

B. E. Meland: A Contemporary Doctrine of God

W. CREIGHTON PEDEN

Since Schleiermacher, a major task of Christian theology has been how to express in an intelligible way the Christian faith to an everchanging, complex cultural situation. This task has centered on the development of an adequate contemporary theologian who has confronted this issue in a creative and constructive fashion. In speaking of Meland's theological pilgrimage, Daniel Day Williams offers this evaluation: "I believe that when our theological era is appraised in a time when there can be some more objectivity about it, Meland's work will be recognized as having achieved not only an insight into the issues but a balance in the handling of those issues which is sound and prophetic."¹

Meland presupposes that modern man is seeking an objective reality around which to integrate his life. This reality he asserts to be God, and it is his intention to point out the functioning characteristics of this reality and the necessary responsibility for man in integrating his life around this reality. Meland uses a variety of terms to point to the characteristics of this objective reality which is God. At this point we shall list some of these terms to indicate the emphasis of his thought. These terms are: "The System of Progressive Integration"; "A force for Growth"; "Growth"; "Growth of Organic Unity"; "Silent Process"; "A Silent Working"; "Creative Order"; "A Sensitive Nature Within Nature"; "Source of Good"; "Saving Creativity"; "Source of All Value"; "Supreme Reality"; And "Creative Source of All Being". Our approach will be to consider how Meland's doctrine of God develops over the years

in his writings. Two of his recent books will be considered for the purpose of presenting a summary account of his doctrine of God. Our purpose in this approach is to follow the contextual emphasis in which Meland's doctrine of God develops.

In *Modern Man's Worship*, Meland rejects all traditional categories of deity and asserts that man will be able to develop an adequate understanding and relationship with God as he comes to be at home in the universe. This process of becoming at home in the universe involves accepting the fact that one is a creature of the earth, that the universe sustains one, and that there is a functioning force within the universe to which one must be related constructively in order to fulfill one's human nature.

To answer the question directly, then, as to how the modern worshiper may recover awareness of reality, it is my conviction that it will come through some adjustment to the universe that has given us life. It will come through full orientation in the natural environment which sustains us and by means of which we fashion our destiny. But before we can achieve this adjustment to actual sustaining processes, or even approach the conditions or orientation in the universe, we must become fully aware of our intimacy with its life. We must acknowledge ourselves creatures of Earth, whose air we breathe, by whose herbs we are nourished, and by whose waters we are refreshed and sustained.²

What Meland is saying is that man is an organic part of cosmic life. If man can acquire this sense of belonging to the age-old cosmic process, then man will have the psychological basis for common devotion to reality. When man becomes attuned to the objective reality of the cosmos, he will then become aware viv-

¹ Daniel Day Williams, "The Theology of Bernard E. Meland," *Criterion*, Vol. 3, Summer 1964, p. 9.

W. CREIGHTON PEDEN, Callaway Professor of Philosophy at Augusta College, Augusta, Georgia, was previously on the faculty of Millikin University, Decatur, Illinois.

² B. E. Meland, *Modern Man's Worship*. (here after MMW). London: Harper, 1934, p. 143.

idly of that functioning within the universe which creates, sustains and redeems him.

"Contemplating this vast, on-going process of life in this intimate way makes one vividly aware of the great community of cosmic activities which sustain and promote life. The cosmos becomes a community, near and neighborly. It is, indeed, a vivid awareness of God."³

In summary, it could be said that the objective reality of God increases for man in proportion as man's activities become relevant to the natural process. Man is a part of the universe, and there is a force within the universe which works in favor of man. This force is God, and man becomes aware that the responsiveness of these environing realities, actually operating on man's behalf and aiding in the fulfillment of his life, is the benevolence of God.

It is Meland's contention that the term "God" is purely a religious or contemplative concept, that it is a collective term meaning "those most important conditions upon which human life depends."⁴ This collective term is valuable to man in worship, used for the purpose of devotional address. Yet, man is related to those most important conditions in other ways besides worship. Man tries to adjust to these conditions and to investigate them for the purpose of theoretical reflection. When man engages in this practical adjustment and theoretical reflection, he should set aside this collective term "God" and use in its place terms that do not confuse the empirical character of these conditions.

