God and the Newer Views of the Universe

HARVEY H. POTTHOFF

IN the 1870's a certain bishop was conversing with the president of a small college. The bishop expressed the opinion that everything of importance had been invented. The educator disagreed and predicted that within fifty years, men would fly like the birds.

The bishop was shocked, and said: "Flight is reserved for angels; you are guilty of blasphemy!" It is interesting to learn that the name of the bishop was Milton Wright and back home he had two young sons—Orville and Wilbur.

Venturing out into space seemed to the bishop a shocking thing. The desire to do it, a mark of blasphemy.

It is interesting to contrast the bishop's attitude with one expressed recently by Harlow Shapley—Harvard's distinguished astronomer:

> The new knowledge from many sources . . . makes obsolete, many of the earlier world views. The new discoveries and developments contribute to the unfolding of a magnificent universe; to be a participant, is in itself a glory . . . we are associated in an existence and an evolution that inspires respect and deep reverence. We cannot escape humility . . .
> Let us note . . . that anthropocentric religions which have so often been conspicuously earth-bound and much tangled up with the human mind and human behaviour, have in these present days an opportunity for aggrandizement through incorporating a sensibility of the newly revealed cosmos . . . A one-planet deity has for me little appeal.[1]

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[1] H. Shapley, *Of Stars and Men,* Boston: Beacon Press, 1958, pp. 148, 149.

As persons concerned with religious values, we may well raise the question: Do the newer views of the universe in this space-age have implications for our concept of God? We raise this question in the awareness that some of the greatest chapters in religious history have been those in which men have grown into larger ideas of God through growing knowledge and experience.

I.

Some years ago Dean Willard Sperry suggested that the primary function of the church is to make God real to men. Would we not agree that the fact of God is the central fact of religion, and the church is most true to its central function when it is serving as an instrument of the living God—communicating the religious meaning of God in human experience? Gordon Allport has suggested that "to view one's problems religiously is to see them in relation to a divine scheme that gives them changed meaning."[2]

Seeing events in relation to a divine scheme is the heart of it—and in the light of that larger perspective—these events assume a changed significance. Erich Fromm speaks of one's "frame of orientation and devotion." In religion our concept of God articulates that frame of orientation and devotion. God is the ultimate ground of courage and meaning and wholeness.

The God concept not only functions in the reinterpretation of events, it also helps define what we believe to be the nature of religious hope; it gives direction to the religious life; it helps prescribe appropriate techniques.

[2] G. Allport, *Personality, a Psychological Interpretation,* New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1937, p. 225.

That we should think clearly on this matter of our concept of God is a matter of obvious importance to all who take the religious enterprise seriously, and who would adopt what Freud called "the reality principle." If God is more than a figment of the imagination—a projection of desires—if the word God denotes something more than a general way of looking at things—if the word God points to an objective reality, not dependent on man for existence, but a reality profoundly conditioning our existence—a divinity that shapes our ends—rough-hew them how we will—then we want to know all we can about the nature of God. Our destiny is involved.

It is quite natural, then, that we should ask the question: Do the newer understandings of the universe have implications for our understanding of God?

In the contemporary scene there are those who would reply in the negative, or who would say that scientific views of the universe, old or new, are of only secondary importance in the theological area of concern.

Those who believe that our most authentic understanding of God comes through supernatural revelation, communicated through authoritative book, dogma, or tradition, will not consider our question a very important one. Those who believe that the road to deity is through analysis of some phase of inner experience, with given deductions following, will be only mildly interested in our topic.

Turning to the field of analytic philosophy, we will find some responding to our question with a yawn or a knowing smile. These philosophers are interested in words and the analysis of meanings—but they doubt that what we have known as natural theology has much relevance. This school of thought sees the importance of getting the meanings of statements clarified—but there is skepticism as to whether we can get anywhere at the point of verification—save in the sciences.

Bertrand Russell tells of asking a shopkeeper, one day, the shortest way to Winchester. The shopkeeper called to a man in the back room saying: "Gentleman here wants to know the shortest way to Winchester."

"Winchester?" an unseen voice asked.

"Aye."

"Way to Winchester?"

"Aye."

"Shortest way to Winchester?"

