

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_evangelical\\_quarterly.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php)

## THE PLACE AND FUNCTION OF REASON IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

It is part of the Christian faith to believe that man has been specially qualified by creation to receive the divine Revelation. A large part of that qualification we believe to rest in his reason, for man has been created a rational and responsible being in order that he might have personal fellowship with God. That does not imply that man can of himself exercise this qualification to know God, as if it could be exercised out of the relationship with God to which he has been called, but it does imply that God makes Himself known to man only along intelligible lines. The Word of God is a rational event. The reception of that Word employs the full use of the human reason. It is therefore imperative for the theologian to make himself quite clear about the place and function of reason in his faith. That is all the more imperative in our own times, because with the discovery of the "unconscious", and the rapid development of vitalist and pragmatic philosophies, the Western World has been tempted to give rein to an irrationalism of a dangerous, romantic type. It is not my purpose to offer a full discussion of that subject within the limits of this lecture, but rather to discuss several of the more important factors which call for close scrutiny.

Before going any farther it may be well to point out that I am not using the expression "reason" in any specially defined sense, but rather in that wide sense which I think we all understand best, at least when we are not in a philosophical mood. Indeed it is probably true that reason cannot be defined at all, but may only be described functionally, for definition would seem to involve drawing that unfortunate line between "thinking thing" (*res cogitans*) and "extended thing" (*res extensa*). After all, we cannot think unless we have something to think about, for we cannot think, so to speak, in a vacuum. What we think about has a great deal to do with the shaping of our reason,

<sup>1</sup>New College Theological Society, Edinburgh, Presidential Address, Nov. 10, 1941.

and with the determination both of its existence and its function. If therefore I come to use "reason" in a more precise sense, it is one that will be evident only in the light of the argument as a whole, and in the light of the data which I believe to constitute the proper subject-matter of Christian reasoning.

## I

The first thing we must tackle is what we have come to call "the autonomy of reason". This conception of reason as a law unto itself is mainly modern, though its roots go back to Greek philosophy. Certainly ancient thought was much more realist and extrovert than we modern folk are apt to imagine, implying a view of reason already bound up with and dependent upon an objective world, but the first steps toward the autocracy of reason, as the Greeks preferred to call it, were taken there, notably by Anaxagoras, Protagoras, and Gorgias. (Cf. Anaxagoras fr. 12: τὰ μὲν ἅλλα παντὸς μοίραν μετέχει, τοῦς δὲ ἐστὶν ἄπειρον καὶ αὐτοματὰς καὶ μέμικται οὐδενὶ χρήματι, ἀλλὰ μὲν ὄνος αὐτὸς ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ ἐστίν).

The fundamental issue was most clearly focused by the Platonic Socrates. The problem of knowledge as he saw it was something like this: "A man cannot inquire either about what he knows, or about what he does not know. What he knows, he knows, and therefore has no need to inquire about it. Nor can he inquire about what he does not know, for he does not even know for what to inquire." (Meno 80; Cf. Republic 518 C. etc.) The answer to that pugnacious proposition was the self-dependence of reason, for Socrates taught that man does not learn the truth from without but from within. In fact, man has only to learn what he already knows. Once launched that view of reason made enormous progress whether in Platonic or Aristotelian dress. The most significant development for modern thought came through the Augustinian, Boethian, Cartesian tradition, parallel with the development of the concept of personality, until in the school round John Locke the term "self-consciousness" came into being, which from Kant onward became one of the central thoughts of modern philosophy. It was in the course of this discussion that reason came to be thought of as "substance" (*substantia*) or as "thinking thing" (*res cogitans*), perhaps the most

disastrous moment in modern philosophy. The understanding of reason as relative to something transcendent of it was submerged, and there was left an introvert view of reason as relative to itself. Of course, there were extremes, just as there were in ancient philosophy: some came to think of the mind as the measure of all things, and of reason as something that operated entirely, as it were, on its own steam, while on the other hand there were positivist reactions to this subjectivism in which reason was regarded not so much as relative to itself as relative to matter, therefore as something epiphenomenal. But on the whole the post-Renaissance world accepted the autonomy of reason as an axiom, and did not think of questioning it. It is within the bounds of autonomous reasoning that all great modern philosophising has taken place.

