# INTRODUCTION:
# FRITZ BURI'S PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

CHARLES S. MILLIGAN

In the autumn term of 1982 at The Iliff School of Theology we had the great privilege of having Fritz Buri of The University of Basel as Visiting Professor of Theology. This issue of our journal is dedicated to him as token of our appreciation for his contribution to the life and thought of our school community.

He was brought here by means of the Louise Iliff Visiting Professorship, endowed for the purpose of bringing outstanding theologians from other countries to our campus, in keeping with our conviction that religious studies should be undertaken in a global context of awareness and understanding. Previous scholars serving in that capacity were Jose Míguez-Bonino, Professor of Systematic Theology at the Institute for Higher Theological Learning in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios, Bishop of the Syrian Orthodox Church in India and Principal of the Orthodox Seminary in Kottayam.

A further preliminary word about Miss Louise Iliff, in whose memory this visiting professorship was established: She was the daughter of John Wesley Iliff for whom the school is named. For many, many years she more than any other person was, to borrow a Harvard title, "overseer" of the school, generous in support and devoting time for a multitude of details, without ever interfering with academic freedom in any degree. She had a lively, inquiring mind and broad interests. So far as management of the school was concerned, the one thing she cared about most was the quality of the faculty. Thus it is singularly appropriate that this distinguished professorship honors her memory.

## *BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH*

Fritz Buri was born in Kernenried in the Canton of Bern, Switzerland in 1907. He studied at the Universities of Basel, Bern, Marburg and Berlin, obtaining his doctorate at Bern. His dissertation grew out of his great interest in Albert Schweitzer: "Die Bedeutung der neutestamentlichen Eschatologie für die neuere protestantische Theologie," and published in Zurich. He served as pastor in Walperswil, then at St. Alban Kirche in Basel. From 1956 to 1968 he was Senior Pastor of the Basler Münster, the great protestant cathedral church which stands high above the Rhine. He is fond of remembering that when he

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preached there he was always aware of Erasmus' tomb (which is visible from the pulpit) and that it pushed him to strive to do his best.

At the same time that he was serving as a pastor his intellectual powers were recognized in the academic world and he was serving as Venia docendi in Bern from 1935 and began as Lecturer in Systematic Theology at the University of Basel in 1939. In 1952 he was named Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy of Religion at Basel, and in 1968 persönliches Ordinariat. When he became Professor Emeritus in 1977 the theological faculty at Basel published a Festschrift in his honor with bibliography. However, retirement was a formality, as he has continued to lecture at the University of Basel and abroad. This recital of facts requires further comment as to something of the content of his work but even apart from that must indicate something of his energy and vitality.

Early in his career at Basel he initiated the debate between his colleagues, Karl Jaspers and Karl Barth, on demythologizing and published an essay on de-kerygmatizing theology as well as demythologizing it—a point of view which was to come in vogue in this country only many years later. Later, in conjunction with his colleagues Milic Lochmann and Heinrich Ott, a three volume *Dogmatics in Dialogue* was published (1973, 1974, 1976). His own systematic theology was developed in a massive three volume work (1956, 1962, 1978) *Dogmatik als Selbstverstandnis des christlichen Glaubens* (Theology as Self-Understanding of the Christian Faith). He has published an extraordinary number of articles, many of which were gathered into the volume, *Zur Theologie der Verantwortung* (Toward Theology of Responsibility), 1971. Four smaller books have been translated and published in English: *Christian Faith in our Time, Theology of Existence, Thinking Faith* and *How Can We Still Speak Responsibly of God?* It is to be hoped that his major works will also appear in English, for it is there that one gets the power and rigorous coherence of his theology.

He was a Visiting Professor at Drew University (1966-67), International Christian University in Tokoyo (1968-69), and Syracuse University (1971). In connection with these assignments he lectured in many other places, including Harvard (as Dudlean Lecturer), Seoul, Boston, Claremont, and Iliff; on other occasions in Denmark, England, Holland, etc. His visits to the United States resulted in the publication of *Gott in Amerika* (Vol. I covering American theological developments in the 60s; Vol. II 1969-1972). The scope of his knowledge of American theologians is astonishing, but equally so is the conciseness with which he treats the various themes. I have recommended these books to theological students studying German, because the flow of thought and familiarity of topics proceed so smoothly. I would agree with C.D. Hardwick's comment:

> To my knowledge, Buri is the first continental thinker of note seriously to attempt to engage recent American theology *on its own*

> *terms* — the implication clearly being that there is a gain to be had for both sides from the *mutual* learning process. *(Theologische Zeitschrift,* Nov. 1971, p. 412)

This was abundantly evident in his stay at Iliff, not only in continuous dialogue, but in the quantity of books he shipped back to Switzerland for later reading. He simply devours books. And, of course, there are American scholars who are familiar with his work. Among those who come to mind are Schubert Ogden, Stanley Hopper, John Cobb, T. William Hall, Harold Oliver, Charley Hardwick, and doubtless many others.

Of particular significance was the invitation by the Japan Foundation to study Buddhism in Kyoto (1978-79). This was not the beginning of his interest in world religions, but an intensive interest of previous years, culminating in *Der Buddha-Christus,* reviewed in this issue. By way of stressing the universality and intensity of Buri's life odyssey, I have before me an article of his by the Swiss-Chinese Society on Chinese Buddhism, graced with sketches from his travel notebook in 1981.

## PHILOSOPHY

*LIBERALISM.* To explain what the term Liberalism means here, it is something more precise than a tolerant attitude toward other viewpoints and an irenic style. It is meant to identify Buri with the historical development which began with Schleiermacher around the beginning of the nineteenth century. The following aspects can be singled out:

1. That every philosophical or religious account of the nature of things and the meaning of human destiny is a *human* construction, conditioned by human needs and cultural heritage, limited by linguistic and intellectual powers. Thus it is a profound error, infected with hubris and idolatry, to take theological assertions literally as if they represented descriptively accurate portrayals of the subjects about which they make claims.

2. That religious affirmations are not therefore to be understood as mere subjective projections. They are about objective factors or attributes of reality, just as, say, Titian's painting of John the Baptist (carrying a cross symbol!) would be profoundly misunderstood as an accurate photograph, but that hardly stands as proof that no such man lived or that because there is much we do not know about John we know nothing of him or that some conjections are not more warrantable than others.

3. That theological statements are representative of the human in relation to the divine and inescapably imbued with the subjective psychological dimension regardless of the linguistic appearance of speaking in cosmic terms. This relationship is real: where we are and what we are. There is the crux of the "mystery of being and the riddle of its meaning." This position rejects any

sort of mysticism that would offer a short-cut around the difficulties of rigorous thought, claiming to present conclusive and definitive theological answers. Rather it is enriched with that form of pietistic mysticism which puts depth and feeling into the structures of thought and conviction. It breathes life into philosophy, not answer-book conclusions. It is the task of theology to explicate the human condition in this relationship.

4. That this explication of self-understanding requires a special language. Objectively descriptive language systems miss the very essence of what is being sought. A religious heritage provides the type of expression and communication needed (in this case classical Christianity). It has been characteristic of religious liberalism to stress the importance of the community of faith, the church, and the individual's participation and sense of belonging to that community. For it is there that enactment becomes a part of this language of expression, affirmation, searching and questioning. Also, historically there has been in this general movement an emphasis on ethics, because in responsible and responsive behavior with reference to neighbor and society we are saying something with our lives about what the meaning of life is. Perhaps it is not too much to say that the hallmark of religious liberalism is insistence upon the legitimacy—indeed the necessity—of theology as contemporary re-interpretation of the Christian mythos.

*EXISTENTIALISM.* Professor Buri was deeply influenced by the existentialism of the twentieth century, especially Jaspers. This was inevitable, given the srong exponents of Neo-orthodoxy with whom he debated, the troubled years leading to and following World War II when various forms of existentialism were adaptable to continuous crises in ways that other schools of thought were not, and the sensitivity which he has for personal spiritual significance in the midst of events and ideologies which would erase or by-pass that concern. In several important respects his philosophy is existentialistic, yet with a difference from that school (schools?) of thought. For some, existentialism was the justification for an orthodox fideism—a theological simplification combined with worldly, sophisticated complexity. For others it eliminated the need to grapple with systematic thought, including systematic theology. In a variety of ways for others, as modern existentialism developed, it provided themes and problems but they then went on in more systematic ways to explicate a philosophy of phenomenology (Heidegger), or socialism (Sartre), or Catholicism (Marcel). For Buri it was to be in terms of an ethic of responsibility explicated by means of classical theological categories, radically re-interpreted. Thus one finds a considerable development (and revision) of his thought from *Theology of Existence* in his later *Dogmatik.*

1. Self-understanding is where theology properly focusses. Whereas much theology stresses the inadequacy of our knowledge of God and the cosmos, for Buri it is self knowledge that really poses the most puzzling difficulties and intense problems of personal concern. To attempt to deal with the

self in objectifying categories may be accurate, yet it misses what we really understand to be a self. Augustine said of a troubled time in his life, " I became a mystery to myself." In other ways the mystery of being a person remains, even deepens. The understanding of selves in the I-and-thou sense resists all objectification. "In the enactment of our self-understanding and its practical application," Buri has said, "we find this mystery speaking, calling us to responsibility—and this in a community of responsible beings."

