

On Knowing God

CHARLES A. ROGERS

THE trade of the historian of Christian dogma is a difficult one these days. Historical studies generally have fallen on dark times, in which not only their importance but their necessity is decried. I mention this for two reasons: (1) as a member of the historians' "guild," I want to gain your sympathy, if possible, at the outset; but, (2) in order to make clear at least one, and probably several, of those presuppositions which will affect whatever I have to say about the "problem of God."

One thing this means is that the question is here approached from the perspective of some involvement in the theological traditions of the Church. A second thing, related to this, is that I am committed in a basic way to **consensus fidelium** as a pre-eminent source of theological insight even for the "modern man." Most of us have such fideistic commitment to some tradition or other, or to some school of thought, for precisely the same reason (e.g. Dumery, Camus, Whitehead, etc.). Such commitments and the enterprises based upon them are entirely proper. Insight should be appropriated wherever it may be found. This includes the theological insights of the tradition of the church, insights perceived and articulated in other ages and contents.

This does not mean that the theological traditions of the church have an "absolute" authority, as if they articulated "Truth" in a manner perfectly clear and permanently binding. The various doctrinal traditions are human

creations — and as such are the fallible constructs of men struggling to understand the truth about themselves and the world, about the origins, meaning and purpose of experienced realities. Doctrines are articulations growing out of **awareness** gained in what Albert Outler calls an "agony for insight."¹ They are man's attempts to clarify and to express truth as made known to and perceived by him in particular contexts. These doctrines are important and necessary insofar as they themselves serve to illuminate the truth perceived. Or again, the various theological traditions are man's past and present endeavors to speak about and facilitate insight into that impulse out of which human culture originates and lives, that which is, as R. E. Cushman suggests, the veritable momentum or power of human history.² To the extent to which **doctrina** may be agencies for insight into truth, they are not only important, but are as sources essential to all contemporary theological struggles.

The traditions of the church, however, are seldom self-evident in meaning. They must be studied from the three-fold perspective of that loyalty, discipline, and freedom which necessarily informs the trade of the critical historian. The theologian-historian comes to the traditions with a loyalty based on commitment to them as sources of insight. He approaches them also with freedom of inquiry that breaks down the kind of loyalty which prohibits doubt or penetrative questioning. He comes finally with the discipline of historical scholarship that seeks to understand the tra-

CHARLES A. ROGERS is Assistant Professor of Historical Theology, Evangelical Seminary. He holds his B. A. degree from Southwestern University, his B. D. from Perkins, and his Ph.D. from Duke. This paper was part of the series read on shipboard enroute to the Fourth Oxford Institute of Theological Studies, summer, 1969.

¹ Albert C. Outler, *Who Trusts in God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 29.

² Robert E. Cushman, "Thoughts on Tradition and Traditions," *Duke Divinity School Review*, 34 (Winter, 1969), p. 8.

ditions, first, in their own terms and contexts; and second, in terms of the intentions or aims of the various doctrines.³ What is the fundamental point or issue alluded to, spoken to, illuminate, avoided, or circumlocuted in some ancient treatise? The integrity of intention of past theologians — i.e., their seriousness of intention to communicate, even if poorly, insight gained in the agony of intellectual and existential struggle — must be assumed. Our task is to perceive their perceptions, to analyze their insight, to discover their intention (and this requires loyalty, freedom, and enormous discipline), convinced that our struggle with them in this way will be a source of contemporary insight.

Such an enterprise is helpful in considering our theme. There are three problems of paramount importance in the contemporary discussion about the doctrine of God: first, knowing that God is (the problem of the Divine Reality); second, knowing God Himself (the problem of man's awareness of God); third, knowing what or who God is (the problem of the Divine Nature). On all of these problems, the tradition generally, and specific representatives within the tradition studied in terms of the content and intention of their thought, provide insight. Here we shall deal only with the first two and will have to be selective and exemplary.

I.

