the man of faith] will get
it from there is the promise given by

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 229.

⁵¹ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 215.

⁵² Cf. on this Gollwitzer's comment on Luke 7:18ff., in: Die Freude Gottes, 8th ed. (Berlin-Dahlem, 1969), pp. 80ff. "John perceived in Jesus the Messiah. His question does not ask for proof, like the question of doubt, but it asks for confirmation" (p. 81). And for this confirmation faith goes not to the world, but to its Lord.

the Christian message itself to its hearer. He is promised that he whom he is here given to hear will stand by his Word and will prove to him that 'it is really so'. 53

By way of summary, then, how can we speak of God? How can we say "He is!"? Our criterion must always be biblical talk of God's encounter with man. In the light of this we must recognize both the inadequacy and the necessity of "is" propositions when applied to God; inadequate because God is not an "objective fact" in the narrow positivist sense, but necessary because of the fact that God encounters man in such a way that thereafter man can address him personally, and possible by a functional analogy because of God's condescension in bringing men into community with himself. The statements we make, then, will not be detached, objective and definitive. Rather, they will be statements of involvement, encounter and response——hence, confessional, vocative and homiletical.

Biblical Anthropology and Representation

Up to this point our development of a vocative theology has been concerned with how we can properly speak of God. In this we were led to talk about his encounter with man. In this section, then, we will turn our attention to the question of how to speak properly of the relationship between God and man. Theology has led us to anthropology.

Here, too, our criterion must be the biblical testimony and our method must begin with an examination of that witness.

What, then, is the new perception of man given by the biblical promise? Both the Old and New Testaments affirm that man "as a creature of God has received life from his Creator, full, meaningful, fulfilled life."⁵⁴ The promise tells us that man can have life only from God, the Creator and Promiser, and "to want to have it from oneself or from anywhere else is a withdrawal from the realm of life into the realm of impossibility, of death".⁵⁵ This is the present state of man. Central to the Bible, alongside the promise of the Name and the Christ-event, is a view of man "as a rebel against God who, by his rebellion, has forfeited every claim of creation. It sees man so radically in sin that we today find it scarcely possible to understand it."⁵⁶ The whole Bible is a record of God's promise in his encounter with man and man's persistent rebellion against it, his rejection of it and his apostasy after brief periods of accepting it.

However, man is not in a hopeless situation. To regain the right of life granted him as a creature of God there

⁵⁴ Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, p. 118.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 94.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 118.

must first be a renewed acceptance of man by God, that is, reconciliation, forgiveness for his sins. To be sure, man cannot speak the needed pardon himself; for "pardoning is nothing, it is a mere wavering sensation of pardon, it is self-pardoning (and for that very reason really nothing), without the Pardoner."⁵⁷ This Pardoner is none other than the Promiser himself. And the fulfilment of his promised "I will be there" has done just this: it has executed the reconciliation, the forgiveness of sins. This is what is new in the New Testament, what fulfills the promise of the Name and surpasses every previous self-revelation of the Promiser. It is startling

how and with what consequence this Promiser would himself take on the burden which is inseparable from the Covenant: himself stepping in the place of the covenant-breaker, taking on himself his own No, negating himself and suffering it completely, and, by this very movement into the depths preserving the covenant-breaker from these depths in which he belongs and raising him to a new community with himself surpassing all previous fellowship, raising him to his rightful place as child, friend and co-governor. 58

This brings us to the place where we can and must speak of "representation". Now we can examine the concept and apply it, where suitable, to the relationship between God and man as effected in Jesus Christ. Only now can we do this in a way which will not distort the message of the

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 99.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 101.

gospel.

Several things can be said regarding the conditions necessary for true representation. First, as Martin Luther rightly noted, "Representation presupposes the absence of the one represented".⁵⁹ Dorothee Sölle was also aware of this precondition, but applied it wrongly. Without a doubt, mankind needs representation. For his rebellion, in fact, amounts to absence: he has withdrawn from community with God and can do nothing himself to restore this relationship. But to deduce from that fact that God is absent because we do not now encounter him directly is her error. A direct relationship to God "whose home is in inaccessible light" (1 Timothy 6:16, my italics) has never been possible. The relationship is always mediated——through a burning bush which is not consumed (Exodus 3:2, 4), through the Word (Jeremiah 1:4, 11, 13; 2:1; 3:1; et al.), through tongues of fire (Acts 2:3), etc., and, supremely, through Jesus Christ. This is especially true for the sinner whose rebellion has broken all bonds of relationship. As true as this is, however, we ought not to deduce from it that God is absent and does not appear at all. "The representation by Christ is precisely not a replacement for an absent God who does not appear, rather ... God mediates himself through himself, placing earthly mediation in his service; God repre-

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 7. Cf. Luther, WA. 7, p. 742.

sents himself by speaking to us through Jesus Christ's appearance and by means of the message about it."⁶⁰ But this means that a more positive form of directness is possible. Sölle confused "directness" (Unmittelbarkeit) and "un-mediated-ness" (Unvermitteltheit). She ignored the fact that directness can also refer to "the intensity, the wholeness and undisguised character of a personal relationship".⁶¹ This is what is effected by the fulfillment of the promised "I Will Be There". "The mediation by Jesus Christ, Christ's representation, is the possibility of a direct relationship to God."⁶² It is mediated and yet direct (complete and personal).

The second of Luther's preconditions for true representation is this: "the representative must be in a position to carry out the work of the one represented".⁶³ Again, Sölle was not totally unaware of this. Her corresponding element was voluntariness——free existing for another. But she did not realize that this must also include a freedom of ability. "Only he can stand in another's place who (a) does not already, as it is, stand in the same place; who (b) has the freedom to go there; who (c) has at his disposal whatever special ability is

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 140.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 140.

⁶² Ibid., p. 140.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 7-8. Cf. Luther, WA. 6, p. 298.

needed in this place."⁶⁴ The necessity of these three conditions of freedom is quite evident. Someone who already stands in the same place, in the same condition of absence as the other obviously cannot represent him, but himself needs a representative. Someone who is bound to his own condition is unable to stand in the others place and thus cannot represent him. On the other hand, someone who is forced by his very nature to stand in the others place cannot represent him because of this fact, namely, that he is in the others place by nature and thus violates the first of these three conditions of freedom. And finally, someone who does not have the ability or talent or strength needed to represent the other clearly cannot effect an adequate representation. This means that one person cannot "play God" for another,⁶⁵ because he has neither the freedom to stand in God's place nor the ability to do so. Indeed, man has no ability at all of his own and can mediate God to another only by God's self-giving grace. This also means that man cannot represent another man coram Deo, before God. For no man is free of the sin and guilt because of which the other stands under God's judgment.

This does not mean, however, that we are without

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 8. (I have replaced three commas with semicolons to clarify this sentence in translation).

⁶⁵ Cf. Christ the Representative, David Lewis, trns. (London, 1967), p. 142.

representation, without hope. The New Testament-----and as noted earlier, herein lies its newness-----proclaims the fulfilment of YHWH's promise in Jesus Christ. In Jesus the Promiser himself fulfils his promise to us. All this-----and especially how far this surpasses anything Dorothee Sölle said-----can be seen by asking three questions: 1. How far does the representation reach? How radical is it? 2. From Whence does the representative come? 3. And, how is he able to do what is claimed of him?

1. How far does the representation reach? In the extreme situations of guilt, death and standing coram Deo we can only declare our solidarity with others. Our study of biblical anthropology has shown us that we all stand in the same situation of guilt as rebels against God and his self-revelation in encounter with men. For this reason there can be no representation by man for man. We need "a completely different representation which reaches further than the merely human. Of such speaks the Christian doctrine of representation; upon such situations it has reflected, and in them it proves itself."⁶⁶

2. From whence does the representative come? Only he who does not already stand in the same predicament can effect true representation.

Therefore the New Testament never neglects to mention along with his [Christ's] identification his non-identical being, his sinlessness

⁶⁶ Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, p. 105.

(2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 2:11-14; 4:15).
With him representation is a truly
voluntary turning from the position
of innocence to the position of guilt 67
(Php. 2:6ff.).

Notice here the paradox-dialectic method inherent also in
the New Testament. Christ is both identified, yet non-
identical with man. This is necessary for representation
to be truly substantial and radical, for it to be "'exchange'
(katallage) in which the Promiser in his Son takes possession
of the world, guilty of rejection, with this rejection
itself (2 Cor. 5:19)."68

3. How can he effect representation? Christ's repre-
sentation reaches us in our extreme situation. Only he is
in a position to represent us. But how is he able to do
this? In the New Testament this question about Jesus'
ability is answered clearly and decisively. His life was
one of complete obedience. He acted not on his own will
but on the will of his Father. Likewise, his ability or
power was not his own but God's. This peculiar unity
between Jesus and God is, in the New Testament, just as
central and necessary as his identification with mankind.

Everything which is said about Jesus'
solidarity with man and his interven-
tion for him, thus about the pro
nobis ("for us") of Jesus' appearance,
only has meaning ... when everything
here happens in the initiative and
power and presence of the Promiser.
... This peculiar unity ... is the
basis of Jesus' ability 69

67 Ibid., p. 105.

68 Ibid., p. 103.

69 Ibid., pp. 107-108.

Besides being closer to the witness of the New Testament, this is much more satisfying than what Dorothee Sölle presented, giving much greater basis for hope. A representation along the pattern she proposed is a bleak thing. It does not reach the radical depths of guilt and death and standing coram Deo. It requires a representation of men by men, all of whom are in the same predicament and therefore have neither the freedom nor the ability to be representatives. Thus, judged also from a purely human point of view, judged by Sölle's own criteria, her proposal is inadequate. The Chalcedonian definition of the two natures of Christ, besides growing out of the New Testament witness, is necessary to our understanding of soteriology. Otherwise, Jesus Christ would have been unable to effect what we claim of him.

Excursus: The "Death of God"

What, then, of the "experience of the death of God"? For Dorothee Sölle this characterized the modern age in theological terms. By this she meant that a "direct relationship to God" is no longer possible.⁷⁰ But, as we have pointed out already, for Christians there never has been a "direct relationship to God"; "to us is granted only a revelatio mediata".⁷¹ This, then, is not a peculiarity of the post-enlightenment era. Faith has never

⁷⁰ Cf. Christ the Representative, pp. 130f.

⁷¹ Von der Stellvertretung Gottes, p. 139.

been a human possibility; "the God of Christian faith is not a possible God who would be understandable as a result of ways of reflection possible to man."⁷² Faith is only possible as God's gift, "by the power of the word of promise itself, by the spirit of this word, the Holy Ghost."⁷³

But what is true is that we kill God for others. "God is not dead, but we kill him, i.e. we make the promise and warning of the Promiser into dead, hollow words, something believable into something unbelievable, in different ways but with the same result."⁷⁴ Thus, we are responsible for the "experience of the death of God". We cannot represent him because we have neither the freedom nor the ability to do so, but also because he does not need it—he is not dead. Rather, his Name itself says "YHWH: He is!" But we must stop killing him. Or said positively: As well as proclaiming the gospel in words we must witness to it in action so that the words do not become hollow, empty of meaning.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 143-144.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 144.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 145.

THE CHRISTIAN AND POLITICS

Introduction

Up to this point the thesis has concentrated on Helmut Gollwitzer's "theology" in the narrow, literal sense of the term. We have been concerned with developing an appropriate language for speaking of God and with the results of this in the area of the relationship between God and man, there developing a soteriology using the concept of representation. In doing this we have been unfair to Gollwitzer. A division into chapters and sections is necessary in writing a thesis, but it is arbitrary. Often there are several possible ways of organizing the material. In this case, however, any systematic organization of that type does an injustice to the holistic nature of his thinking. We already have had occasion to mention the paradox-dialectic method used by Gollwitzer. It is evident here, too, on a more basic level. Traditionally theology has to do with God and his relationship with mankind, and ethics is concerned with man's relationship with other men. For some they exist side-by-side in virtual independence. For others the connection is a logical one, ethics grows out of or is derived from theology. But for Gollwitzer they are so closely bound together that to speak theologically is to speak ethically, and vice versa. The strength of the "and" in Jesus' summary of the Law—"You must love the

the Lord your God ... and your neighbour as yourself" (Luke 10:27, my italics)——is recognized fully and determines the nature of his writings. For this reason, "an examination of the theology of Helmut Gollwitzer" must devote a substantial section to what is more usually called ethics. And it must be remembered that this is not an independent section, but rather an integral part of his theology.

In a sense Christians share in the two natures of the Christ to whom they bear witness. As men, sinful men, they live contemporary lives in a contemporary world situation, sharing the joys, hopes, problems and weaknesses of the others around them. They are identified with them, part of humanity. Yet they are also non-identical, different, special. They have experienced God's encounter with mankind and by his grace have accepted the promise it includes. Thereby they have also accepted the command inherent in that promise. They have a special task in relation to the world in which they live. And it is to that aspect of theology that we now turn in this chapter.

To describe this area of concern I have chosen the word "politics" rather than the more traditional one, "ethics". There are two major reasons for this. The first has been alluded to already. In common usage, ethics, to a greater or lesser extent, is seen as something distinct from theology. The preference for "the Christianity of politics" or "political Christianity" is an attempt to draw attention away from this distinction to a more holistic

approach. In the second place, the term "ethics", however incorrectly, commonly implies an absolute determination of some course of action or other as the Christian way for all time. In the face of that Gollwitzer is a contextualist. Each situation must be examined and met in the light of the experience of God's encounter with mankind. The solution, then, will change as the situation is different. Thus, I am taking "politics" not in the narrow, party-politics sense of the term. Rather, and more originally, politics has to do with the selection of courses of action to deal with the problems raised by inter-human relationships on the national and international level.

Gollwitzer's manifesto in this regard can be found expressed most clearly in the title essay of his book,

Forderungen der Freiheit:

Christians everywhere must be made to realize that something special is demanded of them, even in political life. What is demanded of them is their freedom. The serious threats to humanity and human values in the second half of the twentieth century compel the Christian to face the question of his freedom and its implications in public life. 1

On the basis of that it is not surprising that a great many of his published writings deal with this problem of the relationship of the professing Christian to political life, as even a quick glance through the List of Works by Helmut Gollwitzer will show. Thus, even if his "ethics"

¹ The Demands of Freedom, Robert W. Fenn, trns. (London, 1965), p. 34.

were not an integral part of his "theology", we would have reason enough here for including a chapter on his answer to this problem.

Correctly, as indicated above, that should be in the plural: "his answers to these problems". For each new situation must be examined in its own right. The old answers and conventions do not necessarily apply today. "Rules and conventions resulting from common experience are not there in order to relieve the individual of the necessity for decision, but to help him decide by prior clarification and testing, and by the support of the community."² There must be a re-examination of the situation, and that means, for Christians, looking at the problem in the light of the gospel. "Christian politics in my opinion means getting a grip on the tasks which God sets before us".³ That is, Christian politics means acting on the judgments discovered in the encounter with the Word of God.

This political involvement seems to have two stages. First, after hearing the Word of God, the Christian must speak it to his fellowmen. He must state clearly how the particular course of action proposed stands in relation to God's will and grace. "Therefore, the church must first of all carry out its commission and tell the poli-

² Ibid., p. 130.