"Aye." Then came the voice from the back room saying:

"I dunno."

The man in the back room wanted to get the nature of the question crystal clear, but he took no interest whatever in answering it. That is about as far as some modern philosophy gets in its depreciation of metaphysics.

In a recent article, John Hutchison of Columbia University writes:

> The conclusion to which we are led is that the term God as it is used in primary religious utterance is not a dubious hypothesis concerning specific matters of fact; rather it denotes a distinctive way of looking at the self and world. Apart from such a context 'God' is indeed a meaningless term religiously and possibly so intellectually.[8]

If one assumes with Hutchison that the term God does not designate some objective reality written into the nature of things, but simply suggests a way of looking at self and the world—then obviously the question we are raising loses much of its point.

Returning to theological circles, we find differences of opinion as to what Christian theology is really up to. There are those who think the task of Christian theology is to keep stating and restating, in more or less systematic form, "the faith once delivered to the saints." The professor of theology in one of the Methodist seminaries told

[8] *Journal of Philosophy,* October, 1958, p. 940.

me not long ago that the Christian theologian has just one task—to keep stating the apostolic message.

There are others who would elaborate a bit on this approach. Holding to the thesis that there is a "core faith" not to be challenged under any circumstances, it is the task of theology to state that faith and then to show that it is not necessarily contradicted by contemporary knowledge. In their time, Augustine and Aquinas endeavored something like this in reference to Neoplatonic and Aristotelian philosophies. In our own time, Paul Tillich and Nels Ferre are not too far from this general purpose—although one would have to make qualifications in reference to both.

There are still others of us who think that Christian theology not only has a conserving and apologetic function, but a critical and creative function as well, with the responsibility of seeking new evidence with the right to challenge axioms. Obviously, how one responds to the relevance of the question we are raising, will be affected by his approach to the theological task.

There are those who believe we already know all we need to know about God—and that we now ought to concern ourselves with getting our words in order and using the proper language system. If the analytic philosophers have little time for natural theology, there are those in the theological scene who follow gladly after at this point. For these theologians—by and large in the neo-orthodox tradition—the important thing is to re-establish the historic symbols—and to get everybody to using them.

But what happens when these symbols, reflecting the world view of another era, begin to lose their power? What happens when men begin to ask questions of fact, when they ask for something deeper than just a vague sense of the religious dimension of things? Shouting the symbols more loudly—and crying that those who don't use them are not really Christian —hardly gets to the point. Thus, there are those of us who think the question we are raising is an exceedingly important one.

If there is an objective divine reality —vitally implicated in the arrival, survival, and destiny of man—then we want to know about that reality. If that reality is not discontinuous from the world of our experience, but involved in its basic structures and behaviours, then we must go to those basic structures and behaviours. Either the fundamental structures and behaviours of the universe have something of importance to tell us about God, or they do not. If they do not, then we are implying that God is external to the universe not to be discerned through it; or God is an abstract ideal of some sort; or the relevance of God is limited to some segment of experience not open to public inspection. If one adopts this sort of conclusion, then he is left in the position of being either agnostic or dogmatic in relationship to possible statements about God.

The time has come for a recognition in Christian circles that there is need for a new theological approach more thoroughly empirical in character than the earlier liberalism. There is need for a neo-liberalism which moves out from a concern in the religious phase of human experience to investigative, experimental studies of the nature of man and the universe; and from these studies to a systematic organization of knowledge, which is the heart of metaphysics, so conceived, to the formulation of a theological framework articulating the intellectual phase of religion—wherein man is enabled to "see events in relation to a divine scheme, giving them changed meaning."

This liberalism includes in the data for investigation and evaluation, the insights of the ages, the deepest experiences of man, together with insights gleaned through experimental methodologies of science. It holds that no one

fact, one event, experience, or strand of history is to be absolutized and made the measure of **all** reality. We need a critical and coherent interpretation of all experience. Loving God with our minds is a more demanding exercise than some theology of the past has been willing to admit.

That there will long be those committed to the orthodox idea, there is no doubt. That there will long be those committed to some variation of the early liberalism is probable. But that this newer form of liberalism has something important to say in carrying on and adding to the Christian tradition some of us believe most deeply.