Meland is asserting that God empirically is a community of activities within the universe which sustain man in his existence, that empirically God is pluralistic. At the same time, he is asserting that in worship these many activities are unified under the concept "God" as the object of worship. For the religious purpose of worship we consider God to be One,

but for practical or theoretical purposes we assume God to be Many. It is clear that Meland is raising the age-old problem of "the one and the many", focusing it upon his doctrine of God. In essence, he is saying that God is unified for man in worship and pluralistic for man in his practical and analytical activities.

Meland moves from his pluralist and unified view of God to a consideration of personality in relation to God. His view of the nature of personality is as follows:

Personality, in fact, properly conceived, is not individuated at all; it only appears to be atomistic. Actually it is a network of relations reaching out into a vast community of behaviors. For the sake of convenience we have come to think of a personality solely in terms of the physical senses; but the working of that physical organism reach far beyond the space-time area that is concretely envisaged.⁵

Based on his definition of personality and our tendency to limit personality to physical organism, Meland denies personality to God. But he is careful to point out that this denial is only a half-truth.

It then appears that we have hardly dealt with the matter adequately when we have merely said that God is not a personality. For in saying that, we are uttering a half-truth, the other half of which is that personal life, however inadequate and partial, is included in whatever reality does describe God.⁶

Meland is asserting that neither the on-going-process of the universe nor God is a physical organism displaying personality. At the same time he clearly points out that man, as a personality, has a personal relationship with those conditions which create and sustain him. Thus, in denying personality to God, he affirms that man is capable of and has a personal relationship with God.

Up to this point Meland has asserted that God is a select portion of activities within the universe upon which man

³ MMW p. 176.

³ MMW p. 197.

⁴ MMW p. 172.

⁶ B. E. Meland, "Toward a Valid View of God," *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 24, p. 204.

depends for the fulfillment of his human nature. Man gains an awareness of the functions of God as he becomes aware of his dependent relationship to the cosmos. In worship man seeks an awareness of the Oneness of this objective reality which sustains him, although man practically and analytically understands these activities to be pluralistic. Since these activities are not a physical organism, they cannot be considered a personality; but the denial of personality to God does not deny to man a personal relationship with these activities. Man has the responsibility to adjust constructively to these sustaining activities in order that his human nature can be fulfilled. We shall turn now to this process of constructive adjustment, which Meland practically develops in **Write Your Own Ten Commandments**.

In this publication, Meland develops the concern that man should constructively engage himself in the process of growth toward a healthful fulfillment of human nature. Granted that there are these activities working in the universe for the benefit of man's fulfillment, man still has an important responsibility for developing a design for living that will be compatible with the activities.

Every man guides his own life to some extent and in one form or another. Every time a man makes a decision, or fails to reach one, he shapes the course of his day; and the cumulative results of these daily events condition the course of his years . . . You may have a design for living, or you can just let things happen . . . We are not victims merely, neither of heaven nor of earth forces; we are creative organisms that **respond** in this way or that. And while our response is conditions, both by circumstances of birth and by our sphere of living, we may bring conscious control to bear upon the order of living that is evolving us and evolving in us by reason of these determining influences.⁷

There is a Creative Order in existence, and it is man's responsibility to develop

a pattern of living which will enable him to grow in relation to this order. Meland develops his own ten commandments as aids in this process of growth. "The basic assumption underlying these commandments, then, is that the **chief end of man is to grow, and to grow as significantly as capacities permit.**"⁸ Meland points out that growth is a process in which the individual responds "to the stimuli of environment in such a way that new meaningful relations ensue."⁹

The process of growth in which man must become engaged is on the human level but an illustration of the functioning of those activities which in worship we term "God." It is man's responsibility to create the conditions in his life in order that he can participate in the growth process of God. Meland describes this process of growth in man and the universe as the working of "a Silent Process" and asserts that this Silent Process has been working long before the existence of man, creating the structures through which man could emerge and find meaningful existence.

