

The Intellectual Challenge of the Gospel

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Note

In 1950 The Tyndale Press in London published the address contained in the present pamphlet. It is now being republished, with permission, in this country. The writer would gladly have extended the pamphlet by expounding more fully the dialectical and Roman Catholic positions. This has been suggested by reviews of the first edition. But such an extension would tend to defeat the purpose of having a brief, synoptic picture of modern thought and of the message of the Reformed Faith in relation to it.

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Introduction

While the Apostle Paul was at Corinth the Lord spoke to him in the night by a vision: 'Be not afraid,' he was told, 'but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee ... for I have much people in this city.' (Acts 18:9–10) Had Paul been afraid to bring the simple gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to the city of Corinth with its Jews and with its Greeks? If so, he was afraid no longer after the vision had been given to him. 'Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.' (1 Cor 1:20–21) If the Corinthians would but look at the facts as they are, and particularly as they have shown themselves to be in the course of history, they would be compelled to acknowledge the bankruptcy of the wisdom of man. What answer had Socrates, Plato and Aristotle been able to give to the deepest problems of life? Shall we say that they gave no answer? No, indeed; for they could not escape giving an answer. But the answers they had given were wrong. Their wisdom had been made foolishness with God. In the light of the narrative which Paul brought, the wisdom of the Greeks was not merely inadequate; it was sinful. Man had originally been made perfect. He had then in Adam broken the covenant that God had made with him. Rom 12 He was now a covenant-breaker and, as such, subject to the wrath of God. Having such a view of the nature of man Paul did not merely plead for a 'complete system,' for the recognition of the 'spiritual dimension' as well as the material. He did not want merely to add the idea of the personal confrontation with Jesus Christ to that of the impersonal study of the laws of nature. In short, he did not ask for the privilege of erecting an altar to the living God, Creator of heaven and earth, next to the altars to gods that have been born of human minds. He pleaded for, and in the name of his Lord required of men, a complete reversal of their point of view in every dimension of life. The entire house of their interpretation of life had to be broken down. Many of the building blocks that they had gathered could no doubt be used, but only if the totally new architectural plan that Paul proposed were followed.

But how could Paul expect that covenant-breakers should become covenant-keepers? How could those who had worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator be expected to turn from their evil way? Would they turn as soon as it was shown to them intellectually that the wisdom of this world has been made foolishness with God? Indeed not. Their minds being darkened, they would appear to others to see while yet they did not see. 'But the natural man

receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' (1 Cor 2:14) Or could they be expected to desire and will to believe that which might seem intellectually paradoxical to them? No, St. Paul did not expect that, 'because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' (Rom 8:7)

Yet the Apostle did not despair. He did not lower the requirements of the gospel in order to get men to accept it. Being truly all things to all men, sacrificing himself without limit for the sake of Jew and Gentile alike, he yet continued to insist always on the complete rejection of the 'wisdom' of man and on the substitution for it of the 'foolishness' of God. For this he had good reason.

He knew all the evidence was for the truth of his message. Can anyone really doubt that God, the God whom Paul preached, does exist? The eternal power and Godhead of Paul's gospel are clearly visible to all men everywhere (Rom 1:19). God speaks His requirements through all the facts with which man deals. He speaks to men in the works of creation and providence; He speaks also to men through their conscience (Rom 2:14–15). He spoke at the beginning of history in direct supernatural fashion to Adam. All men are therefore without excuse. There is no fault in the objective revelation of God to men. It is perspicuous; no one can escape being confronted with it. There is no area of impersonal relationships where the face of God the Creator and Judge does not confront man. It is not as though the evidence shows that a god exists or that God probably exists. If such were the case then there would be some excuse for man if he did not bow before his Maker. Paul makes bold to claim that all men know deep down in their hearts that they are creatures of God and have sinned against God their Creator and their Judge.

Nor is it as though the evidence for 'theism' were clear but the evidence for 'Christianity' were obscure. Paul boldly asserts that men are bound to believe the facts of Christianity to be true as soon as they hear of them. When he declares the fact of the resurrection of Christ, he asserts that through it all men have been given assurance of the day of final judgement by the Son of man (Rom 2:14–15).

Through Paul's gospel, then, 'objective truth' stands before men as a challenge. Men cannot react neutrally towards it; they must accept it or suppress it because they do not want to believe it. Paul knows that those who cling to the 'wisdom' of the world do so against their better judgment and with an evil conscience. Every fact of 'theism' and every fact of 'Christianity' points with

accusing finger at the sinner, saying: 'You are a covenant-breaker; repent and be saved!' (Acts 17:1)

The truth Paul brings requires response, the response of repentance; and repentance is the work of the whole man. Paul's truth is 'existential.' He who rejects it virtually commits suicide both intellectually and morally. Yet Paul also knows that sin is of such a nature as to make men prefer intellectual and moral suicide to the truth of God in Christ. Repentance means the recognition of bankruptcy. It involves the suppliant's attitude begging for mercy, for pardon, for life. It means fleeing from the city of destruction and pressing on to the celestial city even when Mr. Worldly Wise Man and all his friends are going in the other direction. It means bearing the offence of the cross. Will any of the wise of the world accept his gospel and repent?

Yes, they will. Paul is quite sure of that. He knows that God has much people in the city. He knows that he himself had been a persecutor. He remembers vividly how the Lord had appeared unto him. 'Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?' (1 Cor 9:1) Now that Jesus has come into the world to save His people, His Spirit will set them free. That Spirit will take the things of Christ and give them to His people. God's work is one. God the Father so loved the world that He gave His Son that they who believe might be saved. God the Son came into the world to do the will of the Father. God the Spirit will give men hearts of flesh instead of hearts of stone. The believers in Corinth were the work of the Apostle. 'Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.' (2 Cor 3:3)

The natural man who of himself cannot discern the things of the Spirit is by that Spirit renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him (Col 3:10). 'This renovation is said to be εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν, not in knowledge, much less by knowledge, but unto knowledge, so that he knows. Knowledge is the effect of the renovation spoken of.'¹ Moreover 'the knowledge here intended is not mere cognition. It is full, accurate, living, or practical knowledge; such knowledge as is eternal life, so that this word here includes what in Eph 4.24 is expressed by righteousness and holiness.'¹

¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, New York, 1872, Vol. 2, p. 99.

¹ *Idem.*, p. 100.

With this assurance that the Spirit of God, who had enveloped him in heavenly light and turned him from being a persecutor to being an Apostle, can and will enable men to turn from the wisdom of the world in order to accept his gospel, Paul goes forth boldly among men everywhere. Speaking for Him who spoke to Lazarus in his tomb, Paul does not hesitate to speak to those who are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1). He expects that the Spirit will in sovereign mercy enable men to repent. It is God, the Spirit, who makes men do that which in their folly they would otherwise not have done. 'Are not ye my work in the Lord?' If you who were enamoured of the wisdom of the world have now owned it to be foolishness, you must go forth with the same challenge that I presented unto you. 'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.' (1 Cor 15:58)

Shall we as Christians, facing the wisdom of the world in modern form, dare to do what Paul tells those who are his work in the Lord to do? Shall we dare to be steadfast and unmovable, never doubting the objective truth of the message that we bring, never doubting that the wisdom of the world has again been made foolishness with God? Shall we have full confidence that our labour will not be in vain in the Lord?