THE CHARACTER OF "MODERNMAN"

Something should be said about him with whom we as theologians desire to communicate—the "modernman" or as E. I. Cummings put it, "mostpeople." Our beginning here, though useful, should not be taken as a suggestion of a necessary methodology, that is, to study of the question of God with an

analysis of the question of man; to begin theologizing with anthropologizing. There are historical precedents for doing so. John Calvin, of famous memory, agonized about this and finally began his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with a lengthy consideration of the character of "modernman," sixteenth century vintage. He understood that if he were to speak relevantly to his generation, he would have to be clear about who it was to whom he was required to speak. Since we are here concerned specifically with the problem of our "knowing God," clearly the question of human perception is involved, and thus the question of the character of the knowing person cannot be avoided.

The terms used by theologians to describe the character of "modernman" are familiar to all of us. Without attempting an assessment of the views of some of the leading spokesmen on this question, we can certainly at least agree that "modernman" is frequently described as secular man, and that lately the presence of secular man has been forcefully impressed upon us. The discussion of the meaning of secularization and secular man has become a theological commonplace. This is all very much to the good. If the worldly man is he who affirms himself and the world as good, turns his attention toward it, lives in it joyfully and creatively, while striving at the same time to reform its inequities, then such worldliness is to be embraced as appropriate and essential, as Harvey Cox has reminded us.⁴ It is also to be recognized as nothing new. Augustine long ago spoke of the goodness of the created order, and of necessary human involvement in the *civitas terranae*. To be sure, Augustine had a rather dark view of the city of man, especially in comparison with the city of God, but nevertheless affirmed the necessity of the faithful man's place and

³ Albert C. Outler, *op. cit.*, p. xii.

⁴ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1966), p. 15

involvement in it, provided only that he resist the temptation to trust in it in a thoroughly motivating way (City of God, Books xiv, xix). To speak of man's "coming of age" as the time of his coming to take responsibility for himself, and for the world and his place in it, is laudable.⁵ Morality, personal and social, is never to be shunned or made light of.

If, on the other hand, this secularity comes in thought and practice to be the objective of man's total commitment or loyalty, then we are faced with what the older theologians viewed as the chief of sins, namely, idolatry. The "man come of age" who affirms the world and himself in a way construed as an affirmation of their full sufficiency is, as the old theologians used to say, a "sinner". We might prefer to say that the man who seeks to live exclusively from and for himself and the world is living inauthentically. But the intention or point of much of the admittedly dry and many times unconvincing discussions of sin, original and actual, was to affirm the ever-present danger in man's seeming tendency to assert his autonomy over himself and the world, that is, to affirm in **this sense** his self-sufficiency or "coming-of-age-ness."

There is still another dimension to secularity: "modernman" as self-sufficient has difficulty, as Paul Van Buren has suggested, in understanding any metaphysical condition of his autonomy.⁶ Further, his commitment to knowledge and reality in terms of an evidence-conclusion process has led him to claim inability of conceiving any reality not physically or mathematically demonstrable. This discussion is not new either. The sometimes latent, sometimes hot, controversy between science and religion is as old as the church itself, waxed hot in the eighteenth century, and is as

new as the flight of Apollo 8. The point is that this modernman's established and accepted canons of evidence (logical, causal, verifiable) as pre-requisite to his conclusions, that is "belief", are a part of his secularity. Seeing, as we say, is believing, and that can be as direct as observing the craters on the moon, the squiggles on a graph caused by radio waves from deep space, or writing on a page. It is because these canons of evidence or proof do not correspond to theistic claims that secular man is sometimes spoken of as one to whom God-talk is meaningless—meaningless because it does not speak to him. The implication is that if God-talk is meaningless, the unknown about which that talk is presumably expressive is also meaningless. What we may conclude from all this is relatively simple: Modernman, because of his fideistic and intellectual commitments concerning the nature of evidence and knowledge, is not aware of God—does not **know** God.

