Henry Nelson Wieman: Theologian of Hope

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I

HENRY NELSON WIEMAN has long been a persistent, prophetic and provocative voice in American theology. He is well-known among the first to develop the implications of process-philosophy for the religious life and its attendant theology. So, broadly-understood, this essay represents an effort to relate the insights of process-thought to the current discussions among men of good-will representing diverse points of view about how we can create a future which will permit us to live lives that are truly human.

Process thought is a resource rich with insights into the nature and ground of hope. One might for example, point to Schubert Ogden's essay on "The Promise of Faith"[1] for a development of this theme focused upon the divine love. Or one might consider the thought of Bernard Meland with his focus upon faith as the constituting power of personal and cultural meaning. But I have chosen to deal with the theology of Henry Nelson Wieman because I think the focus of his theology is such that hope is illumined in a way that is most obviously relevant to and important for the contemporary discussion. I simply desire here to sketch the dimensions of this relevance.

Erich Fromm has expressed the issue well in a manner wholly in keeping with the sensibilities of Wieman's thought and which may set the tone of this essay.

> Hope is **paradoxical.** It is neither passive waiting nor is it unrealistic forcing of circumstances that cannot occur. It is like the crouched tiger, which will jump only when the moment for jumping has come. Neither tired reformism nor pseudoradical adventurism is an expression of hope. To hope means to be ready at every moment for that which is not yet born, and yet not become desperate if there is no birth in our lifetime. There is no sense in hoping for that which already exists or for that which cannot be. Those whose hope is weak settle down for comfort or for violence; those whose hope is strong see and cherish all signs of new life and are ready every moment to help the birth of that which is ready to be born.[2]

Fromm goes on to assert the intimate relation of hope to faith—the "certainty about the reality of the possibility."[3] Faith undergirds hope as the conviction that what is hoped-for is possible in a future which is not irrelevantly distant. Together faith and hope impel to **action** —action directed toward the creation of a human future, toward the re-creation of man, toward the future of God. Whether couched in humanist, Marxist, or Christian terms the current discussion of hope is intent upon concerted historical action. To miss this point is to lack all understanding of the so-called "theology of hope."

All this, I believe, is caught up in Wieman's understanding of faith. "Faith," he says, "is not essentially belief at all, although faith generally has a belief. Religious faith is basically an act—the act of giving one's self into the keeping of what commands faith, to be trans-

[1] Schubert Ogden, *The Reality of God and Other Essays,* New York: Harper & Row, 1966, pp. 206-230.

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[2] Erich Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanized Technology,* New York: Bantam Books, 1968, p. 9.

[3] *Ibid.,* p. 14.

formed by it, and to serve it above all."[4] For Wieman faith is the act of crouching like Fromm's tiger of hope, placing oneself in the service of and at the disposal of that which is the "source of human good." It is the act of creating the circumstances which are requisite for the future desired, or as Wieman would put it, it is "meeting the required conditions."[5] Moreover, as with Fromm, faith for Wieman is the "knowledge of the real possibility."[6] though for Wieman this is grounded in a positive valuation of the divinity of the creative process. For Wieman, as for process theology in general, the ultimate ground of hope is God.

This theocentrism and active hope are strikingly combined in the reply Wieman made to Daniel Day Williams in volume four of the Library of Living Theology:

> The word "God" should indicate a problem above all others imperative for human existence, a problem such as to bring into action all the resources of the individual and of society, to find not a final solution but a working solution fit to deal with the issues of life and death. The word "God" should point straight to the issues of life and death, not for the body alone, but for all the creative potentialities of human existence. Therefore, "God" should stand for what actually operates in human life to save from deadly evil and to transform toward creative potentialities.[7]

These briefly-stated observations suggest in a preliminary way the relevance of Wieman's thought to the current discussions of the theology of hope. To the degree that the current discussion focuses upon the future there is a peculiar relevance attaching to Wieman's thought in virtue of his identification of the specifiable structure of God with creativity. Stated in a preliminary way—which I will seek to show later must be qualified —creativity enjoys primacy over conservation, perishing over preservation. There is too strong an empiricism in his thinking to permit his hope to be anything but starkly realistic. There is simply too much created good that is lost, a fact that is evident even in the Gospel story itself, for religion **effortlessly** to practice those evasions which have long since been exposed by Marx and Freud. Identified with creativity, the future **is** in some sense "a divine mode of being," as Carl Braaten sums up the views of Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jurgen Moltmann in **New Theology No. 5.**[8] God, for Wieman is indeed the power of the future's coming, the assurance that the future—some future or other—**will** arrive; but there is no ground for assurance that without men meeting the required conditions the kind of future that is man's highest good will in fact arrive. There is a subtle dialectic at this point in Wieman's thought that is suggested by the enigmatic statement of Bernard Loomer's that "Technically, we do not know or conceptually recognize God in the immediacy of encounter. . . . We apprehend Him in His passing, but we know Him only after He has passed by."[9]

The relation of the past to the future is a central issue. It is as heatedly debated in American process theology as it is in continental hermeneutical theology, for in an age of revolution no theology can be considered adequate unless it can

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[4] Henry Nelson Wieman, *The Source of Human Good,* Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958, p. 20.