Romanism

The Roman Catholic cannot answer these questions in the affirmative. He refuses to challenge the 'wisdom' of the world in the 'order of nature.' 'Did not God,' he says, 'create man in His own image?' 'And is not man,' he adds, 'surrounded with the revelation of God? Why should he not then be able to interpret nature aright? Was not Aristotle right when he concluded from the fact of motion in the world that there must be an Unmoved Mover back of the world?' The Protestant replies pointedly that the God of Aristotle is not the God of Christianity. The God of Aristotle did not create the world, knows nothing of the world, knows nothing of himself. He is not a person, let alone the triune God of Christianity. Aristotle's God is an It. Yet Aristotle was not inconsistent in his reasoning. On his premises, his highest principle of knowledge and of being could be nothing else than an It. But man cannot worship an It. He must always come back to a person. He must begin and end his system of thought either with himself or with God. And since Aristotle does not begin with God but with man (that is, with himself), he ends his system with man (that is, with himself). And what Aristotle did has been done over and over again. In modern times it has

been done by such men as Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, Hegel and many others following them.

To be sure, the Protestant continues, the non-Christian thinker has said many things that, in themselves and formally, are true. When Aristotle said that God is pure Act he said verbally the same thing that the soundest of Christian theologians also says. Yet the Christian theologian would be referring to the internally self-complete, triune God, and Aristotle would be referring to an abstract principle of logic or being. No greater difference in content could be imagined. So also when the Stoics asserted that man is the offspring of God, the Apostle Paul does not hesitate to accept such a statement as formally true. But for the Stoics, man was of a piece with God, while for Paul man was created by God. In content there was the difference of truth and falsity between them. Again, when the pantheist says that he believes in the immanence of God and when the deist says that he believes in the transcendence of God, shall the theist say that he is richer than both because he believes in both the transcendence and the immanence of God? If he did, he would be building the house of his theology as children build their houses of blocks. The immanence of the pantheist spells identity between man and God, while the transcendence of the deist spells separation of man from God. How then can these two concepts of identity and separation be added together and produce the theistic conception of the relation of God to man?² The meaning of words derives from the total system of which they form a part.

Still further, the Protestant adds, non-Christian thinkers in general, and non-Christian scientists in particular, may discover much that is true about the universe that is made by God. Perhaps most of the great discoveries of science have been made by those who are not Christians. But such discoveries could not have been made unless the universe is what the Christian says it is, namely, created and controlled by God. There would be no order in nature and no rationality of relationships to be found anywhere in the universe had not God made them. Therefore the possibility of science itself presupposes the truth of the Christian concept of God. When, then, the non-Christian scientist discovers truth, this is not because of, but in spite of, his own theory of being and of knowledge.

² Wilhelm Pauck still follows the block-house method of comparing systems when he speaks of Schleiermacher as having stressed the immanence of God and of Barth as having stressed the transcendence of God. *The Heritage of the Reformation*, Boston, 1950.

It is not difficult to see what happens if the Christian fails to challenge the wisdom of the world in 'the order of nature.' If he keeps quiet, the proverbial elephant is given permission to push his trunk through the window! Soon the order of 'the supernatural' is adjusted to the order of nature as interpreted by the natural man. The Roman Catholic starts his philosophy with the idea of 'being' in general. Aristotle says that 'being' is analogical. Applied to the relation between God and man this idea of 'the analogy of being' implies that man takes his beginning from pure potentiality but ends up with becoming pure actuality. If the idea of the 'analogy of being in general' could allow for the meaning of history—which it cannot—then it would involve man's total separation from God in the past and his total identification with God in the future. Thus the entire Pauline gospel of man's creation by God, his breaking of the covenant at the beginning of history, the work of Christ in history, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the application to sinners of the work done for them by Christ, would be denied. No sound Christian theology can be attached to the Aristotelian notion of 'the analogy of being.'

The moral of all this for Protestants should surely be to challenge the wisdom of the world in every dimension. If it is not challenged in every dimension, it cannot be effectively challenged in any one dimension. If a tunnel is to be built under a river it may be wise to start from both sides of the river at the same time, but it cannot be wise to have two engineers working, each from one side, without agreement on a general plan of construction.

The Heritage Of The Reformation

It is, therefore, the Protestant rather than the Romanist who may be expected to challenge the wisdom of the world. It is the genius of Protestantism to make the God of the Scriptures the final reference point of all predication. In Protestantism man is really taken to be the creature of God. Man is not thought of as participant with God in some principle of being that is above and exemplified in both. Protestantism does, in contrast with Romanism, make the Creator-creature distinction basic in its thought. The true Protestant refuses to say as much as one word about 'being in general.' To speak about 'being in general' is, in effect, to deny the self-sufficiency of God. It is to subject God to a standard that is above Him. It is to shift man's final allegiance away from God to an abstract principle of being and logic. And this in turn amounts to shifting man's allegiance away from God to man himself.

This is precisely what 'the philosophers,' as Calvin speaks of them, have done. They, with all men, are sinners and therefore have an axe to grind. They do not want to find God, their Creator. Though they cannot help being confronted with Him all the time and everywhere, they seek assiduously to suppress this revelation. They seek for an exclusively immanentistic principle of explanation of all the phenomena with which they deal. They say that all is water, that all is infinite, that all is air, that all is number, that all is change, that nothing is change. Or, when driven to the recognition of mystery and 'transcendence,' they say that nothing intelligible can be said about the really transcendent one. Whatever the differences between them, they are agreed in assuming that the Creator-creature distinction is not to be taken as basic for all possible prediction. If they introduce the Creator-creature distinction at all, they introduce it after they have said or assumed at least some basic things about 'being in general.' The 'wisdom of the world' is always monistic in the sense that it does not make the Creator-creature distinction basic in its thought.

A true Protestantism, therefore, will differentiate its thought from that of the wise men of this world. The Romanist seeks for an alliance between a system of thought which affirms and a system of thought which denies the basic character of the Creator-creature distinction. The Protestant builds his system squarely upon the Creator-creature distinction and opposes those who build on the idea of 'being in general' and 'thought in general.'

In consequence there is also a fundamental difference between Romanism and Protestantism on the concept of revelation. Romanism is willing to make common cause with those for whom the very idea of revelation is absurd. Those who deal with 'being in general' or 'thought in general' cannot entertain the idea of revelation. The idea of revelation is based upon the Creator-creature distinction. Those who themselves claim to participate in some measure in 'being in general' and in 'thought in general' have no need of revelation; they already assume the presence within them of a principle of continuity that is beyond God and man. For them God can at best be a 'bigger brother' or a 'greater scientist.'

Nor could the 'fall of man' change all this. He who in any wise speaks of 'being in general' cannot think of sin as a wilful transgression of the revealed will of God on the part of the creature. Sin will be thought of as basically a failure to live up to the part that he feels he ought to play in 'reality as a whole.' Thus his own experience, rather than the revelation of God to sinful men in Scripture, will be the final test for him of what is right and wrong. For the Protestant, however, it is the Bible that is the supreme rule of faith and life. For the Romanist it is the

Bible as infallibly interpreted through the 'Church,' and in this case the 'Church' itself is moulded, not according to the principles of the Bible, but, in part at least, according to the wisdom of the experience of man.

Inconsistent Protestantism

It is in Protestantism, then, that we must look for a real challenge of the wisdom of the world as Paul engaged in it. But not all Protestants are consistent Protestants. Since all men remain sinful, no Protestant is, of course, fully consistent. But it is not that of which we speak. We speak rather of the relative consistency with which those who are Protestants have cleansed themselves of 'the old leaven' of Romanism. And this 'old leaven' of Romanism consists in combining Christian teaching based on Scripture as the final and infallible revelation of God to sinful man with the teaching of 'human experience' as interpreted independently of Scripture.

To indicate the difference between more and less consistent Protestantism reference may here be made to the fine little book of the late Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, entitled *The Plan of Salvation*.¹ Warfield's contention is that Romanists are inconsistent supernaturalists because they retain in their thinking that which comes from foreign, that is non-biblical, sources. Further, he also contends—and this is the point of importance here—that non-Reformed, that is non-Calvinist Protestants (he calls them 'Evangelicals'), are inconsistently evangelical because they retain in their thinking something that comes ultimately from foreign, or non-biblical, sources. With the Romanists, the non-Calvinist Protestant treasures the doctrine of the autonomy of the human will so far as to enable it in some measure to resist the ultimate plan of God. We may now develop briefly the implications of Warfield's argument for apologetic purposes. How shall a Protestant really challenge the wisdom of the world in the way that the Apostle Paul requires him to do, if he self-consciously retains some measure of this very wisdom of the world in his own system of thought?