II.

Simply by way of illustrating some possible lines of approach, let us note just four ideas emerging out of contemporary investigations into, and reflections on the nature of our universe: its **vastness;** its **dynamic** character; its **directional tendencies;** its behaviours requiring a re-thinking of the notion of **causality.**

A.

We have left behind the earth-centered and the sun-centered views of the universe. The cosmos apparently has no determinable center. Thus, we are coming to a new awareness of the incredible vastness of the universe. The center of our galaxy is more than 25,000 light years distant, and our galaxy is a small part of the scheme of things. Shapley writes in his book **Of Stars and Men:**

> We must get used to the fact that we are peripheral, that we must move along with our star, the Sun, in the outer part of a galaxy that is one among billions of star-rich galaxies.[4]

This author goes on to express the conviction, on the basis of mathematical probabilities, that there is an abundance of highly developed forms of life, including nerve-guided beings, throughout the universe. He speaks of the high probability of senses and sense organs, now unknown to man. "Many realities may lie beyond the comprehension of human terrestrials, simply because our outfitttting with sense organs is limited." Many years ago William James referred to a dog wandering into a room lined with books, in which great music was being played, and conversation on vital issues was being carried on—yet the dog was capable of discerning only in the most limited way, the significance of events in his environment. Could it be that inherent in the world-order are dimensions of qualitative richness of which man is unaware?

If the universe is vast in space, it is likewise, vast in time. We need many different kinds of clocks and calendars in computing the goings on of the universe—the explosive release of atomic energy, the slow evolution of beetles, the rotation of a galaxy, the geological movements of the centuries.

In his fascinating book **The Creation of the Universe,** George Gamow, the University of Colorado's distinguished professor of theoretical physics, sets forth his theory that "the present state of the universe resulted from a continuous evolutionary process, which started in a highly compressed homogenous material a few **billion** years ago." Then, after describing his theory as to the big explosion that got things going in a really exciting way, and a period of "nuclear cooking" which lasted no more than an hour in which elementary particles began to stick to each other, forming aggregates of different complexities, which were the prototypes of the atomic nuclei of today, Gamow goes on to say: "Following that highly productive first hour of the history of our universe, nothing in particular happened for the next thirty million years."[5] After that, things be-

[4] Shapley, *op. cit.,* p. 9.

[5] G. Gamow, *The Creation of the Universe,* New York: Compass Books, Viking Press, 1956, p. 138.

gan to pick up again—and after awhile **we** arrived. But much later.

It is well to recall, that in all of this we are talking only about that phase of the cosmic drama which we think of as the history of **this** universe. What other histories there may be of what other universes, who can tell? Alternative theories likewise talk in terms of millions and billions of years. This should be enough to suggest that we are a part of an incredibly vast universe—vast in space and time.

We could go on and point out something of the vastness of things on other levels, but time does not permit. In passing, however, we might turn to the atomic microcosmos just long enough to note that in our next breath we shall inhale more than a thousand million, million, million atoms of oxygen, nitrogen and argon. If the Psalmist, living when he did, could say "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it"—what would he say today?

B.

It is evident that we not only inhabit a vast universe, but a dynamic universe. The amazing developments in scientific thought in recent years are related to a major revolution in physical theory. Modern physics proceeds on the basis of dynamic, rather than static, substantial concepts of matter. The evolutionary hypothesis proceeds on the basis of dynamic views of life. Modern psychiatry is rooted in dynamic theories of personality.

If the vastness of the universe reveals the inadequacy of an earth-centered orientation, our understanding of the dynamic character of the universe reveals the inadequacy of traditional modes of thinking, oriented to patterns of inert substance. Sir James Jeans said we now know too much about matter to be materialists, in the old sense of mechanistic materialism.

C.

