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Modern Theology and the Evangelical Faith

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THE THEOLOGICAL SITUATION is extremely fluid at the moment, and the various currents and cross-currents are not easy to understand. The aim of this article is to consider some of the main movements of thought and to make some kind of estimate of them. J. K. Mozley once wrote, 'No writer will lightly take upon himself the task of appraising the work of his contemporaries. Especially when it is men of thought rather than of action whom he surveys, he will do well to remember that the only human verdict that really matters is the one that he cannot write, since he is of the present, not the future.' (*Some Tendencies in British Theology*, p. 96.) There is truth in this, but, when we acknowledge an objective standard of doctrine in Holy

Scripture, we are surely right to employ it as a test of all that claims to be Christian theology. Obviously some limit must be set, and so consideration will be given only to Protestant thought in this article.

1 *BASIC PRINCIPLES*

(a) *The three elements in systematic theology*

The three main elements which are involved in the building of a system of Christian theology are the biblical, the historical and the constructive. The conservative evangelical seeks to subordinate the other two to the biblical element. For him the historic Church and its creeds and confessions have their place, and so has reason, but they must not usurp the supreme place of authority which he accords to Scripture alone.

(b) *The function of faith in theology*

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.' By the supernatural act of regeneration, faith becomes the principle of the new life in its every department. This does not mean that faith is always pure — 'Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief' — but it does mean that rejection of revelation, whether in whole or in part, is impious and sinful. Faith accepts divine revelation on the testimony of the triune God. As the Bible is read, the Holy Spirit commends its truth to the believing heart. The Son's attitude to the Word provides objective confirmation of this inner witness of the Spirit, while Their work, in this respect as in all others, is grounded in the purpose of the Father. Enjoying new life in Christ by grace, the Christian finds that his conscience is captive to the Word of God. This does not mean that faith never asks questions, but it does so trustfully and not sceptically (contrast Luke 1: 34 with Luke 1: 18, where verbal similarity was seen by the angel to express two quite different attitudes of heart).

(c) *The function of reason in theology*

The mind, thus freed from sin's tyranny, seeks to serve God in the prayerful study of Scripture. Some may suggest that this is not freedom but bondage, but is it? Does the scientist feel his mind to be in bondage because it is limited to a consideration of the facts objectively presented to him in the phenomena of the universe, and because he may not speculate in a fashion which bypasses those facts? Does this cramp his intelligence, giving it no room to move? Surely not, for in serving the facts science finds its perfect freedom. In like manner, the mind of the theologian finds fulfilment not in speculation but in the service of that which is authoritatively given in the biblical revelation. Both scientist and theologian seek to exhibit harmony and meaning in the data which they receive. A. Lecerf states that, 'Dogmatics authenticates, catalogues, interprets, formulates and relates genetically the revealed data' (*An Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics*).

(d) *Theology and Philosophy*

These obviously have certain areas of common concern. Can a Christian be a philosopher? Yes, but he must never forget that as a Christian he is under the authority of God's Word. The Christian philosopher of science will see in the natural order evidence of the divine rationality; the Christian philosopher of history will view history not as a mere meaningless succession of events but as 'His story'; the Christian philosopher of religion will never forget that he possesses a religious norm in Scripture. While critical of non-Christian philosophy (cf. 1 Cor. 1: 17; 2: 16; 3: 18-21), however, the Christian philosopher will not treat all religious phenomena as false. For example, as a Christian he is committed to theism, while he must reject deism, pantheism and atheism; and so when he encounters belief in one God Who is both transcendent and immanent he recognizes the presence of an element of truth. Nevertheless, the history of theology shows that it is extremely dangerous to combine some non-Christian system of philosophy with the Christian faith. Platonism, Aristotelianism, Hegelianism and Kantianism are some of the philosophies which have been so brought into combination with the Christian faith in the past, 'Quotable quotes' from non-Christian sources (cf. Acts 17: 28) must be brought to the test of the biblical norm. To forget this is to risk the introduction of un-Christian principles into one's world-view, with all the possibilities of theological error which may result.