[5] Henry Nelson Wieman, *Man's Ultimate Commitment,* Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958, p. 20.

[6] *The Revolution of Hope,* p. 13.

[7] Henry Nelson Wieman, "Reply to Williams" in *The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman,* ed. Robert W. Bretall, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1963, pp. 113-114.

[8] Carl E. Braaten, "Toward a Theology of Hope," *New Theology No.* 5, eds. Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1968, pp. 108. cf., Also, Carl E. Braaten, *The Future of God,* New York: Harper and Row, 1969.

[9] Bernard M. Loomer, "Wieman's Stature as a Contemporary Theo'ogian," in *The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman,* p. 397.

interpret the destruction of created good, i.e., achieved value embodied in cultures, nations, institutions, and individual lives. I draw attention to the fact that I have said "interpret" just now and not "justify." I do not believe that Wieman's theology **justifies** in a moral sense the destruction of created good under any circumstances; and to this degree his is not a theology of revolution if that is what a theology of revolution must claim to do. At this point I find Wieman very close to Albert Camus.

I have suggested, then, that the centrality of God as the ground of hope, situated at the point where the future becomes the present, is the focus of Wieman's theology. Just how this is so and how his is a theology of "openness for the future" despite the fact that it countenances no revolutionary program is the burden of the remainder of this paper.

II

Nothing other than God can be the ground of hope; he is the source of the certainty, which is ingredient in faith, that human good is a real possibility. Wieman is insistent upon the suprahuman character of the ground of hope; it must be of the nature of "a good not our own."[10] This greatest good for man is variously described as "creativity," the "creative event," and "creative transformation." Each has an identifiable and distinct meaning, but at this point in the discussion why Wieman identifies God with these terms should be noted. That is, why is Henry Nelson Wieman a philosophical theologian?

It is simply not adequate to assert in relation to a philosophical theology like Wieman's, as is often asserted, that some "point of contact" with the contemporary world is needed. Undoubtedly, there is truth in the statement, but it is on a deeper level than such statements often suggest, the level of **metaphysical applicability.** On this level two considerations are paramount: (1) the isolation on the basis of generic intuition of a universal structure necessary to human existence and (2) the more personal valuation of this structure in terms of its contribution to qualitative meaning experienced as good. These considerations should make it clear that the elements of a "philosophical framework for Christian faith" are not chosen as one would fill his plate with food at a buffet supper. It should also be clear that in like manner a theological metaphysics is not taken up merely to be able to carry on a dialogue with someone who happens to have opted for that particular metaphysics. The "buffet-supper" interpretation of the function of a theological metaphysics is rightfully condemned by theologians in the neo-orthodox tradition who, like Karl Barth, understood the depth of mystery in religious faith as well as its rootedness in a particular historical situation.

It is understandable that sometimes the premises of a theological metaphysics are taken up for **tactical advantage** for two reasons: (1) either to support discussion with a partner who does not share one's commitment of faith, or (2) to speak to one who shares one's faith commitment in order to persuade him to the kind of action one believes is implied by the commitment. I do not condemn this tactical use of metaphysics (or hermeneutics), for it is clear that it is a central feature of the Christian-Marxist dialogue and of the emergence of the theology of hope as the stimulus of—in the words of Carl Braaten—"a needed dynamic and direction for the social ethical involvement of the church in the penultimate questions of modern society."[11] We are always in need of points of contact; that is what dialogue and what Wieman calls "creative interchange" are all about.

[10] This phrase is actually Bernard Meland's; it was the title of a sermon he preached at Rockefeller Chapel, University of Chicago in August, 1949. Cf. *Man's Ultimate Commitment,* p. 76-77.

[11] *New Theology No. 5,* p. 111.