Again, we have increasing reason to believe that the universe is not just a haphazard sort of business—but there is an element of directionality in it. This need not mean "one far-off divine event, toward which the whole creation moves." But it does suggest discernible movements in specifiable directions. It is quite generally agreed that ours is an expanding universe. Shapley writes: "Spectroscopes, radio telescopes, scientific methodogy, and the mathematics of the physical scientist have joined in revealing a uniformity of structure, composition and behaviour throughout the cosmos and guarantees to the searcher on Planet No. 3 that he can reasonably assume that what holds here, holds widely."[6] Well, what holds widely? Shapley affirms: "The ever higher organizing of organizations appears to be a basic tendency in nature."[7] And there is "the greatest operation of nature—an operation of **cosmic dimensions** that might simply be called growth."[8]

Here again is a matter with major implications. In the light of this, the old emanation theory—in terms of which everything that comes into being is just a re-publication of some prior perfection—seems an unwarranted view. Eighteenth century materialism is outmoded—it fails to interpret the facts. A world-view, evolutionary in character, seems most relevant.

D.

In some ways, more exciting even than these insights, is the rethinking of the notion of causality which is going on. We used to think of causality in terms of a kind of external push-from-behind theory: A single external factor, giving a push, and producing effects. The relations involved were strictly external relations. This view

[6] Shapley, *op. cit.*, p. 103.
[7] Shapley, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
[8] Shapley, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

regarded the universe as a kind of cosmic billiard game—balls being motivated from outside themselves, with a push—bumping into each other, acting and reacting. The external push was the cause in all of this. God was thought of as the external push. But somehow, the billiard game theory doesn't interpret the facts adequately.

Thus, we are giving up the old monocasual, linear conception in favor of a field conception in which **everything** is both cause and effect. Reality is forever **shaping itself** out of the inter-play of forces. Thus, we think of causality in contextualistic terms.

Just as in our previous discussion of man we came to the conclusion that we must see man in terms of a **dynamic contextualism**—so it is with the more inclusive environment in which we live and move and have our being.

For a moment let us consider food—macaroni and cheese to be explicit. You can put cheese on top of macaroni—and that's just exactly what you will have—cheese and macaroni. It's a respectable enough dish, with a certain amount of nourishment—but let's face it—it's really an unexciting bill of fare.

But move these makings into the oven and see what happens. There is an inter-play of forces released in this new and dynamic context—and lo and behold, creative synthesis begins to operate. And before these wondrous events are through, there has been a culminating fulfillment beyond the first man's possible planning or predicting. No longer do we have cheese, no longer do we have macaroni—we have a new creation! The old has passed and the new has come!

Someone, oriented to the 18th century modes of thinking, says: I did it! I was the cause of it all! I shoved it into the oven. It was that push that did it!

But obviously this is a very inadequate accounting of the creative event. Causality in this case—as in all others—is a complex phenomenon, involving a variety of factors in a dynamic context. Casuality is immanent in a matrix of events.

The vastness of the universe; its dynamic character; its directional tendencies including expansion and growth; its behaviour requiring a re-thinking of the notion of causality—these are indeed worthy of our reflection.

Together they directly challenge some notions long held—notions which have been gathered up in the writing of theologies. It is increasingly difficult to maintain a dualism which fails to see the inter-relatedness of things, or which says cause is a single push from outside—an external power pushing the billiard balls of the universe around. This view simply does not stand the scrutiny of modern knowledge.

The newer views of the universe challenge any earth-centered approach. Only on the basis of wishful thinking or dogmatism can one hold that the Earth is the center of the Cosmic Drama.

The newer views of the universe raise havoc with the substance view of reality—replacing it with process modes of thought. We may recall, with interest, that the battles of the Nicene theologians were cast in the context of a dualistic and substance metaphysics—is the Son of the same or of a similar substance. Divinity was defined in terms of substance. This seems pretty irrelevant to us now put just that way, and yet there are voices being raised saying that we must get that Nicene Creed into the liturgy of the church.

Again, newer views of the universe make it increasingly difficult to define all reality as movement toward one far off divine event toward which the whole creation moves. The Creative Process does not reveal one intended event—but an amazing diversification and richness of events, and fulfillments.

In the light of our newer understanding of things, it is impossible to think of reality as being made up of hard, tiny bits of indestructible matter moving about in otherwise empty space. At

the same time, it is difficult to think of any event coming to an absolute end. Perishing and rebirth, decay and resurgence, are written into the nature of things. Recognizing this internal conservation of value, Whitehead made the doctrine of objective immortality a part of his cosmology.