Thus there was a significant shift in his theology around 1953 from the traditional sequence of topics which was rejected in order to begin the constructive theology with the person of faith and the human condition, moving directly to creation and redemption in Christ. This was at that stage more consonant with the existential focus than to begin with the doctrine of God and cosmic creation. Christology remains central as the orientation for understanding the Christian faith and self-understanding in that light.

2. Transcendence is found in a double sense. It refers to that which is beyond our knowledge and explicit conscious understanding, both within and without. It also refers to the capacity for intentionality, the way in which personal beings can view themselves, judge themselves, and contrive ideals, purposes and evaluative criteria. Christian dogmatics can only be understood in terms of self-understanding with reference to transcendence. It becomes a revelation of transcendence. Here we turn to the poets and artists, and in philosophy to revelatory symbols. Objectified concepts, as Bergson pointed out, are not so much mistaken as they are inappropriate instruments which cannot grasp the meaning sought. Indeed, the dichotomy of subject/object is itself simply wrong-headed and when that mode of thought confronts transcendence "it ends in Nothingness." Theology, if I understand Buri correctly, provides a means of discourse—with its mythic overtones and rich associations in heritage and narrative—which enables us to deal meaningfully and relevantly with transcendence. Its themes taken literally are silly. Taken symbolically it is an insightful response to the problems of being, mystery and meaning about which more will be said later. "Theology is anthropology understood and explicated in mythic symbol." Hence theology is self-understanding, whatever else it is, and self-understanding is impossible apart from transcendence.

3. Ethics as responsibility also has a two-fold reference. On the one hand, it refers to accountability; on the other hand, to dependability in enactment, caring and relationship. The inescapable burden of responsibility in ambiguous decisional circumstances has, of course, received emphatic attention in existential literature. What, perhaps, has been neglected is that "decision" does not apply only to the dramatic division in the road. One also makes a decision as to how he or she will follow the road chosen. Very possibly that is even more important than the choice to take that path. The dramatist (a la Sartre) emphasizes the spectacular point of decisional choice. I understand Buri as calling attention to the on-going decision as to one's style and continuing

responsibility. "Christ is for us a symbol of responsibility." The ambivalence and ambiguities of continuing responsible decision are not less than those at the dividing of the roads. As Butler said, it is the "art of drawing sufficient conclusions from insufficient premises," which has much to do with the dread and anxiety of which existentialists have made so much. That can be viewed as basically a curse or an adventure. I consider Buri as one who takes everything Jaspers has to say seriously, and views it as an exciting adventure. He is, to put it bluntly, a happy existentialist, which immediately sets him apart from heavy Germanic phenomenology and cynical Gallic pessimism. I do not want to discount the existentialist dimension in Buri, in fact, to emphasize it. But there are two kinds of Swiss character, the dour and the exuberant, and he, although existentialistic, is definitely the exuberant sort. The existential predicament for him is part and parcel of the exodus, pilgrimage, adventurous character of life. "Hope is realized in the actualization of responsibility."

*REVERENCE FOR LIFE.* My own interpretation of Buri's theology places great importance on the influence of Schweitzer. There is abundant evidence for that in his own writings. The plain fact is that Schweitzer has been largely ignored by professional philosophers, however much celebrated by popular publications and devotees. This strikes me as odd, since he more than anyone else called attention to the ecological dimension of ethics long before it became popular. If I am at all correct we have here an apparent contradiction—or at least a problem—in bringing together Buri's existentialism and ecological orientation.

Existentialists have characteristically been concerned with the individual human predicament. Ecologists have been concerned with inter-relationships with the natural environment. Buri cares about both dimensions. Neither one is to be properly understood without the other dimension. This accords with Jaspers: "The individual cannot become human by himself...only in community with others can I be revealed in the act of mutual discovery." *(On my Philosophy)*

Schweitzer held that there is a God who is known to us through the study of nature and philosophy. This God, who "produces and sustains all that is" is indifferent to normative or ethical concerns. The God within me is a God of ideals and hopes and justice. Schweitzer's great problem was whether these two Gods are really one, and if so, why? Schweitzer's own resolution was not altogether satisfactory. One can envision several possible resolutions. The one which appeals to me—not because it is most pleasant but because it confirms most with such evidence as I can gather, not because it is most orthodox (quite the contrary), but because it relates to where the people I know are in their lives—is that the dimension of justice and humane caring is a distinctively human contribution to the "natural" way of things. It is not ingrained in the "nature" of things, as John Stuart Mill so powerfully demonstrated, but I would claim, as John Dewey did, that it has potential for support in the nature

of things. We humans stand at a decisive juncture of cosmic development on this planet. Our contribution is not something opposed to previous natural processes, but by the same token it is not something ordered or guaranteed by that "natural" development or fiat.

Schweitzer, then, was correct when he acknowledged that the God of nature was different in a sense from the God who is revealed within us. The question is whether we have incorrectly interpreted the God of nature, whether these two "Gods" are different, or whether the God of nature awaits completion and fulfillment in the allurement which presents itself to us as a possibility. From the latter point of view, the human imperative is not the will of the God of nature, but an added normative claim arising out of the human condition on this planet, consonant with the character of the cosmic God, but by no means guaranteed by or commanded by the cosmic God. If I understand Buri correctly, he belongs in the last of these alternatives. It is not only that theology is a human construction of the nature of things and human destiny within them, it is that the human dimension (in our times) is an authentic contribution (for good or ill) to the normative outcome of human events. This is one of crucial points on which a liberal, like Buri, is sharply different from a Neo-orthodox position, and, I might add, from Romantic Liberalism of a century ago.

Returning briefly to the ecological aspect, Schweitzer's reverence for life is so familiar that it is not necessary to expound upon that, except to say that this extraordinary sensitivity to nature and our kinship with the living earth is present in Buri's theology. It is, in fact, characteristic of the Swiss ethos. At the same time, the human is set apart from other forms of life by virtue of transcendence and the attributes of both guilt and responsibility.

The other theme in Schweitzer which I regard as a strong influence is eschatology. There is the problem of determining what the New Testament view was, the sorting out of later versions and their attempt to explain why the expected end had not occurred, and the contemporary potential edge of doom for which apocalypticism is an apt mythic symbol. I might mention here that Buri has published many articles on Schweitzer, going beyond the usual summaries, and among other things analyzing the theology implicit in Schweitzer's unpublished sermons.

It seems appropriate while discussing Schweitzer to call attention to the pastoral dimension. For, like Schweitzer, Buri retained a genuine interest in continuing the role and style of pastor whenever appropriate, without compromising intellectual integrity. Schweitzer said that he considered preaching and leading worship to be a great privilege. It remained a part of his life despite numerous other demands. This is not to imply that Buri borrowed this attribute from Schweitzer, but simply to call attention to a parallel—one which I believe enriched the humanness of the theology of both. And as in the case of Schweitzer, there have been those who found "heresy" in Buri's theology objectionable. Time has a way of bringing perspective to things like that.

*THEOLOGY AS APPROPRIATE DISCOURSE.* We have seen that ordinary descriptive language and objectifying concepts are inept for dealing with the types of themes discussed above, whether separately or in an interrelated wholeness. Theology provides a language system which can do this, if taken mythically and seeking illumination rather than description. There are many reasons why theology is appropriate for this. It deals with existentialist themes of self-understanding, alienation, transcendence, poignant individuality, and the like. Of course theology did not borrow them from existentialism, rather existentialism discovered them in religious life, theology and revealing human crises. Theology also has rich overtones of historic and cultic associations, story, metaphor, combined with ritual, holy times, enactment and re-enactment. It is rooted in heritage and memory. Furthermore, it is communal—shared, communicated, a bonding of lives intertwined with common loyalties and hopes.

In addition to its evocative power and espressive subtlety, however, theology can deal with the whole cluster of themes systematically, in a coherent and integrated form. As mentioned before, artists and poets do this in vivid particularity. Theology does it systematically; it is necessarily philosophical-theology. Hence it is that Buri can take the general structure, vocabulary and symbols of classical Christian theology and re-interpret self-understanding and explicate responsible faith by means of that classical language system. Viewed as a system, his achievement is awesome. Yet because it is a mode of discourse about life, mystery and meaning, it is entirely open to dialogue with theologies of other religions. Whitehead said, "Religions commit suicide when they find their inspirations in their dogmas," and "Idolatry is the necessary product of static dogmas." *(Religion in the Making)*

If taken simplistically and literally, of course Whitehead was quite mistaken about the "suicide" business. Institutions, including religions, often flourish in proportion as they become fossilized and find their inspiration in their own dogma. To borrow Nietzsche's metaphor, such churches and shrines are "the tombs and sepulchers" of dead gods. Tombs have a way of enduring. However, if Whitehead's meaning is taken as referring to that inner vitality which is supposed to characterize religion as faith– something alive and transforming, liberating and sensitizing—, then his observation makes good sense. However, to assert that dogma elevated to deification is stultifying does not require falling into the trap of anti-intellectualism which disparages dogma or theologizing. Dogma is instrumental, not self-validating authority. Insightful and intelligently explicated teachings and formulations (dogmas) have the capacity to reveal to us dimensions of significance in experience that we otherwise would miss.