The point is, rather, that the metaphysical structures specified and offered in support of a theology, such as Wieman's, are at the same time both a truth-claim and a deeply personal testament. This is why Wieman's theology is both metaphysical and predicated upon a judgment of value. The same can be said for the theology of Paul Tillich with its stress upon "ultimate concern" expressed in the symbols of faith and employing the "method of correlation." In both instances the metaphysical structure of their thought is best understood as the **way** they are required by their own personal destinies to testify to the finality and truth of their faith. Ironically, philosophical theology is more kerygmatic than apologetic theology. The buffet-supper concept of philosophical theology is a figment of the anti-metaphysical imagination if it is in fact any more than a self-contradiction. For if philosophical theology is theology at all, it must be one's personal style of professing faith. Failure to realize this, for example, is responsible for the reproach made against Tillich that he claimed to **prove** the Christian faith to be true. The actual situation is, however, that the only way in which one can confess or profess one's faith is by affirming its truth—and if one is a philosophical theologian to the degree that one's theology meets the metaphysical criteria, the more it will in fact appear to be a "proof"; and by the same token if one is a consistent kerygmatic theologian, the more one's statement may appear to be tautological. But whether one professes confessionally or metaphysically is a predilective decision. It is not clearly identifiable as constituted by revelation. I am concerned in this paper, however, only with the relation of Wieman's understanding of God to the possibility of hope and not with the adequacy of his metaphysics.

This ground of hope is described as that which "operates in human life with such character and power that it will transform man as he cannot transform himself, to save him from the depths of evil and endow him with the greatest good, provided that he give himself over to it with whatever completeness of self-giving is possible for him. . . ."[12] From this perspective one can understand the Christian-Marxist dialogue as the service of God by both Christians and Marxists who are in whatever degree possible to them meeting the required conditions of this service. It is obvious, also, that one of the required conditions is the risk of making a judgment of good versus evil. The risk here is an existential one which defines the identity of the person making it; it is more than the absence of a certainty of victory in advance.[13] The risk of serving God is the risk of naming him and that entails the definition of one's own self and his comportment in the world. A man who cannot discern between good and evil or who will not in a specific historical situation make the distinction cannot know God in that situation. And for that fact he is a dangerous person.

In the nature of the case, then, God for Wieman cannot be understood to exercise a power in the world from some situation of transcendence either outside time altogether or from some situation in time either remotely in the past or remotely in the future. It is well known that Wieman's theology constitutes a strong refutation of the supranaturalism of traditional theism. It is no less strong a refutation of traditional atheism and the so-called "Christian atheism" in which God is relegated to the transcendence of the past. The "Death of God" theology sacrifices the dialectic of transcendence-immanence when it denies a **living** immanence of God in the present. Nor is it any more satisfactory to say that God is "absent" from the present,

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[12] *Man's Ultimate Commitment*, p. 11.

[13] Rober Garaudy, *From Anathema to Dialogue: A Marxist Challenge to the Christian Churches*, New York: Vintage Books, 1968, p. 111.

for this would have to mean in Wieman's thought that he had set aside his metaphysical function, which is absurd.[14]

For Wieman God is ineluctably present and is experienced as God primarily by his persuasiveness as "the source of human good." Jesus of Nazareth, for example, was "transparent"—Tillich's term is useful here—to the presence of God by a persuasive goodness which could only be resisted by a rich young man turning away "sorrowfully."[15] The transcendence of God is the transcendence of his concreteness—what Meland terms the "unmanageable" dimension of God.[16] His ineffableness is a function of the fullness and richness of his concreteness in the passage of events. We apprehend him fully only to the degree that we feel the full qualitied meaning of events. Once we have apprehended to whatever degree we are capable, we can be persuaded or we can resist. But no man can escape having to make some adjustment to what God is doing in the world.[17]

If God is God, then, in principle he is present and identifiable universally in human experience. In Wieman's thought this is required by his empirical method. "These claims rest upon an analysis of our experience, revealing that no transcendental reality could ever do anything. . . . We cannot know anything, and nothing can make the slightest difference in our lives unless it be an event or some possibility carried by an event."[18] The assertion of God's presence also meets a metaphysical criterion. "A metaphysics is true if it selects some element necessarily involved in all human existence and explains everything in terms of it."[19] There is nothing, Wieman insists, in an empirical theology that seeks to speak metaphysically that is intrinsically alien to the structure of revelation.