³ Unwilling Journey, E.M. Delacour, trns., with help from Robert W. Fenn (London, 1965), p. 214.

ticians what God's command says to all".⁴ This does not mean giving a clear, practical blueprint of political action to solve the problem. Rather, it means pointing to the way of obedience. "It has not got to wait to say that until it has found a practical method of implementing this fact politically".⁵

Second, after having pierced the political fog with Amos-like statements, the Christian can, and must, go on to methodological discussion. "Only after such plain speaking can the church proceed to take part in deliberations about the way in which this is to be translated into political practice".⁶ In this way the idealism of the first stage is saved from becoming unrealistic.

Separating these stages, as I have done——following Gollwitzer's own lead——, does not mean a complete divorce of proclamation and political action. We have already spoken in an earlier chapter of the hermeneutical nature of theology's task. Having ascertained the gospel message behind the proclamation which is its subject matter, Christian theology must then go on to translate and proclaim it in relation to the actual situation of its particular age. One aspect of this contemporaneity is involvement in practical, political discussions, realizing, of course,

⁴ "The Christian in the Search for World Order and Peace", in: Z.K. Matthews, ed., Responsible Government in a Revolutionary Age (New York, 1966), p. 51.

⁵ The Demands of Freedom, p. 40.

⁶ "The Christian in the Search for World Order and Peace", op. cit., p. 51.

that "these discussions lack basis and direction, if they are not preceded by the clear statement which is fundamental to the whole problem."⁷

In making such a "clear statement" the church must not only proclaim God's will, but must point also to the true facts of the situation. Theology is to give a response to a situation in the light of the biblical witness to God's dealings with men. Obviously, to ignore either side of this would be to invalidate the response. In other words, "the church must not cloud this clear issue but must be its servant".⁸ The church must not for partisan reasons depict things different than they are. It must aim always at a clear, unambiguous presentation of the truth and its consequences.

The criteria, then, for judging Gollwitzer's political writings are not primarily practicability and convenience. Rather, we must ask: Is he obedient to God's will as declared in the Bible, especially by the life of Jesus Christ? And: Has he presented the facts clearly and unambiguously, or has he attempted to cloud the issue in favour of his own position?

Since he is speaking to an "actual situation existing at a particular time"⁹ and in a particular place——namely,

⁷ The Demands of Freedom, p. 40.

⁸ "The Christian in the Search for World Order and Peace",
op. cit., p. 51.

⁹ The Demands of Freedom, p. 40.

West Germany in the second half of the twentieth century —, his words cannot be expected to have universal relevance, temporally or spatially. This is particularly the case with his remarks about the German situation——about re-arming West Germany and about the re-unification of Germany. And to a certain extent his approach to the question of Israel and Jewish-Christian relations is very German, i.e., strongly coloured by a sense of guilt regarding the atrocities committed by the Third Reich.

On the other hand, the problems of nuclear weapons, Communism, and war in general are faced by all countries today. Gollwitzer's remarks in these areas, then, are of some relevance beyond Germany and will, therefore, be examined in this chapter.

Christianity and Communism

Although forced by later circumstances to make an intensive study of Communism, Helmut Gollwitzer's interest in this ideology began very early. His imprisonment in Russia was, indeed, a source for his later studies, providing the opportunity for a certain amount of investigation through prison libraries and through encounters with the Russian officials and people. But his interest even preceded this. As noted in the biographical section, his contact with Günther Dehn at Jena prompted an interest in Socialism and Communism as political theories. Thus, he was to write later:

Before 1933 there was nothing outside the Church which held my attention more than Marxism. The analyses of Marx and Lenin helped me to understand contemporary events, the crises, the war and the rise of Fascism Already I regarded the Soviet Union with lively interest, alternatively sympathizing and criticizing

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His early attitude, then, if not wholly sympathetic, was at least not completely antagonistic, and he could say: "I was quite serious in my attempt to bridge the gap between our differences".¹¹ During the early part of his Russian imprisonment his appeal was for "co-operation". But the response to this appeal among the petty officials he sums up as: "Anyone who does not see co-operation as submission must be exposed as a hypocrite".¹² It is certainly true that "his entire experience in Russian camps was one long attempt at openness to the Communist based on Christian freedom from the prejudices of another ideology."¹³

Events following his release forced Gollwitzer to make a further, more detailed study of Communism. This resulted in the paper delivered on 2 October 1958 and 3 March 1959 to two sessions of the "Marxismus-Kommission" authorized by the Studiengemeinschaft der Evangelischen

¹⁰ Unwilling Journey, p. 118.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 149.

¹² Ibid., p. 163.

¹³ Charles West, Communism and the Theologians (London, 1958), pp. 246-247.

Akademien.¹⁴ But even in this definitive work Gollwitzer did not abandon his attempt at co-operation.

The essay may be understood as a contribution to the Christian-Marxist dialogue. It was written in inner and outer contact with those who through their situation in life are continually involved in this dialogue. The dialogue compels us to leave the quiet aloofness in which the historian sees a historical movement as a unity whose essential elements are necessarily and indissolubly linked. What the dialogue seeks to accomplish is the dissolution of these connections. Their necessity, because it has a historical character, must be regarded as merely relative, since, like history itself, it is still open to the future and undecided. 15

Before going any further we must be clear about one thing: Communism is not a simple phenomenon. Just as there are denominational differences within the church, so, too, there are ideological divisions within Communism. To distinguish these carefully would become technical and tedious, certainly beyond the scope of this section or even this thesis. Thus, I am tending to use Communism and Marxism interchangeably, as synonyms. Gollwitzer points out the inaccuracy of this¹⁶ and attempts to

¹⁴ Published subsequently in an expanded form as: Die marxistische Religionskritik und der christliche Glaube (Tübingen, 1962), in the series: Marxismusstudien, 4. Folge. ET: The Christian Faith and the Marxist Criticism of Religion, David Cairns, trans. (Edinburgh, 1970).

¹⁵ The Christian Faith and the Marxist Criticism of Religion, p. ix.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. x.

maintain a distinction. The comments, however, can retain their validity without this as long as we remember that they refer primarily to Marxism and the Russian attempt at realizing that ideology.

Traditionally the church-----with the exception of some of the Orthodox branches-----, because of various historical factors reaching as far back as the Emperor Constantine, has supported the west and pronounced an unconditional 'No' to Communism. But one question must be asked: By pronouncing this 'No' to Communism is the Christian community being truly obedient to God's Word? For "not every 'No' is a 'No' obedient to God simply because it is a 'No'. The resistance of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar's men and Peter's sword-stroke against Malchus (John 18:10f.) are not acknowledged as the true 'No' of faith."¹⁷ We must always remember that the God of the Bible is Lord not only of the church, but also of the enemies of the church, and even of the Ultimate Enemy, the antichrist or Satan. Therefore, "the Philistines, Nebuchadnezzar, Pilate and the persecutors of the primitive church are regarded as servants and tools of God, whose government is not limited by their power, but confirms itself by means of them, and God uses their chastening to chasten his people."¹⁸

This attitude has important consequences for our

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 9. Cf. J. Hamel, Christenheit unter marxistischen Herrschaft (Berlin, 1959), pp. 7ff.

approach to Marxism. From the outset Karl Marx repudiated all religion, including in that repudiation Christianity which he saw as merely a special case of religion, calling it "the opium of the people".¹⁹ Thus Marxism appears as an enemy of Christianity, and, indeed, of all western society which, since the fourth century, has been moulded in one way or another by Christian teaching. The example of the Bible means, then, that we must examine Communism in a double way, that is, we must look for the valid points of the Marxist criticism of religion as well as the factors in it to which we must pronounce a loud and determined 'No'. "Theology ... will first have to distinguish what is valid in this criticism from what is out of place, inadequate and false".²⁰

Basically there are two points at which Gollwitzer sees the Marxist criticism of religion as being pertinent and applicable to the church. 1. The first is the result of the church's long-standing involvement with the emperors and rulers of the west. "The church was incapable, in the nineteenth century, of grasping the true significance of the rise of the proletariat, because of its long heritage, going back to Constantine, of association with earthly

¹⁹ Marx did not invent this phrase. For its derivation and a survey of its use historically, cf. "Excursus on the expression 'Opium of the People'", in: The Christian Faith and the Marxist Criticism of Religion, pp. 15ff.

²⁰ The Christian Faith and the Marxist Criticism of Religion, p. 150.

power."²¹ Historically, the Edict of Constantine and thereafter the dissolution of the Roman Empire thrust upon the church the responsibility for law and order in the western world. Quite properly she took over and fulfilled this task. Indeed, she even went further and became identified with this task. But she did this at a very high price. "She renounced largely her task as the great disturber, the creator of unrest, the prophetic advocate of the lowly and the oppressed; she sanctified the existing order. Thus she became incapable of recognizing her new task."²² And again, elsewhere:

This valid element includes the observation of the universal social conditioning of religious life, and the charge that frequently religion serves the interests of the ruling classes. In the case of Christianity in particular this criticism of religion makes us aware of a transition which is repeatedly to be observed in the various epochs of Christian history—a transition from a critical challenging of the existing order by the Christian message to an ideological support of the existing order. Further, it draws our attention to the singular limitation of most Christian movements of renewal (e.g. mendicant orders, Pietism, methodism); they limit the thrust of their attack and challenge to the sphere of the private person, remain socially conservative, attacking the heathenism of individuals, but not of institutions. 23

²² "Christentum und Marxismus", in: Unterwegs (Berlin), vol. 1, 1951, p. 10; as quoted in: West, op. cit., p. 247.

²³ The Christian Faith and the Marxist Criticism of Religion p. 151.

To this list might be added also the "Jesus People" whose only comment on society as a whole was to withdraw from it.

In short, Christianity became identified completely with the ruling classes. Despite many deliberations and statements calling for social reform, despite the countless sermons of social concern delivered to "Sunday Christians", despite all claims of identity with the down-trodden, by and large the church has remained inactive and, by its inertia, strictly allied with capitalism. "In the new social encyclical of John XXIII, Mater et magistra, capitalism is called 'a radically perverted economic order'—— but in which of the lands, in which Catholicism is the dominating world-view, has the Church of Rome even made a faint attempt at the realization of its social teaching in such a way as Communism has attempted to do with its own doctrines in the lands dominated by it?"²⁴ Nor does this criticism apply only to the Roman Catholic branch of the church. Similar examples could be adduced against all the major Protestant denominations.

Having agreed that here Marxist criticism of religion is directly applicable to Christianity in its historical embodiment in the church, what should our response be? Surely we must excise this conservative element and cast it into the fires of hell. Then the church can again be revolutionary and Christians can fulfil their responsi-

²⁴ Ibid., p. 149, n. 6.

bility "for such a social Utopia as their proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the commandment to love our neighbour makes obligatory upon them."²⁵ And where already "reforms are achieved in a revolutionary manner, as in Cuba and China . . . , the Christian task is to co-operate in order that the transitory despotic phase may be alleviated and shortened."²⁶

This does not mean that the Christian must sanction this despotism. "The right social contribution of Christians is always and everywhere directed toward the humanizing of society, toward the establishment of freedom and equity before the law and toward the formation of areas of freedom in which the individual can act responsibly."²⁷ Rather, we must show very clearly what in Communism the church is obliged to say 'No' to. "It is now up to us to show that Christianity is not a class-conscious supporter of the 'reaction', that is, of those powers interested in keeping things as they are; that the Church is able to free itself from the chains of class distinction; that our 'no' to Marxism is directed to its Messianic claims and not to its social revolution."²⁸

²⁵ Ibid., p. viii.

²⁶ "The Christian in the Search for World Order and Peace",
op. cit., p. 59.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 58.

²⁸ Unwilling Journey, p. 125.

2. The second point at which Gollwitzer recognizes the Marxist challenge to Christianity as being on the mark is in the Communist appeal to scientific reason and to faith in the capacities of the natural man. Thus, "Marxism shows up the degree to which Christianity has adapted itself to a contradiction of its basic faith, in the faith of the Enlightenment."²⁹ Christianity itself harboured and promoted this idealistic faith in man's capacity to understand and control his environment.

By displacing the elements of magic and myth Christianity opened the way to a rational and immanent (i.e. scientific) interpretation of the world. Christianity is partly responsible for this atheism because of its failure to deal with the questions thus raised, and through a misguided attempt to dominate the intellectual life, and through inadequate grasp and manifestation of the import of the message entrusted to it.

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Marxism absolutized this faith and pushed it to its furthest logical conclusion. Hence, it can accurately point to the weakness of most Christian apologetics.

But something very positive ought to be learned from this: that "the Christian message cannot demonstrate the indispensibility and superiority of its promise by reference to the reality as it is accessible to man before his eyes are opened by the gospel."³¹ If one attempted a demonstration

²⁹ West, op. cit., p. 247.

³⁰ The Demands of Freedom, p. 138. "Immanentism" in Gollwitzer's writings means the explanation of the world entirely within itself.

³¹ The Christian Faith and the Marxist Criticism of Religion, p. 166.

on this basis it would prove merely that the Marxist criticism was correct, that Christianity was nothing more than "a product of need, created for the purpose of satisfying it."³² Thus, this suspicion and criticism should force us back to a truer representation of our biblical faith.

Feuerbach and Marx agreed that God is just a means to an end (and, in their opinion, an unsuccessful means). For them need was prior and religion (God) a subsequent explanation.

But this scheme breaks down as an attempt to explain the origin of the biblical message of God. Here the possibility does not precede the reality, the need does not precede its satisfaction, but the reality creates the new possibilities, the needs, and their appeasement. God is not a means valued by man ... but before all value, before what he can signify for human life, he is Himself. 33

The Marxist denial of the existence of God at this pseudo-scientific level also shows us a second thing, namely, that in the Communist-Christian dialogue the partners are talking often about different things. What the atheist denies is not what the Christian affirms. To believe that you understand the biblical God well enough to say of him, "He does not exist", proves, on the con-

³² Ibid., pp. 166-167.

³³ Ibid., p. 167. The objection that Christ came to bring reconciliation, the answer to a prior need, can be answered by pointing to the fact that this reconciliation is already promised in the Name (YHWH) which belongs to him who is prior to all as Creator and Promiser alike.

trary, that you have not understood this YHWH and thus are not, in fact, denying him. "Karl Barth therefore rightly said ... that the arguments of Marxist atheism did not deal with the God of the Christian confession, but a 'conceptual idol', and that it was an important task of the Christians in conversation with the Marxists to deny his identity with the God of faith."³⁴

The Christian approach to Marxism receives its particular character from the background against which it works, a background it derives from the gospel. This background attitude is characterized by two basic elements: (a) freedom from partisanship in this world, and (b) freedom from this world itself.

(a) The Christian ultimately belongs to neither west nor east. "Because we belong absolutely to our new Master, Christ, we are no longer identified for weal or woe with one of the two world powers."³⁵ The gospel is the Good News for all people.

Panicky fear of a victory for the opposite side leads to biased thinking, which sees only the crimes of the other side and is blind to those of its own, and which even declares everything to be good and just that furthers the interests of its own side. By such an attitude, Christians betray the freedom given to them in the gospel, and the commission that God has given to each in his political camp. ... Only when we Christians seize the

³⁴ Ibid., p. 169; citing: K. Barth, Brief an einen Pfarrer in der DDR (Berlin, 1958), pp. 19f.

³⁵ The Demands of Freedom, p. 76.

privilege, which the gospel has given us, of a frank and just viewpoint and a candid word of criticism of our own side, will we truly serve our own countries.

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(b) Similarly, the Christian is really the citizen of another kingdom, the kingdom of heaven (Philippians 3:20). He is a resident alien in the world. Therefore, no conflict in this world can have absolute significance for him. "They have been rendered harmless. The cleavage is no longer final; it can no longer prevent brotherhood —on the contrary it kindles brotherhood."³⁷ However, this does not imply a political neutralism, as we shall see shortly. Rather, it indicates the proper Christian approach to such oppositions and conflicts.

