The Reality of God

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I

THE Christian educator is entrusted with a responsibility of major importance — nurturing a religion of maturity. Our times call for such a religion. Unfortunately, there is a great deal of immature religion in our midst, ego-centric in its orientation, magical in its outlook, concerned with self-gratification. Immature religion frequently functions in providing an escape from the realities of life, or in denying or distorting facts with which man is called to deal. Some persons insist on having a religion of immaturity. Others wish there were an alternative, but do not know what it might be. Still others, and their numbers are increasing, are turning away from religion because they cease to see its truth or relevance in the contemporary world.

If the church is to function with integrity and relevance in our time, it must nurture a religion of maturity. Such a religion relates a growing understanding of man and the world in which he lives with sensitivity to the deeply personal and subjective dimensions of the life of faith. An underlying assumption of this paper is that if man is to grow toward true humanity in relation to the whole of being, if man is to become what he is now called to become, a religion of maturity is essential.

In his endeavors to nurture a religion of maturity the Christian educator inevitably encounters questions revolving around the doctrine of God. Of what significance is "God-talk" in a religion of maturity? Some would say, "none at all." Others would affirm that the possibility of a religion of maturity in our time hinges upon our ability to talk about the reality of God in a fashion which makes sense in the light of our knowledge and experience in the twentieth century. Lacking a viable doctrine of God, there is no responsible alternative but some form of humanism.

My own judgment is that there is nothing sacred about the word "God" or about any particular **conception** of God. However, I am convinced that there is no vital religion without a doctrine of God or its functional equivalent. From this perspective, the question of the reality of God becomes one of major importance. It is with this issue that we are now concerned, especially as it bears on the work of the Christian educator.

II

Traditional ways of dealing with the doctrine of God are being called into question by persons both within and outside the church.

For example, an influential school of thought tells us that God statements are meaningless; first, because their truth cannot be verified and secondly, because in actual practice religious persons have a way of killing the meaning of their statements about God with a thousand qualifications.

Again, for some years we have lived with the contention that preoccupation with God is best understood in terms

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of psychological projection, and religion is a form of neurosis.

The traditional arguments for the existence of a God external to the world have been undergoing scrutiny of late and found wanting. To all of this Kant and Hume would probably say "Amen" for they said it pretty well in their own time. The author of one such book, Wallace Matson, asks: "Are there any reasons for believing in the existence of a Deity, in the sense in which there may be reasons for believing in the existence of one's grandfather, Himalayan Snowmen, or a prime number greater than ten billion?" After analyzing the cosmological, teleological and ontological arguments, he replies in the negative, but then concludes it really doesn't make any difference anyway.[1]

Still others insist that the God-question is not even the meaningful or relevant **religious** question. Morton White writes: "Among religious intellectuals today the most important question, the question that exercises them most even when it is not asked in this form, is not 'Does God exist?' but rather 'Should I be religious?'" White is endeavoring to make the point as did Santayana many years ago, and as others have since, that religion is not theism.[2]

In a variety of ways we are being told that the God of the speculative philosophers is dead. Thus, Thomas Altizer says, "It is precisely by freely willing the death of God that we can be open to our time and thereby open to the Christ who is always present . . . the Christian Word can neither be identified with an eternal God nor understood as the particular expression of an unchanging deity.[3] Thus, we apparently are called to affirm Christ without God. Whether exponents of the "God is dead" theology are really talking about God, or about some concepts of God, or some particular approaches to God-talk, or about the temper and mood of some modern men is not always clear. But in any event they are reminding us that there are many thoughtful persons for whom familiar and traditional ways of talking about God are dead.

Still others tell us that the contemporary situation is such that this is not a good time for God-talk. Harvey Cox writes, "This may mean that we shall have to stop talking about 'God' for a while, take a moratorium on speech until the new name emerges."[4]

I think there is no doubt that among many informed, sensitive persons there is an increase in various forms of humanism. Many such persons sincerely cannot subscribe to traditional forms of supernaturalism — and God, for them, has meaning only in relation to such supernaturalism. Under these circumstances man's dignity is said to be best expressed in affirming the human enterprise with integrity even in a universe which is meaningless and in which man is alone. So, Sarah, in Archibald MacLeish's "J.B." comes at last to say:

> Blow on the coal of the heart
> The candles in churches are out
> The lights have gone out in the sky
> Blow on the coal of the heart. . . .

Yes, there are many persons of intelligence, integrity and concern who would have considerable difficulty finding meaning or relevance in any affirmation of "The Reality of God." Not a few of these persons, I suspect, are in our churches. Others are not in our churches and probably never will be unless we talk about God in some new key. One of the most crucial tasks facing religious educators today is that of talking about God in ways that make sense to thoughtful and concerned men of the world.

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[1] Matson, Wallace; *The Existence of God,* Cornell U. Press, 1965.

[2] White, Morton; *Religion, Politics And The Higher Learning,* Harvard University Press, 1959, p. 85.

[3] Altizer, Thomas; *The Christian Century,* July 7, 1965.

[4] Cox, Harvey; *The Secular City,* The Macmillan Co., 1965, p. 266.

III

A number of factors contribute to the growing skepticism about traditional ways of dealing with God questions at the same time that multitudes of persons are not disturbed by these issues at all. I should like to refer to just one of these factors which seems to me to be of particular importance.

With the coming of the scientific age men have come to radically different ways of seeing themselves and the universe in which human life is set. Not only is the universe **vaster** than had been supposed, it is **different.** Increasingly modern man thinks in terms of a **one-order theory of the world** and reality. He thinks in dynamic, relational and emergent categories. The world is seen as an inter-related web of spatio-temporal processes. Man belongs in such a world, and whatever meanings human life is to have for him must be found in this context of eventfulness.

In this scheme traditional images of causation are being radically revised. Instead of saying, "For every effect there is a prior, external cause," it is more relevant to say, "For every effect there is a field of relational factors."

This new way of understanding causation has its implications for one's style of life. Value and meaning are not simply imposed from a higher realm; rather, they emerge — they appear — out of the matrix of relationships. It is out of the inter-play of events in which man functions with a measure of imagination and creativity that meaning emerges.