The Romanist doctrine of the human will involves the idea of ultimacy or autonomy. To be sure, Romanism teaches the doctrine of creation, or rather it teaches a doctrine of creation. For the Roman doctrine of creation is intermingled with the Aristotelian doctrine of self-movement from pure potentiality to pure actuality. Accordingly the will of man is thought of as sharing in the freedom of

¹ Grand Rapids, 1935.

God. Its freedom is therefore the ability to initiate that which is wholly new for God as well as for man.

It will be observed that the Romanist doctrine of the human will is involved in the idea of 'being in general.' God and man have the same sort of freedom because both participate in the same being. God has more freedom than has man, but the freedom of man is still of precisely the same nature as the freedom of God.

Moreover, as the freedom of man is involved in and involves the idea of 'being in general,' so it is also involved in and involves the idea of 'thought in general.' God and man are in their freedom confronted with a necessity of being and, therefore, with a necessity of the logic that dwells in being. It is abstract rationality rather than the nature of God with which man deals when he engages in the logical manipulation of the facts of the universe. Therefore he seeks to determine what is possible and what is impossible in the way that Parmenides or any other non-Christian philosopher might do. Parmenides assumed that the human mind is non-created, and therefore is of the same ultimacy as the divine mind. For him the human mind has the right and the task to legislate as to what can and cannot exist.

On such a basis God cannot exist as the Creator of man. If God does exist as the Creator of man, then what is possible and what is impossible depends upon the will of God. Then man's dealings are with the revelation of this God. To be sure, the will of God then expresses only that which is in accord with the nature of God; but what is possible according to the nature of God expresses itself to man by way of the will of God. For man that is possible which God, by an expression of His will, has already shown or said to be possible, and that is impossible which God may show or say to be impossible. He who recognizes God as his Creator should therefore use his God-given powers of intellectual or logical manipulation, not for the purpose of legislating about abstract possibility and impossibility, but for the purpose of ordering as best he can the revelational material in which he lives, moves and has his being.

The sum of the matter is this. The Protestant thinks of himself as a creature and as a sinner. Now that he has been saved by grace, therefore, he seeks to submit his mind and heart wholly and without reserve to the revelation of God in Scripture. The Romanist, on the other hand, though holding himself to be a creature and sinner, also holds himself to be a participant with God in the same abstract generality of being and of logic. He therefore accepts his orders in part

from God but also in part from his own direct experience of the nature of being and rationality.

Now the Arminian Protestant¹ is in all these respects largely controlled by the Protestant principle of submission to Scripture. Yet he has retained in his thinking some measure of the Romanist idea of the ultimacy of human experience. And it is this legacy of Romanism, which, in the last analysis, is really a legacy of non-Christian thought, that makes it quite impossible for the Arminian to fulfil the requirement of Paul with respect to challenging the wisdom of this world.

Arminianism and the Bible

That Arminianism is not able to challenge the wisdom of the world as Paul would have us do is first of all apparent with respect to the question of Scripture. Arminianism cannot do full justice to the Protestant doctrine of Scripture. Its notion of the freedom of man involves the idea of pure contingency. Man is said, or assumed, to be able to do that which is wholly beyond the control of God. We are told by G. Norman Bartlett that 'the tenet of the all-sufficiency of God is in need of radical alterations.'² Bartlett proposes that we think of God as 'both infinite and finite at one and the same time; that is to say He is infinite with respect to one aspect of His nature and finite speaks with respect to another.'³ John Thomas speaks of the self-limitation of God in the interest of the freedom of man.⁴

The important thing to note in the arguments of Bartlett and Thomas is that both appeal to a 'being in general' and to 'thought in general' in the interest of their freedom concepts. Bartlett speaks of a 'realm of personality' and of 'the realm of the spirit' to which both God and man are subject. Thomas speaks of 'reality in general' as having certain characteristics over which God has no control. This reality is timeless for God and temporal for man. But it is one reality that includes both God and man. God cannot do this or cannot do that because the nature of reality does not allow it. Arminians reject the doctrine of election as taught in Scripture as being impossible, as contrary to the law of contradiction. They reject the same doctrine as being out of accord with the aspect of contingency in reality or Nature as a whole. There is therefore in Arminian

¹ When we speak of inconsistent Protestantism we are thinking primarily of the Arminian point of view.

² G. Norman Bartlett, *The Triune God*, New York, 1957, p. 115.

³ *Idem.*, p. 114.

⁴ Cf. John Thomas, *Philosophic Foundations*, London (no date given).

theology something of a legacy from the Romanist methodology. The Arminian theologian often accepts what Scripture says as far as being in general, and therefore rationality in general, allows the 'rational man' to accept its teachings. Making himself the final point of reference the 'rational man' first determines what is possible and what is impossible in general. He finds that the Christian doctrine of the self-sufficient God and of His complete control of the universe is impossible. It is not in accord with logic. It is also out of accord with the 'fact' of contingency or freedom. The biblical doctrine must be toned down so as to make it fit in with the nature of reality as already defined without reference to Scripture.

The similarity of the Arminian view to that of the Romanist is striking. There is the assumption of the 'fact' of freedom or pure contingency in both cases. Then there is the assumption that the 'free' man is able by means of the law of contradiction to legislate as to what is possible or impossible in the realm of being in general. Thus we have something of both the irrationalism and the rationalism of the Romanist position carried over into the theology of Protestantism. And it is these foreign elements both of irrationalism and of rationalism that keep the adherents of Arminian theology from making every thought subject to the obedience of the revelation of God.

Naturally it is also these legacies of foreign or non-Christian thought that make it impossible for the Arminian to challenge the wisdom of this world effectively. For the thought of modern man begins with the assumption of his own ultimacy. That for him is the fact of all facts. It is his basic fact. It follows that for him 'God' cannot be ultimate. To be sure, he knows that man cannot control the whole of reality. Modern man gladly admits the idea of mystery. He glorifies the idea of mystery by speaking of it as the field where that which is wholly new may come forth. Is not the idea of change and progress in science itself based on the idea of the wholly new? Whatever gods there be, we are informed, not merely by the pragmatist but by the idealist as well, are dynamic. The 'static' ideas of Plato are rejected. Reality has an *élan vital* that never ends. Anything is possible. At the outset of any investigation every sort of hypothesis is relevant. Such is the requirement of the idea of pure contingency as it is involved in the assumption of man's freedom or ultimacy.

But this is only one side of the picture. Strange as it may seem at first sight, the irrationalism of the idea of pure contingency requires for its correlative the rationalism of the most absolute determinism. The idea of pure contingency requires the rejection of the Christian doctrine of creation and providence as logically impossible. Thus the statement that anything may happen must be

qualified by adding that anything but Christianity is possible. Theoretically speaking, any hypothesis is relevant, but practically speaking, the Christian 'hypothesis' is excluded at the outset of any investigation. Men will follow the facts wherever they may lead so long as they do not lead to the truth of Christianity.

There is nothing surprising in the fact that modern man is both utterly irrationalist and utterly rationalist at the same time. He has to be both in order to be either. And he has to be both in order to defend his basic assumption of his own freedom or ultimacy. About the idea of freedom or contingency pure and simple, nothing can be said. It is the idea of pure, bare, brute, or mute factuality. It is the idea of existence without essence; the idea of being without meaning. Yet modern man must say something about his freedom. Above all he must be defended against those who attack it. And who are they that attack it? Are they the determinists, and the rationalists? Not at all. The determinists and rationalists are what they are in the interest of defending the same autonomy or freedom of man that the indeterminists and irrationalists are defending. The determinist or rationalist differs from the indeterminist or irrationalist merely in the way that he defends the ultimacy or autonomy of man. They therefore have their internal family quarrels. These quarrels centre on the one question of how best to fend off the common enemy, which is Christianity.