And, further, also connected with this second Christian freedom,

a Christian is free from the domination of fear. As long as we are afraid, our flesh tries to defend itself, and in its fear uses even the Gospel as a weapon of self-defence, for fear justifies every means. But the redeemed slave must know that his former masters cannot do anything to him: they can neither help nor destroy him.

38

In short, then, the Christian is able to say 'Yes' to two aspects of the Marxist criticism of religion, viz., that by and large the church has become identified with

³⁶ "The Christian in the Search for World Order and Peace", op. cit., p. 60.

³⁷ The Christian between East and West (Geneva, 1951), p. 2; as quoted in: West, op. cit., p. 248. Cf. also: The Demands of Freedom, p. 77.

³⁸ The Demands of Freedom, pp. 76-77.

the status quo relinquishing its true revolutionary character, and that the Enlightenment idea of man, espoused by the church for many years, logically leads to humanism and not to the Christian God. And the Christian is able to say this 'Yes' without fear because he, as a Christian per se, belongs neither to the capitalist nor the communist camp and because, by the same token, he does not belong to the world and fears no reprisals in it.

Nevertheless, there are some things in communism, as it appears historically, to which the church must say a very firm 'No'. "The communist superstition about force, about the end justifying any means; the claims of the Communist party to a monopoly of knowledge of absolute truth and of uncontrolled authority not subject to any higher justice—all these are characteristics of communism that make it impossible for the Christian to be a Communist, as long as communism is as it is, and they also oblige a Christian to disagree with it."³⁹ Of course, such a 'No' must be accompanied by a similar 'No' to the horrors and inhumanities of capitalism.

These are practical problems, problems which relate to communism as it is practised. But practical problems can be corrected without altering the basic theory. Therefore, we will not dwell on these. However, there is also a theoretical problem in Marxism for the Christian:

³⁹ "The Christian in the Search for World Order and Peace", op. cit., pp. 55-56.

its Messianism. Originally communism was a revolutionary movement calling for social reform. Dialectical and historical materialism were developed first as socio-economic theories. As such they are not necessarily atheistic. Indeed, the early Christian communities were undoubtedly communistic (Acts 2:44-45). And forms of communist life are followed even today by some Christian sects, e.g. the Mennonites and Hutterites. There is no basic conflict between Christianity and materialism as an economic system. However, later the atheistic metaphysics was added and materialism was transformed into an ideology. Now "the criticism of communism from the Christian angle is not that it is too materialistic, but too idealistic, not too rationalistic but not rational enough."⁴⁰ Or, to put this somewhat differently: It is not Utopianism which must come under criticism from Christianity. Rather, it is the communist lack of awareness of the distinction between Gospel and Law which must be challenged. The Utopia which Marxism attempts to initiate is not in itself wrong. Indeed, the Christian community ought to practise many of the things which would also be found in the ideal communist society. But that is only one side of things. To do that alone is to separate the promise from the Promiser. "Better, more consistent and impressive than

⁴⁰ The Demands of Freedom, p. 145.

all attempts within theology, Marxism has attempted to preserve the promise and at the same time eliminate the Promiser."⁴¹

Of course, it is equally true that the church has made the same mistake from the other side. Marxism can point with justification to the way the church has forgotten the social content of the promise.

The Marxist separation of the social content of the promise from the Promiser who promises himself to us is just as heretical ... as the customary separation in the church of the self-promise of the promising God from its social content. Thus, today, it is not a question of the conquest of Marxism, but of the conquest of two heresies, that of Marxism and that of the church, in order to gain the whole content of the promise. ⁴²

Finally, and following on from this, Gollwitzer points out positively what form the Christian response must take. The practical aspects are well summarized in his synopsis of a lecture on "Marxism and Christianity", delivered in the Free University of Berlin in the winter of 1958-1959.

9. Among the truer forms of witness that the Christian community must offer are:

(a) Evidence of profound penitence, which is concerned not only with the shortcomings of earlier generations but still more of our own.

(b) Detachment from all false associations opposing communist atheism. ...

(c) A new joyous and assured devotion to their Christian faith, demonstrated by willingness to suffer. ...

⁴¹ Zuspruch und Anspruch. Neue Folge (Munich, 1968), p. 229.

⁴² Ibid., p. 229.

(d) Support for efforts aimed at removing the conditions 'in which man is a humiliated, enslaved, forlorn, contemptible creature' (Marx). ...

15. The church's proper social contribution is always along the lines of humanizing society, the maintenance and improvement of justice, and the establishment of areas of freedom as spheres of individual responsibility.

...

16. The church in the communist state makes her contribution to changing the communist system, i.e. the ending of totalitarianism:

(a) by her independent existence, her congregational life, her services and her message. ...

(b) by participating, as an organization as well as individual members, in society: by taking part in the building up of society, while at the same time refusing to worship its official gods

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On the theoretical side, Christians cannot allow the Marxist identification of Christianity with religion and the biblical God with the gods of the religions. Thus, there must be some attempt to correct this mistaken impression. This is partly accomplished by pointing to the real conflict. "The real antithesis which theology must insist on, is not that between religion and atheism, but between the 'God for us' of the gospel, and the human refusal to live in the strength of the vital reality of this 'God for us'."⁴⁴ In other words, the real antithesis is between Gospel and Law, between God's gracious intervention and man's impudent and arrogant rejection of it

⁴³ The Demands of Freedom, pp. 139-140, 141-142.

⁴⁴ The Christian Faith and the Marxist Criticism of Religion, p. 156.

by claiming to be able to save himself. Then "Christians, as messengers of this divine intervention, are sent forth to the communists as to all other men, to proclaim a clear 'No' to the messianism of self-deliverance, but also God's 'Yes' to the atheist as a creature loved and sought by God."⁴⁵ This means that the emphasis is on proclamation rather than argument, demonstration rather than proof, and conversion rather than defeat.

The great hope in this is the fact that communism can change, that like all other human movements it is subject to the Lordship of God. Indeed, already today there is no uniform brand of communism such as Lenin and Stalin envisaged. And despite the recent invasion of Czechoslovakia (20-21 August 1968) and the subsequent severe imposition of a particular form of communism, there are groups within the eastern bloc striving to "humanize" Marxism.

Christianity and Nuclear War

The problem of nuclear weapons must be seen in the light of two things: (a) the Christian attitude to war and the use of force in general; and (b) a clear analysis of the present age, this "age of transition".

God does not want murder. In harmony with the text of the 5th commandment: "You shall not commit murder", the

⁴⁵ The Demands of Freedom, p. 143.

church was always of the opinion that cases are conceivable in which to kill a man is not murder, but can happen in obedience to God's will. But God stands opposed to murder. 46

This is the starting point and one of the keys to understanding Gollwitzer's argument regarding nuclear war. Indeed, he did not refuse to do military service in the second World War, even wearing the uniform of Hitler's army although he disapproved of Hitler's régime. At one time he argued in favour of taking up arms at the call of ones country. By implication he says that at one time, in the past, it had been possible to distinguish a bellum iustum and thereby justify the use of force, even killing. At any rate, he does not deny the historic possibility of making such a distinction.⁴⁷ And when he returned from Russia and "heard ... Hans Iwand, Martin Niemöller and Heinrich Vogel saying ... that with the [atomic] bomb the relative, conditional and limited 'Yes' that the Church had hitherto said to war was at an end", he "did not see this and brought forward all the arguments of" traditional Christian war-ethics.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Die Christen und die Atomwaffen, 4th ed. (Munich, 1958), pp. 42-43.

⁴⁷ Cf., Die Christen und die Atomwaffen, p. 48; and the article, "Krieg: IV", in: Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, 3rd ed. (Tübingen, 1957), vol. IV, col. 66ff. A parenthetic remark in: "The Christian in the Search for World Order and Peace", op. cit., p. 51, shows Gollwitzer's approval of such a distinction.

⁴⁸ The Demands of Freedom, p. 135.

No longer does Gollwitzer take that stand. The modern weapons of mass annihilation——atomic, biological and chemical (ABC) weapons——have evinced a different answer. "The old dispute about the ethics of war is ended: all Christians, if they heed the word of God, cannot do other than assert that they cannot take part in a nuclear war, and that the employment of nuclear weapons is a misuse of God's creation."⁴⁹ Or again: "God's law says No to atomic war."⁵⁰ These are strong, committed statements. The pilgrimage is complete. And it is a pilgrimage. This is not a reversal of his earlier position, but a development of it based on the same principles. "Our fathers' aim to civilize war can now only be paralleled by efforts to abolish it altogether, pursued with the same earnestness and the same devotion of hard thinking, carrying on the work of our fathers with the knowledge that the old Christian ethics of war was not impracticable, as is often said today, but in its application shows that there cannot be a 'just' nuclear war and that this is in fact a contradiction in terms."⁵¹

This development in Gollwitzer's thinking is based partly on the different nature of the new weapons.⁵² The

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 132-133.

⁵⁰ "The Christian in the Search for World Order and Peace", op. cit., p. 51.

⁵¹ The Demands of Freedom, p. 135.

⁵² Cf. Die Christen und die Atomwaffen, pp. 22-27.

destruction wrought by modern weapons of war is far more extensive than the limited effect of so-called conventional weaponry. While the older weapons could be used on civilians, such use was considered unjust by the Christian ethics of war. The new ABC-weapons permit no such distinction. Combatant and non-combatant are both killed indiscriminately. Similarly, conventional armaments had only a limited effect. Our modern weaponry, on the other hand, destroys vegetation and may affect generations yet unborn. A bellum justum, under the old criteria, had as its purpose the rehabilitation of the enemy. Just as the police use force to capture a criminal with the intent of restoring him to society at some future date when his anti-social attitudes are corrected, so, too, the use of force in war was meant to stop unjust acts and restore good international relations. The war did not preclude the possibility of a negotiated peace. Now, however, our ABC-weapons have made this impossible. The only goal a modern war can have is the annihilation of the enemy and unconditional surrender. By the same token, a defensive war, formerly permitted in the Christian ethics of war, is a thing of the past. For defence implies the use of only enough force to stop the unjust attack. The new weapons, then, cannot be used defensively because they would inflict an unjust measure of retaliatory suffering. Finally, in a war where the opponents both have ABC-weapons in equivalent strength, the use of them would mean self-annihilation, suicide. In short, the very nature of these

new weapons does not permit the humanizing distinctions of the traditional Christian attitude to war.

The other factor influencing Gollwitzer's judgment on the use of nuclear weapons is his analysis of the present age, an age which he in many places calls "a time of transition". It is a strange time, with many conflicting elements. But we must "get used to this situation and work out the consequences of it."⁵³ What, then, does he see as the characteristics of this "time of transition" and their consequences?⁵⁴

I. As noted above, the nature of modern weapons makes them unsuitable as a means to political ends. Yet, there has been no abolition of war per se. Therefore, the possibility of a war waged with conventional weapons still lies open. For this reason, hoping to limit war, even the nuclear powers retain standing armies equipped with conventional arms. Similarly, they avoid direct conflict with each other and settle for supplying conventional weaponry to opposite sides in smaller wars——e.g. the civil war in Vietnam, the Arab-Israeli war, or the India-Pakistan conflict. For they know that a direct confrontation would very quickly escalate into a nuclear war.

II. Military armaments still retain their deterrent character. That is, by having nuclear weapons and thereby

⁵³ "The Christian in the Search for World Order and Peace," op. cit., p. 47.

⁵⁴ Cf. "The Christian in the Search for World Order and Peace", op. cit., pp. 47-49.

having the possibility of using them, one country prevents another nuclear power from making any unjust advances for fear of the consequences, e.g. the Cuba missile crisis. Only if a country knew it was so superior that retaliation was impossible would it ever consider actually using atomic weapons. Therefore, today's nuclear balance or equilibrium makes the deterrent effective, thus bringing a certain tenuous peace.

III. Finally, in this "time of transition" we find a large number of sovereign countries. Each has its own complex of foreign policies and international conflicts. But this sovereignty is actually limited, either by an inability to compete in the arms race (smaller countries), or by treaties (larger countries). Nevertheless, a certain hubris causes heads of governments to risk the consequences and engage in war. Therefore, the great powers have been forced into a type of policing at an international level. But they are unable to properly fulfil this task because they are in competition and so take sides as it suits their own purposes, and because they daren't risk an ultimatum with the threat of nuclear war.

Hence, this "time of transition" is a time of uncertainty. Nuclear weapons have brought about a certain peace. No country has dared to actually use them since Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But the factors delineated above make it a shaky peace indeed. What is the solution? The pacifist position is untenable. To only shout 'No' to nuclear war, or even to war in general, is so negative

as to be impossible. Also, it is totally unrealistic.

"The 'Yes' to the Gospel and the 'No' to war must go together—or both will be lost."⁵⁵ In this manner several things can be said.⁵⁶

The church's primary task here is one of clarification. Having gained a full understanding of the nature and consequences of the new weapons and of the present situation she must spread this understanding to all people and nations. For as long as people look at the new weapons as being merely quantitatively and not qualitatively different from old armaments the possibility of a nuclear war remains very real. The corollary of this first task, then, is to draw out equally clearly the fact that these new weapons do not fall within the old category of morally legitimate uses of force. This means, also, pointing out that peace has become not only desirable but necessary. A return to limited conventional war by means of a ban on nuclear weapons does not guarantee that they would not be used. Hence, the church must try to change the present situation as well by thwarting every attempt at absolutizing ideological positions. In other words, she must point to the fallacies in the propaganda of both sides of the present "cold war". At the same time she must oppose openly and emphatically the present idolatry

⁵⁵ The Demands of Freedom, p. 63.

⁵⁶ Cf. Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, vol. IV, col. 72.

of force which implies that "might is right" and must encourage people in general and statesmen in particular to rely on an impotent right. This means, finally, reflecting anew on the strength and promise of the Christian missionary commission. If we more actively and sincerely witnessed to the fulfilment of God's promised "I Will Be There" in Jesus Christ, as is our duty, the underlying interpersonal relationships which are at the root of the psychology of war would be changed. That is, we must become more aware of the political implications of the gospel.

The Word of God and Politics

What, then, does the gospel say to us? What is the Word of God for today? As hinted above, it has not grown silent. "It does have something very definite to say. It gives us clear and practical guidance even for political life."⁵⁷ Of course, not all our questions are answered. We must still use the intelligence God gave us. Nevertheless, God's Word "speaks quite distinctly about those things concerning which there must not be any difference of opinion among us, about what we have to stand for together, what this 'different behaviour' of the Christian community is in the political field, where the

⁵⁷ The Demands of Freedom, p. 63.

Christian community must not equate itself with the world, as Paul says (Romans 12), nor do what everyone else does, but believe in and witness to the rule of God, even in the political sphere."⁵⁸

We have mentioned already that Gollwitzer, obedient to the New Testament, regards Christ as the fulfilment of the Old Testament promise given in the Name, YHWH. Our relationship with God is now mediated perfectly through Jesus Christ. That's where we learn most completely of God's encounter with man. This christo-centric approach now becomes very obvious. "Inquiring of the Word of God means inquiring of Jesus Christ."⁵⁹ And the answer comes not as a detailed plan, but as his whole life and death and resurrection. It comes, new to each person, but yet always the same (paradox-dialectic). This, then, is how Gollwitzer heard the Word of God in the 1950's and how it still speaks today:

"1. In Jesus Christ God reveals himself as a God of Peace".⁶⁰ "They [Christians] are sent by the 'God of peace' (1 Thess. 5:23) with the 'gospel of peace' (Eph. 6:15) into the world as pacifici (Mt. 5:9), as peacemakers."⁶¹

Therefore, Christians must be peacemakers in personal life

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 64.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 64.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 64.