In all of this we have concentrated on the universe as discerned through the eyes of modern science, supplemented with interpretation. Perhaps you have noted that all this ties in with what was said about man.

Man emerges organic to his cosmic environment, incarnating in his very being the complex, dynamic, directional factors of which we have spoken. Representing a distinctive level of growth, he enjoys the pain of creativity, and discernment on a level not vouchsafed to other known forms of life. Unique, yes—yet metaphysically one with his Universe. His basic role is not that of Fighter Against Nature—but Cooperator, Fulfiller—in some measure Director of elements in nature.

It is interesting to note that the newer works on the theory of evolution do not interpret evolution simply on the basis of competition of the mutually destructive sort. There is a larger place for cooperation. The hostility of nature is no longer a useful concept. Man has his constructive contribution to make.

III.

If the God concept emerges, in some significant sense, through reinterpretation of experienced events; and if God refers to that dynamic reality fundamentally implicated in the course of events; the ultimate ground of hope, then the data we have been considering have something to say to us about God.

The vastness of things indicates the inadequacy of a one-planet Deity. The Cosmic Drama in which we are privileged to participate is one to inspire awe and humility—but not humiliation. Man belongs—even though there is no good reason to suppose that he is the center of it all. In God's house are many mansions and many creatures and many ends.

The dynamic character of the universe suggests that on the level of God's implication in the world-order (and that is the level we can know something about) the Divine cannot be equated with the status quo. God makes all things new. Whitehead writes: "The pure conservative is fighting against the nature of the universe."

There is something anti-divine in deifying the past to the hindrance of an emerging future. As Shailer Mathews suggested, sin is sometimes allegiance to an outgrown good.

The security God affords is not the security of the fixed and static point—it is the assurance of large dependabilities written into the nature of things.

Complacency is not God's greatest gift to man—and whatever the peace of God is, it is not the peace of the undisturbed.

The directional nature of things will speak to some of God as the Directive Factor not in some detached sense of simple-location, but operative in the context of space, time, matter, energy.

Dr. Hocking writes:

> . . . there is change everywhere, but not aimless change. . . . The animal faith of man is thus 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.[9]

He tells of a colleague who once said in effect that if there were a trend at the heart of things, then we could either be for it or against it; we could go along with it or resist it. And there would be a sense of well-being and fulfillment in being with it. Perhaps that is a minimum way of putting the

[9] W. E. Hocking, *The Coming World Civilization,* New York: Harper, 1956, p. 102.

matter, but it suggests the point at hand.

Human life is fulfilled through appropriate self-realizations, but in the context of going along with the directional movement which is deepest in the universe.

If the remarks made earlier about a contextualistic approach to causality are valid, then there are important implications for our doctrine of God and our understanding of God's relationship to the world.

For one thing, we are led to think of God's presence and involvement in creation in immanentalistic terms unless, of course, we insist on introducing external factors apparently not required by the facts. It is interesting to find Dr. Daniel Day Williams writing as follows:

> It is essential that we clarify what we mean when we say God acts, God becomes incarnate, God redeems, and the Holy Spirit is present. I find in the naturalism I have tried to describe, certainly for me, the most significant clues as to how we have an intelligible way of speaking about God's relationship to the world, and an intelligible way of expressing our belief that history is the field of his redemptive activity.[10]

To speak of God in immanentalistic terms means that God is **vitally involved.** God is continually in it. It does not mean some kind of depreciation of the divine—unless, of course, one has a low estimate of the creative processes —as did the early Gnostics. You will recall that they were declared heretical, and the apostles creed was formulated a least in part to set them straight.

The creative, reconstructive work of God is not imposed upon the world from outside, it emerges in the very matrix of our relationships. The same divine agency that brings forth something new out of hydrogen and oxygen forever brings forth the new—through the miracles of creative organization in our very midst on many levels. When men set conditions wherein fragments of experience can be woven together into some new pattern; wherein new insights, new values emerge, God is in it. When broken lives are healed, when experiences that seemed all loss are gathered into some new emerging pattern of life, God is in it.