But how then, it will be asked, does the determinist seek to defend the idea of man's ultimacy or freedom and therewith the idea of contingency? He does this by seeking to show that Reality cannot allow for the Creator-creature distinction. Creation out of nothing is said to be impossible. It is said to be impossible because it is contradictory. It would require us to hold that God changed from the status of not being a Creator to the status of being the Creator of the universe and that without any change in His being. Reality must therefore be of one nature. And if man is contingent, as is assumed, then God must also be contingent. If God is ultimate, man is also ultimate. If God is free, man is free with the same freedom with which God is free.

It is thus that the irrationalist may employ the rationalist or determinist to do battle for him in a field where he says he does not feel at home. In fact the 'free man' of modern non-Christian thought is Janus-faced. He turns one way and would seem to be nothing but an irrationalist. He talks about the 'fact' of freedom. He even makes a pretence of being hotly opposed to the rationalist. With Kierkegaard he will boldly assert that what cannot happen according to logic has happened in fact. Then he turns the other way and would seem to be

nothing but a rationalist. Surely, he says, the 'rational man' will accept nothing but what has intelligible meaning for him in accord with the law of contradiction. There must be coherence in experience. It is meaningless to talk about the 'entirely single thing.' But both in his irrationalist and in his rationalist features, the would-be autonomous man is seeking to defend his ultimacy against the claims of the Christian religion. If he is right as an irrationalist then he is not a creature of God. If he were a creature of God, he would be subject to the law of God. He would thus be 'rationally related' to God. He would know that he was a creature of God and that he should obey the law of God. If he is right as a rationalist, then too he is not a creature of God. The law that he then thinks of as above him, he also thinks of as above God; God and he are, for him, subject to a common law. If he were a creature of God, he would grant that what God has determined, and only that, is possible. He would then subject his logical manipulation of 'reality' to the revelation of God.

It is this Janus-faced covenant-breaker, then, who must be won for the gospel. It is he who walks the streets of New York and London. And no one but he does. All men are sinners; all are interested in suppressing the fact of their creaturehood. The irrationalist and rationalist have become friends in the face of their common foe. And this common foe is historic Christianity.

The implication of all this for Christian apologetics is plain. There can be no appeasement between those who presuppose in all their thought the sovereign God and those who presuppose in all their thought the would-be sovereign man. There can be no other point of contact between them than that of head-on collision. The root of both irrationalism and rationalism is the idea of the ultimacy of man. If this root is not taken out, it will do little good to trim off some of the wildest offshoots of irrationalism with the help of rationalism, or to trim off some of the wildest offshoots of rationalism with the help of irrationalism.

Yet both Romanism and Arminian Protestantism leave the root assumption of the modern man untouched. And they leave this root assumption unchallenged because the root assumption of their own theology partakes in a measure of the root assumption of the foes of the Christian religion. Romanism, and in a lesser degree Arminianism, cannot challenge the heresy of those who worship and serve the creature more than the Creator because they themselves are not willing to serve the Creator exclusively. Only in the Reformed Faith is full justice done to the idea that man is the creature of God and that he must therefore live exclusively by the revelation of God. All the facts with which man deals, whether in 'nature' or in Scripture, are revelational of the will of God for man. All these

facts claim man's obedient love and worship of God. And now that man has become a sinner he must turn to the Bible for the final light in which he must find the meaning of all the facts that confront him anywhere.

Let us think, then, in terms of an offensive warfare on the part of those who worship and serve the Creator rather than the creature against those who worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator. It is this which all Protestants want. But if they want it, then let them not first ask for permission to believe in 'the possibility of the book' from those who determine the possibility of anything in terms of the modern contingency idea.⁵ True Protestantism starts from the fact or actuality of the book. The meaning of the word possibility is first determined by the God who has spoken to sinners through the book. That, and only that, is possible which the God of the Bible determines. The idea of the 'possibility of the book' is no better than the idea of the 'possibility of a book.'

The Arminian theologian will argue, as did Bishop Butler and as did Thomas Aquinas, for the possibility and probability of God's existence and of His revelation to man in terms of some chain of being which has a measure of contingency in it. True Protestantism will make the Creator-creature distinction fundamental to its thought. This involves the idea of supernatural, positive thought-communication on the part of God to man from the outset of human experience. God spoke to Adam even in paradise. Man was never left to the study of natural revelation alone. Natural revelation was from the outset of history accompanied and supplemented by supernatural revelation. The two were involved in one another; they were supplemental to one another. They are unintelligible the one without the other. There has been no time in the history of the human race when man was expected to look at nature alone and ask whether God exists. Man was from the beginning confronted with the fact of God's clear-cut communication of Himself to man. Man was to see the place and function of nature in relation to the purpose it was to serve in human life. And the purpose of human life was set forth to man by direct supernatural communication.

The bearing of this on the doctrine of Scripture is clear. Even before man sinned he walked in the light of the supernatural thought-communication given him by God. Supernatural thought-communication is inherent in the human situation. It is involved in the Creator-creature relationship. Without such communication life would be meaningless for man. It is impossible intelligently to think of man without supernatural thought-communication to him on the part of God. The Bible simply carries on this communication after the fall of man into sin.

⁵ Cf. T. C. Hammond, *Reasoning Faith*, London, 1943, p. 70.

The Bible is the supernatural thought-communication of God to creatures who have become sinners. Sinners would seek to destroy any form of such communication that might come to them. So God made provision for a form of revelation which sinners, try as they may, cannot destroy. This communication, as deposited in Scripture, is one in terms of which human life is alone intelligible. There is no meaningful predication about anything except in the light of the revelation of the God who speaks to sinners in the book.

It is therefore mandatory that Reformed theologians urge their fellow Protestants everywhere to call upon modern man to interpret his life in terms of the book of God and therefore in terms of the God of the book. Only thus can there be a real meeting of minds, a real point of contact with those who must be won for the gospel, and a real challenge of the wisdom of the world in its modern form. If Protestantism first asks for permission to believe in the possibility of the book it will surely be given this permission and be assigned a place as a satellite under the dictatorship of the modern mind.

The Modern Mind

The modern mind will never give permission to believe in the Book. The basic notion of 'freedom' or contingency might at first sight seem to allow even for belief in the Bible as the word of God. But when this notion of 'freedom' is taken not merely as a fact but as a 'reasoned fact' then it soon appears that it excludes Christianity. The modern man stands for the defence of his 'freedom.' He makes himself believe that he is thus the custodian of true civilization and progress. In reality he is suppressing in his own mind the fact that he is a creature of God and should seek his true freedom in obedience to God.

What then will be the response of the modern man to the challenge of the gospel of Paul? The response will be based upon the wholly unexamined assumption of his own ultimacy, autonomy, or 'freedom.' On the basis of this uncritical assumption the modern man will find the gospel of Paul to be (a) out of accord with fact and (b) out of accord with the requirements of logic.

Paul's gospel tells the modern man that he is a creature of God. Modern man assumes that he is not a creature of God. Thus he virtually asserts that the idea of creaturehood is out of accord with the fact of freedom. Then, when asked to tell what his freedom means, he proves that it is contradictory to the idea of creation. Thus he has proved, so he thinks, that creation out of nothing is out of accord with logic. As an irrationalist he assumes the brute fact of 'freedom'; as a

rationalist he defends what he thinks is this same 'freedom' by showing that it would be destroyed by the doctrine of creation. As an irrationalist the modern mind assumes the 'entirely single thing'; as a rationalist he makes universal negative propositions about all possibility.