(e) *Methods of evaluating a theological system.*

There are three methods of doing this. It may be tested by the creed or confession of the ecclesiastical body to which the theologian belongs. It may

be probed to discover its philosophical presuppositions and its inherent logic, as in J. G. Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism* and (rather too rigorously) in C. Van Til's study of neo-orthodoxy, *The New Modernism*. It may also be tested by Scripture. These tests really correspond to the three elements whose presence we discerned in systematic theology. Each of them has its value, but we shall confine ourselves here to the second and the third.

2. *HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT*

(a) *The history of the old liberalism*

In the 18th century, the rationalism of the Enlightenment began to influence Protestant theology, and the *theological rationalism* which resulted was anti-supernaturalistic in outlook. J. S. Semler (d. 1791) came to the conclusion that the Scriptures contain no doctrine at all but only ethics. The *theological romanticism* of Schleiermacher sought doctrinal reconstruction on the basis of religious experience rather than objective revelation, and it is for this reason that he is often called 'the father of modern theology', for his was a liberalism with a positive aim, concerned to show the faith by which it lived rather than to exhibit its scepticism. *Theological idealism*, based on Hegel's philosophy, moved the focus of attention from feeling to the dialectical nature of thought, and expounded the Trinity (Father, Son, Spirit) and the Person of Christ (Divine, Human, Divine/Human) in dialectical terms (thesis, antithesis, synthesis). Not surprisingly, from feeling and intellect attention came to be directed upon the will and upon ethics, and the result was *theological moralism*, championed by A. Ritschl (1822-1889). Ritschl was a neo-Kantian, and Kant had placed considerable emphasis on the moral imperative. Ritschl, therefore, tended to see Christianity as the new moralism of the Kingdom of God. To him Jesus has the value of God for us, but we cannot ask if He is really God, for this would be to dabble in metaphysics. Certain knowledge of God comes only by the moral path, not by the metaphysical.

The 'history of religions' school, on the other hand, was a kind of *theological evolutionism*, for its true basis lay in the evolutionary philosophy of Herbert Spencer. The members of this school saw Christianity as the highest product of religious evolution and syncretism.

We note here the immense influence of philosophy upon theology, and the frequent changes in theological fashion which resulted from this. Two conflicting principles were at work — the philosophical and the biblical — and so it is not surpirsing to find 'left-wing' (more philosophical) and 'right-wing' (more biblical) groups in each successive school of thought. To give one example, the later Ritschlians tended either to move further away from biblical orthodoxy by denying the deity of Jesus, or nearer to it by affirming His deity.

(b) *Precursors of a 'wind of change'*

1919 marks the beginning of a new theological era, but this did not come unprepared. Kierkegaard (1813-1855) had reacted against the grandiose claims and excessive intellectualism of Hegelian philosophy in favour of an existential approach. P. T. Forsyth and H. R. Mackintosh were two of those who turned away from Ritschlianism towards a more biblical emphasis in their theology. Albert Schweitzer, despite the unacceptable character of his own theology, rendered valuable service in challenging liberalism at one of its most vulnerable points, namely its view of Jesus.

In the world outside, a new mood was making its presence felt. Victorian optimism was waning. Psycho-analysis was beginning to show man's latent possibilities for evil; early Romantic optimism turned to pessimism and, indeed, began to give way to tendencies to irrationalism in the arts. A world war completed the change of spirit. Increasingly, there was a corresponding dissatisfaction with theological liberalism and its optimistic doctrine of man. This had harmonised very well with the general currents of thought during much of the 19th century, but it came to be less and less at home in the 20th century as the years went by. Moreover, its spiritual barrenness was becoming increasingly apparent.

(c) *Karl Barth and the rise of 'Neo-Orthodoxy'*

Barth burst open upon the theological scene in 1919. He was a dissatisfied Ritschlian. His first commentary on *Romans*, issued that year, caused a great stir. He showed the contemporary relevance of the epistle, emphasized the sinfulness of man and the transcendence of God, and restored 'revelation' to a central place in theological vocabulary.

The 'school' which gathered around him came to be known as 'Neo-Orthodoxy'. Those who belong to it underline the divine initiative in salvation, the divine judgment on man's outlook, and the paradoxical character of truth. Although their doctrine of Scripture is, on the whole, more positive than that of the old liberals, they do not identify Scripture and the Word of God. The Bible has to *become* God's Word in the context of spiritual experience.