This Silent Process was here long before man came upon these earthly scenes. Back in the distant past, aeons of time ago, when the world was a simple mass, the growth of organic unity was barely articulate. Yet structure was in the making. Gradually its complexity increase, rising from forms undefined to the naked eye to inorganic structures clearly defined. The organic life and vegetation emerged. There came a time, with the ripening of environment, when creatures such as we appeared.¹⁰

Thus, Meland asserts that this Supreme Reality working in our midst which we have dared to call "God is to be discerned as a growth in our midst, a Silent Process making us what we are and shaping us into what we shall become."¹¹ Those activities bringing about growth of value in the universe, which occur in relation to man's existence, are empirical evidence of the demands of God placed

⁸ TC p. 63.

⁹ TC p. 73.

¹⁰ TC p. 141.

¹¹ TC p. 140.

⁷ B. E. Meland, *Write Your Own Ten Commandments*. (here after TC) Chicago: Willet, Clark & Co., 1938, p. 27-8.

upon man to respond constructively to this growth. There is a "creative venture" in the universe, shaping the process of chaos into value. Man participates in this venture as he creates a design for living which enables him to grow. God is growth, a creative venture, A Silent Process creating and sustaining man, if man will respond adequately.

Up to this point, Meland's doctrine of God has been oriented from the perspective of morality or individual behavior. Although he has been concerned to point out that God is that process in the universe upon which man depends for fulfillment or growth of value, a primary concern of his perspective has been the manner in which the individual functions in relation to God in order to be fulfilled. This theistic individualism fits in with the general individualistic approach which dominated the popular American philosophy of life during the 1920's and 1930's. During the 1930's the theological community was undergoing a transformation whereby a greater degree of social concern developed. Meland's doctrine of God participates in this transformation of perspective as his interest moves from God and individual to God and culture. Let us turn now to this changing emphasis in his doctrine of God, as illustrated in his writings immediately following the Second World War.

Meland comes out of the war realizing that mankind needs to realize empirically that there is a reality at work not just creating and sustaining man, but a reality which is redeeming man. The shift in his doctrine of God now is to give emphasis to God the redeemer, to the Christ-event which can and is existentially transforming mankind. Meland now develops his doctrine of God from three perspectives in an attempt to reassure man that there is a God working to redeem man and in an attempt to challenge man to accept the responsibility for creating the social and individual conditions through which God's redemption can occur. These three perspectives are represented in his three works of this period: pointing to seeds of

redemption which are at work within the universe, asserting the spiritual dimension of culture, and calling for the necessary reawakening of the Christian faith. Let us briefly consider his doctrine of God from these perspectives.

In *Seeds of Redemption*, it is Meland's purpose to stress the sensitive character of God's nature which is different from the sheer dynamisms of activity without form or value that seem to dominate man's present state of existence. He wants to reassure man that even in these troubled times when life seems dominated by the chaos of change instead of being oriented to value, God is quietly working to redeem us.

Yet, so long as human beings exist and there is flexibility among them as well as incentive to alter prevailing tendencies which have made for deterioration of spiritual sensibilities, the prospects for redemption are present. . . I venture also the possibility of our survival, and seek on this basis to perceive the gentle forces now at work in this shattered world which, given enough time, may become redemptive in the sense of being adequate for providing conditions in which the creativity of God can work to fulfil our destiny as a people.¹²

A variety of terms is used to characterize the way in which God is working to redeem man, and these are: Sensitive Nature within Nature who creates and recreates us; the Source of Good; Saving Creativity; the Process bringing about a sensitive working for meaning and character; the Source of All Value; the source of being; and God as the unlimited companion. By these terms Meland tries to indicate that the nature of God is more than creation, that God's nature is also redemptive. At the same time Meland is careful to point out that even though we are saved by the grace of God, a grace for which we are not responsible, man must accept his responsibility for creating the conditions necessary for God's grace to be redemptive. In essence, he asserts that God is not a superman who can

¹² B. E. Meland, *Seeds of Redemption*. New York: Macmillan, 1947, p. viii.

manipulate the situation redemptively at will, that God works within the limits which man helps to create.