What is true of the doctrine of creation is equally true of the doctrine of providence and of miracle. The modern man will gladly accept any and all of these doctrines if only they may be taken as brute facts. When he accepts these doctrines the modern man acts as an irrationalist. 'Of course,' he says, 'we want the idea of providence, and of miracle. We are open-minded and ready to receive any and every fact for which reasonable testimony can be given. Perhaps the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus are well attested facts. Why should we not receive them? And if you say that you have been born again, we shall accept your testimony to this fact at face value.'

It is here that the 'Evangelical' or 'Conservative' is likely to fall into a trap. For the moment, he sees only the irrationalist face of modern man. He does not realize that as soon as the doctrines of providence or miracle are accepted by the modern mind they are also destroyed. As an irrationalist the modern man will readily accept all the facts of Paul's gospel but as a rationalist he will classify and naturalize and thus 'destroy' every one of these facts. The facts of Christianity will be accepted as raw recruits, but the finished soldier is the raw recruit classified and drilled on the authority of man himself. The main point that we are concerned to make in this section is that Arminians, though in distinction from Roman Catholics they claim to stand firm upon the Bible as the final revelation of God, are yet unable to challenge effectively the methodology of modern man. Their doctrine of free will makes them a ready prey to the modern notion of contingency. Their refusal to accept the doctrine of the all-controlling plan of God is itself of a rationalistic character; it assumes that that cannot be true which man cannot penetrate exhaustively by logic. Thus it is to be expected that they will also fall prey to the modern idea of rationalism.

History

It should be noted in particular that neither pure irrationalism nor pure rationalism appear by themselves in modern thought. The two are usually kept in balance with one another. And it is precisely this balance that makes the total product so deceptive for the unwary Christian. The aspect of pure contingency or irrationalism has received great emphasis in our day. And this emphasis comes to expression in the idea of history so much to the forefront of discussion in recent

times. It is the recent concept of history as entertained by modern philosophers and theologians that appears, at first sight, to hold out an olive branch to historic Christianity.

Certain underlying principles of the modern view of history may first be enumerated.

(1) Basic to all other considerations is the fact that the modern view of history is anti-metaphysical or phenomenalist. In this the philosophy of history is but following the trend of modern post-Kantian philosophy.¹ Modernist theologians anxiously seek to adjust the doctrines of Christianity to the phenomenalist trend of modern philosophy. The essence of Phenomenalism is a nice balance between rationalism and irrationalism.

(2) The rationalistic or deterministic element in Phenomenalism appears most prominently in its conception of science. Science is usually spoken of as a body of well-known and well-established laws. Scientific knowledge is therefore said to deal with the impersonal and mechanical. So far as history falls into the field of physically observable facts, it too, as well as physics proper, is thought of as impersonal.

(3) Yet it is the irrationalist or contingency aspect of Phenomenalism that appears most prominently when history is directly the subject for discussion. History is then said to be the realm of free personality as over against the realm of the impersonal as found in such areas as physical science. It is when this irrationalist aspect is in the foreground that supernatural revelation in unique historical fact, and even miracles, seem to be recognized as quite proper for modern man to accept.

(4) The disjunction between the realm of the impersonal and the realm of the personal involves absolute dualism. But the modern mind cannot end with dualism. Moreover the idea of determinism as involved in the realm of the impersonal is in itself directly and obviously destructive of knowledge. The same may also be said with respect to the realm of pure contingency by itself. Some sort of union between the two realms must therefore be effected. If the principle of union is taken from the realm of the impersonal, then it obviously cannot allow for any of the facts of Christianity. On the other hand, if the principle of union is taken from the realm of personality, it will have to end in the nature of a limiting concept (*Grenzbegriff*). It will then have to be a pure projection of an ideal such as

¹ Cf. Dagobert D. Runes, *Twentieth Century Philosophy*, New York, 1943.

has never in any sense been realized on earth. It is this that finds expression in the Christological principle of recent theology. All the doctrines of Christianity may then be accepted, but accepted after a thorough metamorphosis.

No pretence is made, of course, of being able to trace fully the development of recent thinking on the problem of history as related to Christianity along these lines. The contention is merely that these elements of impersonalism and personalism are both present in the recent views, and that it is the realm of personalism that currently predominates over the realm of impersonalism.

A. Impersonalism

In the first place, when the mood is that of impersonal science, then the attitude of modern theologians is that of great assurance. 'Queen Victoria was, in her later life, much disturbed as to whether she need believe in Jonah's whale and Balaam's ass; and many cleverer people than the queen felt it a wonderful liberation when they were set free from the bondage to the letter of the Old Testament myths.'² Queen Victoria and the people of her time had been misled by the traditional view of Scripture. Men were then in terrible bondage. Modern scientific, literary and historical criticism had not yet been applied to the Bible. Accordingly the cosmological speculations of men about ultimate causation were accepted as literal truth. The process of *Entmythologisierung* of Scripture had not yet been accomplished.³ Accordingly men still thought that their eternal weal or woe depended upon their right attitude toward certain facts that had happened in the past, such as the death, the physical resurrection, and the stratospheric ascension into a real heaven of a man named Jesus who was said to be the Son of God. The 'religious function of imagination' had not yet been discovered.⁴ Accordingly men still thought that ultimate truth was conveyed to them through intellectual concepts or notions. When they found the idea of a perfect being to be full of intellectual antinomies they were in great distress.

It was therefore with a great sense of liberation that modern man was taught the 'modern use of the Bible.'⁵ Men no longer needed to believe in Elijah's literal levitation into the sky. They were no longer bound by the bands of a narrow

² Alan Richardson, *The Redemption of Modernism*, London (no date), p. 7.

³ Cf. Rudolf Bultman's *Neues Testament und Mythologie*, 1942 and see the excellent pamphlet by H. N. Ridderbos, *De Nieuwste Mythologische Interpretatie van het Nieuwe Testament*.

⁴ Richard Kroner, *The Religious Function of Imagination*, New Haven, 1941.

⁵ Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Modern Use of the Bible*, New York, 1924.

intellectual consistency. Notional truth was replaced by the images of a sanctified imagination.

There are two remarks that may be made at this point. The first is with respect to the claim made by those who believe the Bible in the traditional sense. They do not claim that the versions or translations have been inspired by God; they claim only that the autographs were thus inspired. They do not hold to any dictation theory of inspiration; they hold that the personality of each writer of Scripture was allowed full play. They claim only that the prophets and apostles of Scripture were guided by the Spirit of God and that what they wrote was therefore infallible. Accordingly, orthodox Christians do not expect that they will be able to solve without residue every problem that may be raised with respect to the phenomena of Scripture. But this fact does not make them doubtful of the truth of their fundamental claim. They are willing to wait till the foundations of the rival position are investigated.

This leads to a second remark. On what positive ground, we ask, do men stand when they, with such confidence and assurance, reject the traditional view of Scripture? The confident rejection of this view is unintelligible unless those who make it have themselves offered something better. More than that, such a rejection is without meaning unless men can show that they themselves have a final interpretation of the facts of the phenomenal world to offer. How do men know that the doctrine of creation out of nothing is not true unless they themselves can take us back of 'history' and tell us what is there? Or unless they can assure us that nothing is there. Karl Barth may assure us that he cannot believe in a speaking serpent any more than can anyone else. How does he know that God has not created the physical and the animal world? How does he know that the phenomenal world works according to impersonal laws and is therefore not accessible to special intervention on the part of God? Again, Barth may assure us that the idea of temporal creation must be rejected because it is not possible to think of it in a logically coherent fashion. In doing so he rejects historic Christianity because it does not meet the false test of eighteenth-century rationalism. As for his own system, he would not for all the world have its truth or falsity tried by such a test. But more important than this inconsistency is the point that men who say that creation cannot have happened, that Christ cannot have passed into the clouds toward heaven, must themselves claim omniscience. They must have such an exhaustive knowledge of the facts of the phenomenal world, and of the possibilities behind these facts, as to enable them to understand all their relations to all other facts both past and future. They must be sure of what

does happen in 'ultimate reality' in order to be able to say that God does not have anything to do with the origin and control of the phenomenal world.