(d) *The growth of 'Theological Radicalism'*

Barth himself has always remained well to the 'right' of the newer theology, but in recent years it is the left-wing which has been gathering strength. Bishop Robinson's *Honest to God* merely focussed public attention on a trend which had been evident to theologians for some time. He brought together the demythologising of Bultmann, the anti-supernaturalism of Tillich and the religionless Christianity of Bonhoeffer. The tide of 'radicalism' continues to move on, and the 'Death of God' movement is the latest product of it.

(e) *The 'Biblical Theology' movement*

Barth's *Romans* was the first of a long line of books which showed a livelier concern than the old liberalism to get to grips with the theological content of Scripture. Although Bultmann's views on religious syncretism in the New Testament show continuity with the old 'History of Religions' school, less use is made of evolutionary concepts, and there is a clearer apprehension of the essential unity of the Bible. There is less tendency than there once was to endeavour, for instance, to drive a wedge between the teaching of Jesus and that of Paul. It is insisted, however, that criticism must precede the theological study of the Bible, and that we owe a great debt to the liberals for the work of criticism which they initiated.

3. *INFLUENTIAL THEOLOGIANS*

I have selected six as of special importance, although my choice is bound to seem a little arbitrary. Men like C. H. Dodd and Oscar Cullmann and some of those who have come to prominence more recently in the continuing debate over the issues raised by Bultmann would certainly have strong claims for a place in such a list. This article needs to be fairly brief, however, and its main object is to help the bewildered to get their bearings, and to identify oft-recurring names on the modern theological 'map'. Of the six chosen, three are now dead, but their thought still constitutes a living force. My treatment of them is necessarily highly selective and serves only as the barest introduction.

(a) *Karl Barth*

Barth's thought has passed through a number of phases. At first strongly influenced by Kierkegaardian existentialism, he has endeavoured to exclude all philosophy from his theology. Recently he has balanced his transcendentalism with a cautious recognition of the divine immanence. His antipathy to natural theology stems largely from his view that Christ is the one Revealer of God. Indeed, for him Christ alone is the Word of God in an absolute sense. Scripture is God's Word relatively, *i.e.*, potentially. His peculiar election doctrine (mankind elect in Christ) tends towards universalism.

(b) *Emil Brunner*

Although standing in general with Barth, Brunner held a less severe doctrine of man, and he believed in a measure of natural revelation. He and Barth had a lengthy controversy over this issue. Brunner was particularly opposed to the concept of propositional revelation and was more critical in his attitude to Scripture than Barth, *e.g.*, in his denial of the Virgin Birth.

(c) *Reinhold Niebuhr*

Although nearer in Christology to the 'theological radicals', in anthropology (his main interest) he is closer to Barth and Brunner. His criticisms of liberal anthropology are most penetrating. No leading theologian (execept Barth) is more dialectical than is Niebuhr. He employs traditional terminology very considerably and yet in his thought there is a disjunction between doctrine and history; *e.g.*, the expression 'original sin' symbolises sin's universality, but it does not presuppose a historical Fall.

(d) *Paul Tillich*

Tillich is not an easy thinker to follow! His existentialist theology places a great deal of emphasis on man's sense of finiteness and frustration. This makes man aware of the Infinite, the Unconditioned, man's Ultimate Concern. This is 'God' or 'Being', Who is at the same time the Ground of Being, that

is, the Ground of all particular entities and so of me. Is God transcendent, then, or immanent only? He *is* transcendent but only in the sense that a being is transcended by its Ground. The only literal statement which can be made about God is that He is 'Being'. All other statements about Him are symbolic, including the statement that He is personal. In view of this, it is very difficult to regard Tillich as a true theist. Man encounters the Ground of his Being (an expression which in man's case has psychological as well as philosophical significance) in mystical experience. Such experiences Tillich equates with 'revelation', and these are not confined to Christianity for they are experienced by men of all religions and of no religion. In such experience, men are drawn into the 'New Being'. This is a state of unity between the individual and the Ground of His Being, and was first attained by Christ, who is therefore the bearer of the New Being.