⁶¹ Die Christen und die Atomwaffen, p. 44.

among individuals, in political life within the nation, and in international life. They should aim at co-existence with other nations, at co-operation within the state, and at harmony among individuals. All because God in Jesus Christ has shown his desire to live at peace with mankind.

"2. God is a God of righteousness, who loves justice."⁶² This has very little to do with the system of courts and law within any given country. Such laws are made by men of a certain age to help regulate the behaviour of the people for the benefit of that nation or the majority of its citizens in that era. But the Word of God will help us to distinguish between right and wrong at a particular time.

As Creator and Lord, God has ultimate claim on man. He created the state for man and not vice versa. Therefore its power must remain limited. It cannot demand that man should contravene his ultimate responsibility to God. "A just state only exists where the power of the state restricts and controls the powerful, and where the rulers acknowledge God's eternal law."⁶³

"3. God in Christ is a God of mercy."⁶⁴ This has a double significance for Christians. It means they have

⁶² The Demands of Freedom, p. 67.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 68.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 70

felt God's mercy, that they know themselves to be sinners and yet forgiven. It also means that they, too, are ready to forgive. Gollwitzer's examples here deal especially with German-Israeli relations. But his analysis of guilt and forgiveness and their place in politics applies equally to other instances, e.g. the relations between white Anglo-Saxons and the brown and black people they exploited in the days of the Empire; or in inter-racial relations within a country (white and negro in the USA, white and North American Indians and Eskimos in Canada, Malay and Chinese in Malaysia-Singapore, etc.).

Finally, what matters ultimately is not results but God's blessing on what we do. For without that we cannot live, all our good results are for nothing.

Blessing comes only through seeking and listening to the will of God, even in politics. ... If we choose the path of repentance and turning over a new leaf, even in politics, then we choose life. If we persistently choose the right and not evil and terror, then we choose life. If as far as in us lies we choose peace everywhere, we choose life.

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Political Christianity

From Helmut Gollwitzer's life and from the development of his thinking on certain political questions——especially the German question——we can determine two

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 73.

stages of political Christianity.

In the first the Christian is called to be a watchman, a sentry, along the lines of Ezekiel 33:1-9. The Word of God gives him special vision to see the coming storms while they are still at a distance. Before passions become inflamed he can cry out a warning, making clear the alternatives and their consequences. Thus, Gollwitzer appealed against the re-arming of West Germany because it would seriously hamper any movement towards a re-unification of Germany.

The second stage is reached only if the warnings of the sentinel Christians are not heeded. The danger arrives and passions become heated. A just solution is no longer possible because people are more concerned for their own particular political parties. Now the task of the Christian is prayer and repentance. We must say with the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD): "We accuse ourselves of not having confessed more bravely, of not having prayed more faithfully, of not having believed more joyfully and of not having loved more passionately".⁶⁶ Thus, the Christian community becomes truly a "kingdom of priests" (Revelation 1:6; 5:10).

⁶⁶ "Stuttgarter Erklärung des Rates der EKD vom 18.10.1945";
quoted in: Vietnam, Israel und die Christenheit,
2nd ed. (Munich, 1968), p. 46.

PREACHING AND PROCLAMATION

Introduction

We began this examination of the thought of Helmut Gollwitzer, after a brief biography, with a study of his concept of the nature and task of theology. We said then that theology was the search for the gospel behind the temporally determined formal shell and the subsequent translation of this message and the proclamation of it for contemporary persons. By method, then, the theologian goes first to the biblical witness and then takes this to himself and to other people. We have seen how adherence to this concept of theology leads one to regard certain ways of speaking about God as inappropriate. We have also examined Gollwitzer's positive attempt at appropriate language about God. In the chapter just completed we briefly examined two practical examples of the political side of theological proclamation. In this chapter we turn to an even more specialized form of proclamation: preaching.

Once again, as with political Christianity, for Gollwitzer Christian preaching is an integral part of Christian theology. Theology is the ascertainment and proclamation in contemporary forms of the essence of the gospel. And that, precisely, is what preaching is, applied in the specific context of Christian public worship. The same criteria which determine appropriate theological

language will also determine the form and content of Christian sermons. That this is most definitely the case with Gollwitzer's preaching will be seen as we progress.

Gollwitzer's "call" to preach came very early in his life. "Fifteen years before the time when preaching began to be dangerous in Germany, fifteen years before 1933, young pastors experienced a 'need to preach' (Predigtnot) which drove them to ask with new intensity why there really must be preaching in and by the church, what the peculiar nature of this type of speaking is with regard to all other human talk, what it is based on and where it gets its authority and certainty."¹ He soon followed in this movement, receiving his own Predigtnot. This still holds him so securely that on his 60th birthday he could write: "the situation in the pulpit was for me, just as for my theological teachers, the centre of my theological existence, and the collective demand and responsibility of this situation can be equated with no other situation of address——not with the professor's chair, not with the lectern."² And despite a clear awareness of the difficulties and short-comings of preaching today——indeed, also of the inadequacy of the stereo-typed services of worship used generally today——, he is certain that this

¹ ... und lobten Gott. Predigten——gehalten in der Gemeinde Berlin-Dahlem 1938 bis 1940 (Neukirchen, 1964), p. 7.

² Zuspruch und Anspruch. Neue Folge. Predigten aus den Jahren 1954-1968 (Munich, 1968), p. 234.

form of proclamation has not had its day.³

But that analysis must come later. First we must look at Gollwitzer's theology of preaching. What is Christian preaching? What are its sources and methods? After answering these questions we will be able to see in the proper perspective his comments on its place in the church today.

A Preaching Theology

Weitersagen (lit. "to say further")
and weitergeben (lit. "to give further")
-----that is what we are dealing with.
Through that the Word of life came to
us, and through that it should press
on from us to others. 4

³ It is interesting to note that this high regard for the "preaching situation" is shared also by the leaders of many secular groups. Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, Mao Tse Tung and Fidel Castro are the first to come to mind. All three put great emphasis on the gatherings of the guerilla band, the "congregation", when the leader would "preach", that is, he would remind them of the basic promise to be brought into reality by their revolution, and would then go on to instruct them in the application of this "gospel". The same methods are being used also by the leaders of student and social revolt. It seem that the importance of "preaching as a means of reaching people at the level of commitment, generally diminished in the larger branches of the church, has not been forgotten by those groups which are today truly radical and revolutionary. Perhaps this is just one more proof that the church, as Marxism claims, is a conservative institution whose aim is the preservation of the present class structure, i.e., keeping the rich rich and the poor poor. Such speculation, however, although it is interesting and seems to bear some measure of truth, is beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁴ Zuspruch und Anspruch. Neue Folge, p. 220.

"Weitersagen" and "weitergeben"-----from just these two words with which Helmut Gollwitzer characterizes Christian preaching we can derive several things about his concept of preaching.

1. Christian preaching is not speaking a human word.

"It is not merely a beautiful address for decorating festive occasions; it is not merely pious men speaking their minds according to the motto: 'What fills the heart overflows the mouth'; it is also not merely instructing the hearer regarding historic events of the past or regarding established doctrines of faith".⁵

Certainly, the preacher is human-----a contemporary person.⁶ To be sure, he carries out his office in a human setting, i.e., he must use human, contemporary language because his hearers are human and contemporary. And, in the case of the person who speaks not on the spur of the moment but after much deliberation, he may spend several hours preparing and writing what he will say in his sermon. Nevertheless, Christian preaching is not speaking a human word. It is not just "sagen und geben". Rather, it is "WEITERSagen und WEITERgeben". "For it is not ourselves that we are preaching, but Christ Jesus as the Lord" (2 Corinthians 4:5). Expressed positively, Christian preaching "is man's obligatory service to the living Word

⁵ ... und lobten Gott, p. 7.

⁶ Much has been said of this already and more will be said again later.

of God".⁷ The preacher and his preaching are subject to this Word, they become tools of this Word as it gains power over and liberates its hearers.

Compare this with what was said in Chapter 2 about the nature of theology: We remarked there that although I can set out to do theology, I cannot myself guarantee that I will be successful. The success depends upon the self-giving of God himself. The content, then, of good theology is God's self-revelation. It isn't man's word about God but a human tool of God's reaching out to man. Such vocative, confessional theology leads necessarily to preaching conceived in this way.

2. Closely related to the above, the content of Christian preaching is not something new. "For this is what I received from the Lord, and in turn passed on to you" (1 Corinthians 11:23). However much each preacher changes the language or the form of what he passes on, the content, the gospel, remains the same——assuming, of course, he is doing his job properly! To be sure, it comes new to each hearer. Nevertheless, it has and maintains an identity. "That is the hermeneutic problem in whose aporia theology and proclamation die if the confidence dies before Weitergabe can take place: the confidence in this Word that it can preserve its identity through diverse mouths and heads, thus confidence in the

⁷ ... und lobten Gott, p. 7.

fact that it is not a mere complex of ideas but the Word as a living person, at the same time both Word and Person."⁸ Christian preaching is not "AUSSagen und AUSgeben", but "WEITERSagen und WEITERgeben".

Here, too, the concept of preaching derives directly from the concept of theology as a whole. On many occasions we emphasized that to separate the Promiser from his self-giving in the promise is to destroy theology. One is left with empty, hollow words. So, too, in preaching, when we pass on to others our witness to God's encounter with men, we are also passing this encounter on to them. Just as our faith was evoked by proclamation—the proclamation by another person or the proclamation of the biblical witness—similarly, our proclamation can evoke faith. But it can do this only in so far as we pass on the Promiser along with his promise.

3. On the other hand, Christian preaching is not just repetition or translation. Without a doubt, part of the task of theology is to translate—meaning by that more than mere verbal translation—and repeat unchanged the message handed down by our forefathers in the faith. Indeed, to change the essence of this message in any way is not just heresy, but apostasy. The aim of such translation and repetition is to make the essence of the message understandable to the hearer. A preacher

⁸ Zuspruch und Anspruch. Neue Folge, p. 220.

is on safe ground as long as he stays within his biblical text. But this safety is not to be clung to by the Christian. Christian preaching

is not an historical report about what once was thought. ... It is not the past that preaching has to serve, but present and future life.

If that is to happen by instruction from a text coming out of the past, then one must go beyond the text, moving, of course, in the direction indicated by it, extending it, but going beyond it. Thus, into new terrain outwith the protection of the text.

9

It is not "WIEDERSagen und WIEDERgeben", but "WEITERSagen und WEITERgeben".

Here the concept of preaching is derived from the aspect of theology examined in the last chapter, from political Christianity. Remember, though, this is not an appendix to what was said in Chapter 2. For Gollwitzer, ethics is an integral, necessary and important part of theology. So, too, is this aspect of his concept of preaching. A great many of today's questions and problems are not dealt with in the Bible in a literal way. There is no mention in it, for instance, of nuclear war, of abortion, of pollution, etc. Yet, the Christian believes that the gospel touches his whole life. To answer these questions, then, theology must follow the leads given in the Bible and go beyond them to speak God's Word to these problems. So, too, must Christian preaching.

⁹ Ibid., p. 231.

If, then, these are for Gollwitzer the main characteristics of preaching which is truly Christian, on what sources may it draw? What methods are appropriate to it? What is this identity which characterizes it? And what guarantees this identity? The answers to these questions may seem simple, and ought to be obvious from what has been said so far in this thesis. But as simple and obvious as they are, they bear repeating because they are so central to Gollwitzer's whole approach to theology.

All of Helmut Gollwitzer's published sermons would be called biblical sermons—and in a loose sense, expository. As he says of himself: "He [the author] affirmed the salutary custom in the evangelical churches of Europe of ensuring that every Christian address adheres to the text by binding the sermon to a specified biblical passage and therefore practised nothing other than textual interpretation."¹⁰ It would not be fair to say on the basis of this that he would claim all Christian preaching should be textual preaching. That was simply his practice. But it is true to say that it must be biblical. That is, its primary source is the testimony of the Old and New Testaments. It is tied to a particular man of history (Jesus of Nazareth) in whom God's promise to be with us (YHWH; Emmanuel) became a reality for all people.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 227.

Every Christian address has a text,
one and the same text: the Emmanuel
... . By exchanging this text for
another it ceases to be a Christian
address.

11

That sounds extreme on first reading. Nevertheless, it is consistent with all that has been said so far. If all the earlier comments regarding the concept of theology and the criteria for appropriate talk of God are accepted, then this cannot be denied. A concept of theology for which the Bible is central is bound to produce a demand for similarly biblical preaching.

But, at the same time, preaching must be contemporary. The preacher has a double obligation. "Indeed, he has to do with two partners——and he owes his honesty——honest to God!——to them both, to his hearers and to the text."¹² Like his hearers, the preacher cannot separate himself from the age in which he lives. "He is himself the heathen, the doubter, the one of little faith and the atheistic contemporary to whom the gospel is incomprehensible and incredible, and to whom the Bible is a closed book."¹³ His duty to his contemporaries, his hearers, and his duty to himself as a contemporary prevent him from turning his sermon into a mere repetition of the past. At the same time, his duty to the Word ensures that he does not slip

¹¹ Ibid., p. 226.

¹² Ibid., p. 224.

¹³ Ibid., p. 224.

from speaking in contemporary forms and terms into adapting the living Word to contemporary axioms. It is a difficult but necessary balance. To dissolve the contemporary pole of this double obligation is to reduce Christian preaching to a dead historicism or an equally dead dogmatic biblicism. And to dissolve the biblical pole is to lose the very content of true Christian preaching.

Thirdly, Christian preaching, as a part of Christian theology, must be practical, i.e., prophetic and political. We have already noted how "weilersagen und weitergeben" indicate an extension beyond the literal limits of the text. This plus, this "weiter", comes in the practical, prophetic indications of the sermon. "A sermon which clings anxiously within the historical limits of the text and thus does not venture upon its prophetic task would be the expression of a church which runs on the spot and merely repeats its tradition."¹⁴ Just as God risked his divinity by becoming human in Jesus of Nazareth, just as "Christ Jesus ... did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself" (Philippians 2:5ff.), so too, the preacher must venture beyond the direct protection of text and tradition. The biblical God is a living God, and his Word is a living Word. Therefore, it simply cannot be repeated like some dead letter. The situation of the world has changed since the biblical writers made their witness. And

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 232. To a certain degree this would seem to be a good description of a large segment of the church today.

modern, contemporary preaching must be directed at this new situation. "In the rapid changes of the world the church only receives the defensive help of the Canon when it goes beyond the historical limits of the early Christian proclamation contained in the Canon."¹⁵

After all this, only a few remarks about the methods of preaching or sermon preparation are needed. Since the biblical text—or more accurately, the promise witnessed to throughout the Bible and especially its fulfilment in Jesus Christ—is the starting-point for all Christian preaching, exegesis is the first task to be performed. But this is executed in the light also of the contemporary situation. For the biblical texts are historically conditioned. And the present situation is far removed historically and culturally from the biblical situation.

In the exegesis which precedes preaching this historical distance must be reflected upon and the historically conditioned nature of the text must be determined as accurately as possible. However, this must be done not as an end in itself but so that the actualization of the text, its being heard by us modern people for us today, does not happen through an arbitrary entry but as an extraction of the lines of the text leading up to our modern situation,——thus, so that with all that we are today and all that distinguishes us from the man of that age and with what unites us with them we find ourselves in the extended line of those addressed at that time.