To persons who think in these terms the idea of God as a big X to fill in the empty places of our explanations, or the idea of God as an external miracle worker who occasionaly breaks into the course of events, or of a God who is a single big Push from the outside or a single cause of happenings, or a one-planet deity, has little appeal. Modern man increasingly sees himself in a world that provides its own explanations, if we seek them out, and is to be understood in dynamic, relational and emergent terms.

Theologies sometimes die from hardening of the categories, and in our own time some of the categories which have had their day are those of Static Substance, Pure and/or Passive Being, Independent Existence, and so on. The question is — can we re-imagine God in ways which illuminate the human situation amid the structures and processes to which we are subject as they are understood by modern man?

Nature has come to a new status in our time. The very concept of nature has undergone revision in the direction of making it a much more inclusive concept. With the introduction of organismic rather than simply mechanistic models, nature is understood to be richer and more creative than was once assumed to be the case. Nature is seen as including the inorganic and organic, mind, personality, value, individuals and societies. Instead of being a closed system, nature is understood in terms of open-endedness and possibility. There is inter-relatedness and continuity, even as there are distinctions. Talk of God must take this new view and estimate of nature into account.

Some years ago Sir James Jeans wrote, "The old physics showed us a universe which looked more like a prison than a dwelling place. The new physics shows us a universe which looks as though it might conceivably form a suitable dwelling place for free men and not merely a shelter for brutes — a home in which it may at least be possible for us to live . . . lives of endeavor and achievement." [5]

However, in the transition from a three-storied image of reality to a one-order view, and in the transition to dynamic and relational perceptions of reality, something has happened to the outlook of some persons. It all seems so natural, and what is wonderful, let

[5] Jeans, James; *Physics and Philosophy,* The Macmillan Co., 1943, pp. 215 f.

alone worship-inspiring, about the natural? How can we speak meaningfully of God in a world whose human inhabitants experience a waning sense of the supernatural? Any meaningful God-talk in our time must address itself to the questions of what the God-idea really is and how God is related to the world as experienced and understood.

IV

In his autobiography, Andre Gide tells of an experience he had as a young boy. The experience had to do with a caterpillar and a teacher of mathematics. He had reared the caterpillar and was keeping the chrysalis carefully in a small, narrow uncovered box. He writes:

> I used to examine it every day, but never perceived the slightest change, and I should perhaps have despaired of it had it not been for the little convulsive movements this semblance of a creature made when I tickled his abdomen with the nib of my pen. It was really alive then! Now on that day as Monsieur Tabourel was correcting my sums, my eyes fell on the box. O Proteus! What did I see? Wings! Great green and pink wings beginning to stir and quiver!
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> Overwhelmed with admiration, with joy, dancing with enthusiasm, I could not help seizing for want of a better divinity, old Tabourel's fat paw. "Oh, Monsieur Tabourel! Look! Oh, if I had only known . . ."
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> I stopped short just in time, for what I had been meaning to say was, "If I had only known that while you were explaining those deadly sums, one of the mysteries of life, so great a one, so long expected, was going on at my elbow!" . . . A resurrection like Lazarus's! A metamorphosis, a miracle. I had never yet beheld . . .
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> Monsieur Tabourel was a man of education; calmly but with a shade of astonishment or blame or something disapproving in his voice:
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> "What," said he; "didn't you know that a chrysalis is the envelope of a butterfly? Every butterfly you see has come out of a chrysalis. It's perfectly natural."
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> At that I dropped Monsieur Tabourel's hand. Yes, indeed, I knew my **natural** history as well, perhaps better than he . . . But because it was natural, could he not see it was marvelous? Poor creature. From that day I took a dislike to him and a loathing to his lessons.[6]

Could it be that there are those who have little sense of wonder, awe, excitement, reverence, because, after all, things are perfectly natural? And could it be that with the coming of the modern age in which we are more enlightened, in which we are giving up belief in magic and strange interventions on the part of supernatural beings "out there", that for some there has passed a glory from the earth? After all, it is perfectly natural.

Is it not strange that in the very process of coming to know that the world is not flat, some people's world has indeed become more flat? Work and love and suffering have lost their sacramental depth. They point to nothing beyond themselves. Expectancy and surprise, the sense of depth and mystery and profundity and significance, the awareness of qualitative richness, importance, stewardship, and possibility, the discernment of a healing, saving grace, the will to aspire and worship — for some all these seem to fade as they learn to say, "It's perfectly natural." After all, what is there to celebrate?

But it is not so for everyone. There are those who possess a wider range of awareness. Such persons are ready to say "It is perfectly natural," but they say it in a different way. George Santayana once wrote, "The vistas (religion) opens and the mysteries it propounds are another world to live in, and another world to live in is what we mean by having a religion." And Erich Fromm reminds us that what religion provides is a new frame of orientation and devotion.

To some at least, there come intimations of a dimension of wholeness putting what is natural in a transforming light. It is in the intimations and awareness of this transforming dimen-

[6] Gide, Andre; *If It Die,* Modern Library, 1935, p. 83.

sion of wholeness that talk of God begins to have meaning for some persons who no longer are persuaded by the traditional arguments for the God "out there."

V

We find a variety of reactions to our new situation on the part of concerned persons. Some years ago Joseph Wood Krutch wrote of our age that "one of its most distinguishing features is just its inability to achieve either religious belief on the one hand, or exultant atheism, on the other." [7] This has changed. We now see an exultant atheism abroad in the land.