In the judgment of Christianity autonomy belongs to the very essence of sin, whether that autonomy be of the will or of the mind. That is something which modernity has forgotten and does not like to remember: that we sin with our minds as much as we do with our desires and our wills, and that original sin has not only to do with the selfishness of appetition but with the tendency of reason toward autocracy. Man was made for God, made such that the proper exercise of his reason both toward God and toward the world is possible only when man lives in obedience to, and in personal fellowship with, his Creator. Therefore in autonomy, in the alienation from the living God which that entails, the whole effort of reason runs in a direction counter to that for which it was created, not toward loving obedience to God, but toward self-emancipation, and therefore toward the intensification of the very rupture brought about by sin. Thus the autonomous reason operates against its own divinely appointed destiny, and is so far unreasonable. That is why Athanasius could speak of the mind of the sinner as *ALOGOS*, and why Calvin could speak of fallen man as *MENTE ALIENATUS*.

In the Biblical doctrine of creation it is plain that man's relations with God are never regarded as a matter of "pure spirit". Man is a creature and his relations with God are the relations of one who is an inhabitant of this creaturely world. His knowledge of God is never thought of in abstraction from the world of other men or even of nature. On the other hand,

man's relations with the world are never regarded as secular; they depend entirely on his relationship with God. Consequently in the Biblical doctrine of the Fall, there is a two-fold rupture: that between man and God, and that between man and the world. This is not thought of as simply in the mind of man; there is something objective about it, and therefore beyond man's control altogether. On the one hand, God's holiness separates Him from sinful man: God is in the far country. On the other hand, the world itself has gone wrong: it is under a curse. In other words, in the Fall man became alienated from God, and at the same time his relationship with the world was distorted. The fallen reason is not only turned away from God but wrongly orientated toward the world. Consequently man is flung in upon himself, and reason is in-turned. Therefore in its efforts to relate itself both to the world and to God the reason inevitably develops in an autonomous direction.

## II

It is important to see how this works out. Over against God, the mind of man is "at enmity", to use an expression of St. Paul. This alienation from God brings about a breach between man's *idea* of God and the Being of the living God (or shall we say His Spirit?). But the idea cannot rest in mid air, so to speak, upon nothing, therefore it is apt to be attached to the being that man does know, himself or the world. In any case, to cite St. Paul again, when the mind grasps at the truth of God what it gets is not the Creator but a creature. The reason becomes earth-bound, as Athanasius argues, and even self-bound in regard to its idea of God. At first the naïve tendency is to identify the idea of God with something in nature, with a four-footed beast or a creeping thing; but the philosopher tends to identify it with being in general. However, over against the world, man's relations are not happy either. Out of immediate relation with God man finds it difficult to grasp his relations with the world, and so flung upon himself again, there arises the breach between *sense* and *idea*, giving rise to the two-fold problem of philosophy, that between appearance and reality, and that of self-transcendence. This in turn reacts upon the idea of God which now comes to be identified with the depths of man's own being.

“ Truth is within ourselves. It takes no rise  
 From outward things, whate’er you may believe.  
 There is an inmost centre in ourselves  
 Where truth abides in fullness; and to know  
 Rather consists in finding out a way  
 Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape  
 Than by effecting entrance for a light  
 Supposed to be without.”

There you have the full development of the autonomous reason. Reason cannot operate without “*substantia*”. Therefore, cut off from God and unable to grasp its proper relation to the world, reason has been forced to feed upon itself as if itself were “*substantia*”. The earth-bound reason has naturally attained a certain more or less permanent configuration in conformity with the material world, but it has come to imagine that that configuration belongs to its essential being, that it is substantial to it, and therefore it has come to imagine that in view of this, or to use Kantian language, in view of the categories of its own understanding, it can understand any object to which it may direct its attention. This has been taken to be true to such an extent that it has become an axiom for the reason to accept as rational only that which fits in with the forms of its autonomous activity. It refuses to recognise anything from outside the circle of its own self-sufficiency, except what can be understood by the norms immanent to reason. Hence the autonomous reason will only recognise a religion within the limits of what it calls “pure reason”.