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¹⁵ Ibid., p. 232.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 228.

Thus, the biblical exegesis must be balanced by a full analysis of conditions of the modern world. The preacher, as a modern person, must, indeed, be the first hearer of the living Word of God. But, with his eye on the new situation he must not ask: how does this changed situation affect what the gospel has to say to modern man? Rather, he ought to ask instead: how does this gospel address me, and through me my hearers, in this new situation? The direction of movement must always be from the gospel to the contemporary world, from God to man. This balance of the biblical and the contemporary and the necessary direction of movement is the expression in Christian preaching of the same balance and direction in theology as a whole. The German Christians in 1933 by and large failed to make a vital witness to the gospel not because they ignored the changed circumstances, as is generally thought, but because they paid too much attention to it. They were concerned about the consequences of the new situation on their proclamation. What could they say in the midst of these terrible events? Thus, their proclamation was reduced to comfort and consolation in troubled times. In other words, they allowed the situation to become the master. "But the Lord who sent us is not the situation together with its lords, but he whose dominion makes us free precisely from the dictates of the situation."¹⁷

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 233.

The Lordship of God means that in the face of changed circumstances our question ought to be: what are the consequences of the gospel in this new situation? And it means, further, that we are free to take the risk of proclaiming these consequences not just in a general way, but in far-reaching concrete terms.

Throughout the preceding, one serious problem seems to have been ignored: the problems for exegesis raised by the historical element of Christian faith, i.e., by the fact that "Christian faith is real faith in a real historical Man, Jesus Christ."¹⁸ It has not been ignored. Nevertheless, before we turn to the problems of preaching today, we must make specific reference to what Gollwitzer says about the relation of faith to historical research and criticism.

Excursus: Faith and Historical Criticism

After a first reading of Helmut Gollwitzer's sermons and exegetical material one is tempted to accuse him of ignoring historical criticism. Indeed, he always skips over it very quickly claiming that such work should precede preaching but has no place in the sermon.¹⁹

¹⁸ "The Jesus of History and Faith in Jesus Christ", Fr. Gabriel Hebert, s.s.m., trans., in: Theology (London), vol. 65, 1962, p. 90.

¹⁹ Cf. Zuspruch und Anspruch. Neue Folge, p. 228.

One is thus tempted to conclude that he offers it only a small place in the spectrum of theological work. But such a conclusion would be most untrue and unfair. In fact, the very content of Christian faith demands that we give an important place to this type of analysis. "As being faith in the real historical man Jesus Christ, Christian faith is dependent on Historical Criticism, and stands to it in a relation which needs to be defined further".²⁰

Jesus can be received only through proclamation. The disciples received him through his self-proclamation directly. We usually receive him through his self-proclamation mediated by biblical proclamation and/or the proclamation of other Christians. This is the greatest miracle of all, and the basis for all other miracles: that God has submitted, condescended, to coming into such an historical, contingent and personal association with man that proclamation by other men becomes the primary means of passing this association on to others. This human tradition, then, becomes important. But, because of this reliance on proclamation, faith

must use historical criticism to
learn the meaning of the tradition.

This is the task of all Exegesis.

... Critical exegesis is then a safeguard on this right use of Scripture. ²¹

In other words, it prevents us from treating the

²⁰ "The Jesus of History and Faith in Jesus Christ", op. cit.,
p. 90.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 90-91.

Bible as being in itself 'holy'. It is truly 'Holy Scripture' because of him to whom it bears witness. But it is a human witness directed to men and, therefore, best honoured by submitting it to 'profane research'.

Secondly, "Christian faith ... subjects itself to historical criticism".²² To many this would seem to be absolute folly. For them Christian faith is utterly opposed to historical criticism, and such scientific research would lead to the dissolution of faith itself. But such warning and prohibition weakens "what God did when the Word was made flesh; for then God himself entered within the sphere of contingent historical events, into the field of that which can be historically affirmed and can also be historically called in question, while still remaining the Lord of lords."²³

This point is very important. Jesus was not a vision or spectre. All men could look at him. Faith was not a precondition but a response. Today this means that he exposes himself also to the sterile, scientific objectivity of the historian.²⁴ Similarly, faith does not demand an abandonment of historical facts. On the contrary, "truthfulness to fact is a disciple's duty."²⁵ In this way Christianity

²² Ibid., pp. 90-91

²³ Ibid., p. 91.

²⁴ I do not wish to become involved in the question of whether or not an historian can actually be objective. In accepting the extreme position that he can and must be, the argument thereby ensures its validity for the more moderate position as well.

²⁵ "The Jesus of History and Faith in Jesus Christ", op. cit., p. 91.

is preserved from becoming pure mysticism or gnosis. Whether Jesus lived is certainly a legitimate historical question. By this and certain other historical facts——e.g. that Jesus was an Israelite and stood within that Heilsgeschichte, that he came among them at a particular time proclaiming a message for which he was subsequently executed, that the grave in which he was laid was seen by the disciples a few days later to be empty, that this same Jesus then presented himself to them in such a way that they had no doubt that it was he——by such facts Christian faith stands or falls, because for it "Jesus is not a mere vehicle or symbol of universal truths, but is the actual Object of faith and love."²⁶ The historical reality of Jesus is retained in the biblical witness and is necessary for a genuine Christian faith. Nowhere did the biblical writers run away from the facts of history. To be sure, they interpreted them. But they did not try to escape them. (Cf. Mark 12:12-14 and parallels, where in a fit of pique Jesus curses the barren fig tree——surely a most difficult text!) "Christian faith has therefore a restful untroubled certainty that historical criticism will not shake but will confirm these things as facts."²⁷

Thus, there is a certain "dependence" upon historical research necessary to Christian faith. But this is a limited rather than an absolute "dependence". In other words, Christian faith

²⁶ Ibid., p. 91.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 92.

goes beyond what can be examined by historical research. If an image of Jesus gained from the historian were all we had and needed, three things would follow: (a) the "neutral or uncommitted historian would be better qualified to tell us who Jesus is than the confessing Christian witness".²⁸ His judgment of the facts would be uncoloured by the involvement implicit in faith and thus he would give a clearer picture. We have already established, however, that such involvement is necessary in order to know whom we have to do with here. (b) The "gospels were intended to be read as historical chronicles simply, and so might be shown on historical grounds to be untrue".²⁹ The great truth that we have learned from Bultmann is that the texts of Scripture are not chronicles but an interpretation of the events of history by the eyes of faith. Although disproving a basic constitutive historical event such as those indicated earlier would make faith untenable, for the most part historical criticism can have no effect on faith which is a matter of our response and relationship to these events. (c) "God-made-man does not only enter upon the field of history, but is also as regards his divine nature subject to historical study and criticism."³⁰ To admit this is impossible. It has been argued consistently and persistently that God cannot be the subject of human study and examination. We have also tried to show the necessity, from a biblical

²⁸ Ibid., p. 92.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 92.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 92.

point of view and a human one, of affirming both Christ's divinity and his humanity. Without a doubt, the human side, the incarnate side of his being is subject to study, but not the divine side. It is the subject of affirmation and faith. As Lord of lords, he is examiner and judge of the historian, not the historian of him. Thus, it might be more accurate to say that Christian faith is "bound" to history but not "dependent" upon historical criticism.

Historical research cannot bring certainty —only a greater or lesser degree of probability. But, in place of such an incomplete and uncertain account, the confessing witness gives certain and complete knowledge of Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:16). For such testimonies, and the gospels are in this category, are not historical biographies but, in Martin Kähler's words, "proclamation of the Crucified One as Messiah".³¹ And, finally, Jesus is unique in that he cannot be separated from his mission, from his being Emmanuel, God-with-us. Therefore, proclamation, not historical statement, is the only way of reporting about him.

Nevertheless, historical research is not without benefit to Christian faith. It continually reminds us of Jesus' humanity and thus, when heeded——and, unfortunately, there have been periods in church history when it was not——prevents a docetic christology. In focusing so sharply on Jesus' characteristics which are time-bound it also sets in relief what in the incarnation skips beyond the framework of time.

³¹ As quoted by Gollwitzer, ibid., p. 92.

And, by coming on its blind-alleys because the texts do not permit a strictly biographical use, historical research shows us how clearly this subject matter does not fit into our previously devised categories.

What, then, does Gollwitzer say to the historian? "The historian cannot be forbidden to go behind the New Testament text and ask at one point or another 'what exactly happened'; for this is the historian's trade."³² Indeed, he must be encouraged in this because of the historical nature of Christian faith, because there are certain constitutive events of history to whose reality faith is bound. But in pursuing his examination, the historian must be aware constantly of the limitations of this "dependence" as delineated above. He must remember that he cannot treat the Bible as a resource for biographical information. To do so would be to use it as something other than what it is and was intended to be. Further, his so-called "neutral" quest for the historical Jesus may be interesting as an abstract study, but its results will never replace the New Testament witness to these events. Objective facts do not bring faith; only the proclamation by faith evokes faith. And, finally, those aspects of the Christ-event which can be verified belong to the whole picture of Jesus. They must not be separated from the affirmation of his divine nature. Here God met us in human form. To separate these two aspects is to destroy the unity necessary for it to have any real meaning.

Although this sort of recognition of the

³² Ibid., p. 93.

value of historical criticism saves Gollwitzer's theology from being a fundamentalist biblical literalism, it does not save it from the charge of being mildly docetic. Christian faith is not just "bound" to history, but in a sense is actually "dependent" upon it. It is not dependent on history for the full content of faith, but for the constitutive events which make faith possible. If historical research should show, for instance, that there never was a Jesus of Nazareth who was put to death for his teaching and was later seen to have survived death, then Christian faith would be based on a mere parable which was incapable of effecting the fulfilment of the promise attributed to it. Thus, the dependence upon verification by historical research is profound. Gollwitzer has paid lip-service to this and has let it become overshadowed by talk of the limitations of historical criticism. But to proclaim consistently the paradox-dialectical witness he derives from the New Testament he must play up faith's dependence upon this research, not play it down. Otherwise he soon becomes guilty of a mild docetism, which admittedly has been the "orthodox" church position since not long after the Council of Chalcedon.

The Problem of Preaching Today

From the outset it must be realized that, although Helmut Gollwitzer points to severe problems confronting the preacher today, he does not abandon proclamation completely.

Naturally, I do not mean that the task of proclamation, thus the task of Weitersagen and Weitergeben, "has not its day. It remains" "till he comes", and with it also remains the fact that faith comes from hearing (Romans 10) and should be made audible for another. 33

He does not allow his experience of the present situation to determine what he preaches, rather he sees a change in the method or form involving a change in the whole nature of public worship and congregational gatherings. Before we examine that, however, we must note his analysis of the problem.

Various things present themselves to different theologians today as making preaching problematical. The so-called "crisis of faith" raised partly by modern technology and partly by modern theology is perhaps the most commonly indicated. A close second would probably be the "hermeneutic problem", this historical, metaphysical and epistemological distance of the text from "us today". Smaller factors, often alluded to, are denominationalism and institutionalism in the church. But these, disturbing and discouraging as they are, are not the factors which make preaching problematical for Gollwitzer. "All this weighs heavy and makes preaching difficult (perhaps in a most necessary and salutary way!), but it must not place it as such in question."³⁴ Thus, he points to two very

³³ Zuspruch und Anspruch. Neue Folge, p. 234.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 234.

different things.

"1. The preacher stands facing a silent listening congregation to which is given no possibility for questions, objections, improvements and completions."³⁵ In the past, such an authoritarian approach to the sermon was seen as an illustration of the authority of God's Word over man. But to affirm that is to move into ideology. It is true ~~——and it must be always the preacher's prayer——~~, God's Word can use the words of the sermon in reaching out to other persons. It is also true, God does condescend to do just that. Nevertheless, the sermon is in no way identical with God's Word. Nor can the preacher claim to have any monopoly of or control over God's Word.

In addition to this, as the general level of education and literacy rises~~——or in a student context——~~"the real appropriation of what is heard is only possible in active participation in meditation on the content".³⁶ In the past, the action of hearing~~——and true hearing is active, not passive——~~was perhaps sufficient. However, even then the aim of preaching was not to gain the hearers' assent to the preacher's witness of faith, but to evoke a similar response of faith to the Promiser behind the promise. In general, though, an authoritarian approach is certainly no longer possible. The increased awareness of most congre-

³⁵ Ibid., p. 235.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 235.

gations today demands a learning situation in which all share as equals. After all, faith is not the product of specialized theological training. It is perhaps not enough even to give time for discussion before or after the service—a practice which is becoming more and more common. This leaves the unbalanced situation of privileged pulpit and captive congregation unchanged. It is still the ideas of the "expert" which are being discussed, as if he had a monopoly on revelation.

This privilege becomes most injurious when one takes the office seriously. We have already said preaching must be practical, even political. But the preacher's social position means that he does not experience firsthand the questions and conflicts of his congregation. Despite the present trend among both Protestant and Catholic clergy to shed the clerical garb in an attempt to be simply one of God's people, nevertheless, in the eyes of his congregation he is still "different". "Thus, to translate the instruction of the gospel into concrete life he needs the advice of others through their expertise and experience just as much as they need his theological expertise."³⁷ To affirm an authoritarian view of preaching is to deny the need for this counsel. Thus, the "preaching office" must remain subservient to the community's mission of proclamation. And this view is confirmed by modern

³⁷ Ibid., p. 236.

research into the relationship of office and community in the apostolic and post-apostolic church.

With his theological training, the pastor is an assisting advisor of the congregation. Neither must he be the sole preacher, nor must proclamation in public worship in the future occur only in the form of privileged monologue by the pastor.

38

2. Secondly, and following closely from this latter aspect of the first problem, Gollwitzer recognizes the difficulties raised in the modern situation by his demand for concreteness in preaching. "Because of the task of textual interpretation, because of the shortness of time, because of its insertion into the sacral structure of public worship, concreteness in the sermon is possible always merely in indications."³⁹ His sense of fairness prevents the preacher from making an example of his own practical intentions. Thus the indications are reduced to a bare minimum having either no effect, or else undesirable results: "many ignore them or at any rate do not notice the demand intervening in them, others are annoyed because they see only the difference of opinion and, therefore, in good faith, blame the preacher for a misuse of the pulpit."⁴⁰

Undoubtedly, if what Gollwitzer says is correct,

³⁸ Ibid., p. 237.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 237.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 237.

the monopolistic sermon and the worship service centred around the sermon are outmoded. Many, therefore, have moved towards a more liturgical, cultic service in which the sermon has reduced importance. Gollwitzer adamantly rejects this proposed solution, saying that in "the alternative between sermon-centred public worship and cultic celebration" the evangelical theologian must decide in favour of the former.⁴¹

This does not mean we must abandon regular congregational meetings for worship altogether. Rather, a new balance must be sought. "We need congregational assemblies (and what, then, are public worship services, if determined by the New Testament and not by a general concept of the sacred, other than assemblies of the congregation as Christians to equip them for their life and service in the world?) in which information and discussion have their place as well as biblical interpretation, prayer, hymns of praise, prophetic address and the eucharist."⁴² This means being open for a complete revolution and reorganization of congregational life. The Sunday service centred around the sermon or the cult will no longer be central, but just one among many other forms of assembly. The congregational office of witness and proclamation will be central. No longer will there be a distinction between

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 235. Cf. also: ... und lobten Gott, p. 8.

⁴² Ibid., p. 238.