In religious circles we find a variety of reactions. Whenever new ideas and new perspectives call in question traditional ways of thinking and seeing, one can respond to the new in terms of rejection, evasion, or assimilation. So it is today. There are those who would call us back to the old time religion. There are those who advise us to keep using the traditional words but without looking too closely into questions of what referential significance they may have, while reserving the right to insist that all this is said in a highly symbolic sort of way. There are those who would re-emphasize the hiddenness of God — insisting on the futility of philosophical theology — while holding that we may affirm the presence of God at one decisive place in human existence. There are those who in the presence of undeniably difficult questions of fact would travel the road of subjectivism insisting that talk about God does not really say anything about how things are outside ourselves, but rather is emotive, convictive and evaluative in nature; it has to do with ways of looking at things and feeling about things. In this connection there are those who say we ought to give up trying to use designative, descriptive religious language and give larger recognition to the role of myth. Several decades ago Ruth Benedict, in discussing a certain kind of use of myth by religious thinkers of the time, wrote, "it is characteristic of the present century to have made skepticism a special religious category and have defined religion by means of it." [8] We see some of that today. Still others, in the name of radical theology, announce the death of God and call us to a new obedience to Jesus or to responsiveness to the Word in Christ.

Obviously we are in a transitional period in theology. The early liberalism played an important role in setting forth one way of assimilating new understandings of nature and the Bible. Neo-orthodoxy challenged the adequacy of the early liberalism's methodology, doctrine of man, etc. But it did not take long to discern that neo-orthodoxy itself was evading theological issues of crucial importance in its avoiding of problems raised by natural theology. Existentialism made a needed protest against man's resignation of freedom, against depersonalization, resignation of authenticity through conformity, uninvolvement, feelinglessness and bad faith. But the existentialist overemphasis on the subjective nature of truth and its attack on system is wearing thin. It is obvious that it is possible to be existential without being an existentialist. And now we are feeling the sometimes stinging criticisms of the analytic philosophers who keep insisting that much theological discourse just doesn't hold up in the light of the canons of logic, and much of it is just plain meaningless. They call us to greater clarity, a call which we need to hear.

Thus, this is probably not the time for a major theological synthesis, but it is a time for theological spade-work in a new setting. We have evaded the challenge of new understandings and world-views too long on the pretense

[7] Krutch, Joseph W.; *The Modern Temper*, Harcourt, 1929, p. xvi.

[8] Benedict, Ruth; "Myth," *The Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, The Macmillan Co., 1933 VXI, p. 179.

that this really is not important for theology. One of the encouraging signs on the theological horizon is the growing awareness that theological statements in a vacuum — theological statements without objective referential significance in the world of fact — theological statements that really say nothing about the way things are and how they are happening, have little meaning. If we really mean business in talking about God we had better set about the extremely complicated but important business of getting the objective and subjective dimensions of God-talk into some meaningful relation. In reference to the doctrine of God, this more specifically means recognizing the dipolar character of significant discourse about God: we must keep talking about God from both objective and subjective poles. This observation leads into some of my own reflections on the doctrine of God to which I should like to devote the remainder of this presentation.

VI

There are several considerations the truth of which seems to me to be fairly evident. One is that much of mystery attends any serious discourse about God. Augustine said, "If you have been able to understand it, it is not God that you contemplate." And having written rather extensively on the doctrine of the Trinity he commented that he wrote these things not because he fully understood the subject but to refrain from silence. It is not a matter of knowing the whole truth of God, but of seeking to make such meaningful statements about God as can be made . . . . and having made them to recognize that all we say is subject to correction and that we stand in the presence of profound mystery. God is God and we are finite creatures of limited perspective.

But men do continue to ask the God questions. To be sure, they may be asked in new ways — sometimes they are asked in ways that seem to avoid religious categories; but wherever men ask the persistent questions of courage and meaning and wholeness in relation to their own existence and the ultimate mystery that surrounds them — they are asking God questions. Whenever men seek light on their relation to the whole of being they are asking questions of theological importance even though the name of God may not be spoken.

It is evident that the enterprise of theological discourse is complicated by the fact that the varied interests which we bring to talk of God sometimes seem to conflict or involve us in contradictions. For example, to discuss the **fact** of God at the same time that we consider the **meaning** of God, to seek adequacy and comprehensiveness at the same time that we seek clarity and precision, involves us in inescapable difficulties. But these are difficulties with which we must live.

It is well to recognize that there are varied ways in which we engage in God-talk. For example, sometimes we make "God is" statements—presumably designative, informative and descriptive in character. Sometimes God-talk comes out in discussion of styles of life appropriate to "the vision of an eternal greatness incarnate in the passage of temporal fact." We do well to recognize that there is more than one view of what the God-idea really is, and more than one way of engaging in God-talk.

A further conviction that underlies my own thought is that we come to knowledge of God as we come to knowledge of anything else—through a critical analysis and interpretation of what is given in human experience. Theology, then, must forever keep coming back to the data of experience —including the data of firsthand religious experience.

VII

In moving toward serious God-talk we might well note, first of all, that man experiences his world as being both sustaining and threatening. Man

is not "an island unto himself," but is continually living in relationship to other persons and a more inclusive environment. He not only acts, he is acted upon. The "other" to which man is subject is experienced as both sustaining and threatening, friendly and unfriendly. Inevitably, under these circumstances, man has mingled feelings about being alive as a person, about other persons, and about the world in which he finds himself. The important point being made at the moment is that there emerges in the lives of many individuals the conviction that in life and in death one is dealing with a dimension of "otherness," a "Real Other"—sometimes regarded as friendly, sometimes regarded as unfriendly, and sometimes regarded as a mixture of both.

In his classic essay, "A Free Man's Worship," Bertrand Russell wrote eloquently of the vast powers to which man is subject. His perception of these powers is expressed in the words, "Brief and powerless is Man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way. . . ."[9] Here is a clear affirmation of the awareness of man's being acted upon by the not-self or other-than-self. The perception of this Real-Other is that of blind and/or indifferent power.

Among man's possible responses to self, other persons and world (all involved in his experience of being alive as a person in a world) is the religious response. The religious response (in the more mature forms of religion) is marked by the attitudes of trust and devotion in relation to what man regards as the divine. To be sure, man is acted upon, but this being-acted-upon is to be understood, according to the religious person, in relation to the divine, and the appropriate responses to the divine are trust and devotion. In the light of the divine, all things are given changed meaning. Frustration, loss, death are all reinterpreted in the light of the divine. Initial responses of despair give way to hope in the light of the religious vision. There is a marked difference between the pessimism enunciated by Russell and the hope which is characteristic of mature religion.