That is why the great philosophers have not hesitated to reject Revelation. The autonomous reason can only admit anything transcendent to it, if it supposes a secret identification of that transcendent with the ground of its own being—for example, the Cartesian form of the ontological argument, or Kant’s identification of the categorical imperative with the will of the self-legislative ego. But that simply means that Revelation is never taken seriously and is reduced to the last stage of a conscious recollection of what was already there—and so we return to the Socratic doctrine of reminiscence. The only other alternative for the autonomous reason would be a simple suspension of judgment in face of a transcendent, or before certain conceptions which were recognised as drawing

a boundary to the self-assertion of reason. That is what the Greeks called ΕΡΟΣΗ. To say the least that is a very hard way for the reason, for it involves the suicide of complete autonomy. Consequently this alternative is very rarely adopted. Therefore as a rule when the autonomous reason comes across the unknown, it subdues the unknown to the forms of its own understanding, and the unknown is translated into what is already known. It cannot conceive an absolute unlikeness except in terms of itself, for it will allow no breach in the circle of its autonomy. In other language, the autonomous reason can only try to understand God in terms of itself, presupposing an ontic continuity between itself and God, and so can only hold the truth "in the form of a lie", worshipping the creature instead of the Creator. A full-fledged autonomy is bent on self-deification. Think, for example, of how Fichte interpreted the autonomy of Kant, as the will of the ego to infinity. What else is the Kantian advice: Act so that . . . asks Christianity, but a refined form of egoism, in fact the fundamental self-assertion of sin? Here then we have the urge of the Ego towards self-emancipation ending in the Fichtean self-deification, or with Feuerbach in a naturalistic vein, in the assertion that theology is nothing more than anthropology. Happily later philosophy has reached a much saner view of reason. That has been partly due to a thought initiated by Dilthey who saw that the historical philosophies had always broken down in antinomies and relativity, and due partly to Kierkegaard's critique of Socratism. To-day philosophy is engaged in making the step from what Cassirer has called "Substanzbegriff" to "Funktionsbegriff", i.e. philosophy is coming to see that reason is not something substantival but verbal, not so much a state as an act, and therefore must be functionally interpreted.

There is another characteristic of the in-turned reason to which we must devote a few moments: its refractory thinking. Just because it is faced with a cleft between sense and idea, the natural reason cannot grasp the truth without falsifying it. That is evident, for example, in the withdrawal of the scientific attitude from existence, and in the creation of an abstract world which philosophy, if it is to attain a unitary orientation to the whole of being, must relate to actual existence. On the other hand, alienated from God and imprisoned within itself the fallen reason inevitably refracts the Truth of God (μετήλλαξαν τήν ἀλήθειαν

τοῦ θεοῦ) into abstract ideas, which are regarded as true in so far as they are timeless and universal. They are connected by an immanent law of necessity operating with the logical principle of non-contradiction, and are forced into an abortive unity, simply because it is the autonomous reason alone which is the court of appeal. Because these ideas are timeless and are abstracted from concrete existence, they can only be handled mechanically. They are not living, but possess the inevitability of what has passed into object-existence. Consequently such thinking is always characterised by legalism and determinism.

### III

What is the judgment of Christianity upon all this? In Christ we believe that we are restored to the living relation with God from which man fell, i.e. to sonship in Jesus Christ Who alone shows us the Father. Therefore Christian theology is constantly directed toward the expulsion of the abstract concepts of refracted knowledge. It is precisely this abstract character of autonomous thought that imperils the personal character and existence of faith. Therefore we cannot allow such ideas as have come through the refracting activity of the in-turned reason to be placed alongside the living concrete truths which faith gains from divine Revelation. No more than we can allow the person of Christ to be substituted by a docetic, gnostic figure, can we allow the great truths of the Christian faith to be universalised (or maximised) until they have lost their historical concrete character (their Einmaligkeit), in order to be placed alongside the self-evident truths of reason. The knowledge that we gain in faith is not something that can be made scientific. Science is the activity of the autonomous reason in a fallen world, a world in which the relation to God is regarded as deistic and characterised by causal necessity. It would be altogether false to apply the principles that obtain in that refracted relationship, to the living, filial, existential relation which we have with God the Father in Christian faith. That is not to deny that there is a real place for autonomous thinking; there always will be so long as there is a place for scientific activity. God does not ask us to live in this world as if it were a Garden of Eden, and not fallen after all. But the place of the autonomous reason is very limited, only relative

to the fallen world. It ought to be kept there, but the difficulty is that the self-assertion of autonomy insists that the fallen reason break those boundaries and press toward universal validity. Therefore so long as we live in a fallen world there will always be serious tension between the abstract type of thought and the existential thought of faith.