One can say with propriety that God, like any other creative artist, works within the limitations of the mediums that are available to him at any given time; and that his creative working, because it is functional to the circumstances of the age, is productive of those events which are determined by the needs of history at any given time.¹³

Meland has added two emphases to his doctrine of God in **Seeds of Redemption**. On the one hand, he has stressed the redemptive nature of God, that man is saved by a grace which is not his own. On the other hand, he has stressed the realization that God is limited in his redemptive work by the circumstances with which God must work. In this latter point, he asserts that man must be responsible constructively in his relationship with God, not just for growth of meaning, but for the sake of salvation.

In **America's Spiritual Culture**, Meland gives emphasis to two other dimensions of the nature of God. These are that God reveals himself creatively and redemptively within culture and that God is sovereign. He is not accepting culture without a criteria for evaluating it. His criteria are those redemptive aspects of culture which are oriented to value instead of the chaos of change. These same criteria should also be used in evaluating the life of the individual and the church. Meland sees the church and society rejecting culture as being alien from God, and he sees in this rejection the blocking of God's redemptive activity. It is asserted that there are definite spiritual aspects within culture which must be taken seriously, if man is to fulfill his responsibility in relation to God.

This view of God revealing himself in culture is based on Meland's view of the structure of experience. God affords a direction of value to the evolving structure of experience of the culture. Man is

dependent upon and participates in the structure of experience. In this sense, man is dependent upon the creative grace of God and participates in God's grace. It is man's responsibility to help fulfill the spirit of God created in him. Man cannot fulfill his spiritual nature if he cuts himself off spiritually from the revelation of God in culture.

Meland develops his emphasis on the sovereignty of God in relation to his view of God revealing himself in culture. His point about the sovereignty of God is three-fold. He asserts that man can realize the sovereignty only as he comes to understand that God reveals himself spiritually in culture, that God is the Supreme Reality of all life and not just of individuals. His second point is to reassert that man, individually and socially, must create the necessary conditions in order for the grace of God to be operative.

Let us note this elementary fact as our beginning: People living together either live in such a way as to create a condition wherein the growth of personality and human community is possible, or they do not. When they do not, the spiritual possibilities of that society are blocked, and the human personalities within its experience continuous frustration . . . When, however, some measure of organic unity is achieved, the processes of the corporate life becomes the media through which men and groups may experience significant satisfactions and through which the citizenry may achieve continuous growth toward fulfillment . . . Our concern here is to make clear that to the degree that the corporate life achieves this kind of functioning, it begins to be a **religiously motivated** commonwealth, because its processes make possible the release of creativeness in individuals and groups and provide conditions favorable to human growth which will open men more and more to the sovereignty of the Supreme Reality governing all life. . .¹³

For his third point, Meland tries to make clear that one goes to the Source of All Value in order to understand sovereignty and not to the immediate values or to a supernatural god.

In **The Reawakening of Christian**

¹³ B. E. Meland, *America's Spiritual Culture*. New York: Harper, 1948.

Faith. Meland gives emphasis to the following dimensions of God: the sovereignty of God, the God of history, the redemptive God, and the power of God. God is presented as "a tender working" in the universe which transforms chaos in such a way that value is created and sustained. He is asserting that the sovereignty of God can best be understood if God is seen as a creative tenderness to which force must yield. "That tenderness is sovereign over force in every expression of creativity, I submit is the most tremendous idea of history." Even though tenderness is sovereign over force, it is not absolutely sovereign. There are definite times when force of chaos rules, which affirms the point that God's sovereignty is limited to the conditions with which he must work.

This sovereign God is the God of history, which is to say that God is the God of the accumulated traditions of culture. History provides the empirical data of a pattern of the sovereignty of tenderness over force. This pattern is attested to in the Christian tradition, but it is not unique to the Christian tradition. Meland points to the many trends in history which exhibit force triumphant over tenderness, but he asserts that if the major tendency was not for structure of possible value instead of chaos, in effect, there would be no history. Since the sovereignty of tenderness over force is God functioning and this functioning is occurring in history, God is the God of history.