It is precisely at this point that many modern persons are frankly confused. They are aware of existing in a vast and dynamic universe. They seek courage and meaning and wholeness in their existence. They would indeed welcome "the vision of an eternal greatness incarnate in the passage of temporal fact." But it is anything but clear how one can respond **religiously** to his total situation maintaining one's integrity and intellectual honesty at the same time.

The presence of so much immature religion (magical, wish-fulfilling and ego-centric) complicates the situation. Many modern persons are repelled by such religion and they see no religious alternatives. How can one affirm the reality of God in a meaningful way in the present world? How can one speak meaningfully of God in a time when traditional supernaturalism has lost its meaning for multitudes of informed and sensitive persons? The Christian educator must be prepared to speak to these searching questions.

One of several alternatives which presents itself to the educator at this point is the re-introduction of a concept of God as **Agent-External to the World Order—Yet Operative in the World.** This is the approach of much traditional supernaturalistic theism, and there are those who tell us that what we need to do is to refine this concept in such a way that it will be acceptable to more contemporary persons. Fundamental to this way of thinking of God are the affirmations that (1) God does not require the world for his own being; (2) God is somehow "beyond" the changes and

[9] Russell, Bertrand; "A Free Man's Worship," *Selected Papers Of Bertrand Russell,* Modern Library, p. 14.

relationships and processes of becoming which characterize the world order, even though at times he may involve himself in them; (3) God is **a being,** indeed, **the supreme being.** Many persons hold that the traditional theistic arguments for the existence of God (cosmological, teleological and ontological) are valid arguments, and do, indeed, establish the existence of God. A great many Christian educators seem to assume that this is the only **Christian** way of thinking about God and that it is the business of Christian education to foster this way of thinking and talking about the reality of God. Indeed, a great deal of curriculum material seems to make the same assumption.

It is with this approach that I would take issue in this presentation. I would not take issue with anyone's right to think this way. I would simply point out that the sort of God presented to us in much traditional supernaturalistic theism can neither be verified nor falsified. The traditional arguments for such a God have been subjected to critical examination by Hume, Kant, and many thinkers since—and found wanting **as arguments.** If the hope of Christian theology's making some kind of intellectual sense in our time depends on such arguments and on such a conception of God, the going is bound to be increasingly rough in the days ahead. Supernaturalistic theism reflects not only a way of thinking but a style of doing theology which is passing from the scene in the light of contemporary experience and modern movements of thought.

This sort of talk makes many persons extremely unhappy. I am not asking you to agree with me, but I am asking you to consider the possibility of alternative ways of thinking. In this presentation I should like to introduce **one** alternative way of thinking about the reality of God. It represents an alternative to traditional supernaturalistic theism on the one hand, and humanism on the other. It represents a form of empirical theology in a neonaturalistic key. It endeavors to be faithful to the subjective dimension of the life of faith, while also being faithful to the character of the Real-Other to which we are subject in our living and in our dying.

Underlying what I shall say is the presupposition that **the context of relevance** in which we may appropriately speak of God is the context of the **religious response.** To be sure, it may be in order to talk about God in many settings and relationships, but for our present purposes we shall use God as a **religious** term, or a term which has relevance and meaning in the religious context. In this context the word God refers to that reality after which the religious person aspires, around which he seeks to orient his living in its most inclusive dimensions, and to which he responds in trust and devotion. This suggests the meaning of the God-idea.

Taking this approach one next confronts the question, "If one can no longer affirm some form of traditional supernaturalism (with its implications of other-worldliness and basic discontinuites in the nature of things) is it possible to speak meaningfully of the reality of God?" Is there any alternative to humanism, a thorough-going subjectivism or agnosticism? Is there, indeed, a reality which corresponds to the God-idea discernible in the flux of events in which we live and move and have our being?

My own conviction is that it **is** possible to speak meaningfully of the reality of God in our time. Data are emerging from many disciplines providing significant grist for the theological mill. There is much we do not know. We are not prepared at this time to spell out a full-blown doctrine of God along the lines which have been indicated. But I do believe that we are in a position to point in some directions. It simply will not do to retreat into a purely subjective stance, holding that we cannot talk about God but

that we can talk about **faith.** This subjective retreat may provide a temporary shelter in a time of intellectual turbulence, but in the long run it is the job of theology to keep looking for God and endeavoring to make some sense out of God talk. If there **is** a real world; if man truly **is** acted upon in sustaining, threatening and challenging ways; if the religious response **is** a response worthy of the serious inquiry and aspiration of serious men, then inquiry concerning the reality of God is a matter of greatest importance.

My suggestion is that serious God-talk must proceed in a di-polar fashion as we speak from both objective and subjective poles. It is the task of theology to seek to bring together the languages of designation and description, with the languages of personal confession of meaning. We must seek a merging of talk about the **fact** of God and the **meaning** of God in personal experience. The theologian in our time must seek to relate the God discerned in the vast reaches of the universe with the God discerned in the promptings of the inner spirit of man. The theologian must seek to relate in some meaningful way the divinity discerned in reality in its wholeness with the divinity discerned in events of revelatory-illuminating, commitment-evoking significance.

The distinction between objective and subjective poles of God-talk cannot legitimately be drawn in an absolute sense. But for purposes of analysis there is justification for the distinction and we shall proceed on that basis.

VIII

Man's life is set in a context of eventfulness, in a course of events. As Margaret Mead has said, man belongs to a whole from which he cannot resign. He is in history, social and cosmic. Man is not free to build a fictional world and adopt a life style of wishful thinking unless he is prepared to suffer grave consequences. There is an order of things to which man is subject, by which he is profoundly conditioned, in relation to which he finds such freedom as is his, and in harmony with which he finds direction.

If the word "God" has some referential significance beyond man's subjective states, God-talk presumably will lead us into consideration of (a) a God wholly other or partially other than the world-order in which man lives and moves and has his being; or (b) a God truly immanent in that world order. If one pursues the latter line of inquiry and concern, the character of the world-order becomes a matter of considerable theological importance. Talk of the reality of God will take into consideration the way things are in reference to what John Dewey called "the matrix of our being and the inescapable condition of our lives." It is my belief that man can know nothing of a "wholly other" God, but that theology must keep seeking understanding of the reality of God through the life of faith **and** through an investigation of man's most inclusive environment.