Christianity brings no endictment against reason as such (the neutral reason). That would be to repudiate the intelligibility of its own faith. But Christianity does insist that the reason be brought back to a place of dependence on God, and that it learn to exercise its proper function within that dependence. Only then does the reason of man become reasonable in the true sense of the term. Christianity disputes with the autonomous reason its use of the word "rational" as that which is relative to the forms of the autonomous reason alone, and claims that "rational" is only that which is relative to the reason conform to the Word of God through which and for which the reason was created. Not to believe that would mean for Christian faith the abdication of its rationality. Therefore it must press toward the disenchantment of the world from the power of what the autonomous reason calls "rational", and from its claim to universal validity. In place of the autonomous reason Christianity puts the *heteronomous reason*.

When we say that the Revelation of God appeals to faith, by faith we mean the total response of man to God. But when we come to narrow that down for purposes of theology, we find that we largely mean by faith man's rational answer to the Word of God. Faith is (mainly) the obedience of man's mind. Faith is the word we use to describe the new filial relation of the Christian man to God the Father through which personal fellowship is possible. Here reason is not a law unto itself, but submits itself to the rule of God. Reason is not turned in upon itself but turned out toward its Maker. It is here, therefore, that we have the genuine reason, reason as God meant it to be, reason not abstracted from its real existence and destiny either in God or in the world, but reason in touch with personal reality in God, and reason which can come down upon nature from God and see God in it, reason which does not think of God the Creator in terms of *cause* (i.e. deistically) but only of the Creator in terms of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (i.e. filially). It is here through faith

in Jesus Christ that reason comes to be healed of those ruptures which characterise man in his severance from God. From being conform to the fashion of this world reason is transformed and made conform to the Mind of Christ. Consequently the old habits of thought are changed in a thoroughgoing METANOIA. That is the meaning of the New Testament conversion or new birth: we have to become little children again in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

(It is significant that the little child does not tend to have that breach between sense and idea which so characterises us grown-ups, especially the more highly educated (and sophisticated!) we become. I think we must take the Christian sacrament as a pointer to the time when that breach between sense and idea will actually be healed, when faith shall attain fully the character of vision. The New Testament does not promise us a life of "pure spirit" but a life in bodily resurrection; it bids us look forward not simply to heaven, but to a new heaven ("new" because our "values" will be changed), *and a new earth*, that is, to the Kingdom of God. That Kingdom has already come in Jesus Christ in Whom heaven and earth, God and man are reconciled. Therefore in the resurrection of Jesus we have the earnest of our inheritance.)

The Christian reason which in METANOIA is turned out toward God now becomes determined by its object, its proper object, God in Christ, Whom reason was made to apprehend. In a real sense, of course, the reason is still self-determining, but this new self-determination is not the bondage of reason but its freedom in the overlapping determination by God. Such a change really amounts to a new qualification of its existence. Reason is no longer formal or merely critical, but filial in intimate relation with the Heavenly Father. It is no longer what was vainly called the "pure reason"; it is *filled reason*, reason which can now really think about God because it has really got God to think about.

It is reason thus conform to God in Christ and thus determined by His Word, that we are to speak of as having the "imago dei", what the New Testament calls "sonship". What is the "imago dei" but conformity to the Father, and what kind of conformity can there be but personal rational obedience? It is certain that there can be no ontic conformity between mere man and God. God is the Creator, man is a creature;

he is not in any sense an emanation of the Being of God, nor does he have God's Being but God's *Word* as the ground of his own being. In the New Testament Christ alone is thought of as having an ontic relationship with God, an "only-begotten" relationship with the Father, for He is "the brightness of Glory and the express image of His person (*ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ*), i.e. the *Image* Who is at the same time the *Reality* of God. The "imago dei" in man is of a different category. It is not anything static, but dynamic, "possessed" only through faith in Christ the Son of God. It is not a "datum", but a "dandum". The new configuration which reason attains really belongs to the Word which the Word imposes upon the reason, not to the reason itself. It is only possible to think of reason as "possessing" likeness to God if the relation between reason and God is thought of deistically, in terms of a cause and effect relationship, but that only produces a God that is distant and cold, a mere "Maker". The Father-Son relationship in Jesus Christ in point of fact destroys that abstract relationship and gives us a new understanding of the relation between the Creator and the creature, and of the "imago dei". The meaning of "imago dei" only becomes clear when the reason restored to filial love and obedience to the Father grasps its relationship to God *through faith in Jesus Christ*, that is, when it is once again actually in personal contact with the Father.