At this point I would simply like to interject that I do not agree with Buri about the adequacy of the themes and symbols of classical Christian theology, and Christology in particular, however radically re-interpreted. Some of the symbols—including some central ones—no longer have power to inspire.

Some of the problems they were contrived to deal with are obsolete. Some of the themes distort rather than clarify meaning. So it seems to me. Gordon Kaufman has said, "When making a journey through difficult and uncharted territories, one ought to travel light, taking along only essentials..." *(The Theological Imagination)* That, I judge, applies to theology. This difference is no doubt partly a matter of style, preference and tactics, but I believe it is also partly substantial.

Having said that in order to make my own position clear, I must go on to say that I believe Buri is entirely correct about the claim that theology provides a mode of discourse, enriched with the language and symbols of heritage and community, for dealing systematically with the significance of life. The argument about the relevance of classical themes and symbols is perhaps secondary to this point of agreement.

Finally, in regard to the relation of philosophy to theology, Buri would agree with Jaspers, who said, "To remain truthful religion needs the conscience of philosophy. To retain a significant content philosophy needs the substance of religion."

The purpose of this introduction has not been to provide an adequate survey of Buri's theology, rather to set forth selected themes, to give something of the character of his thought. An adequate introduction in the technical sense would be a lengthy monograph. If this sketch has aroused interest in Buri's multi-faceted philosophy—and if I have not seriously misinterpreted his views—it will have served its purpose.

## A PERSONAL POSTSCRIPT

It would not be possible to conclude without words of appreciation for what Professor and Mrs. Fritz Buri's visit meant at Iliff. To have them in our midst was not only a great personal pleasure for me and my wife, but one shared by the entire school community: students, staff, faculty and administration. Their outgoing friendliness was evident everywhere. Whether in the library, bookstore, classroom or at the common meal, their presence was intellectually stimulating and a joy to all. Their ritual evening stroll bestowed a benediction on everyone they met.

My own acquaintance began in 1970 when I had the privilege of spending a sabbatical year in Switzerland, although I was acquainted with some of his books before that. Among many memories, I recall particularly a day at Tübingen with the great Ernst Bloch, whose philosophy was basic for much of the "theology of hope" movement, and whom we had been studying in the seminar at Basel. Acquaintance was renewed when Professor Buri lectured at Iliff in 1971 (a lecture published in *The Iliff Review*). It will indicate something of the esteem in which he is held in Switzerland to relate that he once received a letter from abroad which had only two words on the envelope: Buri —

Schweiz, although that probably says as much about the efficiency of the Swiss postal service as it does about his fame.

In all his travels there is the ubiquitous sketch book in which he very rapidly and skillfully sketches scenes, buildings or whatever catches his eye. It strikes me that this expresses something of his philosophy, as if a photograph were too mechanical, too impersonal, whereas a sketch has the stamp of the artist's individuality on it. Also, it is art for what it leaves out, as if to impress upon us that knowledge and perception are always incomplete and shaped by the perspective we bring. Once when the Buris were at the Kremlin Professor Buri was sketching away in an area where no cameras are permitted. A guard accosted him for violating the regulation. Discussion followed. The guard retreated for consultation with other authorities, for Dr. Buri had insisted that a sketch book is not a camera. It was evidently a fine point in Kremlinese Theology, which had not arisen previously. Finally it was determined that the regulation did not apply. I would like to think that the professor has been a disturbing influence for legalism wherever he has gone.

In the fall there was a friendly squirrel who sometimes appeared on the balcony of their apartment, and whose friendliness increased considerably as they occasionally fed it. I had the greatest difficulty convincing them that since they often left their front door open their new friend might decide to become a house guest, which would be somewhat inconvenient. They also had difficulty comprehending that doors should be locked when away and nighttime strolls should be confined to well lighted areas. For all the talk about theological angst, they both move through the world with an unassuming trust and confidence. Closely related to the sketching is the habit of alert observation—being truly alive to the particular thing or event at hand. Repeatedly on outings Elsa Buri would ask about plants and birds, with a most remarkable ability to retain detailed information.

The visit of the Buris was over all too soon. Their departure left an irreplaceable space—and many rich memories. There could be no better way to conclude than with Buri's words in *Thinking Faith:*

> In living thought one must always remain open to surprises and modifications. Such a course is undertaken as a risk—but also with the joy of discovery! We are not at the end, but on the way. What I expect are not heralds of my thought, nor unsympathetic critics, but rather companions who critically think with me.

# TRINITY AND PERSONALITY

FRITZ BURI

I

In the God-talk of today the dogma of the Trinity and its history is a minimal object. The person of today is interested in one's own personality and in the question of its realization in the world. Taking God into account or not, one's own personality becomes for one's self a problem. Not if God may be a unity in three persons, but if God could be thought of as a person at all, and what our own being-a-person could mean in this connection is for us a problem. This latter question is for the person of today more a problem than the question of the personality of God—only with the distinction that it is for that person not only a historical more or less occasional question as the latter, but an essential substantial one, a problem of one's own self-understanding.

Our human concept of personality—as far as we have one—not only puts in question the Trinity speculation, but our concept of personality itself represents a problem for us. In view of this situation I ask myself, if the Personality of the triune God questioned by our concept of the person could represent an answer to our question about our human personality, and it is my thesis that *personality is just as much the problem of the divine Trinity as the Trinity is the solution of the problem of human Personality.*

In the following I shall develop this thesis—personality as the problem of the Trinity and as its solution—in four parts, based on the third volume of my Dogmatics: The Threefold Creation of the Triune God as the Transcendence of Responsibility.

In the *first part* we shall analyze the Trinity in its entirety as a rational Irrationality or an irrational Rationality in view of its historical genesis.

In the *second part* we shall recognize in its dogmatic formulations symbols of the mystery of being and of the riddle of meaning with which we are confronted by means of the question of the meaning of our existence as persons.

In the *third part* I shall show how the statements of the dogma about the immanent Trinity—the generation of the Son through the Father, the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son and the perchoresis of the three persons—can serve us as a symbol of our self-understanding and of our destiny toward responsible personhood in community.

In the *fourth part* we shall explain the relationship between the Trinity and the world in the economical Trinity to find in the creation as creation out of nothing and as continuing creation—conservation, companionship and gubernation—in redemption and glorification, symbols for the realization of our destiny in a graced self-realization.

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As in my *Dogmatics as Self-understanding of the Christian Faith* I use the concept of symbol as an unavoidable objectivation of the nonobjectifiable Self, of Being, and of the relations of both of them.

## I.

Let us first remember the *basic concepts and structures of the Trininty* for which the dogma refers to the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum (389) and the Athanasianum (the *symbolum Quiqunque*). According to their definitions the Trinity consists in one divine substance in the three separate persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (*una divina essentia in tribus personis*). The three persons have no essences of their own but they have them in community. Nevertheless they have their own qualities through which they operate in different manner, first of all in the initselfness of the Trinity in eternity. In this eternal immanence the Father in his fatherhood (*paternitas*) generates the Son in his sonhood (*filiatio*) and from both of them—from the Father and the Son—proceeds the Holy Spirit in its spiration (*spiratio in processione spiritus sancti ex patre filioque*). Although these functions of the three divine persons occur in accordance with their qualities separately (*divise*) the three persons envelop and penetrate one another (*perichoresis* or *circumincessio*).

But the three divine persons do not work only in the immanent realm of the Trinity in eternity (*opera ad intra Trinitatis*) since they are working also in the world in the sphere of time in a threefold manner: in the creation of the world and its conservation, in the redemption of the fallen world and in the glorious fulfillment of this history of salvation at the end. Although in all these three works in the direction of the world (*opera ad extra Trinitatis*) the three persons operate together (*indivise*) it is supposed (*per appropriationem*) that creation and conservation are mainly the work of the Father, redemption the special work of the Son and that the glorification belongs especially to the Holy Spirit.

It is not astonishing that the dogma assumes for all three parts of the doctrine of the Trinity—the basic definition of the triune God and of the working of the three persons *ad intra* and *ad extra*—a supernatural revelation and faith for its acceptance and recognition. For rational thinking the outlined description of the Trinity is indeed not understandable and not acceptable since it consists in a series of logical contradictions. Although the dogma rejects reason as inadequate for its understanding, it uses reason for the definition of its different parts and represents in its totality an illogical system through an admirable logical subtlety of conceptual differentiations. But it is not able to overcome the inadequacies of its definitions: In how it is that persons can be distinguished if they are one in their essence? How qualities can remain different when their owners interpenetrate one another, and how is it then possi-

ble that they work independently from one another? Is a working at all thinkable in eternity that is before there is a realm and a time in which it could happen? In the *opera Trinitatis ad extra* after the creation out of nothing such a worldly surrounding is at hand. But when all three persons are working together (*indivise*), the Father is in danger of suffering and dying together with the Son so that the Allmightiness of God would be put in question or for a time no God would exist.