A certain emancipation has come with the discovery that the chief function of theology is not to set science straight or to offer some sort of competitive knowledge. But science does not say all that needs to be said about how things are in and with "the matrix of our being and the inescapable condition of our lives." There are dimensions of reality which elude the methodologies usually associated with the sciences. There are dimensions of reality which often go unnoticed and unexpressed in our preoccupation with immediacies and fragments of reality. It is precisely these unexpressed dimensions that begin to put what is perfectly natural in a different and profounder light. Theology is concerned with what Dr. Charles S. Milligan once referred to as "the systematic articulation of the significance of life in its total context." This involves attention to considerations that lie outside the purview of science as science. It involves the endeavor to understand

things in the dimension of wholeness, in the dimension of **extensiveness** as well as **intensiveness.** Obviously our knowledge is partial, but it is well to seek such light on the total matrix of our existence as is possible and to act in accordance with it.

It is my belief that there is a basis for human hope and a clue to man's most appropriate direction of expectation **in the way things are—in the character of the whole of which we are a part.**

At this stage of human history we are not in a position to speak of God with finality or even, perhaps, in the sense of affirming that God is metaphysically **One.** However, I do think we can speak with some assurance of **patterned process** in the light of which man may reinterpret events and experiences, come to an appropriate direction of expectation, discover a potentiality for meaning and becoming in himself and in his universe, and be encouraged in an attitude of hope in an affirmation of the human venture. Insofar as this is true, we are justified in speaking of the reality of God. We would be remiss in not calling attention to the dimension of patterned process even though no theological terminology were used. It is my own judgment that insofar as man comes to be related to what is fundamental and enduring in the nature of things (here referred to as patterned process) in such ways that there emerge religious meanings and values (the life of faith), the language of trust and devotion—including the affirmation of the reality of God—is appropriate.

To speak of "patterned process" need not imply (and for me does not imply) that an external agent has imposed a clearly discernible pattern upon the flux of events. It does imply that there is increasing reason to believe that the matrix of our being is most appropriately understood in dynamic rather than static terms; that no event, experience, object or person exists in isolation, but is relational in nature; that things come into being in processive ways, emerging out of some constellation of events; that there is an inner thrust in the nature of things which, on the human level, is expressed in a thrust toward **becoming**—an urge for expression and fulfillment; that there are long-range dependabilities and directions written into the nature of things. If there be validity to any or all of these notions, the implications for man are deep and far-reaching as he seeks greater fulfillment through a relation to the whole of being.

That the model of "pattern" is appropriate in speaking of the nature of things in their wholeness is indicated by the fact that things do not proceed in a random, haphazard fashion. Some randomness there may well be, but there is enough of consistency and order in the nature of things that the formulation and testing of hypotheses is possible, and in some instances prediction is possible. In speaking of the "order of relevancy" Whitehead pointed to that character of reality by virtue of which man may find some sense in the working out of things, a patternfulness which exhibits a measure of consistency in the relationships of events. Scientific methodology presupposes patternfulness in this sense.

The concept of pattern suggests both limitation and freedom. A pattern limits, it affords the possibility of definition and freedom. Man experiences his world as a matrix of limitation and freedom. There are boundaries to his existence and that of other creatures and objects. Yet, it is within these boundaries or limits that events (including man) come to be defined in their uniqueness and to experience such freedom as is possible. There is that in the nature of things which limits all particular things in space and time and possibility. However, these limitations are implicated in the definition of particular things and in the opening of possibilities to them. Birth,

growth, realization, deterioration, death are inter-related and exemplify both limitation and freedom.

The pattern which characterizes the matrix of man's being and becoming involves inter-relatedness. No event is an island unto itself. All events are relational. Thus, it appears that the deepest character of things is opposed to a career-style of utter isolation, separation, destructiveness and exploitation. That isolation, separation, destructiveness and exploitation have their appropriate times and places in the working out of things may be true. However, the long-range working out of things exhibits a character or pattern more fundamentally on the side of interaction and relatedness of a mutually sustaining nature.

There is an inherent danger in using the term **pattern** as a model for use in understanding the way things are. Not only is there the danger of seeming to imply the existence of an external pattern-maker, but there is also the danger of thinking of pattern in static terms. Reality is **dynamic;** it is of the nature of process. It is a processive universe. Thus, we need to speak of patterned process. It is within the movement and change of things that we discern long-range trends, dependabilities, characteristics which suggest the model of pattern.

To speak of the most inclusive matrix of our existence in terms of patterned process is to suggest the element of directionality in the eventfulness of the universe. This does not necessarily mean "one far-off divine event, toward which the whole creation moves." Rather, it suggests that on the various levels of existence directionality appears to prevail over randomness. On the level of maximum extensionality we find various cosmological theories (such as the Big Bang and Steady-State theories) being advanced, but in each some general direction of eventfulness is implied. Indeed, what we call gravity may well be expressive of a dynamic directionality fundamental to the nature of things.

On the organic level we discern the presence of inner thrust, aspiration, "subjective aim." Life seeks expression and fulfillment. Harlow Shapley has written:

> . . . whenever the physics, chemistry, and climates are right on a planet's surface, life will emerge, persist and evolve. . . . It is my own belief . . . that the central theme of biological existence is to grow in refined complexity, in durability, in adaptability. Man as half beast, half angel must comply with the biogenetic common law, but he must be able to make amendments thereto.[10]

The behaviour of living things is not entirely haphazard behaviour. It is directional in the sense of being directed toward the satisfaction of desires, the fulfillment of needs, the realization of possibilities.