> Revelation means that the power of God unto salvation has broken through our human resistances, so that one can observe it in the behavior of transformed lives. This is empirical knowledge of God by way of sense experience. Thus, revelation and empirical knowledge of God are not opposed to one another, but rather are so inseparable that the rejection of one is the rejection of the other. [20]

The metaphysical and empirical commitments of Wieman's thought—and it should not be forgotten that in any man's theology these commitments are no less a part of his personal religious odyssey as are the specific symbols of revelation he may appeal too—have led him to identify that specifiable structure which can be called "God" with the structure of creativity, or more precisely the structure of the creative event. If our attention is focused upon the unity of the event to which our highest devotion must be given, then God is identified with creativity, which "retains its identity and its unity through all change in itself and through all change in other things."[21] If we focus our attention upon the diversity of the event to which our highest devotion must be given, then God must in some sense be identified with the creative event in its concreteness. If

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[14] I.e., that which constitutes his divinity and at least part of his goodness would be sacrificed; namely, that aspect which can be attested and certified in terms of philosophical criteria. But, of course, Wieman's interest is in the empirical cognition and service of creativity, not in any a priori proofs of its divinity.

[15] For Wieman's views of Jesus, cf. *The Source of Human Good,* pp. 39-44. *Man's Ultimate Commitment,* pp. 27-28, *The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman,* pp. 361 f., 373-377.

[16] Bernard E. Meland, "The Root and Form of Wieman's Thought," *The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman,* p. 60.

[17] Henry Nelson Wieman, *The Wrestle of Religion with Truth,* New York: The Macmillan Co., 1928, pp. 179ff.

[18] *The Source of Human Good,* p. 8. Cf. *Man's Ultimate Commitment,* p. 34.

[19] *The Source of Human Good,* p. 301.

[20] "Reply to Miller," *The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman,* pp. 42-43.

[21] *The Source of Human Good,* p. 298. Cf. *Man's Ultimate Commitment,* pp. 90-91.

we are to be able to speak about God at all we must specify some self-identical structure which is indispensable to the creation of that which is man's highest commitment. If we are to be able to claim that God is the rightful recipient of our highest commitment we must point to that which is the locus of concrete or achieved value, the creative event itself with all the qualities of meaning inseparable from it and we must affirm these meaning-qualities as good. Knowledge of God, like any type of knowledge, is constituted through specified forms or structures emergent in the content of experience. In the creative process there is a continuing enrichment of experience by greater complexity of structure which in turn enlarges appreciative awareness and the possibility of further richness of content and complexity of form. "Form and content, the structures of knowledge and the qualities of immediate experience, must be developed together. . . . The creativity of God is the development of form and content together. . . . Both are magnified progressively. . . ."[22]

III

Now what does a man commit himself to when he commits himself to "God" as Wieman understands the meaning of that term? It is clear from Wieman's constitutive distinction between "creative good" and "created good," which is sacrificed to the former, that religious commitment is not directed to any achieved or specific yet-to-be-achieved structure of events and their qualities. While these may be valued highly, they do not command commitment, for only that which is the ultimate ground of these is entitled to such commitment.

This is the fundamental reason why Wieman is not a biblical theologian; for that kind of theology has come to be associated with a normative structuring of experience and knowledge in terms of the thought-forms and categories of the Scriptures as interpreted by biblical scholars (and, I should say, the Reformers). Wieman, I feel, would have no quarrel with biblical theology were it not to insist that historically-realized meaning-qualities associated with the biblical experience are the **only** legitimate interpretive structures available to theology. In fact, their use in a non-dogmatic, non-normative way could in Wieman's view be themselves submitted to the creativity which effects the concretion of new meaning-quality in an ever-richer achievement in the service of God. From Wieman's viewpoint, Jurgen Moltmann's **Theology of Hope** represents at worst an effort to reduce appreciative quality to an achieved structure, the structure of a pattern of biblical thinking which is asserted to be normative for faith and commitment. Or at best, it is the effort to domesticate experienced qualitative meaning by conforming it to the forms of biblical thinking about promise and fulfillment imposed heteronomously upon events in the present and not freely emergent out of them. Compare Moltmann's seemingly modest claim to "show how theology can set out from hope"[23] with his persisting claims later that the category of promise is **indispensable** to understanding Christianity on the authority of recent biblical research and of the Reformers. "Christian eschatology in the language of promise," Moltmann says, "will then be an essential key to the unlocking of Christian truth. For the loss of eschatology—not merely as an appendix to dogmatics, but as the medium of theological thinking as such—has always been the condition that makes possible the adaptation of Christianity to its environment and, as a result of this, the self-surrender of faith".[24]

If it is true that religious commitment

[22] *The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman*, pp. 71-72.

[23] Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch, New York: Harper and Row, 1967, Preface, p. 11.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 41. There are not one but two historical judgments which are open to challenge here.

in Wieman's theology can never be directed to any achieved system of qualitative meaning represented by a creed, a church, an institution, an event, or even an individual, then does this mean that religious commitment in his view must be directed to a structure of qualitied meaning to be achieved and striven for in the future? Our answer here must be of the nature of that abominable "in-a-sense-yes-and-in-a-sense-no" kind of answer. The reason is, as Wieman so nicely puts it, "No man's present ever includes the future but only his anticipation of it."[25] There are no future events to be committed to; there is only an anticipated structure of events with those qualities that imagination can hope will in fact be experienced when the anticipated structure becomes an actuality.