"sacred" and "profane" congregational meetings or offices. In other words, the public life of the congregation as it constitutes itself in assemblies must be a reflection of the totality of life. Only within this framework, and not as the only occasion for gathering, will "preaching", in the narrower sense of the textual interpretation and application effected by a person with specialized theological training, have any valid place. Only there can it function legitimately as "exhortation and demand".

GOLLWITZER'S PLACE IN MODERN THEOLOGY

Introduction

As I said when introducing the plan of this thesis, an assessment of a theologian who is still alive and active is a very difficult affair. This is borne out by the great diversity of comment made by the various critics of Helmut Gollwitzer's work. Any criticism made faces the prospect of being nullified by his next book. On the surface it might seem that this difficulty would be compounded by the researcher's own basic agreement with Gollwitzer's approach. Nevertheless, an accurate assessment is possible and must be attempted.

Accuracy in criticism involves drawing attention to the key issues and commenting on their strengths and weaknesses, giving reasons for the evaluation. These might be arranged with the weaknesses in one section and the strengths in another. However, that would be confusing in this instance. For the very issues which give Gollwitzer's approach its strength also raise the most serious and basic questions. Therefore, I shall make my evaluation topically, beginning at the most crucial level and moving to the more peripheral. These remarks will then lead to some suggested hints as to the way forward for Christian theology.

The Why

Two major questions were raised in the course of the earlier chapters and we must return to them now. For by them Gollwitzer's whole approach stands or falls. The first has to do with the validity of one of his constitutive tautologies, the second with the real possibility of pursuing this method.

Gollwitzer has given us a theology which claims to be centred around the Bible. To these texts it must go for the message it is to translate and repeat for modern man. By the standard of the proclamation recorded in these texts it must judge all subsequent proclamation, including its own. And in the light of the witness of these texts it must comment on the affairs of men. Laying aside for a subsequent section of this chapter the question of method——whether we actually can follow the method of biblical exegesis required of theology by Gollwitzer——, we are faced still with the even more fundamental question: why must Christian theology be tied so closely to these texts interpreted in Gollwitzer's way? Or, phrased differently, why must Christian theology use this method of beginning with the Bible and then moving to man in his present situation? Other people, similarly claiming to be doing Christian theology, have reversed this methodology. Why are these other methods inappropriate?

My earlier suggested solution——this is a constitutive tautology for theology as practised by Gollwitzer——is not

a satisfactory answer. It was necessary, at that point in the thesis, so that we could pursue the examination of his thought without being delayed by what will prove to be a long discussion, too long to be placed in a footnote or an excursus. Nevertheless, it avoided the real thrust of the question. After all, those other theologians also claim that their methodologies do justice to the biblical witness. To answer that they are not doing Christian theology despite their claims, although logical from Gollwitzer's point of view, is simply another evasion of the issue and a retreat into dogmatic circularity. In fact, Gollwitzer never offers such a simplistic answer. Yet, it does seem, at times, to be implied.

The real question, which demands an answer, is not whether Christian theology needs the biblical witness,¹ but the priority and nature of its relationship to Scripture. And the only answer which is not an evasion is one of demonstration, that is, of showing the ultimate consequences of alternative theological methodologies developed on the basis of other possible relationships,

¹ Altizer and Hamilton seem to deny, in their most radical moments, any need for either a Christian tradition or the biblical proclamation. Nevertheless, the one thing that saves them from becoming out-and-out atheists is their retention of elements from those texts, e.g. the person of Jesus (Hamilton) or the Incarnation (Altizer). Similarly, though perhaps unconsciously, they retain elements from theological tradition. Cf. Langdon Gilkey's remarks noted in: Thomas J.J. Altizer and William Hamilton, Radical Theology and the Death of God (Indianapolis, 1966), p. 27, n. 5.

of showing that ultimately they do not accomplish, in their own terms, what they intend.

This demonstration I shall execute using three alternative positions representative of three major streams in modern theology.² All three claim that the type of absolute theism which Gollwitzer sees as essential to the Bible, and the methodology implicit therein, are neither possible for man today nor necessary in theology. Further, as proof of this underlying disagreement, all three develop their positions by beginning, ostensibly, elsewhere than in the Bible. I shall demonstrate, either that they have made a prior theistic assumption not unlike Gollwitzer's and that it is necessary for their representation of the biblical witness on their own terms, or that they have made a prior theistic assumption which is no more acceptable to modern man than Gollwitzer's.

I. Christian Atheism. "Death of God theology" is not an unified school of thought. The names frequently associated with it range from Gabriel Vahanian with his "new iconoclasm", through Paul M. van Buren with a revival of the verification principle, to Thomas J.J. Altizer and William Hamilton who present a near-atheism. Vahanian, in fact, does not belong in the category, as he is speaking

² I have divided modern theology into these four streams —the one Gollwitzer represents plus the three alternatives to be discussed here—on the basis of William Hamilton's suggestion in: Radical Theology and the Death of God, pp. 4-5.

of the death of idols, thus clearing the decks for an affirmation of the true and only God. In this he differs only verbally with Gollwitzer. Van Buren, likewise, can be eliminated from our discussion because his real purpose is simply to translate the traditional message into the secular terms of logical positivism, without questioning deeply what he is translating. The alternative of "radical theology", then, is represented by Hamilton and Altizer.³

In their "radical theology", which for the sake of simplicity I am calling 'Christian atheism', we meet what seems to be the greatest break with past theology and with the Bible. And that is precisely their intention. "The death of God group wants to break away from that",⁴ i.e., the neo-orthodox or biblical-theology tradition. That is not to say, however, that they abandon either completely—even though that seems on the surface to be their claim. Although their writings are intended as attempts at starting afresh in theology, they still profess to be making a contribution to Christian understanding, that is, they are claiming to witness truthfully to what happened

³ I recognize that there are striking differences between their two approaches, and some of these will be noted as the argument proceeds. Nevertheless, the similarities are substantial enough to group them together here. Also, the fact that they joined forces to collect some of their essays into one common volume would indicate a mutual recognition that any differences between them are not basic.

⁴ Radical Theology and the Death of God, p. 27 (my italics).

in and because of the life of Jesus Christ. "The death of God theologians claim to be theologians, to be Christians, to be speaking out of a community to a community."⁵ Thus, there will have to be some implicit connection, however tenuous, with Christianity of the past. Otherwise the claim to be Christians becomes meaningless.

The prime reason, they argue, for having to make this new start in theology is the event of the "death of God". This is not simply a theological expression of man's inability to experience God directly any more (Sölle). Rather, it means God no longer exists. He no longer makes himself known to man in any way. The theist presupposition is no longer possible for man and, thus, for theology, because the God who once had dealings with men simply does not exist now. This fact must be reflected in theology and must be reflected upon by theology. It must explain what it means to be a "radical Christian", a Christian after the "death of God".

Central to Hamilton's attempt at working this out is the person of Jesus. He is not an object of faith, it is argued, but our "standpoint". We are to see the world through his eyes and to see him in the world. In his life he sought out the outcasts, the sick, the maimed, the unwanted and unloved, to be with them. Now he sends us to be neighbours to them. Thus, faith is no longer the

⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

way of knowing God. It "is more like a place, a being with or standing beside the neighbour."⁶ Our relationship to Jesus ought to be one not of faith, but of obedience. And we are to find and serve him in the world.

Altizer, on the other hand, turns to eastern mysticism, especially the "coincidence of opposites", to reinterpret the Incarnation. In this he is concerned, in view of the "death of God", to find a way of regaining a sense of the "sacred" in the midst of the "profane" present. Taking a cue from Nietzsche, he argues that to seek the "centre" of life outside the present in some special place or time, either past or future, in fact, negates life. And modern man cannot do that. We find, on the other hand, that by affirming life it gains meaning and significance. The "centre", then, is actually everywhere and "eternity" is in every Now. In the moment we say this Yes to life, the "coincidence of opposites"-----sacred and profane-----takes place in such a way that the profane is transformed without being annulled. This idea, Altizer claims, is inherent in the Incarnation. Thus, even in the face of the event of the "death of God", we can confess Christ's presence in the Now, and begin, then, to love the world as his body. We need cling no longer to past forms of Christ's incarnation. "The Word appears in our history in such a way as to negate its previous

⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

expressions."⁷ We now know that the Word ever again becomes flesh in our present, in our time, in our existence.

These two attempts at Christian atheism, appealing as they may be, raise serious questions. Hamilton must be asked how it is that Jesus can demand this obedience of us. A person who has studied extensively in a field might legitimately demand some respect for his opinions, but not unconditional obedience. Similarly, one whose experience was extensive might demand consideration for his counsel, but, again, not unconditional obedience. But Jesus of Nazareth was neither one of great learning nor one of wide experience. The most one might say is that he was a man of great insight. Yet, even admitting this, we could only give him conditional obedience. Jesus, then, is not the sign of hope and optimism that Hamilton makes him out to be.

Nevertheless, fully recognizing this objection, Hamilton maintains his allegiance to Jesus. "Jesus is the one to whom I repair, the one before whom I stand, the one whose way with others is also to be my way because there is something there, in his words, his life, his way with others, his death, that I do not find elsewhere. I am drawn, and I have given my allegiance."⁸ It now seems

⁷ Ibid., p. 137.

⁸ Hamilton, "The Shape of Radical Theology", in: Christian Century, October 6, 1965, p. 1221 (my italics).

that the answer to the problem lies in this unusual item in Jesus' life. Since unconditional loyalty can be given to an historical figure only if something unconditional is disclosed in that figure, we must deduce that, for Hamilton, the "something ... that I do not find elsewhere" of Jesus' life is, in fact, the disclosure of something unconditional. Or, to put that in other words, the way of standing beside our neighbour to which Jesus points us, as recorded in the New Testament, demands our unconditional obedience because it is the will of "unconditional being". That, however, requires the same sort of theistic assumption as: In Jesus is fulfilled God's promised "I will be there". In fact, it seems difficult to conceive of the difference as anything but verbal. Thus, if the one is impossible for man today, the other must likewise be impossible.

Altizer's argument is not dispatched so quickly. In dealing with transcendence he uses a model derived from eastern mysticism. Transcendence, then, means that which is quiescent, motionless and remote from the processes of life. In mysticism, the aim is to negate the world and lose oneself in the transcendent whole. Altizer, however, inverts this. We must, he argues, affirm the world and negate only the past. In this way we will find transcendence in the Now. The symbol of transcendence inhering into time is the Incarnation of the Word.

But it is difficult to see how transcendence, as he conceives of it, can inhere in time and space and still remain transcendence. For in doing so it has ceased to

be quiescent, motionless and remote. His desire to say that through the Word becoming flesh in Jesus Christ we have transcendence present in every Now seems to be, in fact, not unlike saying that in Jesus Christ God has fulfilled his promised "I will be there". Once again, the differences are verbal rather than substantial, and the one is neither more nor less acceptable for modern man than the other.

In both of the major developments of Christian atheism, then, the conclusions presented can only be reached by assuming something substantially similar to what Helmut Gollwitzer would claim is the biblical witness. The demand for an ethical involvement in the world (Hamilton) is certainly salutary. And it must be noted that Gollwitzer also makes this demand. However, the only way the demand can be universally and unconditionally valid is if Jesus is not just a man, but also the locus of God's self-fulfilment of his promise.

Similarly, the call for a sense of transcendental presence without a negation of the present (Altizer) is very appealing. Yet, it can only be said to occur if transcendence is experienced, instead, as a "being" who is not remote but related, not quiescent but active in history. That, according to Gollwitzer, is also the biblical witness. To bind oneself to this witness in a primary way, then, is to ensure that one does not abandon these elements which must be present for Christian atheism to accomplish what it purposes.

II. Christian Hermeneutics. This modern movement of theology is even more diverse than the former. It derives, in the main, from Rudolf Bultmann, and from Martin Heidegger as interpreted by Bultmann, but develops this line of thought beyond them in varying degrees. Within the scope of this thesis it is impossible to go into all these differences. Nor is it necessary. The demonstration can be made on the basis of what presents itself as their consensus of opinion. The weakness of their approach, it seems to me, lies inherently in the areas of common ground.

The great differences between the world-views of biblical man and of modern man are recognized. On this basis it is recognized also that Christian theology today, whether or not it once could, cannot simply repeat the biblical message in the same form. Nevertheless, they are convinced that the Bible has something very important to say. Thus they seek to find a way of interpreting this to modern man——hence the name 'hermeneutics'.

The modern clues, then, that make such a reconstruction possible come in the concepts of "event", "encounter" and "commitment". We cannot know God, they argue, apart from our experience of his encountering us. Any talk of God apart from this experience of encounter is meaningless and must be translated into talk about our response and relationship to him. The mode of this relationship is "existential commitment". The Christian is convinced so deeply that God has encountered mankind in the event of Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection that he risks

his whole existence in the world on God's behalf.

In this re-presentation of the gospel we are faced with the same problem that arose from Hamilton's work. If we wholly define God's existence in terms of our experience of his action, that is, if we actually intend that God does not exist apart from our experience of his encounter with us, then "existential commitment" to God really means commitment to self and ones own experience. In that case there would be no justification for demanding the type of self-sacrificing existence in the world which, they claim, is part of the New Testament ethic.

On the other hand, however, perhaps they are not intending to deny God's aseity. It may well be that they are saying simply that we can apprehend God only in our experience of his action in encountering us. This, then, is an epistemological statement which, in itself, says nothing of God's existence, except that he acts in a way which we can understand. Now, this latter representation of their argument is nothing other than an ostrich-like evasion of the problem. Modern man cannot speak in theistic terms, they think, therefore it is better to translate them into existential ones which are within his ken. But to speak of "encounter" and "commitment" necessarily involves the existence, either real or assumed, of some other being who/which encounters me and to whom/which I am committed.

In short, then, this interpretation needs the very theistic basis its proponents are so eager to do without. It is implied precisely in the way they have chosen to

speaking of man's apprehension of God. If it is true that modern man can no longer think theistically, then it is equally true that he will have to reject Christian hermeneutics. If, on the other hand, the possibility of theistic language still exists, then Christian hermeneutics must be rejected as dishonest, although well-meaning.

This movement, in conclusion, represents a healthy awareness of how we can apprehend God. But in speaking of man's relation to God it has had to assume a form of absolute theism which Gollwitzer would claim is safeguarded by adherence to the biblical witness. And, to be honest, these writers ought to admit this and face the problem of speaking of God's existence beyond our experience of his action.⁹ This, too, according to Gollwitzer, is demanded by Scripture. To bind one's theology to these texts, then, ensures that one does not ignore this element. Gollwitzer's proposed methodology provides a safeguard against the weakness of Christian hermeneutics.

III. Christian Panentheism. The third alternative movement in recent theology which I wish to discuss briefly is represented most clearly by the "process theology" of Norman Pittenger. Also within this movement are John

⁹ That this is beyond our understanding is admitted. Yet, that is not a serious objection. The possibility of holding beliefs beyond our understanding is argued cogently and convincingly by Murdith McLean, "On Believing that which is Beyond our Understanding", in: Studies in Religion—Sciences Religieuses (Toronto), vol. 1, N°. 3, Winter 1971, pp. 213ff.