These statements concerning modernman should be recognized as generalizations, all of which could be, and generally have been, qualified indefinitely. There is another kind of modernman emerging, the character of whom suggests that we may be entering a new period. The "old" modernman, we have suggested, is one who affirms himself and the world, and who has a fundamental commitment to a rational process of understanding, and to control of self and world—which supposes both his ability and moral obligation to do so. The "new" modernman is concerned not so much with understanding as with insight, not so much with logic as with perception. The "old secularity" with its overriding concern for understanding based upon established canons of evidence, and its insistence that all true knowledge conform to these canons, has all but surrendered the ability of "insight." A new kind of man is appearing. He is primarily, but not exclusively, young; he is, no less than his older

⁵ Cox, *Ibid.*, pp. 223, 228-29.

⁶ Paul Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York, MacMillan Company, 1963), pp. 1-, 68.

counterpart, committed to the *saeculum*; and he is, increasingly, appearing in our colleges and seminaries. But there is a difference. The new breed has misgivings about the old unquestioned acceptance of fixed attitudes and goals, about his passive participation in an impersonal and de-personalizing society. And over against what the old secular man holds as crucial—knowledge as the gathering of facts and as reasoned conclusions—the new man is struggling to re-discover the meaning and reality of insight. Samuel Terrien has lately pointed to the emergence and development of a “new aesthetic sense” in art, music, and drama which, however had it may be in particular instances, points to a search for perception involving not one human faculty primarily (the mind), but man’s entire “sensorium.”⁷ Without denying the validity of understanding gained through mental process, there is a developing recognition that knowledge must move beyond ratiocination to an awareness of truth and meaning at a level involving the entire human constitution. W. J. Ong, the Jesuit scholar, in his book *The Presence of the Word*, has argued that we are moving into a new era in which sound and hearing is coming into its own alongside of sight and its organizing “cousin,” the reason; that sound is beginning to reshape our entire conception of the meaning of knowledge and of knowing. This is because of its appeal directly to the whole man at levels other than, but not excluding, the mind.⁸

Insight involves the whole sensorium. It is something like, as Bernard J. F. Lonergan has suggested, what happens in a well-written detective story. The reader is carefully given in sequence all the clues, but does not spot the criminal. Each clue may be considered

separately; new clues may be needed and provided. But with all we remain in the dark, for the reason that reaching the solution is not the mere apprehension or understanding of any clue, nor the mere memory of all of them, “but a quite distinct activity of organizing intelligence that places the full set of clues in a unique explanatory perspective” with the result that darkness becomes light, perception happens, we *know*.⁹ This all-encompassing awareness which happens is “insight” and is a perception of truth which is qualitatively different from mere understanding. Another useful example is the *aufklärung* of Martin Luther in which Luther’s knowledge of the teaching of Scripture gained in the process of preparing and delivering lectures on Genesis and Psalms was, in an occasion of enlightenment or awakening, transformed into insight into the truth of Scripture. Or again, insight is something like what the old mystics sought by means of the *vita contemplativa*, which included reflection, meditation and action, and what they intended to communicate in all that talk about the mystical vision of God. Perhaps insight is akin to what the devout Buddhist seeks in his meditations, and one wonders if it is more than coincidence that many today are turning to the wisdom of the mysterious East in their search for truth and meaning. As Albert Outler has said, this much, at least, seems true: “Significant insights don’t just happen, and they do not turn up as direct conclusions of linear reasoning. They require a context of freedom and rational inquiry. They are ‘spontaneous’, but not without background; they are also cumulative . . . and they rarely come in the course of didactic comments or coaching.”¹⁰

The attainment of insight, then, involves more than written words or

⁷ Samuel Terrien, “Towards a New Theology of Presence,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 24 (Spring, 1969), 227 f.

⁸ Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (New York, MacMillan Company, 1968).

⁹ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight, A Study of Human Understanding* (London, Longmans, Green, and Co. 1968), pp. ix-xiii.

¹⁰ Albert C. Outler, *op. cit.*, p. 76

mental processes; it includes conversation, hearing, contact and communication of persons with persons, meditation, and a context of love and mutual support. Understanding can take place alone, with a centrifuge or a book; insight is possible only in a cumulative circumstance of the confluence of all these activities. Much of contemporary drama, music and art is appealing not only to the mind, but to the whole man, seeking to involve him in an insightful way. Some innovations in worship lately are moving toward this same involvement. The recognition that knowing is more than understanding, that knowing is insight or awareness, is a significant development in the ranks of secular man—both in academia and at large. It is significant also, as we shall try to show, for the problem of secular man's knowing God.