To speak of God's operations in history as a tender working is not to reduce it to sentiment which may or may not be ignored; it is rather to speak of it as a subtle, intricate, disciplined, restraining, resourceful, persistent, patient, and deep-working process, not unlike the skill or the artist hand, that shapes the crude clay into visible structures of beauty and intelligibility.¹⁴

This God of tenderness working in history is redemptive. God has created the structures of human consciousness, and it

is through these structures that his grace must confront man. Events occur when God, the process of tenderness, affords a direction of value instead of the chaos of change; thus, God makes possible the becoming of each event. Since past events participate in the becoming of new events and since some of these events have given over to some degree to force instead of tenderness, God redeems these distorted past events by recreating them in such a way that they can participate in the process of tenderness over force. Meland realizes that this redemptive process is a mystery which cannot be grasped fully by his descriptive statement, and he asserts that the religious drama of sin and redemption is pointing out the same redemptive character of God. Thus, God creates man; man sins, and God recreates him by his redemptive grace.

The Whole drama of sin and redemption roots in this creative act. In it, the intention of God is made manifest, namely, to bring into actuality, vivid events of spirit, capable of bearing in their structures of consciousness, the very creativeness that has brought them into being. In this sense, the Creator gives of His sensitive nature to His creatures in the expectation that in them, His spirit will be actualized and enjoyed.

The whole of this mystery we cannot know; but that a sensitivity works in the depths of all of us, and in the world, to realize the fulfilment of spirit, is so evident to the reflective mind that one wonders that it can be so widely missed.¹⁵

The very fact that God is sovereign over force, that he is the God of history, and that he is redemptive in his relationship to man points to the Power of God. God's power can be seen in the fact that man alone cannot provide the becoming event with a direction of value. Only God is able to provide the becoming event with that basic structure oriented to value, instead of a structure oriented to chaos or power. Without the creative and redemptive work of God no event could display value, beauty, meaning or

¹⁴ B. E. Meland, *The Reawakening of Christian Faith*. (here after RCF) New York: Macmillan, 1949, p. 117-8.

¹⁵ RCF p. 108.

intelligibility. The power of God is the power that creates, sustains and redeems, and without this Power chaos of evil and destruction would reign.

His power lies in the fact that He, and He alone, can give to every situation of actuality, intelligibility, beauty, and meaning. Cultures can ignore His tender working; men may flaunt their arrogance and proud intellects or wills; but they do so at the peril of inviting inescapable evil and destruction, by reason of the fact that without the dominance of this tender working, which give order, restraint, resourcefulness to every actual occasion, the discipline and incentive to live meaningfully collapse.¹⁶

In *Higher Education and the Human Spirit*, Meland gives emphasis to God as the creative ground of being. It must be remembered that he is developing an educational theory that tries to take seriously the spiritual working of God; and, consequently, he considers his view of God from the perspective of God as mystery. In education, man has come to approach reality from a perspective which assumes that the data of reality reveal the true and complete nature of reality. Meland asserts that there is a mystery operating within reality which is not revealed completely by the data of reality but which must be taken into account, if man is to attempt to deal seriously with reality. This mystery is the force which creates, sustains and redeems the events of reality. God is the mystery which cannot be overlooked, if the educational process is to be of real value.

Although God is a mystery working within our midst, this mystery is not hidden completely from man. If man will become sensitive to this mystery, he can gain insights on the basis of observation and reason into the nature of this mystery; man will come to understand in part the goodness of God. This goodness of God can be discerned in part because it is operational in the structures which give actuality to meaning. "God's goodness may thus be viewed operationally as his participation in events which move

toward qualitative attainment. This is what is implied in the creative act of God."¹⁷ By making the point that man can gain in part operational insights into the nature of God, Meland is asserting that, even though God is a mystery which he can never understand fully, God does reveal himself to man through the human structure of consciousness which God has created. Thus, even though God is hidden, God also reveals himself to man in the manifestations of his creative and redemptive action.

In *Faith and Culture and The Realities of Faith*, Meland's doctrine of God is developed within the context of his concern for the relationship between faith and culture. In an attempt to draw together the different dimensions of his doctrine of God, we shall consider his doctrine within the context of this faith-culture theme.