The situation for the dogma becomes even more difficult if one appeals for its statements to the Bible as their revelatory fundament since the Scriptures do not contain any similar speculations. It is even easier to delineate some of them from the realms of nature and reason than from the Bible. But such profane similarities are taken only as hints of the superrational revelation (*vestigia*) and not as their full proofs. So with the rise of the sciences of nature and history there remained not only a mystery of faith but nonsense for reason so that the dogma was more and more abolished. For modern Protestant Theology the Trinity formula only played the role of a historical problem and the *opera ad extra* were used only as a summary of the dogmatics but without their basis in the *opera ad intra.*

It is indeed easy to explain in a historical manner the origin and the development of the trinitarian dogma as a consequence of the process of the biblical-Christian world of representation and thought. In the Old Testament there is no problem in the relationship of the creator-God and his Messiah since the latter is thought of as a new David or in the late Jewish Apocalyptics as a heavenly angel created and chosen by God. As this Son of Man Jesus probably expected to appear after his death from heaven to realize the kingdom of God on earth in a new world. But because his parousia did not occur and since the history went on, his salvatory work had to be changed by his adherents. In the meantime they had to proclaim their faith in the world of the late Hellenistic mystery religions. Under the pressure of the nonarrival of the parousia and under the influence of their new surroundings they had to reinterpret the eschatological work of Christ in sacramental terms, that means that it no longer consisted in the change of the aeons but in the foundation of the church as a salvatory institution through whose sacraments humans could get immortality. But to work in this manner Jesus Christ had to be deified. The change in soteriology necessitated a change in Christology, a double change which was already working in the gospel of John. That is, in short, the origin of the Christological debate in the Early Church leading to the Trinitarian Dogma.

## II.

In contradistinction there are the theologians who concluded from this history of the dogma of the Trinity its dispatch and uselessness for modern

people from Feuerbach to Albert Schweitzer. I am convinced that it is still of value for us as a symbol for our self-understanding in a manner in which the original meaning of the biblical eschatology can be understood in a better way than in the traditional use of it—not in the speculative Hegelian method as D.Fr. Strauss interpreted it, but in an existential interpretation of its mythological content.

The origin of the biblical eschatology, that is the expectation of a new world as the completion of the present distorted world or as a completely new creation lies in the problem of the idea of the world as the creation of an almighty good God. For Israel the liberation from Egypt and the foundation of the nation through Moyse the prophet and guide was the basis for its religion. In this situation Jahve was for it the power of the foundation of its being and of the solution of its meaning-problem. Under the influence of the Babylonian myth of Marduk and his killing of the dragon Tiamat, this national experience was enlarged in a cosmological drama of the creation of the world within which God preserved a special place for his elected people and guided its history. But when Israel succumbed to its enemies and lost its land, this faith in an innerworldly reign of David was changed into a hope of a Messiah coming from heaven in the future to solve all the earthly problems. This late Jewish eschatology was taken over by Christianity, which concentrated on the belief in the resurrection of Jesus and to substitute for "Israel" "the Church" for whose completion the return of the raised Christ is expected.

In this manner the biblical-Christian eschatology is an expression of the being-meaning-problem and a speculative construction of its solution. Although its basic structure is dualistic and world-pessimistic it is in its goal not less optimistic and monistic than other worldviews which are in their entirety optimistic on the basis of a total harmony. In view of the reality in which we can find only particular meanings but not a total overcoming of the meaninglessness, the biblical-Christian dualism is less illusionary than any harmonious optimistic monism, although it is in its final vision not less illusionary. In using the idea of history as the means of overcoming in a supernatural or natural manner the meaning riddle it is burdened with the problem of the beginning of history, that is, with the question of the origin of being from which the harmonious eternal return seems to be free. But as the cyclic worldview does not give an answer on the question of the why of being, also creation out of nothing does not answer this question. Neither of these worldviews solves the mystery of being and its riddle of meaning with which we are confronted in reality when we are asking: Why is there something and not nothing, and what is the meaning of our being in the world? Both worldviews are not solutions but expressions of these two problems which arise for all thinking about our situation in the world.

Usually we find ourselves confronted primarily with the *meaning-problem* since it is important for our physical and spiritual life. The criteria we use

thereby are not only subjective in relation to what is meaningful for us, but we observe also facts and events which are independent from us in their own relationship of a positive or a negative value. But as our judgment is always relative, since we do not know the whole realm, so our realizing of intended meanings remains always relative since we cannot know all the consequences of our doing and even our best doing has its shadows for us or for our surroundings. In any case we have always to do with a *riddle of meaning.* But while in the question of meaning we are dealing only with a riddle, in the *question of being* we are confronted with a *mystery* in which we cannot take any step toward its enlightenment or we would have to extinguish our thinking consciousness which would produce for us a night in which all cows are dark. We are not able to say anything about being since in our necessarily objectifying thinking we have always to do with beings and not with being as such. In our work we have to do with the same absolute boundary, since we are not able to produce something out of nothing but are always dependent on something to create something. Being remains for us an absolute mystery.

To speak about this mystery of being and to explain in some measure its riddle of meaning, we have to use inadequate concepts in which we objectify what is lastly not objectifiable, a mythological or speculative imagery understood as *symbols,* that is, as objectifications of the nonobjectifiable, which have their truth in pointing beyond to an existential reality.

In this manner of *symbolizing an existential truth the dogma of the Trinity in its rational irrationality as a whole can serve us as a symbol of the mystery of being and its riddle of meaning.* Although it is constructed by reason it is said that it can be understood only by faith, that is, in acknowledging the boundaries of rational knowledge and pointing to that which cannot be explained in conceptual logic. As such, its function is only a formal one and it is a basic symbol for our thinking about being and its meaning. Already in this formal boundary marking manner it preserves us from an illusionary natural or supernatural universal teleology and from a nihilism despairing of all meaning. But as we are not only interested in the forms of our thinking but in their content, so the dogma of the Trinity, too, is for us not only of formal importance, but has a content which for our self-understanding is of even greater importance in view of the *opera Trinitatis ad intra* and in view of the *opera Trinitatis ad extra.* First we take in account the context of the doctrines of the *opera Trinitatis ad intra* in connection with the positive content of the above mentioned boundaries of our knowledge symbolized in the rational-irrational mystery of the Trinity as a whole.

## III.

*The shattering of our objectifying thinking* in the question of being and its meaning has—as already mentioned in view of the exclusion of an illusionary

teleology and a despairing nihilism—not merely negative consequences, but this shattering includes also *a positive turn* insofar as it opens for us a new horizon of our being in the world and its meaning. To acknowledge the impossibility of a universal teleology and of the self-contradiction of nihilism is more than such an illusion and self-contradiction. Already in this negative manner it is truth instead of untruth or halftruth. It frees us from self-deception and leads us to a positive solution of the basic problem of our life. We experience in this shattering of our asking for meaning in the midst of the meaning riddle of the mystery of being the fact that we are forced and destined to confront this question. In view of the inevitable shattering we would not choose this undertaking. But we acknowledge ourselves as forced and destined to it. With its problematical form it belongs to our essence without which we would lose ourselves. So in the shattering of our asking about being and meaning we discover our real being and meaning through which we are distinguished from all other forms of being. It is the human personality which appears here and with it we have no more to do with an opaque transcendence but with a special revelation of the transcendence knowable not in its wholeness but in this special destiny to be responsible for this question of being and meaning. It is upon us to ask this question, but we feel ourselves inevitably destined to ask it and to take on us its shattering. To understand oneself as responsible for this undertaking is a special occurrence in the world. It is not an objectifiable causality but a free decision to which we find ourselves destined. This destination cannot be found in the world as a whole and it is not our work, but it is a special particular working of the transcendence in our self-understanding. We understand ourselves in this manner, but the enactment of it is in the same manner as this enactment not objectifiable, a nonobjectifiable experience of the working of the transcendence in us and through us. It is a special kind of mystique, not a becoming one with the mystery of being, but with a special working of it, not experiencible without it.