(e) *Rudolf Bultmann*

In his book, *Jesus and the Word,* Bultmann says, 'I do indeed think that we can know nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary, and other sources about Jesus do not exist.' This historical scepticism is one aspect of the same rationalism that causes him to view the universe as a closed system not open to the supernatural. The older liberals had treated certain supernatural elements in Scripture as mythological and rejected them accordingly. Bultmann's approach is both continuous and discontinuous with this. He asks for a really thorough demythologising of the New Testament, involving the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Second Advent, Original Sin, angels and demons, the Last Judgment, *etc.* However, he would have us interpret the 'mythology' before discarding it. It is this which differentiates him most from the older liberals. He interprets the mythology in terms of an existentialist philosophy. Such interpretation exposes the *kerygma,* which in his hands becomes an existentialist challenge to 'authentic existence' (after Heidegger). All New Testament statements are to be viewed in the light of their significance for my existence. So I 'rise with Christ' to new life even though the resurrection of Christ is 'mythological'!

(f) *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

Of all theologians, Barth was the one to whom Bonhoeffer felt most indebted. However, he considered Barth to be too conservative, while Bultmann he thought too liberal, and Tillich he felt to be too preoccupied with 'religion'. Unlike the latter, he sought to appeal to man not in his weakness and frustration but in his strength, as 'come of age' in the scientific era. His concept of the 'religionless Christianity', which would not be tied to religious observances and ritual, but which would be thoroughly secularized, has been understood and developed in a variety of ways by recent writers.

4. *THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION*

In such a brief study it is difficult to avoid sweeping judgments. This difficulty is aggravated by the fact that modern theology is exceedingly diverse. A number of generalizations seem valid, however.

It is only fair to mention that there are some respects in which the 'right-wing' of contemporary theology is superior (from a conservative evangelical view-point) to the old liberalism. There is a greater tendency to take the teaching of the Bible seriously, for example, although this does not always include the testimony of the Bible to itself! There is a less optimistic view of man and a greater sense of the relevance of the Bible's message for the man of today. The prominence of the *kerygma* in moden study underlines this fact. There is more interest in the historic creeds and confessions of the Church. Even the dialectical emphasis serves as a reminder to the theologian that he must exercise a reverent humility when he comes to construct a system of theology.

While giving full recognition to all these aspects, however, there are a number of other points on which much contemporary theology is open to criticism:

(a) *Its subjective tendency*

Despite wide divergencies in doctrinal outlook, all the theological trends we have been considering (both before and after 1919) exhibit tendencies towards subjectivism. This is much more evident in the case of the older liberals and the present-day 'radicals', but it is true of all. It is even very doubtful whether Barthianism can be said to have a really stable objective authority. In the final analysis the Word of God, to

Barth, is that which has become so in the context of *my* experience. The words of H. E. W. Turner concerning the thought of Bishop Robinson can really be applied to most of the writers we have been thinking about, in some degree or another: 'I doubt very much whether others will be able to stop precisely where he stops himself. He has given us not a platform but a slope' (*The 'Honest to God' Debate*, p. 154). In the same book (p. 160), John Lawrence says of *Honest to God*, 'It will provide no resting place. It takes you half way up a precipice and leaves you there. You must go up or down with the aid of other guides. . . . If one train of thought in *Honest to God* is followed to the end it will lead to a full-blooded trinitarian theology, and if another train of thought is followed it will lead to existential despair.'

Christian theology, just like science, begins with the 'given'. It should not try to create its material, nor should it accept some of it and reject other, but should seek by God's help to discover the laws of it. 'An authority which has its source in ourselves is no authority. In us authority can have but its sphere and its echo, never its charter' (P. T. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, p. 299).

(b) *Its doctrine of God*

No element in a theological system can be more important than this, for what a man believes about God will affect what he believes about all else.

The older liberalism revealed a considerable tendency to fall away from a true theism towards either deism or pantheism. In both, God is found only in nature, and if grace is recognised it is only as a species of nature. In this respect, extremes meet. We wish it could be said that the more recent theology has kept clear of these twin errors but it has not. Biblical theism involves a doctrine of creation which would exclude the notion of the eternity of the universe, but even Barth and Brunner do not affirm such a doctrine really clearly. Barth's works on the creeds would provide an opportunity for an unequivocal statement to this effect, but the present writer has been unable to find one. In his small book, *Our Faith* (p. 26), Brunner says, 'That a Divine Being created the world — is not faith in the Creator, but a theory of the origin of the world, which signifies nothing. That God is the Creator means: *your* Creator is the Lord of the world, *your* Lord, you belong to Him totally. Without Him you are nothing, and in His hand is your life.' Perhaps it is fear of attack from the standpoint of science which determines the nature of their language on this point.