In believing the Bible and its teachings as they do, traditional believers humbly offer their interpretation of life in the name of God, whose mind and thoughts are higher than man's mind and thoughts. They do not claim to understand one fact in the phenomenal world exhaustively. They do not claim to understand the facts of nature exhaustively any more than they claim to understand miracles exhaustively. But they appeal to the Creator and Controller of the world as the One who, because of His creation and control of the world, does understand all things in it exhaustively. They admit the existence of mystery in all things for themselves but they do not admit the existence of mystery in anything for God. Accordingly, they do not pretend that they can reduce the relation of God to the world to a system that they themselves can exhaustively understand. They recognize gladly that all things end in mystery for them. But they hold that unless they may believe in the Bible and, therefore, in the God of the Bible, who controls whatsoever comes to pass, all things would end in ultimate mystery for them. They would rather admit relative mystery from the start and with respect to everything than claim virtual omniscience at the beginning and end with ultimate mystery at the last. They fear that such will be the case with those who claim to know the laws of the phenomenal world so well as to be able to say that God cannot have created it and does not control it.

B. Personalism

We turn now to the second aspect of the position of those who hold to the modern view of history in its relation to Christianity. It is the aspect of pure contingency. It is also, therefore, the aspect of pure personality, or of selfhood. This realm of the personal is said to stand in independence over against the world of physical phenomena. In two great works, *Studies in the Philosophy of Religion* and *A Sacramental Universe*, the late Archibald Allan Bowman has defended the independence of the realm of selves over against the realm of physical phenomena. 'Any attempt to qualify the quality of the spiritual and the physical, any monistic prejudice which tends to obscure the absoluteness of the cleavage between these two ultimate modes of being, is fatal to an understanding of either, and is indeed apt to issue, not in a genuine monism, but in a dualism more invidious than that which it is designed to obviate.'⁶ The selves of this realm must not be taken as known by the method of psychological

⁶ *A Sacramental Universe*, Oxford, 1939, 1939, p. 9.

inspection, biological observation and experiment, or historical investigation. The nature of man as an individual must be defined in relation to the human race. And the method of defining man in terms of the race is by a 'philosophy of symbolic forms.' 'The philosophy of symbolic forms starts from the presupposition that, if there is any definition of the nature or "essence" of man, this definition can only be understood as a functional one, not a substantial one. We cannot define man by any inherent principle which constitutes his metaphysical essence—nor can we define him by any inborn faculty or instinct that may be ascertained by empirical observation. Man's outstanding characteristic, his distinguishing mark, is not his metaphysical or physical nature—but his work. It is this work, it is the system of human activities, which defines and determines the circle of "humanity."'⁷ Cassirer tells us that it is to great historians that we owe this modern definition of man as identical with his work. 'It is the gift of the great historians to reduce all mere facts to their *fieri*, all products to processes, all static things or institutions to their creative energies.'⁸

C. R. G. Collingwood

A glance at one of these modern historians tends to corroborate this contention. In his brilliant survey of modern views of history, the late R. G. Collingwood asserts the historian's freedom both from all authority and from all objective data in the traditional sense of the term. 'For the historian there can never be authorities, because the so-called authorities abide a verdict which only he can give.'⁹ This gives him great freedom. Moreover, he is also free from bondage to data that exist prior to his interpretation of them, as in history 'there are properly speaking no authorities, so there are properly speaking no data.'¹⁰ 'The web of imaginative construction is something far more solid and powerful than we have hitherto realized. So far from relying for its validity upon the support of given facts, it actually serves as the touchstone by which we decide whether alleged facts are genuine.'¹¹ 'It is thus the historian's picture of the past, the product of his own *a priori* imagination, that has to justify the sources used in its construction.'¹² Giovanni Gentile expresses a similar point of view when he says: 'A fact is by definition *quod factum est (perfectum)*'; that is to say, it is

⁷ Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, New Haven, 1944, pp. 67, 68.

⁸ *Idem.*, p. 185.

⁹ *The Idea of History*, Oxford, 1946, p. 238.

¹⁰ *Idem.*, p. 243.

¹¹ *Idem.*, p. 244.

¹² *Idem.* p. 245.

something past and no longer real.' ¹³ The historian is therefore not bound by any such matters as authorities or objective data, whether past or present. There are, to be sure, authorities and there are data. But they receive their meaning for the historian when he has related them to his present experience. And all experience is present experience and as such self-authenticating. 'The historical past is the world of ideas which the present evidence creates in the present.' ¹⁴

D. Karl Barth

It is wholly in line with this modern philosophical notion of pure contingency that Karl Barth uses the freedom of God as the main interpretative principle of his *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. Barth constantly militates against every form of system. God has not given any permanent or final revelation of Himself to man. If He had done so, He would not, thereafter, have been free in His actions. And God wants to be free to turn into the complete opposite of Himself for the help of man. He is wholly identical with His revelation in action toward men. He is what He is as action toward and within men.

Corresponding to this notion of the freedom of God is the freedom of man. Man, too, is nothing except what he is in action; he is what he is in his action in relation to God.

It is of special importance to observe that the freedom of man is for Barth the same in character as the freedom of God. Man's freedom is participation in the attributes of God through Christ. Of this we shall speak more fully presently. For the moment we are concerned to intimate that for Barth, no less than for modern philosophers, the real subject of predication is 'reality' or 'being' as such. If God is free, then man is free with the same sort of freedom with which God is free; both participate in the same being.

E. Alan Richardson

It is in line with this modern philosophical notion of pure contingency that Alan Richardson speaks when he says in criticism of the older liberalism: 'It is our contention that if modernism is redeemable, if it is to be a potential force in the making of the religion of the future, it must not be a theory, a *corpus* of conclusions, a set of liberal dogmas, or even a series of liberal principles: it must

¹³ Giovanni Gentile, in *Philosophy and History*, Oxford, 1939, p. 99.

¹⁴ R. G. Collingwood, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

be a spirit, an *ethos*, a method.' ¹⁵ One may thus believe what he pleases as long as he has the proper spirit. We shall presently note that the 'proper spirit' requires the rejection of all the doctrines of historic Christianity. But for the moment we are concerned to note the apparently attractive promise of absolute freedom that is held out to weary pilgrims by those who live in the realm of pure contingency.

F. Daniel Lamont

It is to be greatly regretted that men of great stature in the church have allowed themselves to be trapped by the attractive promise of freedom offered by modern philosophy. A case in point is that of the late Daniel Lamont. In his book *Christ and the World of Thought*, he seeks to make Christian concepts relevant to the mind of the modern man. For that purpose he works out a dimensional philosophy similar to that of Karl Heim. There is first, he says, the dimension of the I-my world. It is the realm of the personal, that is, of the finitely personal. But then there is the dimension of the I-Thou. It is the realm of the impersonal. With it fits the observer attitude. Finally there is the dimension of the I-Absolute. Now the relation between man and God takes place exclusively in the present. 'The Absolute is the Eternal Present.' ¹⁶ The present is the realm of the spiritual. ¹⁷ 'Whatever exists in the present exists in non-objective form.' ¹⁸ The present defies the observer attitude. All objects are in the past.

On this basis we are not surprised to find that Lamont agrees with Schleiermacher that 'the essence of Revelation is not communication of doctrine but impartation of life.' ¹⁹ No revelation could come to us from the past for everything which passes from my Present through my corridor into my Object Moment has the stamp of an imperfect race as well as the stamp of my imperfect self upon it.