But as our self-understanding is not objectifiable in its enactment, so this special appearance of transcendence does not become an object of our discursive thought and to say something about it we have to use the language of symbols—in this case not the Trinity in its entirety as we use it as the symbol of the mystery of being and its meaning-riddle but *the opera Trinitatis ad intra in which we have the adequate symbol of the special revelation* of this mystery and of the manner in which it solves the meaning of our destiny to become a person in community with other persons to whom we are in relation with the transcendence operating in this manner. Each of the three kinds of working of the Trinity in its immanence represents a *symbol of our destiny to become a responsible person in community.*

*First* the *generation of the Son* through the Father as an eternal act outside of space and time. As the generation of the Son is the irreducible free will of the Father so our destination to become a responsible person is not our choice and—without losing it—we are not able to reduce it to a causal occur-

rence in space and time but it occurs itself in the enactment of our non-objectifiable self-understanding. In its interiority occurs the birth of our personal being in a once-for-allness of each person. Personhood in its essence has the character of once-for-allness.

*Second:* as the *filiatio* is at the same time the work of the Father as it is the essence of the Son so our self-understanding as a person is in one an act of the transcendence and of ours. We are negated in it as much as the transcendence itself. Neither the destinational working of the transcendence nor our self-understanding realizing this destination occurs independently from one another. In its nonobjectifiability is an ontological-existential event for which the dogma uses—*third*—the symbols of the Holy Spirit and of the *spiratio.* In the enactment of our self-understanding as destined to become a personal being we realize this transcendental destiny in our existence. That is what the dogma calls the *spiratio* as the working of the Father in the third person as the Holy Spirit and that is the reason why it lets the Spirit go out from the Father and *filioque,* from the Son. In our personal self-understanding we have no more to do only with transcendence as such and in itself, but with its working in its special revelation of our destiny in our inwardness symbolized in the Holy Spirit.

Here we have to do with a *fourth* aspect of the immanent Trinity, with the *Perichoresis* of the three trinitarian persons, that is, in its comprehension of one another in the separateness of their individual working. This *Perichoresis* has for us a double meaning. *First:* it symbolizes in our relationship with transcendence, in which it does not work without our self-understanding but only through it, the distinction between both of them. We do never become identical with transcendence but stand in a transcendental relation to it. We have to understand ourselves, we are the subject of our self-understanding although it is not possible without the revelation of transcendence. In our conceptual thinking we have to go around (*circum ambulare*) the transcendence which remains finally a mystery, never unveiled totally, but only revealed in the nonobjectifiable realization of our self-understanding as responsible persons.

*Secondly,* this *Perichoresis* does not remain in the inwardness of our personal self, but comprehends in the same manner other persons. We have to respect them in their own personal destiny which remains for us a mystery with its meaning problems. And it is the same with all kinds of beings which are to be respected in their dignity. This enlarged aspect of the *Perichoresis* leads us now to *the opera Trinitatis ad extra as the symbols of the realization of our destiny in the world and of the world* as the place for the realization of this destination.

## IV.

In the foregoing we have dealt only with the *opera Trinitatis ad intra* and

have found it in the symbols for the relationship of our self-understanding with its transcendence. But as the transcendence is not without the immanence, so our transcendental self-understanding stands in connection to the world. Christianity formulates this relation between transcendence and immanence in the doctrine of creation and in the trinitarian dogma it is taken into account as the outer working of the Trinity. They consist in the doctrines of the creation as *creatio ex nihilo* at the beginning and the continuing creation, of the redemption after the Fall and of the final glorification at the end of time. In contradistinction from the *opera ad intra* these *opera Trinitatis ad extra* occur *indivise,* separated from one another.

For the objectifying thinking of the natural and historical sciences these doctrines are untenable but for our existential self-understanding and its realization in the world, they can serve us as the adequate symbols in different directions corresponding to the doctrinal specifications.

First, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo.* This nonbiblical philosophical speculation which was originally constructed to distinguish God the creator from any *demiourgoi* which needs for the creation of the world some material, can serve us not only, as already mentioned, as the symbolic answer of the unanswerable question: Why is there something and not nothing? but also as a *symbol of the essence of the unconditionedness of responsibility.* For objectifying thinking no such unconditionedness is possible, since in each decision can be discovered a reason for its causal effect so that it can be explained in the schema of cause and effect, which excludes unconditionedness. It is not recommendable to neglect this calling in question of responsibility since its unconditionedness occurs only at the boundary of objectifying knowledge after passing its criteria and acknowledging them as far as it realizes itself in the realm of demonstrable causality in which there is no absolutely new beginning possible. But in the midst of the beginningless and unending relative connection of causal conditioned factors one has the chance to understand oneself as free and responsible for decision in overtaking its consequences and to set in this realm of liberty a new beginning. Insofar as one does not acknowledge a ground of one's decision outside of one's free will, in which one acknowledges personal duty, one acts in a creative way out of nothing objectively demonstrable. For such a kind of unconditioned responsible self-understanding *creatio ex nihilo* is the adequate symbol.

Not only the creative effects of this existentially understood *creatio ex nihilo* but already its fundamental enactment occurs in space and time and needs being for its execution, which is not in our disposition but must be given by a special creative working of the mystery of being as a not forseeable grace. As for the existential understanding of *creatio ex nihilo* so, too, for its consequences in the continuation of this creativity (*creatio continua*) we appeal not only to God as the creator but—in accordance with the trinitarian doctrine—to all three persons of the Trinity. The three parts of the *creatio continua* as preservation (*conservatio*), divine concomitance (*concursus divinus*) and

gubernation to the fulfillment (*gubernatio*) are, as the dogma says, the common (*indivise*) work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, although the preservation may be mostly the work of the Father, the accompanying is mainly the work of the second person and the gubernation the part of the Holy Spirit.

In our *existential interpretation* of these dogmatic distinctions we would say *conservation* means the understanding of *being as wonder.* The *divine accompanying* consists in our consciousness to be accompanied by others in a responsible manner for our neighbors from far and near—as Luther said, "We have to be Christ to one another"—that is, to form a *responsible society* which would be the definition of the true church. *Gubernatio* would then consist in the *personal and political realization* of such a program under the guidance of this spirit, which means liberty in obligation and contains in it the *hope of its fulfillment.*

But before we say more about this goal we have to take into account not only that in the trinitarian dogma but also in our existential realization of its content must be acknowledged the great hindrance to this personal and societal way of meaningful behavior. The dogma speaks here about *the Fall and its consequences.* We understand them as symbols for the possibility of missing destination through outer or inner fallacies. In view of this problematic human situation, Christianity proclaims the *salvatory work of Christ* in his preaching, vicarious atoning death and his resurrection, which consists in the content of the second trinitarian *opus ad extra: Redemption.*

It is not the place here to develop the different stations of the redemptive work of Christ as the Son of God in whose passion and death even the Father is involved. We content ourselves with the existential interpretation of this mythology as a symbol of the *saving insight and acceptance of our guilt* for the possibility of its *expiation through our own atonement* and *regaining of our lost identity as a resurrection* from the spiritual death.

As creation out of nothing goes on in the continuing creation so redemption works in our individual and collective history to its fulfillment in the final *Glorification* as the third *opus Trinitatis ad extra.* In it we find not only the symbols for the *meaning of culture and its history* for its *decays* and its *judgments* but also for the *hope* which is *included in responsibility* since we have the right to hope as much as we realize our destination to nonconditional responsibility in community. In each moment of such a personal realization the last judgment occurs with a new creation of our world wherein we find a full compensation of an illusionary so-called history of salvation or pseudo-Futurology in an actualized *real eschatology.*

In this manner we deliberate the biblical Christian eschatology from its fallacy in which we have found the origin of the doctrine of the Trinity with whose symbols we are able to overcome the historical problematic of this doctrine, understanding the *Trinity as the symbol of personality.*

Let me close with an allusion to a speciality of the last treated *opus*

*Trinitatis ad extra.* Although the dogmatic stresses the *indivise* character of these *opera ad extra* it allows nevertheless to speak *per appropriationem,* in approximation of the creation as the work of the Father and of the redemption as the work of the Son and of the glorification as the work of the Holy Spirit. We would enlarge this appropriation of these main Christian doctrines to the trinitarian schemas of other religions in the Buddhist *Trikaya* or in *Trimurti* of the Hindus and especially to say about Christ what is said in the Bhagavadgita about Krishna: "In what name a person does venerate me, if he does it with all his heart, it is all right." In our terminology that means: in unconditional personal responsibility in community in the transcendental relationship to the special revelation of the mystery of being and its riddle of meaning as it is symbolized in the symbol of the triune God.

In view of the problem of God-talk in contemporary discussion, the result of our deliberations, in their methodological importance could be summarized in the following thesis: *In the encounter of the different beliefs in God and of their negations we have not to insist on their positive or negative positions, but we have to bring in connection the problems of both of them and to interpret these positions as expressions of the basic problem of being and its riddle of meaning which cannot be solved in objectifying thinking but only in existentially understood symbols in whose hermeneutical dialectic the God-problem reveals itself as the problem of becoming-human.*

# THEOLOGICAL ETHICS AND ETHICAL THEOLOGY

FRITZ BURI

Immanuel Kant, at the conclusion of the *Critique of Pure Reason,* states that for pure reason "theological ethics" is "impossible," just as it makes no sense to speak of "theological physics." Kant requires, instead, an "ethical theology" for which "religion is the perception of our duties as divine commandments"—a statement which Kant went on to expound in his book *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone.*

Kant's statement could well stand as the motto of this my treatment of Kant's theme. My procedure will be as follows. In the *first part,* I shall present the essence of theological ethics and the ethical problematic of its establishment in salvation history. In the *second part,* on the basis of an ethical reflection and in confrontation with the theology of salvation history, I shall outline the essential moments of an ethical theology, which I think is required today.