It is this doctrine of the filled reason, reason in contact with God through Christ, which Christianity gives as its answer to the pugnacious proposition of the Meno. How can man come to know the truth? The answer of Socrates was, in effect, this: Man can come to know the truth, because he IS what he wants to know: therefore, KNOW THYSELF. Socrates gave the only answer that could be given: a doctrine of filled reason, but for Socrates the reason was filled with self, and only filled with God because, as he said, he learnt from certain priestesses and divines, the self has a "diviner part", and is at bottom divine. The reason can know divine truth because it is what it wants to know. While Christianity also gives the answer of a filled reason it is the exact antithesis of the Socratic answer. The reason is filled not because it is what it wants to know, but because God has become Man and gives to the human reason His Word in human form. The reason can now really

think about God because it has really got God to think about.

Put the question in another way: How is the human reason able to apprehend God, for the reason requires an object, and God is not objectifiable by reason? The answer of Christianity is: Jesus Christ, who is the objective self-revelation of God. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Jesus did not come simply as the bearer of a Word, or as a Teacher of Eternal Truth. He was the Truth in His own person. That is the astonishing thing about our faith: that the Truth of God is identified with a Man. The Truth which we apprehend in faith is already in human form, Truth in the form of being; concrete historical Truth, "existential", as we have come to call it lately. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His Glory." We do not believe that this flesh, the humanity of Christ, was merely an outward garment which He assumed in order to pass for a while incognito among men, and then throw off, rather did it belong to His essential form. The Incarnation is not a theophany; it is far more profound than that. It means that the Word of God has made His own for ever our human form and being, so that we human beings who can only know and think humanly, might here come to know the Eternal in concrete, living, existential fashion. Just because Jesus Christ is the Truth in His own person, Truth which has really become Man, therefore it is Truth already amenable to the human mind. Indeed we can say, just because it is the Truth in human form it is Truth already in conceptual form.

Without doubt that is extremely difficult for the abstract reason to grasp, for the abstract reason only operates with the idea, with truth in a form in which it is abstracted from existence. But here in Christianity we do not have that gap between idea and existence, between truth and reality, between a realm of the imagination or vision, and a realm of the conceptual. For the abstract reason the concrete and the historical only play the role of concretions of the universal idea; they are only symbols and outward garments which must be shed before the truth can be set free. But here the historical belongs to the very being and inner form of Truth, and that Truth cannot be divested of its historical character without losing its essential form and therefore without being altogether falsified.

The tragedy of the autonomous or the abstract reason is that whenever it thinks it has found the truth, it finds it to be far removed from actual existence, and is more or less worthless, at least so far as saving virtue and relevance to human life are concerned. But here in Christ we have Truth inseparable from Being, and yet Truth which has become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. Here we have Truth which is itself the living Reality of God and yet bound up intimately and inseparably from our actual existence. Wherefore it is Truth that can be apprehended only **EXISTENTIALLY**.

## IV

If, as I am trying to maintain, Christianity does not allow of a separation between Truth and Reality, between idea and being, then in knowing the Truth we have a cognitional experience in which the Truth cannot be apprehended apart from the Real, in which a man cannot form a genuine idea of the Truth without his being altered in being. We can only apprehend Jesus Christ Who is the Truth with our whole being, therefore only in an act where cognition and decision concur. The apprehension of the Truth involves a real becoming, what the New Testament calls a rebirth; a special qualification of our existence, because the Truth which we apprehend in faith becomes a determining factor in our beings. That is why we think of faith as being the **TOTAL** response of rational man to God's Word; it is a decision which is existential, in which not only the intellect but the will and the whole person are summoned to decide before God.

This becomes clearer when we think of it in relation to sin. If Christian Truth is a form of Being, sin is also a matter of being. As Professor Mackintosh used to say: "Before God we feel shame for our whole being, for our good as well as our evil." Sin is, in fact, a being-in-error. It is not simply a defection from the good or a mere wounding of our being which can therefore be cured by some "ad hoc" remedy. That is only to make sin a very superficial thing, and in the last resort mere appearance. Sin is a matter of being; it is total. It has to do with the inner form of our being which has become perverted. It cannot be separated from us for it belongs to the inner structure of ourselves. That is why St. Paul even

said that Christ was "made sin for us", words at which we can only stand aghast. Christ died not only for our sins but for Us. The whole of our being was the object of His redemption. Redemption means therefore a new creation, a new qualification of our deepest existence.