The patterned process in which man lives and moves and has his being involves both creation and destruction, evolution and devolution. Indeed, so inter-related are these phenomena that one cannot draw absolute distinctions between them. Questions of setting, timing and levels of extensionality are all implicated in distinguishing creation and destruction. However, it is evident that in a scheme characterized as patterned process, individual events (including man) are destined to be subject to and participate in both creation and destruction, evolution and devolution. The real-other to which man is ultimately subject is both life-giving and life-taking. In a universe which is dynamic, relational and emergent the processes of coming into being and dying are inter-related. Thus, the concept of individual identity is one of great importance but also one of limited applicability. It is a pluralistic universe—of many ends. In such a universe there is a time for living and a time for dying. Without this insight the

[10] Shapley, Harlow, *Of Stars and Men,* Beacon Press, 1958, p. 113, 156.

problem of evil becomes an utterly insoluble problem.

Once we are prepared to acknowledge and in some measure accept the transient character of particular things, we are better prepared to affirm the integrity and enduring significance of particular things. To accept things for what they are, to let them be what they are, to relate to them as though sharing a common source of being, to participate responsibly in enabling all that partakes of being to be what it is born to be, is to live in harmony with the nature of things in their wholeness. So to live obviously involves extremely difficult decisions for man where conflicts of interest are involved, but such decisions are an important part of man's becoming what he is born to be.

Within patterned process new realities come into being. Creation and re-creation are facts. Indeed, even in the seeming death and dissolution of some episodes, all is not lost. In a universe best characterized as dynamic, relational and emergent, nothing is wholly lost. The processes of dissolution are related to processes of re-creation, re-birth. The immortality of influence applies not only in the human scene but on the cosmic level. There is a working, of cosmic dimensions, which unites past, present and future, which links what has been to what is becoming, which functions in a conserving way even in the flux of events.

It is in the midst of such patterned process that man lives and moves and has his being. To live in harmony with this deepest nature of things, to live in the light of the vision of that which is immanent in all things and yet is transcendent to all particular things, to reflect in one's own life style the patterned process which characterizes reality in its wholeness, is to know the highest wisdom and to find the highest good.

A world-order such as we have been describing is not conducive to a life of ease or complacency. But it is a matrix which is potential for meaning. Having produced the human creature it provides a setting for growth and becoming. Its directionality suggests appropriate directions of expectation. It affords grounds for hope even though it does not promise that all man's desires will be satisfied or all his goals realized. It is a setting for struggle and challenge and some achievement. It is a setting for becoming persons of integrity, related to the whole of being through work and love and creation.

In the foregoing discussion of reality as patterned process we have not been using the word "God." This has been intentional. The facts are there for all persons—religious or not. Whether or not one names the Real-Other to which one is decisively related in life and death "God" will depend on subjective considerations. But there is good reason to believe in the reality of the Real-Other which sustains a relation of immanence to all things, entering into the determination of all things, even though other-than or more-than or transcendent to particular things. It is difficult to refute the reality of what Whitehead called "the intangible fact at the base of finite existence." In life and death we are subject to the power implicit in being and becoming.

Whether one names the intangible fact at the base of finite existence, "God" depends on deeply personal considerations. We have previously suggested that the word "God" is most appropriately used in the context of the religious life. Thus, we go on to speak of God from the subjective pole.

IX

The religious response is a fact. Some human beings do respond to the vision of what they believe to be the divine in trust and devotion. The religious response is marked by the coming of hope in the midst of what might be demoralizing; by an inner reorientation in the light of the vision of the divine; by various techniques of acting

out the transforming vision.[11] William James wrote, "If any one phrase could gather its universal message, that phrase would be 'All is **not** vanity in this Universe, whatever the appearances may suggest.' "[12] Religion fulfills integrating functions in both individuals and groups.

In this section of our study we are endeavoring to move from a consideration of the way things are in the larger matrix in which we live and move and have our being, to a consideration of the inner life of faith. It is well that we listen to the testimony of those who bear witness to a new life of trust and devotion in relation to the divine. Thus we shall be in a better position to speak of God and the life of faith from both objective and subjective poles.

Gordon Allport has distinguished the religion of immaturity (egocentric, magical, wish-fulfilling, concerned with impulsive self-gratification) with the religion of maturity. He writes:

> . . . mature religion is less of a servant and more of a master, in the economy of the life. No longer goaded and steered exclusively by impulse, fear, wish, it tends rather to control and to direct those motives toward a goal that is no longer determined by mere self-interest.[13]

Devotional literature provides an abundance of writing expressing the inner life of trust and devotion. The lives of innumerable persons of faith, together with their testimonies variously expressed, often give evidence of the reality of what Allport calls a religion of maturity. Such religion is to be understood not simply as a quest for the satisfaction of immediate desires or the fulfillment of given needs, but as a response to what is experienced as the divine—coming with the force of a claim upon one's life. Reverence for life and the God of life marks the religion of maturity.

An important mark of mature religion is its persisting relevance through the varied experiences and chapters of life. It is not fair-weather religion. It gathers into itself some vision of life in its wholeness, so that joy and sorrow, pain and pleasure are recognized as being a part of man's experience. It is marked by the will to create even through suffering, and a quest for a blessedness which transcends the satisfaction of self-gratification. To be at one with God in the varied dimensions of one's existence comes to be the ultimate concern and blessedness.

Mature religion has a deeply personal dimension at the same time that it has implications for all the relations of man. The individual comes to understand **himself** in relation to God. He is not simply an observor but a participant in the divine order of things. In some vital sense he is addressed and called into question. The reality of God breaks in upon him **as light** (bringing a new perception of existence); **as possibility** (for a new kind of existence); **as summons** (into the world). The life of faith emerges at the meeting point of man's search for God, God's coming to man, man's response in trust and devotion. It is at the point of emerging faith that the language of personal confession is appropriately employed. God is **my God,** and I am God's.

The confession that God is a saving God is grounded in experience. Man aspires and seeks; he bears witness to being found. Out of events and experiences one comes to trust as disclosing the deeper nature of things come the abiding affirmations of faith. The experience of deliverance after our own anxious efforts have proved futile; the experience of an **integrity** and **presence** abiding through changing circumstances; the experience of **trust** that persists through honest doubt and through one's own waywardness; the

[11] Compare W. H. Bernhardt's *A Functional Philosophy of Religion,* The Criterion Press, Denver, 1958.

[12] James, William; *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* Longmans, Green, and Co., 1915, p. 37.