## I.
## *The Problematic of Establishing Theological Ethics in Salvation History*

There are very different forms of *theological ethics.* In all the differences, however, all forms have something basically in common. They all relate themselves to the divine salvation history revealed in Holy Scripture. For theological ethics, the Bible is not merely a document of religious history, but a witness to God's revelation—a witness which awakens faith and which is understood in faith. Both the witness to revelation and its acceptance in faith belong to this salvation history, which stretches from the creation to the fall of Adam, the old covenant, the Christological work of salvation and the new covenant, and, finally, to the completion of the history in a new creation. We shall now present, in the given order, the ethically essential aspects of this salvation history as it is witnessed to in the Bible and systematized in traditional Christian doctrine.

We have, first, to refer to the *revelation-character* of the basis of knowledge of theological ethics. For the answer to the question about what one should do, the individual is not referred merely to oneself, one's environment and the history of that environment. One can, to be sure, find answers to one's question in these, but the answers found in them are unsure and contradict one another. On this basis, the meaning of the world and of one's existence in it will remain unknown. Faith perceives the answer, therefore, in the

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witness of Scripture to the revelation of God, which has occurred and which ever again occurs through the witness of Scripture. Faith perceives what God's plan for God's creation is, what God has done for creation's salvation and what God will yet do. To that belongs also God's declaration of God's will in the commandments. On the basis of these commandments, a person can know what is good and evil and what one, accordingly, should and should not do.

In this connection, the idea of the *creation* becomes ethically significant. God is not simply the mysterious original ground of being. The world is the creation of God's spirit and will. God created humans in God's own image, equipped with spirit and will, and made the human co-worker and partner in covenant. God entrusted humans with the cultivation of the earth. God allows the doings of this partner in covenant to occur in freedom, but humans have to hold to God's commandments. Not only that. Humans must respect the order which God has given creation. If they do not, they fall to the punishment of the judgment God has already spoken against evil.

That brings us to the *Fall of Adam* and the curse of sin and guilt. The Bible sees human history—not entirely, but in wide sections—under this curse. The Bible does not depict a perfect world, but the world of paradise lost. In Christian theology, in spite of the emphasis on divine providence, we find a further development of the doctrine of original sin. In connection with this doctrine and with the doctrine of salvation, the doctrine of predestination has been further developed. This whole complex of doctrines presents the greatest difficulties for theological ethics, but theological ethics can also here find its greatest ethical depth. For here one actually has to do with the deepest, most abysmal problem of ethics—a problem all too often covered over in other kinds of ethics. But we must also say that theological ethics itself can be guilty of the same mistake.

Before we go into this problem, however, we move on to the other points to be considered. We refer to the *doctrine of reconciliation* in its establishment in salvation history and to its positive significance for ethics. We mention, first, the fact that this doctrine takes the guilt of humanity seriously, and, indeed, not only as in the doctrine of original sin, as human destiny, but also in view of the possibility of liberation from personal guilt. Second, we have to say positively that this redemption is seen as being everything but self-evident, for it does not have to do with a grace standing at our disposal. Positive is also the fact that, in the realization of reconciliation, the moment of atonement is given great significance. It is all positive in that one tries to keep grace from being either cheap or magical, and to keep it from being limited to the sphere of individual inwardness. Rather, one tries to let it be openly effective in society.

This existence-changing effect of salvation history's idea of redemption is especially important in the significance the *church* has in the structure of salvation history. The church is understood not only as mediator of salvation, but also as the area where the salvation it mediates becomes effective as world-changing in a struggle which will end with the victory of the church's Lord

over the powers of the world. As fantastic and different as the depictions of the *end of the world* in the Bible are, they are, nevertheless, the expression of a faith which does not compromise with sin and guilt in human existence, but which fights against these powers, which remains undaunted in set-backs and which is ready to make sacrifices as it ever again throws itself into the struggle to reach its goal. With all its talk of a life beyond and of other-worldliness, the church's doctrine of the last things also brings such an ethical attitude to expression.

Paul writes in the 13th Chapter of the First Letter to the Corinthians, "Now remain faith, hope and love. Among these, love is the greatest." We have, therefore, also to emphasize the *love* in the essence of God and in God's commandments. This is the last in our series of the ethical motifs in salvation history. If it is initially weak and in many places darkened and displaced, it nevertheless moves, finally, victoriously through the whole history of God with creation and shows itself—at this history's high points—to be the completion of this history.

We can speak of the love of God and of fellow humans as the most sublime ethical motif in the history of salvation, but we must also include its occasional absence, darkening and displacement. This fact allows us to focus more sharply on the other parts of the establishment of theological ethics in salvation history—those parts we emphasized prior to love as being ethically significant. However, here we must say that just in those parts the problematic of this establishment also becomes evident. For there the establishment of theological ethics shows itself to be highly questionable, and, indeed, in the entire scope of these parts.

The *belief in revelation* itself, presupposed by the whole of salvation history, can have a questionable result for ethics. That is true both for the believer's attitude toward self as well as for the attitude toward one's fellow humans. The faith of salvation history is bound together with definite mental images—images in which people in a specific situation expressed the feeling that perception could go no further, or images in which people in a specific situation expressed the feeling that they won insight into the possibility of overcoming difficulties through the way they actively or passively behaved toward those difficulties. Here the determination of a limit of perception is questionable because one does not simply speak of a limit of perception in a specific case, but of a limit of perception itself in general. Such limits are, however, severely transgressed when what is supposed to lie beyond these limits is characterized and defined with thoughts about what it is that limits perception. That happens in statements about God which faith makes. That which limits, which has shown itself to be something empty for perception, is brought into connection with possibilities of meaningful behavior, whereby these possibilities are drawn from one's own specific personal experiences. Here the danger exists that faith, in order to insure its own *experience of meaning,* so paints its ideas of God—ideas which from the beginning represent a

transgression of the limits of possible experience—that these ideas seem to guarantee the experience of meaning which faith has had. The guarantee seems, then, to be once and for all and to encompass all being and events generally. A faith that tries so to insure its own experience of meaning will pay for it with inner insecurity. And, in order not to have to admit this insecurity and in order to conceal it from others, one will bear oneself with all the greater self-surety before oneself, one's environment and, finally, even before one's God. The history of piety shows enough examples of such perversion. The superstitious person, of whatever kind, necessarily becomes a fanatic. In matters of faith, such persons can tolerate no views other than their own because, if they were to be tolerant, they would become unsure. Fanaticism, however, is always a sign of *superstition.*

These basic difficulties and dangers of perception stand over the whole faith of salvation history and threaten, therefore, the whole of the theological ethics based on this faith. We may see that in the problematic of this ethics' use of the Biblical *idea of creation.* With this idea, to be sure, theological ethics can refer to the respect we owe to all creatures. But, to cite only one example, we also know how fatal the creation story's command of God can be. God says, "Subject the earth!" One need only mention how this command was effective in the imperialism and colonialism of Christian peoples and how it is today effective in the threat to the environment by Christian people's technical capacities. Certainly, theological ethics here objects that such wrong-doing is a misunderstanding of the *dominium terrae,* for the creator also gave commandments forbidding such inhumanity. However, in the creation story itself, there is no talk of commandments limiting the rule of the world or the use of nature. Furthermore, neither the divine commandments which emerge in the further course of salvation history, nor the orders of creation put into creation by the creator, nor the natural right derived from those orders are as humane and friendly to the environment as one would like. Moreover, the commands and orders require human interpretation for their application, and therewith they unavoidably lose the divinity attributed to them. For theological ethics, they belong anyway to the world corrupted by sin. The old law is deposed by Christ and replaced with a new law. The relation of this new law to natural right and the following of the Sermon on the Mount within the existing world, however, present even greater problems. In this connection, the idea of the continuous creative activity of God also becomes problematic. For here is presented not only the—also ethically—significant question about theodicy—the justice of the divine government of the world—but also especially the question about the relation of divine omnipotence and human freedom of will, behind which stands the question of predestination. It is no wonder that it is practically impossible to bring all the different covenants of God into an orderly series. How could God at different times make such different requirements? How can God punish humans for doing what God had earlier commanded?

May God punish humanity at all—in history and, at the end of history, in

the last judgment—after God had allowed, if not ordered, the *Fall of Adam* and allowed or made possible the consequences of the Fall? But the Fall of Adam touches not only the justice of God. This doctrine—in its development into the doctrine of original sin—also especially places in question human ability to judge what is and is not just, not to speak of the possibility of being able to strive for justice. And, therefore, it also places human guilt in question. As profound as this doctrine is, it has the effect—especially in its form in Reformation doctrine—of laming ethics.