The divinity discerned in the processes of creative synthesis on all levels of existence, including the most profound human relationships, is a respecter of the individual. Indeed, the deepest potentialities of the individual are brought forth only in the context of the Divine Presence, God working in and through man. Such psychologists as Harry Stack Sullivan have helped us see the role of inter-personal relations in the emergence of personality. The creative dynamic operative in these relations is God on this particular level.

There is a divine initiative—a divine Grace—involved in all of this. We may plant and water, but God gives the growth and healing—preceding, proceeding in, and following after the human contribution.

Man, too, is a part of the universe in its most inclusive sense, and his private experience may well have something to say about God. One can say this without holding that man is the measure of all things.

In his experience man discerns a responsiveness in the universe about him. When the notion of the universe as law-abiding first began to sink in, there were those who thought that this, of course, took God out of the picture entirely—unless it be as a God far removed in the deistic sense—or as a highly impersonal and inflexible law or principle somehow holding things up or pushing them on.

It is well to recall that a so-called law of nature is nothing more nor less than a man-made formulation regarding some observed uniformities and dependabilities. The notion of natural law or order need not imply mech-

[10] *Union Seminary Quarterly Review,* May, 1957.

anistic materialism. I would go further and suggest that there is no necessary inconsistency between the general notion of orderliness and the belief in a divine responsiveness. It is very doubtful that prayer for a change in weather will induce God to change the weather. But I think man's experience of prayer over the centuries gives us all the evidence we need that in prayer man helps set conditions in terms of which God can work creatively and recreatively in human life in ways which would otherwise be impossible. God is a responsive God without being a violator of natural law for the special benefit of a chosen few.

Likewise, in the aesthetic and mystical experiences, man responds to a greater responsiveness. These experiences take place in a context of events —and just as man plays his part—so there is that beyond man which draws forth, evokes the feelings of rapport, kinship, communion, appreciation. God is in it.

The testimony of the inner life is not the only testimony, but it is real and important. My own judgment is that when the mystical element goes out of religion, a major dynamic goes out of religion. And there is no reason—on intellectual grounds—why it should go out.

When man in his inter-personal relations learns to love in a mature way, he discovers what is oftentimes the most important responsiveness of all. The evidence is growing that love is an essential soil for healing and growth of the human spirit. Through love, God brings forth newness of life and hope. At the point of love, we so often discern the divine responsiveness which heals, empowers and makes whole.

In our thought of God, we need to maintain a kind of alternation—between the God discerned in vast cosmic movements and the sweep of the centuries on the one hand—and the God discerned in our immediate presence, in the emerging creativeness and significance of the situation at hand. God is extensively and intensively present in our world in the matrix of our being —far and near.

Thus, we do well, to take the doctrine of incarnation with new seriousness—but also with reinterpretation. Incarnation suggests that that which is most Divine in all reality dwells in the specific event or person.

If we think of God as only right here, right now, we miss the dimensions of vastness of God, we may miss the vivid reality of God in the situation at hand. Then it is that we need to hear a voice telling us that the place on which we stand is holy ground.

Many years ago there were some people, who through their associations with Jesus of Nazareth, entered into a new life and a new hope. Jesus was a part of it—but not Jesus alone. Their own hopes and fears and aspirations were a part of it—but not that alone. Their conversation and work together was a part of it—but not that alone. It was all of these things in association which seemed to create a situation in which the spirit of God could move creatively, bringing forth newness of life and hope.

In time Jesus died a martyr death, and at first this seemed to take away all that really mattered. Perhaps it would have been better if they had never met him—they would have been spared this tragic hour.

But the God who sometimes seems so far away—sometimes draws near in our consciousness and is manifest even in the midst of tragedy. And thus it was that out of the depths of what seemed utter loss, defeat, and death, there rose what Paul chose to call "the body of Christ," manifesting his living spirit, which now for nineteen centuries has been an instrumentality of God's creative and saving power. Our presence here speaks of its reality.

No man finds his way to God in abstraction. One does not find his way to God in principle alone. Men find

their way to God in specific situations, through specific relationships, in terms of specific commitments and so often through a first-hand meeting with a God-filled life. Man finds his way to God—on the level of profound religious meaning—when having contemplated the greatness of God, he enters into that greatness at some specific point or points through some specific agency, through some specific commitment saying: here is God incarnate; here I am privileged to participate in the reality of God.