The situation is far more troubling when one moves nearer to the theological left. Bultmann reminds one of the old deists at times. He describes human nature as 'a self-subsistent unity, immune from the interference of supernatural powers' (*The New Testament and Mythology* in *Kerygma and Myth I*, p. 7). He tends to think of the universe as a closed system. The thought of Tillich, despite his protestations, seems but a hairs-breadth from pantheism. His rejection of supernaturalism implies that God does not transcend the world in any sense which can meaningfully be squared with orthodox Protestant — and we might say, biblical — doctrine. The mere disavowal of pantheism is not enough, for this is an emotive word when employed by Christian theologians. Alasdair MacIntyre would go further still. He says. 'Bonhoeffer's Christianity . . . does not issue in atheism as the conclusion of an argument (as Bultmann's theology does), and it does not present atheism in theological language (as Tillich's theology does), but it fails in the task for which it was designed and in our sort of society it becomes a form of practical atheism, for it clothes ordinary liberal forms of life with the romantic unreality of a catacombic vocabularly . . . . We can see now that Dr. Robinson's voice is not just that of an individual, that his book testifies to the existence of a whole group of theologies which have retained a theistic vocabulary but acquired an atheistic substance' (*The 'Honest to God' Debate*, p. 222f.). This is strong language, but the recent emergence of the 'Death of God' theology prompts us to recall the fact that pantheism and deism have often been twin routes from theism to atheism.

(c) *Its rationalism and anti-supernaturalism*

These were characteristics of the older liberalism. In each of the liberal 'schools' those on the 'left' were more rationalistic than those on the 'right' but it was largely a matter of degree. The same is true today. Even in this so-called 'post-liberal' era it is difficult to find theologians who accept the Biblical miracles *in toto*. Those who are well to the right, like

Barth, accept the great central miracles such as the Incarnation, the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection, but one has only to move as far as Brunner (who certainly comes right of centre) and the Virgin Birth is eliminated. Reinhold Niebuhr probably belongs just about to the centre of the group of theologians we have been considering. Alan Richardson says of him, 'Niebuhr is tempted to believe (with Bultmann) that there is much to be gained by disassociating the historical basis of Christian faith from any divine miraculous interventions in the realm of natural causation (for example, the Virgin Birth or the physical Resurrection). But at the same time he is aware of the grave dangers involved in this type of solution of the problem; there is the danger of turning Christianity into a new Gnosticism' (*Reinhold Niebuhr*, edit. Kegley and Bretall, p. 225). Is not the real reason behind Niebuhr's dilemma the fact that he is unable to accept whole-heartedly the biblical doctrine of God, from which stems the biblical doctrine of a world open at all points to God's continued activity, because all its phenomena are under His sovereign control?

On the 'left' of the movement, this abandonment of the supernatural is complete. Even Bultmann, of course, still believes in a transcendent God, and Tillich is the real extremist here. He criticised Niebuhr for retaining some elements of supernaturalism in his thought. However, the misleading thing is that these men still continue to speak of miracles. For Schleiermacher and Ritschl, a miracle was a subjective and not in any sense an objective fact. It was the attitude of man which determined that a certain act should be regarded as a miracle. It is, to use Rudolf Otto's terminology, an experience of the numinous, the exciting within us of awe and wonder. So, for Tillich also, 'Revelation is the manifestation of what concerns us ultimately' (*Systematic Theology I*, p. 110). A miracle for him is a subjective, mystical experience.

The Bible writers make it clear, however, that the Christian faith is supernatural through and through, and they require belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ as an integral part of true Christian faith (Romans 10: 9f.).

(d) *Its defective doctrine of biblical history*

The historian's conception of his basic task has changed much in modern times. He has, on the whole, ceased to believe in the possibility of a truly objective approach to historical fact. R. G. Collingwood is one of the most distinguished representatives of this point of view, and he held to a doctrine of complete historical relativism. 'The historical past is the world of ideas which the present evidence creates in the present' (*The Idea of History*, p. 154).