It is Meland's contention that "both transcendence and immanence are essential even to a limited and tentative formulation of the character of the living God."¹⁸ He develops the transcendent element of God by his emphasis upon mystery and the necessity of using myth-forms in speaking of this mystery. By giving emphasis to the transcendence of God in relation to his immanence, he wishes to affirm that God is a free and integrated Being who is at the same time related to man.

... God is free and integrated Being with a destiny beyond all creatures, yet intimately partaking of the destinies of all His creatures. And He is involved in every moment of their existence. In this mode of thinking it is possible to see that supremacy in the transcendent sense as applied to the person of God may very well include relations; in fact that it must do so.¹⁹

Yet, for all his emphasis upon the mystery of God, great emphasis is given to the immanence of God. By stressing immanence, he desires to affirm that God

¹⁷ B. E. Meland, *Higher Education and the Human Spirit*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953, p. 162.

¹⁸ RCF, p. 227.

¹⁹ RCF p. 227-8.

¹⁶ RCF p. 118-9.

reveals himself to man within the structures of reality, and that man is offered enough resources by God in order to accept his human responsibilities for providing the necessary conditions for being in an adequate relationship with God.

I regard the doctrine of immanence as a crucial premise to be retained because upon its retention, to whatever degree, however altered or reconstructed, rests what I would call the sanity of the theological enterprise. Notice I do not say **reasonableness** of the enterprise. I am parting company with rationality as an arbitrary norm or generalized feature of existence in the sense in which idealism insisted upon it. Sanity does not presuppose a completely rational order of existence. It simply implies a margin of rationality in the midst of irrational and **unpredictable** factors which, nevertheless, assures sufficient order and meaningfulness to enable us to function intelligibly in a context of related disciplines.

Now immanence simply presupposes that there are structures within the reach and recognition of man which disclose God's working in some form and to some degree. This does not deny the hiddenness of God.²⁰

On the basis of his view of the immanence of God, Meland attempts to develop the manner in which God is related to man. God creates the structures of experience which are the foundation of the depth of man's existence. The structure of experience is "a myth in our nature that relates us as events to all existent events."²¹ This structure of experience is not something which God alone creates, for man must participate with God in this formulation. Man must be responsible constructively to God in this effort or the structure of experience will not develop fully, for "God's fulfillment of actualized good clearly depends upon the opportunities of history."²² If man will

work with God, then God will transmute the tragic dissolution of concrete good, evil, into actualized good in emerging events. Working within his limits, God creates for the individual and for the culture structures of experience. It is in this creating that the individual and the culture are given a primordial faith; God is the Primordial Ground of Existence. In this primordial act God gives himself to man; God imparts to man his sensitive nature. Thus, man is primordially created in the image of God. Not only is man created in the image of God; but each culture includes the image of God, "for each culture exemplifies the concrete nature of God's working within the range of its available structures."²³ This primordial faith is a disposition of mind given to man by God which asserts that tenderness is sovereign over force. In man, this disposition of mind is called faith; and in culture, it is called the mythos. Since the nature of reality is relational, faith and mythos must always be related in man's relationship to God.

In the emerging events of life, man is faced with responsibility for creating the conditions through which his human spirit, created in the image of God, can be nurtured. As man attempts to create these conditions, a sense of good not his own awakens him to a judgment of his past actions and a grace that forgives him for these action. Meland calls this sense of good a "feeling tone"²⁴ or a "sense of wonder,"²⁵ which recreates our hopes and reclaims us to a more adequate relationship with God. That which nurtures man in this way is "spirit," or is more traditionally designated, the Holy Spirit. It is spirit in that it confronts man with judgment and grace while at the same time sustaining the structures necessary for man's response.

When man is confronted with God's judgment and grace and responds, man has been redeemed by God and enters into the second level of faith, a trans-

²⁰ B. E. Meland, *Faith and Culture*. (here after FC) London: George Allen Unwin Ltd., 1955, p. 37.

²¹ FC p. 108.

²² FC p. 106.

²³ FC p. 85.

²⁴ FC p. 120.

²⁵ FC p. 160-1.

cent trust. In this encounter and response redemption occurs for man, and he is saved from the sin of his own acts of dissolution.