[13] Allport, Gordon; *The Individual and His Religion;* The Macmillan Co., p. 63.

experience of a **forgiveness** uniting what was separated and granting permission to move beyond the past into a new present and future; the experience of **healing;** the experience of a newfound **freedom** to affirm oneself after the agony of ambivalent self-rejection and struggle for identity; the experience of a **relationship** which outlasts all other relationships and by which other relationships are judged and understood; the experience of a **love** that accepts and brings wholeness; the experience of a **claim and summons** calling one out of his self-centeredness into a new life of commitment; the experience of **moments of grace** when it is given one to see that the raw materials of life can be redeemed for meaning—these are among the experiences which lead some persons to affirm the reality of God as the **Real Other** and to witness to the meaning and experience of God's continuing revelation.

In the religion of maturity revelation is recognized as being a profounder matter than the communication of some propositional truths from a faraway realm. Revelation is not so much something that happens **to** someone as something that happens **in** someone. The lights come on; there is disclosure; there is illumination involving new self-understanding and commitment. Thus, Dr. Daniel Day Williams has written, "To speak of revelation in the prophets and in Christ is not to speak then of some supernatural doctrine added to our human knowledge from an extrahistorical source. It is to speak of those happenings in human history which have so opened our eyes, and so transformed our minds that the disclosure of God to man has taken place."[14]

The coming of faith (in the sense of trust, devotion, hope, and a new relation of meaning to the whole of being) appears to involve many factors. To probe deeper into the reality of God involves us in a study of those settings and processes which sometimes issue in religious values and in the life of faith. God (in the religious sense) is there.

Whence comes the life of faith as defined above? Experiences of dependability, appreciation and love in one's human relationships have something to do with it. Experiences of at least partial success in dealing with problems have something to do with it. Experiences of incoming strength, healing and deliverance have something to do with it. The achievement of a comprehensive belief system providing "a theory of Being in which all fragments are meaningfully ordered" has something to do with it. Having significant identification figures (persons of courage and mature love) has something to do with it. The exercise of the capacity to decide, in some measure, what events shall mean to us, has something to do with it. The presence in one's life of **mediating agents** (declaring in their being the presence, power and glory of God, evoking a response of trust and devotion) has something to do with it. Participation in the life of a community of faith has something to do with it. There is much of mystery in the coming of the life of mature faith, but we can discern in some measure, settings and processes and experiences and relationships which often are related to the coming of the faith reality. It is here that we may speak most appropriately of the reality of God on the subjective level. We affirm the reality of God **where God is experienced.**

Reference has been made to the role of the **mediating agent** in the coming of the faith-reality. It is here, I believe, that the Christ-idea has its greatest significance in a religion of maturity. W. E. Hocking has written, "To find God in immediate experience, which is indeed the substance of religion as experience, is . . . to find him through some mediation. If 'the heavens declare the glory of God,' it is nature that here

[14] Williams, D. D.; *God's Grace And Man's Hope;* Harper and Bros., 1949, p. 50.

serves as mediator. The concept of the Christ is the concept of a personal being whose presence 'declares the glory of God' with the more adequate immediacy of companionship. . . . If the author of the Johannine Epistles is right, love itself is a mediator."[15]

In a variety of ways Christianity has affirmed that what is central and enduring in the nature of things addresses man in an ultimately significant way in Jesus Christ. Christian faith is not simply the result of reflection on the nature of things in their wholeness. It emerges in the response of trust and devotion to the vision, presence and summons of God mediated by nature, by varied events and experiences, and supremely by dependable, accepting, self-giving love. Such love is the supreme healing, life-giving reality. Such love, according to Christian witness, is declared in the Jesus of history, in Jesus as remembered in the church, in the drama of a people understanding themselves as called of God to serve, in the fellowship of the faithful. In this perspective the Christ-event occurs where new life emerges out of an old existence, freedom to trust and hope and care is born through experience of the living God mediated in relationships of integrity and mature love. Divinity, in this perspective, is most appropriately defined, not in terms of substance or supernatural adoption, but in terms of the enactment of the mediating role, issuing in a new life in a new community. He who experiences this new life appropriately affirms "God is experienced **here.**"

One of the characteristics of Christianity is the recognition of the potential revelatory significance of historical events—sometimes seemingly inconspicuous events and experiences. For the Psalmist **the heavens** declared the glory of God. For a young man, who later was to be known as Brother Lawrence, a dry and leafless tree in the cold of winter became a mediating agent—as it spoke of the new life God would bring with the coming of spring. For Paul it may well have been the sight of Stephen being stoned. For others it has been the story of a man coming at last to a cross—declaring not only the creative power, but the redeeming love of God. Not all have found something revelatory in this one, but others have said, "Here is disclosed the deepest truth man needs to know. Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all."

When God is revealingly present it is in life itself—amid the events we often pass unseeingly. Usually there is a **context of events**—a person deeply concerned about ultimate matters; a situation of potentiality (life called into question, foundations shaken, so that life must either be broken or redeemed for meaning); and then there is the **agent of mediation,** the revealing event, declaring and incarnating the divine, yet transparent to and pointing beyond self to the fuller reality of God. Out of such a context of events there sometimes comes an opening up; the lights are turned on, and existence is disclosed in a new way with a depth of meaningfulness hitherto missed. Out of such revelatory experience comes new self-understanding, new faith as trust, new freedom to hope and create and love, new commitment in gladness of heart.

It is out of such revelatory experiences (disclosure situations, Ian Ramsey calls them) that the distinctive language of faith and devotion emerges. God is mystery—but his presence is known and declared. Human language is inadequate, but one is constrained to speak—often in the language of analogy — of what is surpassingly important. So it has been and is for those who take the name of Christian; in an actual historical life—a life of self-giving love centered in God—the glory of God, not only as creative power but as redeeming love, is declared. In the light of this vision and mediation all

[15] Hocking, W. E.; *The Coming World Civilization,* Harper and Bros., 1956, p. 99.

things are seen in a different way. The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof . . . in life and death we are the Lord's . . . the deepest wisdom about life is grasped under the image of summons and commitment; and life calls for a fulfillment in love of God and neighbor.