For Lamont, then, as for Barth, the contact between God and man must come exclusively through subjective confrontation in the present. It is here that all the limitations and relativities of the objective past are said to fall away. It is argued that the very idea of revelation as undoubted confrontation with God cannot otherwise be maintained than by putting it thus in the realm of the personal, the

¹⁵ Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁶ *Christ and the World of Thought*, Edinburgh, 1934, p. 105.

¹⁷ *Idem.*, p. 77.

¹⁸ *Idem.*, p. 79.

¹⁹ *Idem.*, p. 145.

spiritual, the present; by completely liberating it from contact with the past and any authoritative interpretations of the past.

G. Phenomenalism

It is perfectly true that the modern theologian does not altogether and in every sense break his connection with the world of objects and of the past. To this we shall return presently. For the moment we have taken the notion of pure contingency by itself, just as before we took the notion of pure rationality by itself. It is only by thus analysing each ingredient of the compound with which we are concerned by itself that its properties can be seen for what they are.

Above it was shown that when modern man was in a rationalist mood he was assured that all the doctrines of historic Christianity were totally wrong. Now it appears that when he is in an irrationalist mood he seems to be favourably disposed to those same doctrines. He beckons the pilgrim to come into his realm and with great gusto holds aloft the banner of true freedom for all. If they will only come into the realm of pure contingency, Christians may hold to the doctrines (1) of creation out of nothing, (2) of the providence of God over all things, (3) of the special revelation of God through the historic life of Christ, and (4) of the death and resurrection of Christ. A good deal is said by way of criticism on the static notions of the Greeks. A good deal is said by way of praise for Christianity with its ideas of a dynamic relation of God to His people. It seems to many orthodox Christians as though the modern view of history, containing as it does so large an element of contingency, is particularly favourable to the idea of a unique revelation of God through the Christ of history.

It is obvious, however, that a Christianity that comes to expression through the idea of pure contingency is no Christianity at all. The 'wholly other' God of Barth is wholly without meaning for man. The wholly unique Christ of the contingency thought of Brunner is the purely single thing about which nothing can be said. The exclusively present confrontation of God and man is exclusively private and purely mystical. In the idea of pure contingency there is no room for any sort of criterion by which truth may be set over against falsehood; Christianity could in no sense on this basis claim to be the true religion. All religions would be true and all would be false. The freedom promised by the idea of pure contingency is the freedom of anarchy.

It is to be expected therefore that the promise of freedom for believers in the traditional view of Scripture will not actually be kept. The view of history held by

recent writers is not exclusively that of pure contingency. The realm of the personal is always somehow said to be related to the realm of the impersonal. Man has a body as well as a soul. He is related to, and dependent upon, the realm of pure determinism as well as upon the realm of pure indeterminism. If Christians are therefore given permission to believe in the authority of Scripture, in the doctrine of providence, and in the miraculous work of Christ they will be asked to modify these doctrines so as to have them conform to the particular form of the mixture of pure determinism and pure indeterminism, of pure rationalism and pure irrationalism, that is in vogue today.

H. Herbert Butterfield

So, for instance, Herbert Butterfield graciously gives Christians permission to believe in the doctrine of providence. He studies secular history, including the facts of the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth so far as these fall in the realm of such secular history. He finds that history has a way of going on 'over our heads'; there is much of determinism in it. He also finds that much change is accomplished in history by the deeds of men; there is much of indeterminism in it. Why should we, then, not speak as if there were a universal mind, directing men's affairs in general, leaving room for the freedom or the will of man? 'It is better worldly-wisdom, even when we are only looking for a pictorial presentation, to think of history as though an intelligence were moving over the story, taking its bearings afresh after everything men do, and making its decisions as it goes along—decisions sometimes unpredictable and carrying our purposes further than we wanted them to go.'²⁰ Will not Christians feel relieved when they are thus authorized by an outstanding historian to hold their doctrine of the providence of God? Only if they are willing to compromise that doctrine beyond recognition.

I. Revelation

It is precisely this that the modern theologian is willing to do. He wants by all means to make Christianity relevant to our age. Relevancy means more to him than truth. The idea of revelation is much in vogue in our day among modern theologians. But the transcendent God of Karl Heim and the 'wholly other' God of Karl Barth have not created the world, do not control the world, and do not in any sense determine the destiny of men. They are pure figments of man's imagination; they have no attribute except such as are assigned to them by man.

²⁰ Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History*, London, 1949, p. 109.

But they are assigned definite attributes in terms of a philosophy that excludes the God of the Scriptures. And therefore he who holds to such deities is not permitted to hold to the God of Scripture. And so the promise of freedom to the orthodox believer is not kept. He is not permitted to hold to the God of Scripture. He is not allowed to hold to the Christ of Scripture.

Richardson may say that the new modernism must not be a set of doctrines or even a set of principles, but he forthwith proceeds to put forward a set of principles and of doctrines. As Christians are 'liberated' from the old narrow outlook 'they will embark upon the venture of reordering society upon a new and divine plan.'²¹ 'The task before the Church in our generation is that of realizing the values of the Christian gospel in modern social life. It is to create a community which shall live on the basis of the eternal rather than of the temporal, on a basis of social well-being rather than of individual self-satisfaction.'²² And if the spirit of the Eternal seems too abstract to have any meaning it will no doubt become concrete as current social theories built in total independence of the God of Scripture develop.

The Modern Gospel

The broad features of the 'Christian gospel' as visualized by the modern mind include therefore at least such points as the following:

(1) Mankind, it is said, has a common origin from some form of animal ancestry. Creation *ex nihilo* is not to be accepted. The idea of creation is to be accepted, but as some form of *Saga*, as a pictorial presentation. This is the general view of such men as Barth, Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr and many others. The idea of *Saga* allows the physical, biological and psychological aspects of man to be interpreted in purely impersonal, non-Christian terms. *Saga* is said to deal with the realm of the personal, the realm of pure contingency. If anything intelligible is to be said about this realm and therefore about man's origin, it has to be done in terms of categories of impersonal science. And of this world of impersonal science nothing intelligible can be said unless everything is said. In other words, the world of pure contingency or personality is the world of the 'entirely single thing.' There is uniqueness, but such uniqueness as is meaningless. Therefore this world of pure contingency must be brought into relation with the world of the impersonal, of pure determinism and pure rationalism. But as soon

²¹ *The Redemption of Modernism*, p. 70.

²² *Idem.*, p. 71.

as the spiritual truths of the world of personality are taken out of the 'present' they freeze into the deterministic objectivity of the dead past. If the soul speaks it is, alas, no longer the soul that speaks.

(2) In the second place, the modern mind suggests that all mankind has evil in it by virtue of its finitude. There was no original perfection in an historical paradise. The Christian who accepts of the favours of modern thought, either in the form of its pure rationalism, or in the form of its pure contingency, or in the form of a combination of these two, will have to give up his idea of Adam and Eve as historical figures. Barth assures us that he cannot believe in 'a speaking serpent.' Brunner affirms that in thinking of the fall of man as historical, orthodox believers reduce man's responsibility to biological and physical, and therefore to deterministic, categories. Orthodox Christians are told that the fall took place, or rather is taking place, in the realm of the spiritual, the realm of the present. Each man, says Kierkegaard, is in the same place where Adam is said to be in the pictorial presentation of the Old Testament. Thus the modern view, in rejecting the orthodox view of the origin of sin on account of its 'irrationalism,' its supposedly mythological character, also rejects the orthodox view on account of its 'rationalism and determinism,' because it relates man to a general plan of God. The modern view then substitutes its own irrationalism (its notion of pure contingency) for the 'irrationalism' of orthodoxy and its own rationalism (its impersonal fate) for the 'rationalism' of orthodoxy. Each man is said to be his own Adam. As such each man originates sin in the absolute sense. Nothing can be said about him while he is in the realm of pure contingency. In that realm how could man know himself and his responsibilities? Those questions must not be asked. Or, if they are asked, they are at once answered in purely rationalist terms. For the purely individual self, floating in the pure vacuum of pure irrationality, must be somehow related to the man called John Brown in the phenomenal world. And this relationship cannot, on the modern view, be expressed in other than purely rationalist or determinist terms.