We have to say the same thing about the complement of this doctrine, the *doctrine of reconciliation or of redemption.* To be sure, in this doctrine the significance *grace* has corresponds to the weight *sin* has. But, just as sin is a foreign thing poisoning life, so also grace is a foreign thing which is supposed to heal life, only that the healing is more difficult to imagine and to effect. If already in the doctrine of sin one can not really speak of guilt when the matter is regarded legally, so in the doctrine of redemption guilt is only imaginatively extinguished by a foreign sacrifice which may be transposed and made effective only by sacramental magic or fictive legalism. The mutually exclusive doctrinal systems of the different confessions themselves judge one another for manipulating an awareness of guilt that may not be manipulated.

Today, theological ethics vainly tries to escape this problematic of its doctrine of redemption on the one hand, by borrowing from secular psychology and, on the other, turning to the long neglected sphere of society and politics. In psychologizing the old *order of salvation,* theological ethics runs the danger of abandoning its foundation. In speaking of the "politics of God," the foundation shows itself to be crumbling. The psychological structure of secular humanity is different from that of Biblical humanity. The secular idea of world and history is different from that in which the plan of divine salvation history was conceived. Especially in the form it was actualized in the New Testament as the expectation of the near end of the world, this plan has shown itself to be antiquated simply by virtue of the continued existence of the world. Whoever today, standing on the platform of our world, still believes in that long since cancelled schedule and still waits on the arrival of the "Advent Express" is deceived about the state of things, and will hardly be able to say anything clarifying about the order of things. Rather, such a one urgently needs enlightenment.

The problematic of theological ethics' reference to its basis in the revelation of salvation history cannot be made more radically clear than it has been made with the ascertainment that salvation history's plan, which was long ago expected to be culminated in the end of the world, is completely antiquated. This ascertainment uncovers that problematic at its very root. Basically, theological ethics is aware of this problematic and wrestles with it, just as, since its beginnings, the theology of revelation has ever again attempted new solutions. As a theological structure, the theology of revelation, as all Christian theology, owes its origin and its history to one fact: *the non-occurrence of*

*the parousia. The disaster of theological ethics and its promise* lies in that non-occurrence. It is the fate of theological ethics that it sees itself caused, by the unexpected course of history, to try to make valid the salvation in its salvation history by ever new theological formations in history. Beyond that, and as seen in our survey of its problems, theological ethics, to its detriment, develops in many parts into theological dogmatics. Even today the advocates of theological ethics think they can solve their problems with theological dogmatics. Their theology is the disaster of theological ethics. However, the promise of this theology lies in the fact that theology is done for the sake of ethics. But the promising aspect of this undertaking does not lie in its theological character, which is questionable throughout. Rather, the promising aspect consists in the fact that it is a reflection on ethics. Such a reflection on the essence of the ethical is the task given theology by the non-occurrence of the parousia. If theology truly sees that this is the case, the promising possibility opens before us of attaining an ethical theology in which also the ethical significance of theological ethics' basis in salvation history can find its proper validity. This brings us to the *second part* of my presentation, which has to do with the attainment of an ethical theology. I begin by setting forth the essential moments of ethical reflection.

## *II. The Essential Moments of Ethical Theology*

The role played by revelation and faith in theology is in ethics that of awareness of responsible personal being. Just as the whole of salvation history, to which theological ethics refers, presupposes revelation and faith, so ethical reflection in all its essential moments presupposes an awareness of responsibility or of being determined for responsibility.

Awareness of personal responsibility is so comprehensive that it encompasses every reflection of whatever kind, whether theological or specifically ethical. In every case *we* are the ones who do the reflecting—whatever the area intended is, whatever the circumstances and conditions of the reflection are. What reflects is not something outside us, not something other than we, but exactly we ourselves. We are the *subject* of our reflection on any given thing. As this subject, we distinguish ourselves from every object on which we might reflect. In this sense, we also distinguish ourselves from ourselves, insofar as we can make ourselves the object of our reflection. We are always something other than the self which can be the object of our reflection on ourselves. The object "myself" is and is not "myself." We are the subject that makes the self into an object. But this, our being as subject, is never identical with any of our ways of objectively thinking it. In all its objectifications, our being as subject always shows itself to be *what cannot be objectified.* To be sure, we would not know about ourselves at all if we did not make the self into an object. But, at the same time, the self escapes every attempt to grasp it. In all comprehension,

exactly in it, the self remains ungraspable. With relation to this ungraspable self, therefore, we speak of an awareness of the self in its being as subject and distinguish it from our consciousness of the self as an object. Consciousness of self is psychologically graspable and can be analyzed. The awareness of self in the *act of* self-understanding withdraws itself from every psychological or other scientific or even intuitive comprehension. In distinction from the latter, self-understanding acts in rational conceptuality, but in such a way that it is, with relation to the self, aware of the limits of rational conceptuality. And these limits cannot be dissolved. The self occurs actually as the appearance of the unconditional in the midst of all its objectively demonstrable conditionedness. In this unconditional aspect of the self, the essence of responsibility stands as *unconditional responsibility in distinction from all relative responsibilities.* This distinction is of the greatest significance for ethics, for it is the question about what should be.

The self has not only to do with itself, but also and just as much with the environment in which it always already finds itself in its reflection on itself and on the question about how it is to behave actively and passively in the environment. This environment stretches infinitely from the objectifications of our self to everything that can be an object of our consciousness and, therefore, of our experience and our knowledge. The objects of our conscious world are related to one another in researchable orders. In and according to these orders, these objects present themselves to us in meaningful courses of events. However, we are able neither to grasp the whole of beings nor to perceive a univocal meaning of the different appearances of the whole of beings. On the one hand, the horizons of our knowledge can be widened. On the other hand, we always remain within these horizons. Our perception is never complete and absolute, but always remains incomplete and relative. There is no answer to the ultimate questions about the why and for-what of being. The *ground of being* remains for us a *mystery* and its *meaning* an *enigma.*

This openness and relativity of our perception is also true when we ask how we should behave within this mysterious and enigmatic area of being, of which we ourselves are a part, and when we ask what responsibility we carry for our individual behavior within it. Here there are, in distinction from others, demonstrably more correct insights and better ways of behavior, which can themselves be judged differently according to intentions pursued and the measures applied. What is useful or damaging or what is good or evil remains *relative* within these perceptible connections and *conditioned* through the outer and inner circumstances from case to case. Correspondingly, the responsibility for the choice we make for our behavior among the possibilities at hand, and for the effects resulting from that choice, are also, objectively seen, only conditional and relative.

Our responsibility is in only one point and relation *absolute* and *unconditional:* in that self of which we are aware only as a magnitude which cannot be further objectified. That does not mean that we here disregard given outer and

inner circumstances as we make judgments about this responsibility. On the contrary, only with the best possible ascertainment of the relative responsibility we carry in the connections of relations in which we find ourselves—only with this ascertainment do we become aware of the unconditional character of our responsibility as that of a self in the authentic sense.

The demonstrably relative responisibilities belong to what is given in our existence in the world. Behind them stands for us, finally, the *silent mystery of being with its enigma of meaning.* In our awareness of our determination to being self, this silent mystery reveals itself to us as the *voice which calls us to responsibility,* and in a special way in the midst of the constant enigma of the whole of its meaning.

Not only the fact that this voice can be silent belongs to this enigma of meaning, but also the fact that we can refuse to listen to it, that we can refuse our determination to being self, that we can content ourselves with the relative responsibilities and that we can try to excuse this our failure by appealing to the conditions of the relative responsibilities. But, just in connection with the possibility of such *guilty* failure, the enigma of meaning shows itself in our existence in another way. What I mean here is something that does not stand at our disposal and is not a matter for our choice about how to understand ourselves. Rather, it goes before our choice irresistably and encompasses it, so that when we speak of it we cannot easily speak of our guilt. This yet more original appearance of the enigma of meaning in connection with our determination to being self consists in the fact that we cannot speak of the self and its determination without *objectifying* them in images and concepts, even though we become aware of both in their non-objective character. In fact, only in the images and concepts of thought can we become aware of the self and the special revelation of the mystery of being resulting from the awareness of self. Even when we speak about the limits of thought in this matter, this acknowledgement of limits is possible only in objective thought. Already in comprehending the limits of thoughts we transgress on something which is incomprehensible in its essence. This is true more than ever when we make what lies beyond the limits of thought into an object of thought.

Here we have clearly to do with the *mystery of what should not be* and, indeed, not simply from the point of view of perception theory, but also in view of the metaphysical depth of this mystery. But this mystery also has significance for our action, for what we do. Transgression of set limits and objectification, for purposes of being able to dispose over it, of what is not an object, shows itself exactly in *practice* to be the *original image of evil.* At the same time, this transgression and objectification shows that the guilt of violating what should not be is not merely to be sought in our striving to make disposable what does not stand at our disposal, but that this audacity of ours hangs together with a structure of being, and, indeed, in such a way that, if we wanted to fathom and measure out this abysmal depth, our wish would be, more than ever, hybris.