That throws considerable light upon why the autonomous reason can only intensify by its activity the very rupture which brought about man's fall, and at the same time it indicates how impossible it is for man to return to God of himself. The contradiction of sin does not only belong to his mind but to his existence, and therefore cannot be removed by dialectic or by any activity of reason. It is impossible for man, even if he thinks of himself as having an analogy of being with God, to retreat backward through that into eternity, to knowledge of God. He is brought to a halt by the barrier of sin which is *existential* severance from the Truth (*existential* just because that Truth is in the form of *being*) which no abstract reason can ever get over. So we can say here looking back again to the saving knowledge of Christ the Truth, that just as sin is real, its contradiction belonging to the very being of man, so man's saving knowledge if it is to be true and actual must be a real act of man's whole being, corresponding to the objectivity of God's forgiveness in the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ. That act which is something different from mere intellection is the decision of faith, which entails a new relation altogether to the Truth and Reality of God in Christ.

It will be seen that the inseparability of Truth from Being, of Knowledge of God in Christ from rebirth in Christ, has very far reaching consequences for the function of reason in theological activity. A great number of our pet distinctions are invalidated, such as those between "reason which cognises truths", and "experience which cognises reals", between "knowledge by description" and "knowledge by acquaintance", between the discursive reason and the intuitive reason, between the poetic or mystic vision and philosophising, and even between the "fides quae creditur" and the "fides qua creditur". These do have, and I think must have, a real place in our thinking, but they are not distinctions ultimately valid for Christian theology. If they were valid then theology would have to be defined as the attempt to interpret in conceptual language what is apprehended in other fashion, or as an inquiry which

draws out the implications of an implicit inference contained in some initial vision or awareness of the religious consciousness. Now theology, I believe, has very little to do with the "religious consciousness"; it has to do with the Word of God, that is with God's Truth as already present to man in rational concrete form, therefore in a fashion already amenable to human mental activity. The Truth which faith deals with is embodied Truth, Truth in the form of Being, Truth in the form of Man, and therefore does not need to be reduced or translated from some realm of mystic imagination or dim awareness into a realm of conceptual forms fit for theological activity. If theological knowledge is something different in kind and attitude from the knowledge of faith, then you drive a wedge in between Truth and Being, in fact between The Word of Christ and the Person of Christ. If that were so then a merely clever man working upon what is called the deposit of faith could be a theologian, and that we cannot allow. Every judgment made in the body of theology must be a faith-judgment or it is not a Christian judgment; every doctrine in the body of theology must be one over which the theologian has made an existential decision before God, over which he has prayed. Theology really means the completion in the full realm of thought of the act of faith. It is still the Word of God, though worked out in all the forms of human mental activity.

That does not mean that there is no difference at all between faith-knowledge and theological activity. There is no difference in knowledge, but a difference between the "terminus a quo" and the "terminus ad quem". In faith, which is the "terminus a quo", we have a knowledge of God in which very little attention is paid to the *forms* in which Christ is veiled. In theology, which is the "terminus ad quem", we have the same knowledge of God with more attention paid to the *particular forms* which the Word of God has taken in giving itself to our apprehension; but just because these forms are not given to the Word by us, but belong to the essential form of Christ, theology cannot be said to be an interpretation of, or a construction put upon, an apprehension given in other form, such as an irrational numinous experience. Theology has to do immediately with Truth in the form of being just as much as faith; it has to do with ideas that are inseparably bound up with the living objective reality of the Word; it has to do

therefore with the existential and not simply with a consciousness which claims to be aroused by the existential in some intuitional fashion.

## V

My quarrel with what has so long *passed* for theological activity, particularly since Schleiermacher, namely with theology conceived of as the analysis of the religious consciousness and its redaction to the conceptual, might be illustrated by the respective philosophies of Husserl and Heidegger. Faced with the impasse of modern philosophy brought about by its Cartesianism, Husserl tried to break through that subjectivism by what he called the "phenomenological analysis" through which the meanings of definite phenomena behind (or within) consciousness could be described. Those meanings, he held, were directly accessible to intuition, and therefore could be read straight off the phenomena without any elaborate philosophical constructions. Heidegger who took over his method of phenomenological analysis found it difficult to see how that could really succeed in breaking through the ring of self-consciousness when it *started* with self-consciousness. Therefore, borrowing from Kierkegaard a deeper cognitive penetration into reality, called existential thinking, he proceeded to the analysis of existence hoping to break through into an understanding of Being. I do not think that Heidegger succeeded or on his premisses could have succeeded, but it is not my purpose to discuss that here. However, in the relation between Heidegger and Husserl you do have an illustration of the difference between what I hold to be genuine theological activity and what so often passes for theological activity. What is, I believe, impossible on the philosophical level, is the only possible way in Christian Theology. Theology has to do with the Word of God in concrete form, with existence not with a consciousness which has become refracted in itself and abstracted from that existence. The theology which proceeds upon the analysis of consciousness will always be involved in endless discussions, because it is bound to break down in antinomies again and again, if not end in sheer relativity, especially as theology becomes more and more psychological. It seems to me therefore of the utmost importance to recognise once again that Theology, just because it operates with a Truth which is