(3) In the third place, says the modern mind, all mankind is being saved through Christ. To be saved does not mean to be free from the wrath of God. Man is not guilty in the orthodox sense of the term. When Reinhold Niebuhr speaks of original sin, he is careful to warn his readers that this is not to be taken as the literalists take it.

(a) To be 'saved' in the modern theological circle means being lifted up in the scale of being. It is to become eternal from being temporal. But to become eternal is not to become static; it is to be always active in making progress

toward a set goal. This goal cannot be defined except in terms of pure negation, and particularly in terms of negation of the orthodox Christian position. To be sure, the goal is to glorify God. But nothing can be said about the nature of God. That is, nothing different can be said about God than about man. The moment that which is different about God is said, it is no longer God of whom it is said. Therefore, there is no information available to man as to what God desires man to do; there is no criterion of judgment between right and wrong. No one can say of any set of propositions that God has said them; if they are a set of propositions, they are not of God. If God has spoken His will, it is no longer God that has spoken. God is wholly hidden in His very revelation. This is particularly true of the revelation of God in Christ. Barth is most insistent that he who in any way tampers with the wholly hidden character of the revelation of God in Christ has wholly missed the meaning of the Christian gospel. Yet though he is thus insistent on the fact that no one knows what Christ is, and what it means to be saved, he is certain that Christ has saved all men and is saving all men, and that this is not done by the way orthodox theology says men are saved. Of course Barth knows very well how men are saved. It is, he virtually argues, by man's participation in the being of God. There is nothing else he could say on his general assumptions. That is to say, it is salvation of man by man. For, on the modern view, God is no more than an hypostatization of man's own ideals. The God of the modern view is a God of whom nothing can be known, who cannot express His will, who cannot be sinned against, and who therefore cannot forgive sins or do anything to help man in his needs. He has no power over the world. He could not punish man if he would; in any case he would not because He does not exist in any sense that means anything to man.

(b) As, according to the modern view, all men are saved, so it is also said that all are saved. For the modern view, the idea of orthodox theology that some men are saved and others are not saved is immoral and intellectually inconceivable. It is at this point especially that the realm of pure freedom or contingency is itself invaded by the adherents of the modern view with the tools of pure determinism and rationalism. It is surely impressive to watch the great theologian of the freedom of God, Karl Barth, argue with vehemence for the absolute impossibility of the existence of any man that is not saved. The great stress in his anthropology is that self-consciousness involves Christ-consciousness. Man cannot be man unless he is a sinner; he is a sinner in virtue of his finitude; but neither can man be man unless he is saved in 'Christ.' Nothing can be said about the pure individual. He must be related to the pure universal. To be sure, nothing can be said about a pure universal; it must be united to the pure particular. But when the pure particular is somehow—no one knows how—joined to the pure universal then we

have The Individual. He alone exists; all individual men that 'exist' must exist by way of participation in The Individual. It is this great 'discovery' of Kierkegaard that is offered as the panacea of all the individual and the social ills of men by Niebuhr, by Barth, by Brunner, and by a host of others. Yet when analysed into its component parts of pure determinism and pure indeterminism, this notion of The Individual appears to offer to man nothing but autosoterism. Man must lift himself by his own shoe laces. On this view men are, of course, in no way dependent on the 'accidents' of history, e.g. on hearing the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth as the only name that is given unto men by which they must be saved. The Christ is then everywhere present; the 'unique' historical revelation of God in Christ is said to be virtually present to those who have never heard of Him as well as to those who have. He is present in forgiving grace basically as much to those who, like Judas Iscariot, deny Him, as to those who, like Peter, accept Him. In all men there is potential faith or they would not be men. And it is faith that counts, whether it is attached to objective facts, such as the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, or not. In fact, such data as the death and the resurrection of Christ must in any case be so interpreted as to be happening now and everywhere in every man, else, we are told, they do not have any meaning.

(c) It is thus that we have reached the Christological interpretation of the gospel record which is so popular in our day. Orthodox believers are given freedom to believe in Christ and in the 'unique' nature of His work. But the once-for-all character of this work is the once-for-all nature of reality as a whole. The Christ of the modern view stands for the ideal perfection of mankind according to currently accepted social views. Not all modern theologians go as far as does Bultmann in his reduction of the New Testament message to the categories of an existentialist philosophy. But it is not too much to say that the current modern view holds, with modern philosophy in general to the ultimacy of time. God Himself is said to be in, and to have, history. Redemptive history, argues Oscar Cullmann, has no eternity back of it and has no eternity before it. All reality is through and through temporal. There is no great difference between the view of Cullmann and that of Bultmann, or the view of Barth.¹

In Christ all men exist and in Christ all men are potentially saved; that is the message of modern theologians. This message must be challenged as Paul challenged the wisdom of the Greeks in his day. For the message of the modern gospel is to all intents and purposes the same as the wisdom of the Greeks. Recent modern theology, and especially the recent emphasis on the so-called historical revelation of God in Christ, fits in with recent philosophy in general.

¹ Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Times* translated by Floyd V. Filson, Philadelphia, 1950.

Modern idealist philosophy is not radically different from ancient idealist philosophy. Modern idealist philosophy no less than ancient idealist philosophy, as the first Christians met it, will accept the message of Christianity only on condition of absorbing it into a larger coherence. Modern historians, such as Collingwood, Butterfield and Jaspers² assume that the history of Israel is to be explained without residue in the same categories as is the history of other nations. And they assume that all history is to be explained in terms of itself without any reference to the existence of the God of Scripture who controls all things that come to pass.

It is in agreement with this general tendency to emphasize modern philosophy as a whole that modern theologians, particularly those of the school of Kierkegaard, stress the 'uniqueness' of Christianity. But they do not fail to incorporate this 'uniqueness' into coherence with a whole which reduces the uniqueness of the story of Paul the Apostle to the class of the uniqueness of all other religions. The criterion of truth, says Bowman, must be that of the adequacy of concept. There must be no claim on the part of any religion that it alone is true and that others are false. Truth and falsity are relative concepts. And who knows what is the nature of truth? No one does. Everyone is searching for it. As contingent history is admitted to have no criterion within itself, man is regarded as wholly and exclusively historical. Christ is wholly and exclusively historical. God is wholly and exclusively historical. And the historical has no criterion within itself. And yet it is on this basis, which admittedly is no basis, that orthodox Christianity is rejected.

It is thus that God has made foolish the wisdom of this world in the modern day no less than He did in the day of Paul. Instead of accepting the favours of modern man, as Romanism and Arminianism do, we should challenge the wisdom of this world. It must be shown to be utterly destructive of predication in any field. It has frequently been shown to be such. It is beyond the possibility of the mind of man to bind together the ideas of pure determinism and of pure indeterminism and by means of that combination to give meaning to life. Either modern man will have to admit that he knows everything or else he will have to admit that he knows nothing. The only alternative to this is that he claims both absurdities at the same time.

Let us again remind ourselves that what has been said does not mean that Christians are in themselves wiser than are other men. What they have they have by grace. They must be all things to all men. But it is not kindness to tell patients

² *Geschichte*, Zurich, 1949.

that need strong medicine that nothing serious is wrong with them. Christians are bound to tell men the truth about themselves; that is the only way of bringing them to recognize the mercy, the compassion, of Christ. For if men are told the truth about themselves, and if they are warned against the false remedies that establish men in their wickedness, then, by the power of the Spirit of God, they will flee to the Christ through whom alone they must be saved.