So through the centuries, the Christian Church has held out a way, a place, a central figure, a commitment, a fellowship. And we are true to our trust only as in our own time and place we serve this way—setting the conditions within ourselves and in our relationships wherein the incarnate God may work in the lives of men—bringing **new life** and **new hope.**

IV.

Sooner or later two questions are asked of every doctrine of God: what of the problem of evil, and what of the meaning of life? These are inter-related and may be treated together.

Good is good and evil is evil from some perspective. If we define good as that which is conducive to the maintenance and enrichment of human life, obviously there is a great deal of evil in the world. And if we insist on defining God's goodness in those terms—the maintenance and enrichment of human life—it is obvious that either God is greatly limited in power or else we must qualify God's goodness on the basis of data available to us. Man's existence is a precarious one and entails much suffering. To maintain that this universe is structured primarily around the maintenance and enrichment of human life hardly seems to be warranted by the observable facts. Man belongs, he has the opportunity for meaningful existence, he may know the joy of creative work, play, love, worship, but his membership in the universe does not entail total ownership or control, let alone perpetual occupancy. As the late Chancellor Duncan used to say in his church history classes, man was not made for omnipotence.

Here, then, is a series of introductory statements which may indicate an approach to the age-old problem, in the light of the doctrine of God we have been discussing. In speaking of these matters one does well to recall the statement that "all simplifications of religious dogma are shipwrecked on the problem of evil."

Man's experience is that of being both sustained and threatened. From the perspective of his own maintenance and welfare, he experiences both good and evil.

By the application of knowledge and skills he may eliminate some of the evil.

Man can turn some evil to good . . . his own, that of others about him, and those who will follow after.

He can extract from some evil, elements of good. As Shakespeare put it: "There is some soul of goodness in things evil, would man observingly distill it out."

His problem, as Lewis Mumford put it, is to reduce evil to such amounts as can be spiritually assimilated.

But man has been given the power of reflective thought, with a certain degree of detachment. He comes to recognize that his very arrival was dependent upon conditions which contain within themselves the makings of his frustrations and eventual passage from the scene. Many of the most meaningful things in human experience are rooted in the nature of the universe—dependability, inter-relatedness, growth, the possibility of achievement. But participation in a dynamic universe, so characterized, entails frustration, the pain of outgrowing, the possibility of failure, the certainty of death. Life without suffering is inconceivable in a universe of growth. Pain is the guardian

of life. When we discern God in the very drive, order, creativity of the universe, so-called natural evil is seen (not as a planned punishment) but as of the nature of travail inherent in the processes of creation and appreciation. God has many ends in view.

Thus, there must come that point at which man rethinks his value-system in terms of a perspective more inclusive than his own existence and enrichment. "To be or not to be" is a question each of us faces. Consciously or unconsciously we accept the gift of life—on terms we do not wholly determine. We are offered life on terms of only partial realization of our wishes. With Margaret Fuller, we either accept the universe on those terms, or we don't.

But the acceptance of life on those terms need not be one of bitterness or hopelessness or belt-tightening resignation. Where there is a vision of an eternal greatness incarnate in the passage of temporal fact, where there is a vision of a Creator-God, whose perspective is greater than our own, whose ends and goals in part are past man's finding out —so great and varied are they—man may find a sense of wonder, a sense of excitement, a sense of profundity, a sense of joy and a sense of expectancy, even in the awareness that he is not the sole center of it all.

The sense of the meaningfulness of life does not come through promises that some day we shall have all that we ever wanted. It does not come from participation in a fixed plan that is imposed from above and in which we must enact our roles as determined pawns; it comes from a vision of greatness, in which we are privileged to share—as co-creators in dignity and integrity. We share in the creation of meaningfulness. God provides raw materials.

Too much of our religion is geared to the idea of security, and not enough to the vision of greatness. Religion for primitive man is one thing. Out of his fear he seeks to induce the divine powers to change things for him—the weather, the crops, what not. His God is the god of sheer power.

After awhile man outgrows his more magical views and seeks to adjust himself to what must be—in resignation. On this level his God is a God of Power plus a greater measure of Dependability.