inseparable from Being, is a different sort of pursuit altogether from the analysis of the religious consciousness, which from the very start must make the devastating breach between the Person and the Word of Christ.

It may be objected that this kind of theology is based on a Revelation viewed as the communication of ready-made doctrines. If that were true, it would be intolerable, for it would mean that already in Revelation itself the cleavage between the Word and the Person of Christ has been made. But actually that is just what this theology obviates by its identification of Truth with the Real. Nevertheless the Bible does constitute revelation in the sense that there is the communication of truth, and communication of truth in its most concrete form—such as in the parables of Jesus—and in the sense that the forms of those particular truths are not forms which *we* impose upon them either by our logic or by our systematic construction, but which the *Word* imposes upon us creatively in our minds. That is why Anselm insisted that faith must press on from “credere,” to “intelligere”, because only in its full formation in the understanding does faith really come to itself. In other words, only as we grasp the forms by which Christ’s Word comes to us do we grasp Christ. God’s Word made Man is a rational event, and faith which answers to that is the most rational experience possible.

This means, of course, that in theology as well as in faith we do not have knowledge in the usual sense, but rather knowledge in the sense of *acknowledgement* because the *fact* that God’s Word has become the Word of God to us, and its actual *Truth* are indistinguishable. Acknowledgement is the kind of knowledge where the driving power lies not in the knower himself but in the determination of what is known, namely God’s own Person, in the self-imposition of Truth that is Real in itself. This knowledge is one in which we surrender ourselves to the Word and to its power of disposal and qualification. That is why theological truth is always so humbling. The ordinary relations of knowledge are reversed; the knower gives himself up entirely into the hands of the Known. In other language, this kind of theological knowledge deposes the critical reason, for, strictly speaking, all inquiry has come to an end. The Word of God can only be believed, i.e. acknowledged.

The critical reason by its very activity eviscerates Christian

Truth of its concrete reality; it turns "reals" into mere "truths", and so loses touch with Reality. That is why in mere argument you cannot arrive at a vital decision. It is only when the continuity of abstract thought is broken that man can decide. So long as he can and must follow the compulsion of logic he cannot decide. It is only when he is confronted by Truth which is at the same time living Reality, that he is summoned to decisive acknowledgement, for this truth is in no sense a product of human judgment but objectively real. That is why the Incarnation spells the end of speculation and the abandonment of inquiry. Therefore because the Word of God BECAME flesh, because Christian Truth is Truth in the form of being, you cannot question whether it is true or not, or ask whether you think it to be true or not. You do not dream of inquiring of a man with whom you are talking, whether he exists, for if you do not think he exists, of what value is his assertion that he does exist, for his assertion is certainly of less value than his very existence? So we must see the situation here where we are confronted with the Word of God in the form of being. You cannot question it. You cannot prove it. Christian Truth is self-authenticating precisely because it is not only the Truth, but the Way and the Life as well—that is, it is Truth and Reality, so to speak, "in one person". And so the Truth for us even in theology consists not so much in "knowing" the truth but, as it were, in being the truth, for "Christ is the Truth in such a sense that To BE the Truth is the only true explanation of what the Truth is" (Kierkegaard).