II.

The Problem and Point of the Proofs of God's Existence

One of the primary points in this paper is that the question of God's existence is not, first of all, the problem. By and large the "question of God" has been considered in terms of ontology—whether in some way God is, and by attempting to re-conceive Divine ontics in terms of "Being-itself." Ultimate Reality, or what have you. Without decrying the crucial character of these deliberations, the primary consideration in our time is not so much "Is there a God?", but "How can God be known by modernman?"

There is small doubt that God's presence is something little known by many in this enlightened age. Some among us speak of "God" as an irrelevant or meaningless concept, or of his "death" to modern man, and assuming this, attempt to establish a justifiable religious system of belief and practice without God. This is all very well-intentioned and, for that reason, perhaps, laudable.

Certainly, however, it seems based on judgment too quickly made. To conclude from "modernman's" apparent lack of awareness of transcendence or perception of Divine presence in the world that God is irrelevant or dead is a bit hasty logically. It is a possible conclusion, but the evidence does not support the conclusion as **necessary**. We can conclude from the same evidence, and I suggest more appropriately, that God is **absent** to us and from us, but not necessarily that he is meaningless or dead.

In this connection we might benefit from Luther's similar experience of God's absence, and from careful study of his notion of **Deus absconditus**, the "hiding God." In his treatise on the "Bondage of the Will" and his 1535 "Lectures on Genesis," Luther speaks of the hiding God as He who does not make himself known completely, and manifests himself in ways unexpected to men. Our searching for God's presence, according to Luther, fails frequently because we are looking in places and by means other than those in which God chooses to manifest himself. We are not able to control God and we are not able to produce his presence by magic, ritual, or reason. But the knowable God is the hiding God and, for Luther, this God is hiding close to suffering and distress, i.e., hiding in Jesus of Nazareth. It was this God hiding in an unexpected way that was a scandal to the Jew and foolishness to the Greek. God, for Luther, is always hiding and beyond man's grasp, beyond scrutiny and control in human terms. From this perspective the question then becomes: how can **Deus absconditus** become for us **Deus revelatus**? This form of the question, learned anew from the tradition, may become of more positive value in our contemporary crisis than the conclusion that since God is little known to us, he must therefore be deceased, and in any case not relevant to contemporary mind-sets or needs.

Beyond this quick critical gambit into

contemporary anti-theology, there is another dimension of the "question of God" that needs mentioning. Some contemporary theologians and philosophers are seeking to present convincing principles of "theistic verification" to prove the reality of God, and the intellectual integrity of believing in him. The long tradition of the church is full of attempts to prove on rational grounds the "existence" of God. The problem with the "proofs" or arguments is, as we all know, that they prove too much, i.e., they prove the fideistic commitment of the persons or groups advocating them. They do not logically **prove** God's existence, since that is already the assumption. One cannot argue **necessarily** from secular or worldly effect to Divine causality, or from the reality of finitude to the existence of infinitude or transcendent being. This means, of course, that the "proofs" or arguments for God's existence fail in accomplishing what is, on the surface at least, their avowed purpose.

This does not mean that the arguments are therefore of no consequence. Their significance lies not in their being proofs of God's existence, but in their being descriptive of human perception of the nature of finite creation, of the self and the world. Or again, their contribution lies in their analysis of finitude as experienced, and particularly man's awareness of finitude, including his own. They are, in this sense, descriptive of reality as perceived.