But there is another level of religion —more appropriate to the spirit of men capable of leaving the earth and soaring into space. It is the religion inspired by the vision of greatness in God—a greatness to which man responds, not simply out of external compulsion, but out of the inner thrust of his spirit—in curiosity, in wonder, in sensitivity, in growth, in aspiration, in devotion, in the awareness that one's life is not his own—there is that which has a rightful claim on us.

We are told by some experts in personality-theory that man is pointed in the direction of future possibilities. As Maslow points out, there are both deficit and growth motives. Deficit motives call for reduction of tension; growth motives maintain tension in the interest of distant goals. There is such a thing as locating the religious life too exclusively in the defensive functions of the ego; there is a developing ego we would encourage—capable of responding to the lure of a very great God, involved in vast enterprises, calling for effort and imagination.

Before climbing Mt. Everest, Tensig was reminded of the danger involved. He replied: "Life is precious to me, but climbing this mountain means more . . ." As Whitehead comments, the worship of God is not simply a rule of safety—it is an adventure of the spirit. The religion of a new day, capable of lifting us out of ourselves, providing a new and transforming motivation, must be oriented to a divine greatness we recognize as having a claim upon us. Nothing less will do.

In his famous essay "Is Life Worth Living?" William James wrote:

> God himself may draw vital strength and increase of very being from our fidelity. If this life be not a real fight, in which something is eternally gained for the universe by success, it is not better than a game of private theatricals from which one may withdraw at will. But it feels like a real fight—as if there were something really wild in the universe which we, with all our idealities and faithfulness are needed to redeem, and first of all, to redeem our hearts from atheisms and fears.[11]

The goodness of God is not in providing guarantees of final answers and final success in all we do, and fulfillment of all we wish—the goodness of God is in providing conditions for growth and greatness through work and play, love and worship, and commitment of life to self-transcending value.

To love God with heart, soul, strength and mind is to accept the gift of life and to bring to the experiences of life the qualities of spirit and effort and trust in which we honor the Giver of Life.

We do well to ask the question, "What is the meaning of life?" But we do well to go on and ask, "What is the meaning of **my** life?" What of the eternal greatness and goodness can I incarnate in my being?

The meaning of life is defined at two levels—through participation in what we believe to be the larger purposes of God, and on the level of self-realization. But we cannot think of these things independently. It is in our daily inter-changes in life, our responses in specific situations, our participation in the creation and conservation of value, that we reflect in some measure the image of God and show forth the meaning of life.

For many centuries the Christian Church has held that God is one, but our experience of God is varied as Creator, Redeemer, Life-Giving Spirit.

The doctrine we have been setting forth takes its place within this framework of interpretation, but in a metaphysical setting quite different from that of the Nicene theologians who presupposed a dualistic and substantive metaphysics.

Trust and devotion are the foundations on which Christian hope rises. Trust in the ultimate destiny in whom we live and move and have our being, known only in part; devotion in relation to that which has been disclosed of God in his creating, restoring, healing, life-giving, beckoning nature.

Though the God so discerned be vast and far, He is also at hand inviting us to look up and out on life in reverence and expectancy. The salvation He offers is not simply from evil (however we define it), but also **to** the dimension of greatness wherein we show forth in human life a measure of the Divine.

In a recent article, James Reston of the New York Times said that a top-flight reporter keeps asking: "What's not getting reported? What's the big story we're all missing?" And that is what the Christian preacher keeps asking: "In the midst of our comings and goings, what's not getting reported? What's the big story we're all missing?" The big story is that this is a God-permeated universe, and the meaning of God is vaster and profounder than we had ever supposed.

For those who are of a mind to look and see and listen, the newer views of the universe and man have something to say to us about God. They may help us, as religious leaders, in our important work of rendering "clear to popular understanding, the eternal greatness which is incarnate in the passage of temporal fact."

It is appropriate to recall a prayer offered by Dr. James Killian, for a time the President's Special Assistant for Science and Technology:

> Infinite Spirit: Give us, we pray, the will and the capacity to grow, the sensitivity and receptivity to see in new ways, and the humility to understand how little we yet have grown and how little we yet have seen.

[11] W. James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays,* Dover Publications, 1956, p. 61.