"Ideals" are one class of anticipated structure of future events. As Wieman put it in an early book, an ideal "may mean (1) some human idea of a possible good to be attained by human effort, or (2) that which truly is a possible good to be attained by human effort."[26] The fallibility of man makes him prone to construct, also, a third type of ideal, an impossible ideal, nothing less than a delusion.[27] Perhaps he would consider the hope for a time when everything will be "all in all" an example of the delusory type of ideal; the Marxist vision of a classless society is certainly a candidate for an ideal in a legitimate sense. Perhaps, also, some kind of historical human structure filling out the content of the biblical idea of "promise" would also be a real possibility.

But Wieman is insistent that it is not the ideal **per se** which is the recipient of ultimate commitment. "To strive for the ideal," says Wieman, "and ignore God is like trying to make the sun stand still while ignoring the rotation of the earth."[28] The only legitimate recipient of commitment is that structure of possibility which is both metaphysically and religiously ultimate.

> The reality underlying all others in the sense of a changeless structure of felt quality and knowable order is creativity because it is necessarily prior to every other form of experience. It is also the reality which alone can bring to supreme fulfillment all the creative potentialities of human life when man gives himself over to it in religious commitment of faith.[29]

There can in Wieman's theology be no legitimately ultimate commitment to any human program concretely prescribed for the future—whether it be under Christian or Marxist auspices. This in his view would be a misplaced faith in what might possibly never be actualized. But even more serious than this, it would be demonic. "The devil," says Wieman, "is the most glorious vision of good that our minds can achieve at any one time when **that vision refuses to hold itself subject to creativity.**"[30]

Yet there is commitment to the future which is ultimately in the hands of **both God and man in the present.** Wieman insists no less than the Marxist upon what Garaudy calls the "subjectivity" of man by which he is called to be "a flaming hearth of initiative."[31] This is a commitment made by man in the present to a future whose possibility is mediated to man by God in the present and is apprehended as such by man in the present. So in the final analysis the present is where whatever action there is. And is for Wieman the future is at stake only because commitment to creative good or God is in every moment the issue in the present.

From what has been said here it should

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[25] *Man's Ultimate Commitment,* p. 93.

[26] Henry Nelson Wieman, *The Issues of Life,* New York: The Abingdon Press, 1930, p. 157.

[27] *Ibid.,* p. 158. Wieman here displays an empiricistic certainty that Freud was more careful to qualify.

[28] *Ibid.,* p. 164.

[29] *Man's Ultimate Commitment,* p. 91-92.

[30] *The Source of Human Good,* p. 128.

[31] *From Anathema to Dialogue,* pp. 82, 112, 123.

not be surprising that Wieman's type of theology—and, I think, process theology in general—can entertain a deep appreciation of the existentialist motifs in the thought of Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann, what Jurgen Moltmann terms the theologies of "the transcendental subjectivity of God" and of "the transcendental subjectivity of man" respectively.[32] No one would question the phenomenological differences between what Moltmann calls "epiphany religion" and "faith in terms of promise" nor even the risks of quietism or of what Garaudy calls the "Constantinian" religious style. But it seems to me questionable to support what is in effect a normative theological principle ("promise") by an appeal to a psychological effect it will supposedly have on hearers.[33] If the theology of hope finds God only in the future to the exclusion of his presence now, then we have in this type of theology yet another "new supernaturalism" in which God has his being in a mode of time which does not exist now and never has existed. This is hardly preferable to classical theism with its transcendence outside the modalities of time altogether. (At least the very problematical nature of classical theism contributed to its viability.) But like the "death of God" theology which confers on God the transcendence of having once existed in the past, the theology of hope takes God out of the present but it puts him into a modality of time in which he can never exist at all. When Moltmann says that "God is not somewhere in the Beyond, but he is coming and as the coming One he is present"[34] has he not reduced God at last to the metaphysical level of a subsistent idea in the subjectivity of man? Then in the last analysis the Christian hope is grounded no less in man than the Marxist hope.

Perhaps the Marxists have perceived this; if they haven't they apparently show no signs that they think themselves in danger of being converted. Some theologians on the Christian side have, in their eagerness to get on with building the human future, even suggested that a moratorium be declared on the use of the term "God"—at least until satisfactory ways of speaking of him can be found.[35] Without in the least minimizing the problem, the empiricism and theocentrism of Wieman's theology would consider this course potentially disastrous for the future should it eventuate in a misplaced commitment to that which is anything less than God.