B. Cobb, Jr., Daniel D. Williams, Charles Hartshorne and Schubert Ogden. It represents an attempt consistently to do justice to both the transcendence and the immanence of God, using as a model Alfred North Whitehead's "new metaphysics" (process philosophy). Thus, it is tackling the very root question of talk of God. "To find a way of asserting simultaneously the absolute difference of God from everything else, and his relation to everything else, without diminution of the difference, is without any doubt the key problem for theological thought."¹⁰

Christian panentheism begins by studying the world as it exists. Although there is much in its thought that is theoretical and speculative, its doctrine of God is developed primarily on the basis of his activity in the world. "In process-thinking ... the meaning of the concept of God is not derived from abstract theory but from observation of the world and its concrete actuality."¹¹ From this observation we learn that the world is not static but dynamic. Consistent with post-Einsteinian physics, the world as a whole is seen as being in process and as a process. At the same time, we are also learning from our observation that the world and everything in it are

¹⁰ Ronald Gregor Smith, The Doctrine of God, K. Gregor Smith and A.D. Galloway, eds. (London, 1970), p. 89.

¹¹ Norman Pittenger, Process Thought and Christian Faith (Welwyn, 1968), p. 39.

interrelated. Hence, there can be no possibility of isolation. If there were a supreme being, then, he could not be "perfect" as taught by absolutistic theism, i.e., unchangeable, impassible, self-sufficient. A supreme being, should one exist, must be affected, rather, by what happens in the world——supremely affected.

If we now turn to the Bible, we note a remarkable correspondence between these deductions of process philosophy, made by observing the world, and the idea of a "living God". Pittenger points to the giving of the divine name to Moses, as recorded in Exodus 3:13-14. Usually rendered "I Am Who I Am", this obscure piece of Hebrew might equally well be translated "I Will Be Who I Will Be". Thus, for process theology, God's being will change as he is affected by the process of which he is the sum of the parts and more.¹²

This view of God is "panentheistic", as distinct from "theistic" or "pantheistic". In pantheism God is completely identified with the cosmos. In traditional, absolutistic theism, according to Hartshorne, God is completely independent of the cosmos, affecting it but unaffected by it. Panentheism, on the other hand, represents God as being both all-inclusive and at the same time something independent.¹³ "Panentheism is to be distinguished

¹² Ibid., pp. 11-24.

¹³ Charles Hartshorne, The Divine Relativity, pp. 88-90. My summary of Christian panentheism has relied more heavily on Pittenger than on Hartshorne. Whereas the approach of the former is primarily phenomenological, the latter's is philosophical. Nevertheless, both are subject to the criticism presented in the ensuing paragraphs.

from pantheism, the view that God just is the cosmos, in that it insists that deity is personal, and has a real unity rather than being a mere collection of entities. It agrees with traditional theism that the individual essence of deity, that without which God would not be God, is independent of the cosmos."¹⁴ And it is to be distinguished from absolutistic theism in that God is affected by and immanent in the cosmos. Thus God has a "di-polar" nature. He is, at one and the same time, both abstract and concrete, eternal and temporal, infinite and finite, supremely absolute and supremely relative ("sur-relative", Hartshorne).

There is great appeal in this restatement of theology. It tries to represent accurately the "living God" concept of the Bible. And because it is in accord with much modern thought——existentialism, post-Einsteinian science, modern philosophy of history, depth psychology (including the recent Transactional Analysis)——and with the empiricist temper of our times, it might, at first glance, satisfy modern man. However, on further examination this appeal is seen to be superficial.

In the first place, process theology does not accomplish its purpose. It intends to present a new metaphysics, free from the dualism of the old (God/cosmos, natural/super-

¹⁴ Hugo Meynell, "The Theology of Hartshorne", in: The Journal of Theological Studies (Oxford), vol. xxiv, part 1, April 1973, p. 148.

natural, mind/matter, transcendent/immanent, etc.). But instead of solving the paradox, the process theologians simply push it back into God's own being, so that they speak of him as being "di-polar".¹⁵ Indeed, in some ways, Christian panentheism might be described as a sophisticated form of Christian gnosticism. The crass dualism is softened into the idea of a di-polar God, and instead of speaking of the cosmos as emanations from God, God becomes all-inclusive of the cosmos. Nevertheless, the similarities are very striking.

In the second place, process theology makes a theistic assumption not unlike Gollwitzer's, and certainly no more acceptable to modern man. Hartshorne's analysis of the ways God and the cosmos could possibly be related¹⁶—— God = cosmos (pantheism), God ≠ cosmos (absolutistic theism), God = both cosmos and something independent (panentheism)——has omitted a fourth possibility, the one represented by Gollwitzer, viz., God ≠ cosmos, but

¹⁵ In actual fact, they often seem to solve this paradox by dissolving the transcendent pole. Thus God ceases to be di-polar and becomes totally immanent. This, however, I take to be a result of their concern to right the supposed wrong of traditional theism by speaking of God's immanence. One would wish that more time would be given to speaking about how God is more than just the whole cosmos, about the distinction between panentheism and pantheism. For the sake of this critique, then, I have represented what they would claim is the advantage of process theology and have not been side-tracked by this weakness derived from the polemic against absolutistic theism.

¹⁶ Cf. S. Paul Schilling, God in an Age of Atheism (Nashville, 1969), p. 202.

is in ultimate relatedness, creatively sustaining it and being affected by it. God's being is not the process nor the sum of its finite parts, but his activity is hindered and advanced by their deeds. Process theologians take as a constitutive tautology the existence of a di-polar God.¹⁷ Gollwitzer's constitutive tautology is the existence of a transcendent/immanent God. The difference is only verbal. Thus, by the same token, the one is neither more nor less acceptable to modern man than the other. The skeptic who has difficulty with the concept of a timeless Being who intervenes in time will have equal difficulty with the concept of "infinite temporality".

Christian panentheism, then, is not unlike Gollwitzer's biblical theism. Indeed, Pittenger takes great pains to explain that it truly reflects the witness of the Bible. And in the aspect of God's relatedness to the world this is true. However, as I pointed out in a footnote,¹⁸ the process theologians have tended to make too little of the

¹⁷ In both the phenomenological and philosophical branches of this movement such a theistic presupposition must be made. Pittenger, after observing the world, proclaims that if a God exists he must be relative, in process. But that such a God in fact does exist is still a presumption. Hartshorne, on the other hand, tries to "prove" God's existence by reviving the ontological argument. However, like St. Anselm and Descartes before him, he achieves for those who already believe a valuable analysis of what they mean by God's necessary existence, but does not "prove" this for the skeptic. It remains a constitutive tautology.

¹⁸ Supra, p. 203, n. 15.

otherness of God. I have suggested that this tendency derives from their primary interest in correcting what they see as a deficiency in traditional absolutistic theism and in divorcing Christian theology from Aristotelian metaphysics. The endeavour is indeed laudable. But to prevent it from becoming the sole interest they need to develop more fully their thinking about the other pole of God's being. Here the most effective safeguard would be the close adherence to the Bible suggested by Gollwitzer.

In short, then, all three alternatives——Christian atheism, Christian hermeneutics and Christian panentheism——require a theistic presupposition not unlike that made by Gollwitzer; all three present positions no more acceptable to modern man; and all three have inherent weaknesses which could be avoided by a closer connection with the Bible as a safeguard. Admittedly, this has not proved Gollwitzer's constitutive tautology, but it has verified it, that is, it has demonstrated its value and validity in comparison with alternative approaches.

Perhaps, though, one more thing needs to be noted before proceeding. The claim to be doing Christian theology is a claim to be part of a tradition. The first Christians referred directly to their personal experiences of the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus whom they called the Christ. They wrote letters to other parts of the Christian community when unable to go in person. And, as the direct, personal experience receded further into the past, the community began to gather together in

written form the recollections of the witnesses. From the great quantity of material so produced the community selected a relatively few which they recognized as most clearly and accurately defining the experience they were witnessing to. By A.D. 200, this process of canonization was virtually complete¹⁹ and subsequent generations of the community were to judge their proclamation by the criterion of this canon. That, then, is the tradition to which the Christian theologian belongs. To reject this criterion is to divorce oneself from this tradition. Clearly, Gollwitzer has attempted to remain a part of that tradition. Whether or not the same could be said of the alternatives we examined above is irrelevant to this thesis. It is enough to note that by his method of giving priority to the biblical proclamation as the safeguard of modern proclamation, Gollwitzer ensures that his theology is Christian, i.e., within the Christian tradition.

The How

We turn now to the second question raised earlier in the thesis: is it possible to follow the method Helmut Gollwitzer has proposed? Is it possible to go first to the Bible and let its witness determine the direction of our theology? And with this question we encounter the

¹⁹ Vide, C.H. Dodd, The Authority of the Bible, Second Torchbook Edition (New York, 1962), pp. 186-187.

most serious problem in his approach. It has been dealt with partially in the excursus on the "theological circle".²⁰ But a further difficulty must be acknowledged here.

A person is affected to a greater or lesser degree by all the previous events in his experience and his cultural heritage. Objectivity, in any absolute sense, is impossible. We have already noted that the biblical texts must be assessed in actu, i.e., as a participant in the community of faith. But beyond this, a person also brings his cultural and experiential bias. In other words, an attempt at theology cannot be made in a vacuum. Thus, theology in the United States takes a very different character from German theology, and recently "black theology" and Latin American "theology of liberation" have developed each with new outlooks. Similarly, each generation brings its own problems and means of expression, thereby producing its own characteristic theology. Every person, then, approaches these texts out of the context of his national and cultural tradition and of his generation.

At the same time, each person brings with him his own set of problems and questions. Undoubtedly these are partly conditioned by his heritage and his generation. But they will include also factors determined by personal experience. For example, in an over-simplified way, a

²⁰ Supra, pp. 35-40.

person who was made to feel inadequate and unwanted by demanding and domineering parents may well bring to his reading of the Bible a personal identity problem. In short, then, every person will be seeking, albeit unconsciously, answers to his personal and cultural questions, and solutions to these problems. And every attempt at allowing the Messenger behind this message to put the reader in question will be clouded by these conscious and unconscious problems and questions.

It is not irrelevant to mention here that theology is undertaken by people who are also sinners. It matters not whether one adopts the extreme position of the total depravity of man or some more moderate position, one still admits that man's insight and understanding, response and action are affected adversely. If we take seriously the biblical view of the universality of sin, then we must admit that any human attempt to discover the "kernel" of the New Testament will be tainted by this sinful state and any apperception of the Messenger behind and within the message will be clouded by this rebellious fog.

On the surface, then, theology, as Gollwitzer has defined it, seems to be impossible, or at least to be executed always imperfectly. Not only is the success of our theological undertaking always a matter of grace,²¹

²¹ Cf. With Wilhelm Weischedel, Denken und Glauben. Ein Streitgespräch, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, 1965), p. 39; also vide supra, p. ~~39~~ 40.

but also the very attempt at theology seems to fall within the sphere of grace. Reduced to its simplest terms, then, only he can attempt theology—to say nothing of succeeding in the endeavour—to whom God has given eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to understand (cf. Mark 4:10-12; Isaiah 6:9-10). Gollwitzer warns at one point that this does not justify the deduction of a theory of predestination. Rather, it is simply a description of the facts. "Jesus describes here nothing other than the actual separation which is accomplished by the veiled coming of the kingdom. The one perceives the mystery in the veiling, the other sees the veiling itself and—in reality sees nothing—his 'hearing' does not become 'understanding'."²² In other words, God gives not only the message which forms the primary subject matter of theology, but also the faculties for hearing it rightly and thus for understanding theology correctly.

In reality, therefore, the answer to the question of how theology is possible within the limits Gollwitzer imposes can be put simply: by God's grace. Apart from that it is impossible. But, given God's grace, it may be undertaken and can attain success. "For men ... it is impossible, but not for God: because everything is possible for God." (St. Mark 10:27)

This may not sound encouraging to the person who

²² Die Freude Gottes, 8th ed. (Berlin-Dahlem, 1969), pp. 88-89.

wants to undertake to do theology. Undoubtedly he will be attracted more to a methodology which claims to begin at the human side and to work towards the divine. It can be demonstrated, however, that this opposite extreme position in fact offers no greater promise. The claim to have begun with what man is able to understand and to have had no recourse whatever to what might be classified as revelation is, in the western world at any rate, an empty one. For, despite all its shortcomings and its far-reaching syncretism, western culture has been permeated by Christian teaching and precept. Unconsciously we take various aspects of this for granted. And it is very likely that this unconscious cultural background will determine our approach to the problem of what man can or cannot understand. This is not to mention, of course, a general Christian belief that in no age or nation has God left himself without a witness, that is, a means of revealing himself and preparing people to find him.

At the same time, even if one were able to discard all previous Christian influence and proceed "objectively", the result would not be theology but a phenomenology of human understanding. And to claim at the end of it all that this delineation of human aspirations and abilities is a better form of theology is to take a giant step into the humanist-atheist camp. For, if God supplies nothing but the answers to human aspirations and exists in no way beyond human ability to understand existence, then the criticisms of such as Feuerbach become valid and fatal

for Christian belief. On the other hand, if there is more, if God provides more than satisfaction of human aspirations, if God's existence transcends human ability to understand, then the theologian cannot rely solely on a study of what man is able to understand. At some point he must allow God to speak and present himself in his difference.

But how is this possible? Only on the basis of the grace of God. Apart from that it is impossible. But given God's grace it may be undertaken and can attain success.

For neither methodology, however, has the question been answered. It has been simply pushed back another degree. We must still ask how, by grace, it is possible for God to reveal himself to man and for man to encounter God. We must define a little more closely this grace which overcomes the distortions imposed upon the message by man's nature-----either because he is too human or not human enough.

Gollwitzer, without specifically mentioning the term, has it in mind when he says that "human ways of speaking can correspond" to God.²³ God, in his condescension, allows himself to be known by man. And man, although sin has defaced the imago dei in him, retains a faculty for receiving this gift, this grace. One would wish, however, that Gollwitzer would explain more explicitly where the

²³ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, James W. Leitch, trns. (London, 1965), p. 151 (my italics).

limits of this correspondence lie and elaborate more clearly the distinction he notes between analogia entis and analogia relationis.²⁴ This might prove a profitable step forward in theology and serve to heal the breach between the two extremes of methodology frequently referred to in this thesis. We must return to this, briefly, in the next section of the present chapter. For the moment, however, we must concentrate on the notion of grace.

Grace is an important concept for theology presented in this way. The stronger the emphasis on the otherness of God, on the distinction between God and man, the greater the need for a bridge across the gap. Nor should this be regarded as a purely subjective, human need. More pertinently, to reveal himself to man whose being is so totally different, to establish contact with and encounter man in such a way that man would recognize with whom he has to do, to be able to condescend to confront man in history, God must have a point of contact with man, a bridge across the gap. For Gollwitzer, this bridge is called grace. "It is a sign of grace that we can predicate the words 'being' and 'existence' both of God and of the creation, without detriment to their totaliter aliter in the two references."²⁵

²⁴ Ibid., p. 185.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 210-211.

Again, one would wish for more clarity here. Gollwitzer uses the vocable 'grace' as if its meaning were generally understood and agreed upon. But since that is not the case, there is a danger that the vocable 'grace' is being used as a talisman to solve difficult problems and, at the same time, evade the real issues. Nevertheless, a consistency of use of this vocable can be inferred from Gollwitzer's writings, even though it is never articulated.²⁶

Primarily, grace is the relationship between man and God established by God's encountering man and man's response of faith. "What the Christian says of God is said on the basis of concrete confrontation with him within history as a result of his address and action within history, to which he has to testify."²⁷ This gives no special new eyes to the believer, to make him different from the non-believer. Rather, it establishes the point of contact, thereby giving propriety to our inappropriate concepts and words. Without this re-established relationship (reconciliation) our attempts to speak of God in even the most limited and

²⁶ I say this despite one place where he seems to deviate: "Christian talk of God can remain true to ... its origin and object only in having the courage appropriate to its commission" (The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 200, my italics). Gollwitzer here seems to identify "courage" and "grace". For at other places, speaking appropriately of God was seen to be possible only on the basis of grace. However, courage is but a fruit of grace, as is appropriate talk of God.