In affirmation of the meaningfulness of existence is the practical affirmation of the reality of God.

X

In the foregoing discussion we have endeavored to speak of the character of reality in the dimension of wholeness. It was suggested that in the light of present knowledge and experience we may appropriately speak of our most inclusive environment in terms of patterned process, exhibiting dependability, directionality, limitation and freedom, the inter-play of creation and destruction, loss and conservation. Clues to man's appropriate expectations may be found in the way things are in his environing world in its wholeness. This world is best understood as being dynamic, relational, and ever-becoming.

We have also considered the testimony of the inner life of trust and devotion, noting the role of the mediating agent in the coming of the life of faith. We have suggested that in the **inner** life the affirmation of God's reality is confessional and expressive. It is not primarily an affirmation of God's existence "out there" but rather is an affirmation of **the meaning of God** having come, having appeared, in one's own experience. One lives in the trust and devotion appropriate to the assurance that "the final word about man and the world is not a word of condemnation and despair but a word of grace and hope."[16] On the level of personal confession and devotional expression it is perhaps more appropriate to speak of God's **coming** and **appearing** than to speak of God's **existing.** The most encouraging word to man is not that of a past creation or past redemption, but the good news of the possibility of **the coming** of a **new** existence. On the experiential level God comes as light and possibility and summons in relation to the whole of being.

This approach to the question of "the reality of God" suggests the great importance of the Christian educator as he is called to nurture a religion of maturity in a new day. The eduator (be he parent, pastor or teacher) is in a position to encourage a linking of man's experience of a world about him with the subjective dimensions of man's experience in the life of faith. Such a linking of objective and subjective dimensions of man's experience is essential if religion is to function in relating man more creatively to the whole of reality.

Nicolas Berdyaev has asked, "Will the creature who inherits this contemporary world be still called man?" We are, indeed, summoned by what is central and enduring in the nature of things to be sensitively, courageously, lovingly human. Our becoming more and more human can take place only in the midst of the eventfulness in which our lives are set. We are called to be human in the midst of a cosmic spectacular which we understand only in part, but which is dynamic, inter-related, and ever becoming.

Meaningful existence in such a medium calls for "oriented becoming" in the midst of patterned process. The most appropriate worship and aspiration reflect trust and devotion—not in the static and isolated—but in the God whose reality is manifest in long-range dependabilities, and possibilities — as well as in mediating agents which come to have revelatory-illuminating, commitment-evoking meaning for the individual. Bishop J. A. T. Robinson has reminded us, ". . . we need not fear flux: God is in the rapids as much as in the rocks, and as Christians we are

[16] Farley, Edward; *Requiem For A Lost Piety,* Westminster Press, 1966, p. 124.

free to swim and not merely to cling."[17] In a similar vein W. E. Hocking has written of "the outgoing of man's life process toward a corresponding life process in outer reality, which outgoing we might call the unceasing prayer of being alive as men."[18] And Philip Phenix has written, "To know the world profoundly, in its origins, actualities, possibilities, and promises is to know God, and to live in the world with unconditional concern for the realization of its manifold and multiform excellences is to worship him in spirit and in truth."[19] The Christian educator is now called to nurture a religion of maturity. Such a religion links man's hopes and aspirations to what is central and enduring in the nature of things as discerned in **man's own nature** (including "a passion for integrity and for a meaningful relation to the whole of Being"[20]), in **the larger matrix of man's existence** (experienced as patterned process) and in **mediating agents** which kindle an awareness of the deeper and enduring themes of existence, calling men to creative and reverential living. In this understanding there is justification, I believe, in affirming the reality of God, not simply in relation to one's own personal experience of trust and devotion, but in relation to what is perceived to be central and enduring in the inclusive eventfulness in which we live and move and have our being. The reality of God may thus be affirmed from both the objective and subjective poles of man's experience—as he experiences a world around and beyond him and as he experiences the faith reality of trust and devotion in his inner life. Enduring hope in the actual world must be grounded in a structure of reality which justifies such hope.

The Christian educator is called to nurture a life style which reflects a vision of patterned process in its widest reaches. Hope and expectation characterize the mature religious response —but it is a hope and expectation appropriate to man's own nature and to his social and cosmic setting. The image of patterned process suggests a structure of reality which supports and nourishes a life of hope and expectation and becoming.

Some Christians once sought a piety of individual righteousness and purity unspotted by involvements in "the world." Such piety has no place in the theological perspective we have been discussing. However, we do need a new image of Christian style or piety or being and doing—call it what you will. There is a way of life to be sought—a life of response to "the vision of an eternal greatness incarnate in the passage of temporal fact." It is a life of being human in one's uniqueness in relationship to other unique persons. It is a life of wakeful, sensitive, good-humored, self-disciplined, responsible involvement in the world. It is a patterned life reflecting the patterned **process** in which man lives and moves and has his being. It is a life in which work and play and love and life's testing-stretching experiences are lifted to the level of worship. The reality of God is declared in the affirmation and celebration of life.

Education is thus education for meaning. And education in this sense calls for a new kind of educator. He is one who is knowledgeable about his world but he is also one who has found and is finding meaning in being alive as a person in that world. He is one who discerns the inter-play of law and grace in the nature of things, who knows that on the higher levels of becoming persuasion is more important than coercion, and that he who points toward and kindles awareness of the significant and wonderful teaches more truly than he who simply imparts facts without benefit of vision. It is

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[17] Robinson, J. A. T.; *Christian Morals Today,* Westminster, 1964, p. 20.

[18] Hocking, W. E.; *cit. supra,* p. 102.

[19] Phenix, Philip; *Education and the Worship of God,* Westminster, 1966, pp. 28, 29.

[20] Allport, Gordon; *Becoming,* Yale U. Press, 1955, p. 98.

in the uniting of facts and vision, issuing in new self-understanding and commitment, that education plays its supreme role. It is in the enactment of this role that the educator himself becomes an agent of mediation. It is as a teaching - worshipping - learning - ministering - witnessing fellowship that the church becomes the **group** agent of mediation, declaring in its life and mission the reality of God.