The problem of what to do with the understanding of "God" is, despite its peculiar difficulties, symptomatic of the fundamental issue of the relation of the past to the future of hope. Roger Garaudy has observed that Marx believed men "make their own history, but not arbitrarily. They do so in conditions that are always shaped by the past."[36] For Marx the influence of this past, in particular the mode of production and the attendant productive relations, was the problem to be overcome by revolutionary historical action. Wieman would not underestimate the influence of economic structures in men's thinking and acting—and consequently the past—but for him it is not the kind of problem it is for Marx. For Wieman the problem is the integration of new meanings with the old, new meanings of some kind or

[32] Cf. "Intellectual Autobiography" in *The Empirical Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman,* pp. 15-18 and *Theology of Hope,* ch. I, sections 4-5.

[33] *Ibid.,* p. 100; cf. p. 16.

[34] *Ibid.,* p. 164.

[35] Cf. Leslie Dewart, *The Future of Belief: Theism in a World Come of Age,* New York: Herder and Herder, 1966, pp. 212-215; Harvey Cox, *The Secular City; Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective,* New York: The Macmillan Co., 1965, pp. 265-268. But John A. T. Robinson, *Exploration into God,* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1967, p. 56, refuses to give up the term. Cf. *Man's Ultimate Commitment,* p. 12.

[36] Roger Garaudy, "Creative Freedom," in ed. Paul Oestreicher, *The Christian-Marxist Dialogue,* New York: The Macmillan Co., 1969, p. 154.

other which will come to birth in the creative process in any case. For him the problem is the loss of potential meanings which might have been acquired and new qualities which might have been actualized. (This also means reintegration of past meanings in new terms.) For Wieman the tragedy is this loss of what-might-have-been-but-never-can-be. Wieman is concerned that as many meanings be realized as possible; Marx is concerned that one structure of meaning in particular be realized, that of the classless society. For Marx tragedy is too tender a feeling; it might be an opiate; for he is concerned with what-might-be-and-must-be-made-to-be.

But what about the past that-used-to-be-but-never-more-can-be? For Wieman all created good and created evil—the past as past—perishes. There is for Wieman a poignancy and sadness which attaches to the perishing of occasions some rich and others not so rich in qualitative meaning. But this is not the experience of tragedy which is born out of genuine hope, rather than counterfeit hope. For Wieman the sublimest feeling-qualities are the prize of those who ride the crest of the wave breaking into the future; for those that ride onto the beach there is the exhilaration of novel qualities integrated with previous meaning, and for those who fall beneath the wave there is the sense of the titanic struggle between good and evil and of the forfeiture of a high destiny.[37] But I am aware that this metaphor does not capture the sensitivity of Wieman's treatment of tragedy.

The power of the creative event confers a kind of freedom to let the past go and in so doing makes possible that "openness toward the future" which is so much desired by Christians and Marxists in behalf of their respective views of the future. But I should think that the "openness toward the future" that Wieman's God requires is much more radical in the sense that it is free of preconceived structures for the future, because it is open to the structures which emerge in the emerging future (i. e., when it becomes the present.) The creative event, says Wieman, cannot be domesticated instrumentally "because it transforms the mind and purpose so radically that what it produces is never what the initiating mind intended."[38]

> We can be sure (Wieman insists) that the outcome of its working will always be the best possible under the conditions even when it may seem to us to be otherwise. Even when it so transforms us and our world that we come to love what now we hate, to serve what now we fight, to seek what now we shun, still we can be sure that what it does is good.[39]

What is unqualifiedly good is the creative process itself in its work of engendering ever richer qualitied relationships; it is sovereign and it can be trusted.

And yet the past has an integral role in this process of enriching the present. Much is lost, but not all; if all were to be lost meaninglessness would result. On the one hand, the "fullness of rich meaning can emerge only with the passage of time" but on the other hand Wieman asserts that

> The supreme periods of human culture have been those times when men have saved most from the past and so have brought the present to its highest fulfillment; for there is no other possible way to enrich the present except by conserving and recovering the qualities and meanings of past events.[40]

I think that in this statement Wieman discloses a facet of his thought that is responsive to the criticism of Bernard Meland that he has lifted the modernist principle "to such dominance that concern for qualitative attainment in any actualized sense is relinquished. This,"

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[37] Cf. *The Source of Human Good,* pp. 154-158.

[38] *Ibid.,* p. 57.

[39] *Ibid., p.* 81. One cannot confess the name of God and not call him good. One cannot talk of God without making a judgment of value, without the risk of having the "knowledge of good and evil."