## VI

Before bringing this discussion to a close there is one more question which we must answer. If Christian truths are also reals, what kind of connection exists between them? The connection between the idea-truths of the abstract reason is essentially one of logical necessity. But here in Christian theology, truths are concrete, living, existential; their connection must be of a different sort. Obviously the connection must be of an intensely *personal* kind. That is clear from the fact that we only know them through the most complete kind of decision, existential decision with the whole being. But just because Christian Truth is Truth in the form of being, that personal

connection between the truths will only be gained by inspection of their real Being, that is, Jesus Christ Himself who is the Truth, the Word upon Whom all truths are grounded. All our thought of God is dependent upon the Incarnation, the coming of God to man and His becoming one with man in personal union with Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore we must turn thither, for what happened there and then must once and for all be the basic norm of theological knowledge. It is in the togetherness of God and Man in Jesus Christ that we are to see the kind of connection which Christian truths bear to each other; therefore in what we have come to call "the hypostatic union". It is a unique togetherness in which perfect Deity and perfect Humanity are united in Christ in such a way that they do not impair each other's presence; there is no separation between the two, nor is there any fusion, for Christ's humanity remains humanity, and His deity remains deity. The fact that there is no separation between God and Christ in Jesus means that there can be no separation between Christian Truth and Being. The fact that there is no fusion means that there is no ontologism (*analogia entis*) between the human reason and God's Being.

There you have in the hypostatic union of Christ and God, I feel sure, the perfect pattern of the connection between the truths of Christian Theology. Their connection partakes of this central union, and so we may perhaps use the expression "hypostatic union" not simply to refer to that personal (consubstantial) union between God and Man in Jesus Christ, but to express just that kind of union. And so "hypostatic union" becomes a sort of category which describes the peculiar relatedness found throughout the whole body of theology, and not elsewhere. Here I am convinced we have the proper norm for operation in all dogmatic activity; by means of it we may determine the genuine forms of particular doctrines, rejecting those formulations which tend either to transubstantiate, as it were, divinity into humanity, or humanity into divinity; and it does not take much inspection to see how all the historic heresies have done one or the other. It is thus that we get our deepest glimpses into the actual forms which the Word of God assumes in our understanding, the particular ways in which divine Truth always comes to articulation. Did theologians pay more attention to this and see that there is given

in and with the objective truths of the faith their intrinsic relation one to another, and use that relation as a norm, there would be far less disagreement. Disagreement arises always at the point where we allow the abstract reason to enter and distort apprehension of the Word of God in the living form which it chooses to take, and when we try to impose instead a form upon it in conformity with the configuration of our autonomous reason. It is only thus when we let Christian truths speak for themselves, and see that in their objective existence they are already closely connected in this personal way, that we can have real unity, and at the same time a living, personal theology.

I cannot stop to show how this connection between the Christian truths works out in the whole body of theology, but for purposes of the present discussion, it might be well to focus that so as to determine our final answer to the relation of the human reason to the Spirit of God in faith or in theological activity. With Chalcedon we must say that there can be no separation, but no fusion. That rules out at once both pure transcendentalism and pantheism, the doctrines of "totally other" (totaliter alter) and "analogy of being" (analogia entis). Just as the hypostatic union rules out a docetic Christology, so here it must rule out the idea that the human reason is set aside altogether in faith. On the other hand, just as the hypostatic union rules out a doctrine of ebionite adoptionism, so here it must rule out any attempt at the deification of the human reason. The human reason remains human but by the Spirit it is filled with the objective Revelation of God in Christ which creates out of the matrix of the human mind the forms by which Christ is apprehended. That does not mean that the full mental activity of man is in any way impaired or set aside. The new thought-forms under which man apprehends Revelation are human thought-forms. It is his language that is used. The difference is that he does not now think *out* God, but thinks Him *in*—nevertheless he thinks.

It is important to note here that the Incarnation does not mean that the Word united Himself to humanity as a whole in some metaphysical fashion. The Word became flesh, united to a particular man, Jesus of Nazareth the Son of Mary. That means to say, that the forms of the objective revelation are are not to be found in man as such, but only in this Man.

The hypostatic union means that at one particular point, and at that point only, have God and Man been brought together. It is therefore at that point where we have God and man in hypostatic union that we can talk of the true point-of-contact (Anknüpfungspunkt) between God and man. The only place where the human mind, while engaged in perfectly true mental activity, may get across to God is in Jesus Christ. The "Form of a servant" which Christ took comprises "in toto" all the forms and is the source of all the categories which reason may legitimately use for its knowledge of God. Thus theology can only be pursued under the most intense mental activity in obedience to the Revelation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ, while the Incarnation means the proper delimitation of the sphere in which reason may operate for theological purposes, and at the same time it guarantees the validity of human categories as the proper analogies through which we may really know God.

T. F. TORRANCE.

*Alyth, Scotland.*