Redemption is the renewal of the creative act in human life by which the sensitive nature which is God is made formative and fulfilling in our purposes. We are saved from our own acts of dissolution to the degree that this sensitive nature can reach us. Whatever happens in our lives to open up our natures to the tenderness of life which are of God is redemptive.²⁶

The redemptive process reveals a depth insight into the nature of God in relation to man. This redemptive working of God with man to transform and redirect his life is not, in our human imagery, an impersonal functioning. God is not a computer or supernatural, magical power which functions redemptively; He is that Sensitivity within nature that is concerned and suffers with man in order to save man. God as Suffering Love can best be understood in the meaning of Christ as this revelation of God.

The essence of God's meaning, and this is the essence of the meaning of Christ as a revelation of God, is that God is related to men, that He is concerned, that He is involved in the travail of our critical circumstances . . . God suffers, as He suffered in Jesus Christ who died on the Cross.²⁷

In the redemptive process we also come to understand the ambiguity of human goodness and the ultimate goodness of God. Both the good and evil man may be brought to a crisis in which his life is inverted. Man is created in the image of God, an image of sensitive love. Because of the instability of his creaturely existence, man by himself cannot fulfill this image within himself and is, thus, an intermingling of good and evil. The only way in which man can be fulfilled is by the Source of Good coming to man, a good that is not his own and which he

cannot control, and redeeming man by His suffering love. "There is none good but one, that is God."²⁸

In summary, we can say that Meland's doctrine of God is trinitarian in formula, within the context of his contemporary metaphysical orientation. God is Creator, in that God creates man in his own sensitive image through structures of experience and the primordial faith. God is Spirit, in that He nurtures and sustains man by working with man within the structures of experience and human consciousness to bring about an increase of value instead of chaos. As Creator and Spirit, God displays empirically a tender concern for man over against the force of chaos which operates to destroy the nature of man. God also redeems man. As man grows within the limits of his environment, he is an inter-mingling of good and evil. It is not possible for God to save man by divine decree; it is necessary for man to create the conditions in which God's saving creativity can occur. This makes it necessary for man to be responsible in his relationship with God, and it also means that God is limited by the actions of man; individually and culturally God struggles and suffers with man in his sin and confronts man with a goodness not his own. This goodness reveals to man the judgment of God and at the same time offers to man God's grace, if man will but respond constructively to God. When man responds to this act of judgment and grace, redemption has occurred in his life, and he is saved by God. In Meland's method the Protestant principle of faith is extended to include a tension between faith and reason. His doctrine of God is based on the Lutheran principle of salvation by the grace of God, but he extends this principle so that salvation does not occur by a "cheap grace." God's creative, sustaining, and redemptive love demands that man be responsible in creating the necessary conditions in which the God-man relationship can develop. Thus, his doctrine of God as Creative Sensitivity is

²⁶ FC p. 176.

²⁷ B. E. Meland, *The Realities of Faith*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 265.

²⁸ Matthew 19:17.

balanced by his emphasis upon man's responsibility to create the conditions in which God can sustain and redeem His image in man. The Protestant emphasis of salvation by grace is qualified by man's being responsible to God. Our summary statement will be concluded by presenting quotations from a "credo" presented by Meland, which will serve to show that his doctrine of God is related to the more traditional trinitarian formula.

- (1) I believe God to be a reality of grace and judgment which both interpenetrates and transcends the life of man in the way that the hopes and judgments of a father transcend and intermesh with the life of his son . . .
- (2) I believe God to be both hidden and discernible . . .

(3) I believe Jesus Christ to be the revealer of God and the mediator of God's redemptive work to men . . .

(4) I believe the Holy Spirit to be real God . . .

(5) I believe the work of Christ as mediator of redemption and the work of the Holy Spirit may be distinguished; yet they stand related . . .

(6) I believe that the church is the self-conscious and continuing witness to the revelation of God in Christ.²⁹

²⁹ FC pp. 195-205. This credo is also printed in B. E. Meland, "Interpreting the Christian Faith Within a Philosophical Framework", *Journal of Religion*, Vol. 33. For an earlier statement in which Meland attempts to relate his views to more traditional forms of expression, cf. B. E. Meland, "Toward a Common Faith", *Christendom*, 1937, pp. 96-102.

Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.