²⁷ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 199.

narrow way would resemble an entomologist essaying to speak definitively of insects, never having seen one.

One will notice at once the great similarity here with one of the basic truths of a "subjective" methodology, one which proceeds from the human to the divine. Our knowledge of God is limited to a knowledge of how he presents himself to us in this personal encounter. "It is not the essence of God that is comprehended by [human words] per analogiam, but his action in history among us and upon us, and this they can denote precisely because it is action in history and, as such, action that is directed towards us and takes us up into communion with him."²⁸ But the difference——and, to my mind, the great strength of the so-called "objective" approach which Gollwitzer propounds——lies in the next step.

The "subjective" approach is content to make its proclamation of the Gospel to modern man on the basis of only this first step. This is all man, on his own at any rate, can understand. Therefore nothing will be said of what is beyond——or, more accurately, who is beyond. Yet to do this is to ignore the very basis of even this level of speaking of God. To speak at all of a relationship implies immediately the existence of at least two partners. A proper reticence keeps us from claiming to know the other partner (God) in himself, in his whole being.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 185.

Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable to assume that he is who he reveals himself to be and no other.

Gollwitzer's "objective" approach, then, pushes the affair further by speaking in a confessional, vocative way of this partner who encounters us. In this relationship of grace which God establishes with man, man discovers that he has to do with an Other who reveals himself as more than just an extension of our needs. We gain from the relationship more than we expected——love, forgiveness, hope, new life. Here we have to do with one who reveals himself as existing for us. But "God's being, if it were exhausted in his being-for-us, would be only a being-for-our-sake: God would then in fact be only a function of our needs."²⁹ To adequately express our understanding of our partner in this relationship, then, we must be prepared to speak, however improper our language may be for this task, of God's existence apart from us, of God's aseity.

In summary, the two major approaches to theology are not as opposed as the arguments between their various proponents would indicate. As I see it, they are speaking at different levels, trying in different ways to witness to the same experience of being encountered by God. The "objective" methodology espoused by Helmut Gollwitzer is

²⁹ Ibid., p. 220. This important argument comes from a section (pp. 220-232) which Gollwitzer, unfortunately, entitles an "Incidental Note". I regard this as not just an incidental note, but his crucial argument against the "subjective" methodology.

the more radical, i.e., reaching to the roots. The "subjective" methodology is the more superficial.

To be sure, the "How" question has not been fully answered. And we shall have to return to it yet again in the next section of this chapter. We have attempted to demonstrate, however, that an alternative approach to doing theology will have to answer the same questions eventually, that is, when it presses beyond its concern with the human experience of the relationship with God to a consideration of who the other partner in that relationship is in reality.

The What

In the previous two sections of this chapter, while dealing with two questions raised in the body of our examination of the theology of Helmut Gollwitzer, some of the criticism of his approach has been discussed. An attempt was made to demonstrate the usefulness of his methodology, as compared with three alternative streams of modern thought. Then, adopting a simpler division of methodologies——into "subjective", moving from the human experience to speak of God as we experience him, and "objective", on the basis of an evoked faith speaking of the God who condescends to reveal himself in relations with men——, I endeavoured to effect a form of peace between the two, seeing them as differing in emphasis and radicality rather than as opposed in essence and subject matter.

But this discussion has not yet brought us to what I regard as the most serious questions raised, and left unanswered, by the approach adopted by Gollwitzer. Nor have the various reviews of his publications gone to the root of the matter. Very often they have had a defensive tone, retaliating for the serious questions he raises about the alternative methodologies.

In this section, then, I will begin with a brief examination of two further criticisms which deal more with what Gollwitzer has written than with his basic methodology. These, too, it seems to me, have not reached the real problem areas. Therefore, I will go on to indicate these unanswered questions and the seriousness of their nature.

Gollwitzer has been accused of defensive conservatism. It is said he is unwilling to accept the vast changes so universal in the world today. His theology has to do with what ought to be, rather than with what really is. "I must state frankly that I am out of sympathy with Helmut Gollwitzer's attempt to re-establish the orthodox doctrine of God. It seems to me to be based on the familiar Canute-style of argumentation: to counter the rising tide of change with a more and more strident reassertion of what is supposed to be the case."³⁰

If that were truly what Gollwitzer was about, I would

³⁰ Alistair Kee, The Way of Transcendence, Christian Faith without Belief in God (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 198.

have to confess my own lack of sympathy. Too often in the face of change and opposition, the church has answered with entrenchment. Such an attitude, far from aiding the spread of Christian faith, has proved debilitating. The long history of the church's attempt to manacle the progress of scientific research gives ample evidence of this disposition and its outcome.

That, however, is not what Gollwitzer is doing. Rather, Gollwitzer is attempting to speak of matters that lie at the basis of Christian faith. Our statements about how we ought to relate to others imply a source for this sense of obligation. It is this source which concerns Gollwitzer. Thus, he is not merely reasserting "what is supposed to be the case", but is attempting something much more radical: to speak of what must be the case for our more peripheral statements to have the meaning we wish them to have.

Elsewhere, and more sympathetically, it is noted that Gollwitzer's writings lack any clear statement of the doctrine of the Trinity,

that precisely the event of Jesus Christ' crucifixion placing God's existence in question necessitates a trinitarian statement. ... GOLLWITZER hints at the possibility of speaking of God's self-relatedness in a footnote Curiously it remains at that footnote, although without a doubt only the possibility hinted at here could preserve GOLLWITZER's book from the aporia into which it must have flown by now.

31

31 Eberhard Jüngel, Gottes Sein ist im Werden. Verantwortliche Rede von Sein Gottes bei KARL BARTH. Eine Paraphrase

That Gollwitzer regards this criticism as serious is demonstrated by the fact that he acknowledges the criticism and admits it is an unfortunate oversight not to have spoken specifically of what is ever present as a background to his statements.³²

I feel, however, that this gives too much away. Indeed, Gollwitzer's theology is trinitarian, in the same sense as the New Testament is trinitarian. In this thesis I have tried to reflect and hold together Gollwitzer's proclamation of the tri-unity of the God-in-himself, the God-for-us and the God-in-community of God's being. This is a doctrine of the Trinity in vivo.

To be sure, it is never presented systematically or explicitly. But that is not an "unfortunate" state of affairs. Rather, it is one of the strengths of Gollwitzer's approach. In this reserve when speaking of God, he reflects most closely the biblical practice. In this hesitancy to use conceptual images he remains obedient to the second commandment: "You shall not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven or on earth beneath or in the waters under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them" (Exodus 20:4-5). This prohibition

(Tübingen, 1965), pp. 4 and 111, n. 146; referring to Gollwitzer, The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, pp. 187-188, n. 3.

³² The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 9. "The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is the unexpressed, but unfortunately not explicit, background of this book" (p. 9, my italics).

of idolatry applies not only to physical representations, but also to any conceptual objectification of God.

Thereby it is not only forbidden that we should worship God in the form of created nature, perhaps in the image of a golden calf or in statues of human form; thereby also there is given not only motive for the dispute between the confessions regarding images; the deepest meaning of the commandment lies in its sharpening of the fact that it is not man's affair to get hold of God in definitions and descriptions. We have not to hold God fast to the images which we ourselves make of him. We have not to conceptualize him; for that means setting him before us as we would something in our fantasy and in our memory which belongs to our spiritual property: earthly subjects, persons, experiences. What we can conceptualize (vorstellen), we can also lay aside (abstellen)—and thus even annul (abbestellen). 33

In other words, Jüngel, following Barth, is correct in his contention that any talk of God's being must be trinitarian. All Christian theology, to reflect adequately the nature of the Wholly Other who yet condescends to meet us in personal relationships within our history, must be trinitarian. On the other hand, however, to transform trinitarian talk into dogma, into a doctrine of the Trinity, is to run the risk of conceptual idolatry. Gollwitzer

33 Gottes Offenbarung und unsere Vorstellung von Gott, 3rd ed. (Munich, 1965), pp. 10-11.

has attempted, successfully in my judgment, to speak in a trinitarian way, yet avoid the pitfall of conceptual idolatry.

We must turn now to the more deep-seated problems in Gollwitzer's theology. These have been hinted at in the exposition portion of the thesis and earlier in this chapter. But they must be presented again, and more clearly, for it is in these areas that future theology must concentrate its efforts.

1. The Place of Apologetics. In an excursus bearing this title³⁴ I have already indicated the question raised by Gollwitzer's rejection of any theological method which sets out to defend Christian faith on the basis of what man is able to understand and accept. Stated briefly: If, through grace, through God's condescension, human language can correspond to God as a possibility bestowed on man by God,³⁵ then why is it necessary to adopt the particular methodology proposed by Gollwitzer? If God gives the gift of the possibility of speaking of him appropriately, can he not give this gift also to one who, perhaps by temperament----also God-given!----finds Gollwitzer's methodology unacceptable?

This question in no way detracts from the evident

³⁴ Supra, pp. 45-48.

³⁵ The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, pp. 151-152.

truth in Gollwitzer's argument, viz., that limiting our understanding of God to the humanly possible is to cease speaking of God. Nevertheless, in his attempt to enunciate the confessional need to speak of God as controlling the encounter we have with him and providing the possibility for speaking of him as our partner in relationship, Gollwitzer has tended to make absolute what can at most be described as a preference.³⁶ He has implied that his methodology is the paradigm for every theological undertaking. When this happens, when preference becomes paradigm, theological methodology is no longer the tool of proclamation but becomes the criterion for judging the truth of the content of the proclamation; methodology becomes epistemology and metaphysics.

2. Christology. I have had occasion already to raise a question regarding the relationship between faith and historical criticism in Gollwitzer's theology.³⁷ He has proclaimed an historical faith, that is, a faith bound to an event in history and passed on within history. Because it is thus based on an event in history, Christian faith can be said to be "bound" to history. That is not to say,

³⁶ This happens even where he speaks of his vocative theology as a preference. "'Preference' means: the non-preferable way of speaking is not absolutely ruled out, but must submit to the standard of the other, which has the precedence, and must receive its content from the latter" (The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, p. 153, my italics). Thus, "preference" is synonymous with "authority".

³⁷ Supra, pp. 179-180.

however, that it is "dependent" upon history. For it is God's condescending action in meeting us in the man Jesus which is constitutive for faith, not the man Jesus as the locus for God's condescending action.

But if, as Gollwitzer rightly contends, the two poles of this Christ-event must be affirmed together, if separating the divine-transcendent and human-immanent poles of this event destroys the real meaning of faith, then the relationship is one of dependence, for to deny the historical validity of the one is to deny the relevance of the other. If Jesus of Nazareth never lived, then God did not condescend to encounter humanity in him. If Jesus was not an identifiable human, then there was no event in which God broke down the barriers of temporality to re-establish a right relationship with us.

Further, the question of the relationship between the human and the divine in Jesus is not answered clearly. In what way does the Wholly Other coincide with the Wholly Like? This is the root problem behind the matter of human language corresponding to divine reality. The concept of analogia relationis, of functional analogy, may prove fruitful. But the elements must be presented in greater detail——what are the areas of and limits of correspondence; what are the criteria for judging the propriety of the extension of human terms to divine reality; and what are the implications of this for our understanding, not only of God, but of man and of the divine-human relationship?

3. Grace. The question of the 'theological circle' is evaded in Gollwitzer's writings.³⁸ Even for one sympathetic to his approach a problem arises: why do some have faith and others not? Theology, as envisaged by Gollwitzer, is possible only on the basis of the gift of faith. In other words, God graciously condescends to encounter man in such a way that man, perhaps for the first time, recognizes with whom he has to do and responds in self-commitment, i.e., with faith. Theology is then possible. But it is evident that not all have responded with faith. Does this mean God has chosen not to encounter them? Or was his self-revelation in the encounter so veiled that the human partners could not perceive with whom they had to do? Or was there some deficiency in their seeing and hearing, did they lack an ability that others possessed? To say that this is merely a description of the facts which result from "the veiled coming of the kingdom. The one perceives the mystery in the veiling, the other sees the veiling itself and-----in reality sees nothing-----his 'hearing' does not become 'understanding'." ³⁹ -----to say that is really to ignore the question.

If God's encounter with humanity in Jesus Christ is for all people, why have not all people responded in faith? To counter that faith is a gift or fruit of grace is to

³⁸ Vide supra, pp. 35-40.

³⁹ Die Freude Gottes, pp. 88-89.

beg the question. For it must be asked, in that case, why has this gift not been given to all people? Does this not contradict the universality of the Christ-event and of God's acting in love?

Finally, 4. Idolatry or Atheism. Gollwitzer, at least by implication, accuses many of his opponents of atheism. By concentrating on the purely human side of God's encounter with man they have tended to ignore the divine partner. In some, this aversion to speaking of God's existence approaches a denial of his existence. Indeed, it is difficult to understand, in extreme instances, why they have not joined the atheist camp.

However, even as the 'subjective' methodology in theology tends towards atheism, Gollwitzer's 'objective' methodology tends towards idolatry. Despite an illuminating commentary on the commandment against idolatry⁴⁰ which clearly shows his awareness of the danger of creating conceptual idols, Gollwitzer does not avoid completely this pitfall.

I have attempted to portray Gollwitzer's theology as a corrective for the purely phenomenological study of the human side of God's encounter with man. But his emphasis on the logical need to speak of God's existence in himself and apart from the encounter with man threatens to

⁴⁰ Gottes Offenbarung und unsere Vorstellung von Gott,
pp. 10-11.

dissolve into an affirmation of God as a formal "that" which has lost the substance of personality. Only in the context of relationship does personality carry meaning.

At this point, there seems to be an inconsistency in Gollwitzer's argument. One of the safeguards for appropriate talk of God is to adhere to a limitation evidenced in biblical talk of God, namely, not to leap from testimony regarding an encounter to an ontology of God.⁴¹ In other words, remaining within this biblical limitation, it is appropriate to speak of God as the other partner in our encounter, speaking, acting, willing and loving. But it is trespassing beyond this limitation to proceed to say "God is". And to joyfully proclaim that it is by grace alone that "existence" and "being", properly predicated only of God, can be predicated also of creation,⁴² clearly places ones words in the realm of ontology, and thus, when the referent is God, idolatry.

Coda

Helmut Gollwitzer's theology, to my mind, comes as a much-needed purgative for the modern theological scene. Because of his writings, we can see more clearly the real issues to be debated as theology progresses. For both the sympathetic and the disapproving reader he has set in

⁴¹ Cf. The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, pp. 128ff.

⁴² Cf. Ibid., pp. 210-211.

clearer focus the essential points of agreement and difference.

This, then, gives us indications as to the way forward. Where confessional theology must refrain from making absolute its methodology, apologetic theology must cease rejecting 'objective' methodology out-of-hand as irrelevant and impossible for modern man. Where vocative theology must explain the 'rules' of analogical talk of God, most 'non-theistic' theologies must demonstrate their continuity with the biblical proclamation. Where so-called Neo-orthodox theologians must wrestle with the inherent doctrine of predestination in their approach, other theologians must recognize that this same problem is present in their approaches, if only at a different level. And where 'objective' theology must guard against idolatry, 'subjective' theology must guard against atheism.

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