Now this change in the historian's attitude to his task has affected theology, for Christianity is nothing if it is not an historical religion. The 'Jesus of History' movement in the 19th and early 20th centuries sought to discover the 'real' Jesus behind the dogmatic interpretation of the Church which had blurred His image in the New Testament itself. The changing attitude of the historian towards his own task sounded the death-knell of this quest of the historical Jesus. The utter historical scepticism of many of the Form-critics finds expression in the famous words of R. H. Lightfoot: 'the form of the earthly no less than the heavenly Christ is for the most part hidden from us. For all the inestimable value of the Gospels, they yield us little more than a whisper of his voice; we trace in them but the outskirts of his ways. Only when we see him hereafter in his fulness shall we know him also as he was on earth' (*History and Interpretation in the Gospels*, p. 225).

Associated with this changed historical attitude was a shift of interest away from the history of Jesus to the theology of the early Church. At about the time the Form-critics were reaching this sceptical position, Karl Barth came on the scene and the Biblical Theology movement got under way. Formerly men had set aside the theology of the Bible in order to discern the history lying behind it. Now the reverse was true.

The disjunction between history and faith is now treated by many as inevitable. The influence of Kant, and, behind him, even of Plato, can be detected here. Indeed, we are really back to Ritschl's 'value-judgment' theology, for it is with the Church's valuation of Jesus and not with His own valuation of Himself that we are concerned.

C. H. Dodd expresses disquiet at this movement away from history. 'There is, then, a historical and a supra-historical aspect of the Gospel story. On the one hand it reveals what the saving purpose of God is eternally, in relation to all men everywhere, overruling all limitations of time and space. In this sense the Gospel is timeless, and

can be preached everywhere as the present power of God unto salvation. On the other hand, it narrates the singular, unrepeatable events in which the saving purpose of God entered history at a particular moment, and altered its character. If the former aspect is emphasised exclusively the precise factual content of the story is not important: it is only 'truth embodied in a tale', and the tale may be dropped if the truth is acknowledged. But this is most certainly not the intention with which the story is told. It is told as the story of events that happened, once for all, at a particular historical moment, whose particularity is a necessary part of what happened. If we lose hold upon that historical actuality, the Gospels are betrayed into the hands of the Gnostics, and we stand upon the verge of a new Docetism' (*History and the Gospel*, p. 27). However, Dodd has himself developed a form of 'Realised Eschatology' of a thorough-going kind which has had the effect of setting aside any eschatological fulfilment of a future kind for many moderns. Where historical scepticism and realised eschatology are combined, both the past and the future are put into the background. It is the existential situation of the present moment that alone appears really to matter. Indeed, Bultmann makes it clear that for him 'eschatological' and 'existential' are virtual synonyms.

We see here 'the offence of the particular'. The particular is, however, a leading characteristic of the Christian faith, for it is in a particular event (the Cross) in the life of a particular Man (Jesus, the Son of God), Who belonged to a particular race (Israel) and which is recorded in a particular book (the Bible) that God's redemption is accomplished. We may not like it, but we dare not reject it for it is the way God has chosen to take.

The 'theological radicals' appear to be going even further. All Bultmann's demythologising really leaves us is one sure fact of history — the Cross — to which is given a meaning that bears little relation to the meaning assigned to it in the New Testament. Both the history and the theology have almost reached vanishing point. What further step can be taken but the rejection even of this? No wonder some of Bultmann's own disciples feel that he has gone too far and that there must be some attempt to find a fuller historical basis for the faith!

(e) *Its defective epistemology*

Prior to Kant, epistemologists were roughly divisible into two groups: the rationalists and the empiricists. The former found the source of all true knowledge in certain *a priori* notions present in the mind. This means that the powers of reason need to be taken on trust. The latter found the source of all true knowledge in empirical facts, and these were taken on trust.

Kant was concerned to bridge the two approaches, and so to embrace innate ideas and objective facts securely within one system. Accordingly, he held that the stimuli which come to us from the objective world are 'given sense' by the innate ideas or categories with which the mind is supplied. For him it is these stimuli which need to be taken on trust. We can never be absolutely certain that we are in contact with things in themselves (*noumena*). Kant allowed only one exception to this rule. In moral experience, he held, we are in contact not merely with *phenomena* but with *noumena*.