[40] *Ibid.,* pp. 15, 23.

continues Meland, "is to set the future event **per se** in a place of preference over persistent, existent value."[41] That creativeness does not imply the future event as necessarily a preferred value is surely a cogent point; and it is equally cogent against the theologians of hope and the Marxists. Wieman has frankly indicated that future events may bring to pass an impoverishment of life and a loss of qualitative meaning.[42]

Most important in this connection is Wieman's analysis of the creative event into four "sub-events":[43]

> [1] emerging awareness of qualitative meaning derived from other persons through communication; [2] integrating these new meanings with others previously acquired; [3] expanding the richness of quality in the appreciable world by enlarging its meaning; [4] deepening the community among those who anticipate in this total creative event of intercommunication.[44]

Particularly important for my purpose here is the second sub-event, in which "meanings derived from others are integrated with what [the individual] already has." This integration is largely unconscious; it cannot be forced; it requires "creative imagination in solitude"; and Wieman points to Jesus in the wilderness and Buddha under the Bo tree. Now I am suggesting that what Wieman expresses as a concern that new meanings find a place alongside and integrated with old is but the complement of what Meland terms "pressing the burden of past attainment upon emerging events."[45]

Wieman insists that this integration is indispensable to the creativeness of the event.

> This integrating does not occur in every case of communicated meaning, since there is much noncreative communication in our modern world by way of radio, television, movies, newspapers, and casual interchange between individuals. The mere passage through the mind of innumerable meanings is not the creative event.[46]

From Wieman's perspective Marshall McLuhan's electric, and tribal culture, is both a threat and a promise. "If new meanings are coming in all the time," Wieman says, "the integration is hindered by the new ingressions."[47] Considered in this perspective, I think, Wieman can be said to be appreciative of Meland's concern that **too much** of past created good may be lost, when the latter wrote:

> Now it is my concern to say that God's work is of a structurizing nature at the level of feeling, achieving the creative act of transmitting past attainment to every moment of advance into novelty. You cannot say that this is simply a conserving of values. . . . It is rather putting attained values to active use in the shaping of novel events.[48]

In this concern Meland shares with the hermeneutic theologians and the hope theologians a respect for an inherited structure of faith animating all cultures as they confront the future. It is precisely at this point—the interpretation of the dynamics of the passage of old forms of faith into new forms—that process theology, and especially that of Bernard Meland, is most urgent to the dialogue on hope.[49] My concern here is simply to say

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[41] Bernard E. Meland, *Faith and Culture,* New York: Oxford University Press, 1953, p. 109.

[42] This I do not think should be interpreted to imply that God is less present in some events than in others on Wieman's principles.

[43] *The Source of Human Good,* pp. 57-69. In *Man's Ultimate Commitment,* pp. 3-5, the detail of this analysis recedes from view as Wieman focuses there upon the "creative transformation" of man through "creative interchange." But even there the crux of the emergence of qualitative meaning is located in the second sub-event.

[44] *The Source of Human Good,* p. 58.

[45] *Faith and Culture,* p. 110.

[46] *The Source of Human Good,* p. 59.

[47] *Ibid.,* p. 60.

[48] *Faith and Culture,* p. 110.

[49] Cf., for example, in addition to the books cited: Bernard Meland, *The Realities of Faith: The Revolution in Cultural Forms,* New York: Oxford University Press, 1962; and Bernard E. Meland, "Interpreting the Christian Faith within a Philosophical Framework," *The Journal of Religion,* XXXIII (1953), 87-102.

that Wieman and Meland agree that (in Meland's words) "the creative act of God. . . .transmutes every novel event into a qualitative event by transmitting to it, infusing into it, such past attainment as the structure of experience at any time in any group life will permit."[50]

Now from the perspective of process thought the present is where the possibility of hope or the impossibility of hope is encountered because at the intersection of the past and the future both God and man are present. The outcome is in the hands of **both** as they work together in this intersection which is the strategic point of the creative advance into the future. There is no problem with what God will do; he will maximize the actual good realizable from the possibilities that human decisions present to him. This is the ground of hope in Wieman's thought, and it entails also that just as he is apprehensible and at work in every present he will be apprehensible as the source of human good in whatever the future comes to be, for it is the nature of the future to become present when God is.

Perhaps, then, Wieman's theology may be criticized because it does not provide the blueprint for a full-blown revolutionary program? Certainly it does not do this in any way that would permit revolutionary ideals to escape the radical judgment of the creative event. Revolutionary fervor just as much as the electric age may precipitate man into evil. Man must calculate and plan; but action must be subjected to the criterion of the creative event.