The Thomistic form of the arguments is the most familiar and we may use them as exemplary. Man perceives **motion** in the universe, and raises the question of the origin of motion; he perceives also other "effects" and asks the same question: what caused these things? Contingency is experienced: is there something permanent to provide meaning in a contingent world? Man and nature apparently act with purpose, but what is it, and what is the ultimate purpose? Perfection is apparent in some

limited degree; is there such a thing as unqualified perfection to serve both as goal and norm? The five arguments reflect the perception by men of the world in which they live—movement, effects, contingency, purpose, perfection—all these finite realities are in the world, and are known by men as "givens." While we may not, logically, argue from finite to infinite reality, from the givens to the giver, we can, do and should ask the question of the **source** of the givenness of finitude as experienced. Here we come to the matter of the intentionality or aim of the "proofs"—namely, to confront us with the reality and nature of finite existence as given, and to drive or force us to consider existentially the question of source. In intention, the arguments are actually queries; but queries put in such a way as to require of us analysis and resolution.

Facing this question existentially in a search for insight, there are, as Albert Outler has pointed out, several alternatives. One is a simple nihilism in which the problem of a source of creation, purpose, and meaning beyond creation is considered as impossible of resolution, and man must then face the meaninglessness of his situation with the heroism of stoic courage. So Franz Kafka affirmed his suspicion concerning transcendence: that there is "No one there at all." A second alternative is naturalism in which the origin of the given is resolved by an assumption of the eternity of matter, or that the source of nature is nature. This position has genuine intelligibility in that what it really affirms is the principle of infinite regress—no beginning, no first origin of things. However, in centering on the affirmation of a self-contained natural process, it leaves unanswered the questions of purpose and perfection. Third, agnosticism is a "non-position" which is honest in its disclaimer of knowledge for the time being, but does not qualify as a positive position on the problem of

the source of the given. Fourth, theism is another alternative with its claim that "it is rationally conceivable . . . to think of nature as given, as a configuration of finite processes, contingent and interdependent, but neither self-contained nor self-explanatory," and that the givens of nature have their source in a giver beyond nature.¹¹ This is not a rational argument; it is a legitimate and reasonable alternative arising out of human experience of finite creation.

There are, then, two real candidates possible as explanations of the human experience of finite reality—naturalism with its doctrine of infinite regress, and theism with its doctrine of a Giver. No logical argument, old or new, is going to be able to coerce men into deciding for one or the other; neither, however, can such a decision be finally avoided. The purpose of the classical arguments was to raise the question of God by reference to human experience, and thereby, through the provisions of additional resources of tradition, help precipitate the insight which precedes existential decision.¹² The classical arguments do no more as "proof" than present the reality of finite creation, together with an option credible even to "modernman," in terms of which experienced reality is itself intelligible.

III.

Knowledge of the Presence of God

One thing should be made clear: I am not here suggesting that the question of the ontic reality of God is unimportant. On the contrary, Harvey Cox is correct in his assertion that the question of whether God exists or not is a desperately serious issue, one of the most serious enterprises in contemporary theology.¹³ Nevertheless, put in its baldest terms, what I want to argue is that attempted verification of the ex-

istence of God on rational grounds has been a dubious undertaking in both past and present; that the rational proofs were not that in fact or intention; and that we might be well-served to remove the center of focus from **ontology** to **epistemology**. If we can say that the reality of God is, at the very least, an intelligible and credible notion, then we might usefully raise the question of God's hidden presence in the world, and how that presence can be knowable to us.

Gordon D. Kaufman has written a provocative and suggestive essay on the meaning of God, based upon data from human experience.¹⁴ What he seems to have done is to lift up one of the five classical arguments—that of contingency—as the key to the meaning of "God-language." Certain problematic situations in the world seem to require reference to transcendent being, and it is in those situations that "talk" about God is meaningful and proper. Kaufman mentions several such situations—"man's sense of limitation", guilt, sin, meaning of life. But he is especially impressed by man's awareness of himself as a limited being, and reasons that to such an awareness "God is seen as the reality which is the final limit" to man's being and power.¹⁵ Man's experience of "thrownness" into a life beyond his control, and his looking to a future attenuated by unavoidable death is the major contingency in relation to which God-talk is meaningful. Presumably, even if other contingent problems are resolved, the sense of limitation will remain and provide a ground for the meaningfulness of a God-idea. We cannot pass on without noting that here the question of God is couched in terms of human needs; however sophisticated the language, God is seen as a "god-of-

¹¹ Albert C. Outler, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹³ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, p. 212.