Our involvement with evil has the character of fate, and it is impossible for us to deny our guilt in the realization of evil. Just in this fate, however, do we catch sight of the *essence of the good that should be,* whose image we are. This essence of the good that should be exists in our assumption of our responsibility unconditionally in spite of all the unavoidable circumstances that condition our responsibility, and in the grasping of the possibilities of acting in accordance with the obligation assumed. Once we have become aware of this our determination, we can never deny it. If we should try to deny it, the determination would only show itself in the subject-being of the denial itself. As we, in the acknowledgement of our being obligated, experience freedom through the awareness of our determination, so we experience the loss of freedom when we deny being obligated.

Just as little as we may render harmless the abysmal depths of this matter can we overlook the possibilities which open to us in the depths of guilt, however it has risen. These possibilities open when we are ready to assume the guilt unconditionally, as alone corresponds to our being as self, instead of trying to push the guilt from us with superficial or profound reason. As we do this—first, at least, in the action of understanding ourselves to be unconditionally responsible—we cancel the guilty objectification we have performed on ourselves and our environment. Because the environment of the self belongs to our self-understanding, we cannot cut ourselves off from the environment. Rather, we have to regard it as the area of influence of the change which has taken place within us, and we have to try to compensate for the damage our behavior has done. In the degree to which we can do this, we have a measure for the reality of our own process of becoming self. As much as the realization of our self-understanding and its effectiveness in the environment is our matter, just as much will we see in both the mystery of a gift given us—the gift of the special effectiveness of the mystery of being. To the fate in evil corresponds a grace in the good.

Just as there is a history of the effectiveness of evil, so there is a history of the effectiveness of good. As we have emphasized in relation to both, they are not limited to the individual, but also belong to one's sphere of influence. Because irresponsible behavior endangers or, indeed, takes away the possibility of responsible self-being in others, the responsible person knows he or she is obligated to respect the self-being of the other and to assist, spiritually and materially, in the realization of the other's self-being. Only in community is responsibility possible, but responsibility also makes community possible. That is true even as we have to admit that new problems arise just by virtue of the necessary objectification of community.

To be sure, the ethics of responsibility we have sketched here is not a cure for all ethical problems. It also cannot guarantee its own success. But it is filled with *hope* for the success of the inner and outer ways of behavior that it perceives as good. Hope is proper to the degree in which it corresponds to the measure of the good and to the degree in which we engage ourselves for the

good critically, actively and with the willingness to suffer. Responsibility is in hope. Hope is in responsibility. Both are unconditional.

It should be clear that the above-presented essential moments of ethical reflection parallel the essential moments of Biblical-Christian salvation history. This parallelism is basically not surprising, for in both it is a matter of the same question, if with entirely different presuppositions. It is the question about the meaning of our existence in the world and the possibility of its realization. It may certainly seem that our ethical reflection, when compared with the dynamic of the theological ethics of salvation history, is an abstract philosophical structure of thought which has no right to be called theology. For, one may ask, in this ethical reflection, is not everything that is proclaimed as God's work and expected of God in the theology of salvation history here loaded upon and expected of humans? But, however many advantages it may offer, the assumption of salvation history is felt as a burden by persons who are not able to believe as salvation history believes. But it could also be the case that more theology is contained in our ethical reflection and that its content is more related to that of biblical salvation history than might appear at first sight.

If that were the case—and I think it is the case—the holy history could, in the light of our profane reflection on the essence of the ethical, receive real ethical significance for us. Our ethical reflection could also, in the holy tradition as ethically understood, win an historically powerful language, just as the proclamation of salvation history once possessed. In conclusion we wish, at least in an indicating way, to try to make this very promising possibility visible.

For this purpose we begin again with the *presuppositions of perception and their theological-metaphysical implications.* Not only the so-called perception of faith, but all perception presupposes revelation, that is, the making-itself-known of reality for our experience and perception. That something is rather than nothing—that does not result from us ourselves. Nor does it result from us that we can become aware of this mystery of being in our existence among beings. Just as "*creation out of nothing*" through a power transcending our thought is the adequate expression for this mystery of being, so "revelation" is the adequate expression for this making-itself-known to our astonished awareness of it. *Faith* is, first, nothing other than the astonished awareness, which silences us, of this mystery of being and of our being-in-relation to this mysterious power. *We* become aware of this mystery and of our relation to it, but we are not its origin. Rather, we owe to it our existence in the world. Therefore, we call this original power of being "*Creator.*"

This personal designation of the creative mystery hangs together with the other side of revelation. This other side consists in the fact that we not only experience ourselves astonished by it, but we are also caused, in view of meaning and meaninglessness, to ask about the meaning of our existence in this enigmatic meaning of being. It is a *special revelation* of the creator in his creation that this question emerges in us at all and that we experience ourselves—in

all entanglement in the enigma of meaning of nature and history—as determined to a self-being which must ask about meaning and which knows itself responsible for its choice and for the consequences of its choice. "You are in every case responsible for your decisions and the consequences of your decisions." This is the voice of God in us. It is God's *commandment* that we know ourselves unconditionally responsible. Our image of God consists in our awareness of being called to such responsibility. For responsibility is, in the frame of our causal thought, like a creation from nothing. It presupposes a rationally ungraspable new beginning of unconditionalness in the midst of all demonstrable conditionedness. For its realization, the given orders of the different areas of being are to be taken into consideration and ordered together anew for the purpose of attaining goals of meaning, which goals are themselves to be set by humans. To be sure, all of this activity is always bound with new complications of meaning. For all these creative sides of human action, a better image is to be used than that of the world-architect and the idea of providence. The better image is the original *mystery of the struggle with the dragon,* which is found in different forms in the whole of biblical salvation history. From the doctrine of the continuing creation, we can use the thought of the *covenant* as the expression of the ethical obligation which cannot be destroyed by any of its transgressions. The remaining parts of this doctrine, on the other hand, are rather problematic in regard to ethics, unless they are understood in the sense of the on-going struggle with the power of chaos mentioned above. If they are so understood, they can be freed of questionable metaphysical constructions and win an ethically positive validity.

However, whether mythology or speculation be used to interpret the situation of the person in the world, statements about the self and about transcendence always present an objectification of what cannot be objectified. In this danger, also, their symbolic use stands as a statement for self-understanding's relation to transcendence, that is, for the form that *faith* assumes here when correctly understood. With the admission of this unavoidable failure, which includes the gain of mature faith, we touch on the mystery of the guilt bound essentially with human existence. This guilt is the original image of all evil. However, from the way we, in our ethical reflection, have understood the fatal character of objectification and the possibilities contained in it, there results for us an understanding of the Fall of Adam and its consequences which does not end in tragedy, resignation and protest. Rather, it shows how the curse, which lies upon sin as transgression of God's commandment, can be canceled by the assumption of guilt. This assumption, however, can only be experienced as being pardoned.

The sharpest form of the struggle with the "old serpent, which (according to Revelation 20:2) is the Devil and Satan," and the completion of the victory in this struggle are presented in biblical salvation history as the *Messianic work of salvation.* According to the Bible, Jesus accomplishes this in his earthly appearance and as the ascended heavenly lord Christ. Just as regards the presen-

tation of *redemption and reconciliation* in our ethical theology, if much that is essential to redemption and reconciliation is found without the Biblical-Christian tradition and is represented outside it (as history shows), then we must say—again, in view of history—that the deepest content of ethical reflection is contained in this tradition in a singular way and in a language adequate to this content. We only add the qualification that this language is adequate to this content if it is not understood objectively, but is in faith, that is, in self-understanding, recapitulated as faith's symbolism.

We have called this the occurrence of grace, which we have presented as reconciliation in the acknowledgement and assumption of guilt and in the grasping of possibilities of atonement and betterment. I think this can form the basis for a *Christology* and for a *soteriology* for an ethical theology. Here, too, the last two points of our series of themes, namely the church and eschatology, can be rightly valuated.

On these I have only the following short comments. The *true church* occurs where people know themselves determined to be unconditionally responsible for each other, where they can so form their existence that the individual can perceive what responsibility is, and where it is possible for the individual to live responsibly. From the essence of responsibility itself we see that this is not true of every community, much less of every social institution. As we have presented it, the essence of responsibility corresponds exactly to the biblical commandment of love of God and one's fellows and to the Pauline image of being a member of the body of Christ. Whoever tries to be seriously responsible will experience the fact that responsibility is not a formal criterion, but a very concrete criterion which is socially effective. It is a criterion which, like the *Holy Spirit,* is able to distinguish among spirits and which presents the principle of life of the new world promised in the Bible—a new world which breaks into our reality where we let ourselves be led by this concrete criterion.

If in these statements the difference between theological ethics and ethical theology is again indicated, then, in the confrontation of the two that we have given, not just what separates them should be clear, but also what it is that unites them. And that can only be a gain for both.