I do not believe Wieman's theology permits a "justification" of actions in any moral sense. Johannes Metz displays a subtle dialectic like that of Wieman and Camus, which shies away from justifying violence when he says that circumstances can arise when Christian love needs to use revolutionary means. "Where the social status quo contains as much injustice as may arise by overthrowing it by revolution, then a revolution—for justice and freedom 'for the least of the brethren'—may not be prohibited even in the name of Christian love."[51] One must act; one will act with the fullest possible knowledge of the consequences of the act and with the greatest integrity of commitment possible, and then it is left to God. This is "openness to the future" in a sense more radical than even situational ethics countenances. For it does not claim to justify the action. On the contrary, the act of commitment, not unlike Camus' idea, is the creation of the value. This is why God cannot be left out of the picture; for in the commiting action he is in part constituted as the value ultimately to be served.

But if there is no blueprint for a revolutionary program justifiable in terms of Wieman's theology, there is no escape either from assuming responsibility for action or from the demands of the future represented in the actions of others. In any case, quite literally, God is where the action is—whatever it is. In this situation, the relevant ethical question is: How does one serve the creative event in this situation? When the situation is out of control—as when the two most powerful nuclear nations, Christian and Marxist, precipitate an armament buildup? Or when neither the Christian nor Marxist nations are in control?—which seems imminent in this nation in the unity of those whom this society has excluded from power, privilege and prosperity, or which seems imminent with the rise to self-consciousness and concerted action of the so-called Third World.

The Third World is a threat to the

[50] *Faith and Culture,* p. 111.

[51] Johannes B. Metz, "Christianity and Social Action," in *The Christian-Marxist Dialogue,* p. 202. There is a utilitarian-like calculation, but a certain outcome of the calculation does not necessarily justify or require the revolution. Cf Albert Camus, *The Rebel,* trans. Anthony Bower, New York: Vintage Books, 1956.

meaning-structures of both the Christian and Marxist nations. Perhaps the Christian Marxist dialogue is, as Paul Oestreicher has candidly suggested,[52] the effort to recover a "fundamental" (in Roger Garaudy's phrase) that Christians and Marxists have in common, and which both need in order to find joint resources for action. What is at stake is the reinvigoration of the "cultural myth," with its noncognitive symbols and "those subrational feelings whereby a person becomes aware of that depth, scope, and richness of qualitative meaning made accessible to him by his culture."[53] We have come to such a time in our own history, said Wieman in 1946. Twelve years later Wieman again wrote as follows:

> Western man may be entering a time when the bright possibilities which have sustained him will no longer do so. If this is to be our experience during the next century or so when the power of other peoples rises to dominance and our power relative to theirs declines, this period of decline can be fruitful and rewarding if it teaches us to reverse the order of priority by which we have lived heretofore and devote ourselves to seeking out the conditions most favorable for creative transformation of the human mind.[54]

Wieman is correct, I think, in insisting that this is not a pessimistic, apathetic, or defeatist attitude. "The values of Western culture," he continues,

> are precious and we shall not relinquish them if they can be retained. But human life at its depth, a depth shared by all humanity and not alone by Western man, has another kind of good more precious and of greater promise. It can be uncovered and released for its divine work in time of cultural decline as may not be possible in times of security and prosperity because, in times of prosperity, created good dominates the mind. . . . Creativity cannot dominate human concern until it is seen that the mind of man is unfit for life except as it submits itself to creative transformation.[55]

Wieman's theology is a theology of hope in the most radical sense in that it specifies the possibility of an openness to the future of **man**—not merely the future of Western man, or Christian man, or Marxist man. Hope in this theology is possible not only to man who wields great power in the councils of churches, nations, and parties but also to men who have opportunity only to be open to their neighbors. Hope is possible even when neither Christians nor Marxists control the power and the meaning-giving structures of the world—when everything is new.

I submit that those who speak in behalf of Christians and Marxists in the common task of creating a human future might well admit his insight to the dialogue. This in itself would be one piece of evidence that God is indeed at work and at least some men are committed to the service of his reality. Hope is eminently possible because just as the future can and undoubtedly will be more than we can plan for and imagine, so also God is "much more than this,"[56] more than he can be envisioned to be by any theology.

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[52] *The Christian-Marxist Dialogue,* pp. x, 7.

[53] *The Source of Human Good,* p. 147.

[54] *Man's Ultimate Commitment,* p. 60.

[55] *Ibid.,* pp. 60-61.

[56] *The Wrestle of Religion with Truth,* p. vi; cf. *Man's Ultimate Commitment,* pp. 305-306.