¹⁴ Gordon D. Kaufman, "On the Meaning of 'God': Transcendence without Mythology." *New Theology* No. 4 (New York: MacMillan Co., 1967), pp. 69-98.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 74, 95.

the-gaps" who fills in at those points where other "answers" are inadequate. The experience of limitation and death is a primary and so-far unfilled lacuna. At any rate, Kaufman argues that men have a sense of finite limits of various kinds, in relation to which and by a process of analogy there may and does emerge a notion of "ultimate limit."¹⁶ Kaufman does not hold that the analogy "proves" God's existence; rather it shows only how the idea of God arises and functions in relation to this particular dimension in human experience.

What is suggestive about Kaufman's position is that it suggests a way in which the presence of God may be known to "modernman." Actually, it is very much like that seen in our description of the aim or intention of the classical arguments: (1) to confront man with an understanding of finite creation in such a way that (2) he will be driven to raise the questions of origin, meaning and purpose. There are in Kaufman's position two major shortcomings, however. First, as already mentioned, is his almost exclusive emphasis on man's sense of limitation or contingency as the primary category of human experience, in relation to which the idea of God as Ultimate Limit is affirmed. This severe limitation of the spheres in which God-talk is appropriate runs aground of the problems of a "god-of-the-gaps" position. The classical arguments are possessed of more breadth and balance, perceiving man's experience of finitude in a far more inclusive way, i.e., in a way which perceives several dimensions of human experience in the world. Second, Kaufman's position is, at least in places, suggestive of an overdependence on rational process, i.e., his use of analogy from experience to idea is couched exclusively in terms of a mental process. The correction here suggested is that one may move from perception of finitude to a perception of God, but that

the perceptions on both ends are more in the order of "insight" as described earlier, than in the order of logical or analogical reasoning.

In discussing the presence of God in the world, we may be facing a credibility gap as great as that involved in discussing his reality—if proof of presence is required. Rather than to speak about proving Divine presence, however, I want to speak about knowing it. It is important at this point to note how pervasive the awareness of the Divine presence has been in the Christian tradition—biblical and post-biblical. The Old Testament knows full well of the presence of God in the world and history, and the affirmations of Hebrew man stand in vivid contrast to the withdrawn, impersonal, sometimes benevolent, sometimes destructive, but always whimsical deities of *fata* and *fortuna* of the Greek world. The presence of Yahweh is perceived and expected; his intervention in the world in the past, present, and future is celebrated.¹⁷ "The nations rage," says the Psalmist, "the kingdoms totter; He utters his voice, the earth melts: the Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Psalm 46:6-7). Christian theology, building on these foundations, proclaimed as a central dogma the benevolent presence of God is all creation, human life and history. It was awareness of this kind of Divine presence that underlay the long, complicated and frequently controverted doctrine of Providence. The central intention of the doctrine of providence is the affirmation of God's real and continuing presence and guiding activity within the *saeculum*.¹⁸

This may very well be in terms of the tradition, but the question is begged if left here: the testimony of tradition does not make it so that God is present. In any case, if we assume Divine presence in the *saeculum*, how many we as

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 84 f.

¹⁷ Samuel Terrien, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

¹⁸ Albert C. Outler, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

modern men come to know the present God? We may here refer once again to Luther's teaching on the "hiding" or hidden God. The notion is not original with Luther, nor is it limited to him. It is part of biblical man's insight about God as present that he is also hidden. Deutero-Isaiah, for example, spoke of the "self-concealing God" (Isaiah 45:15). Hiddenness is not the same as absence, and while God may be elusive he is not necessarily dead. The "hiddenness of God" was biblical man's way of expressing his perception that God is not within man's control or manipulation, and is not made present by man's efforts whether rational, emotional or any other. On the contrary, like Samuel Beckett's "Godot," God has a way of not appearing or becoming known to us on terms appointed by us. The present God is *Deus absconditus*. "It is God's way of life," says Carl Michaelson, "to be hidden. . . . Hiddenness is intrinsic to his nature as God." This hiddenness is not "a council of despair or a concession to human finitude, but a positive description of God himself." And it "prevents man . . . from looking for God in wrong places," and in the wrong way.¹⁹ With characteristic sharpness, Pascal claimed that "All religion which does not affirm God as hidden is not true." The point of these statements is that God as present is also hidden; is thus beyond our control and our attempts logically to verify his existence. We cannot prove either his presence or his absence. Nor can we engineer belief in God by argumentation. God's presence will be known, if at all, through the complex activity involving the whole person which we have called insight.