This means, then, that the metaphysical arguments for theism are invalid. Only in the realm of moral experience can man truly know God.

Kant's influence has been immense. Not only are all the main philosophical schools of the present day anti-metaphysical, but this is the prevailing trend in theology also. The idea that God has communicated truths about realities which lie beyond the phenomena of our world is decidedly out of fashion. Historically, Kant was followed by Hegel and Kierkegaard, and many moderns combine the anti-metaphysical bias of Kant with the dialectical approach to truth of Hegel and Kierkegaard, especially the existential form of it which we have in Kierkegaard's writings. It is worth noting that the early Barthians were trained under Ritschlian influence, and they inherited the Ritschlian bias against metaphysics, which itself goes back ultimately to Kant.

Now we can understand the antipathy of modern theology to the whole idea of propositional revelation. Probably there is no one idea on which contemporary theologians are so united as on this. Apart from conservative evangelicals, the only notable exceptions are the neo-Thomists. Revelation, for most modern theologians, is a personal encounter which does not communicate propositional truth. Yet in Scripture do we not find God reasoning with men and direct-

ing His message to their minds? God certainly meets man in historical deeds, but we can be thankful that He does not leave him to his own devices in the understanding of these deeds, but provides him with an authoritative revelation of the meaning of them. Some of the manifestations of dialectical theology border upon the irrational, but biblical thought, although sometimes paradoxical, is never irrational.

(f) *Its increasing tendency towards an anthropocentric outlook*

There can be no doubt that existentialism is the leading philosophical influence upon present-day theology. Since Kierkegaard's day, existentialist philosophy has tended to become less and less Christian. Heidegger's brand of it has considerably affected Bultmann and Tillich, and he speaks not of God but of 'Being'. In his thought man is challenged to forsake 'inauthentic existence', in which he tries to hide from reality. It is when he turns round and faces the truth about himself 'like a man', that he comes into 'authentic existence'. It is not easy to see how Heidegger's man in authentic existence differs from a self-made man.

These tendencies towards a man-centred view of things (often linked with a subjectivist outlook in ethics) are being given their head by those who occupy the left of centre in theology at the moment. Barth and those who belong well to the right of his movement may well find themselves left high and dry by the tide of so-called 'radicalism'. Only a God-given revival of true biblical faith and truly biblical theology can stem this tide.

The Interpretation of the Old Testament by the New Testament

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IT IS SELF-EVIDENT that this is an important aspect of the interpretation of the Bible. It concerns both the Old and the New Testament. On the one hand, we have to examine the New Testament to see how the inspired authors approached and read their Bible. And, on the other hand, we have to study the Old Testament for ourselves and try to answer the question: How shall we today read this part of the Bible?

Even a superficial reading of the New Testament shows us that all the authors make much use of the Old Testament and we immediately notice that they read it in a special way, viz., as a *Christian* book. Take for example the *Gospel according to St Matthew*. In the very first chapter we find the genealogy of Jesus Christ and we see that Matthew traces it back to Abraham, the founding father of Israel (1: 1). After that, he gives us a long list of names: three times fourteen (1: 17). In this list the whole Old Testament passes before our eyes. Many of the most important personalities are mentioned: the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; then Judah; later on Boaz (who married Ruth), David (together with Bathsheba), Solomon, Hezekiah, *etc.* But this genealogy is only the beginning. In the remaining part of the book, too, the Old Testament is repeatedly quoted.

In chapter 1: 23 the well-known words of Is. 7: 14 — 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel', are quoted and applied to Jesus. Of course, this quotation as such does not create much of a problem if we accept that the birth of the child Jesus was indeed a virgin birth. The next quotation in chapter 2: 6, however, (from Micah 5: 2 — Bethlehem as the birth-place of the Messiah), is more difficult, for Matthew quotes the Old Testament passage somewhat differently from the original. Chapter 2: 15 is more difficult again; Matthew quotes Hosea 11: 1 — 'Out of Egypt have I called my Son', and applies this to the return of the infant Jesus with his parents from Egypt after