The activity of insight includes man's insight into himself. Here Kaufman's view of man's sense of limitation is significant, because it indicates one of

the primary dimensions in our knowing God's presence, viz., self-knowledge, more particularly man's insight into his own finitude. Kaufman is correct in insisting that one of the chief parts of the awareness of finitude is the awareness of limitation—and awareness which confronts us with the contingencies both of ourselves, and the world, and presses upon us the questions of death, of our evil-doings and guilt, of our weakness in some things, and impotence in others. Such self-perception—and we mean not mere perfunctory agreement with the relative truth of human limitation, but a pervasive and encompassing insight—may well produce a condition of despair; may reduce us to what R. E. Cushman has called the "zero-point of the will,"²⁰ or what Augustine termed the "dark night of the soul," at which men's pretensions to prove God and to control his own destiny are neutralized. In this condition we are freed from a kind of bondage to ourselves, and freed to know the presence of God. Kaufman's insistence on the importance of insight into self is crucial in order to know God's presence. The "Oracle" already understood this, and carved it in the wall of the Temple at Delphi. The proponents of the classical arguments also perceived it, but, as we have seen, pressed the question of finitude on levels which included all the created order. The intention was the same—to force the question of finitude in such a way as that it could not be avoided, and bring man to fundamental insight of himself.

Such insight is not something attained by argument and, in one sense, there is no such thing as "instant insight." Nor is it something "engineerable." In human terms, the most that can be done relative to insight (of oneself and of God's presence) is provide a context. Insight of this kind is not something done but

¹⁹ Carl Michaelson, "The Real Presence of the Hidden God," in Paul Ramsey (ed.), *Faith and Ethics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), p. 259.

²⁰ Robert E. Cushman, "Salvation for All: Wesley and Calvinism," in W. K. Anderson (ed.), *Methodism* (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1947), p. 113.

something which **happens**, and which in its authentic forms is outside our control or manipulation. Even given a context for insight, including the agony of struggle, it may or may not transpire. Perhaps, once again, the **vita contemplativa** of certain monastic orders provides the best model of context for the activity of insight. There was a **disciplina** or **regula**—the rule. It was not generally held that the “rule” would automatically produce insight even if rigorously followed, but it was nevertheless held as an essential element structuring, loosely or tightly, the search. There was the rule of **reflection**, of intellectual endeavor in which the theological and devotional writings of the “Fathers,” past and present, were assiduously studied in order to understand both their content and intention. There was the rule of **action** wherein the brothers, going about their ministries and sometimes purely “secular” work, found themselves in contact and communication of personal sorts with each other and with the lay-folk. It should not be thought that the monks were all, or always, isolated from the world: on the contrary, **contemplatio** included **actio**. There was conversation and discussion, mutual support in love, medita-

tions, including confession and eucharist. The **regula** of the contemplative life was such that the man in his wholeness was appealed to. In spite of perversions, this was the intention and genius of the orders.

In some such context of involvement of the whole man, insight into self and of God’s presence is possible. Through serious reflection on the traditions, for example, the tradition centered on Jesus of Nazareth; through disciplined intellectual endeavor, trying to perceive the meanings and aims of past and present theologians; through action in the world involving authentic personal contact with others; in serious worship that focuses and lifts us beyond trivia and despair; in all these and other ways which involve the whole man, “modern-man” **may** come to insight of God’s presence. Not in reason alone; not in action alone; but in the whole round of life in which man is involved. In these ways, in this context, men **may** receive insight about their finitude, and come to despair. But they may also raise the questions of origins, meaning, purpose; and in the insight received, they may come also to know the presence of the “hiding God.”

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.