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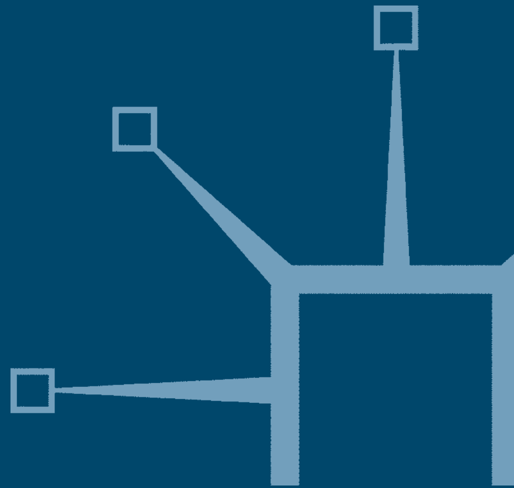
# Biblical Concepts and Our World

Edited by
D.Z. Phillips and Mario von der Ruhr



Biblical Concepts and Our World

*Claremont Studies in the Philosophy of Religion*

General Editors: **D.Z. Phillips**, Rush Rhees Research Professor, University of Wales, Swansea and Danforth Professor of the Philosophy of Religion, the Claremont Graduate School, California; **Mario von der Ruhr**, Lecturer in Philosophy at University of Wales, Swansea.

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**Claremont Studies in the Philosophy of Religion**
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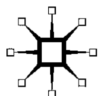

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First published 2004 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS and
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010
Companies and representatives throughout the world

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ISBN 1–4039–1819–8 hardback

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Biblical concepts and our world / edited by D.Z. Phillips and Mario von der Ruhr.
p. cm. — (Claremont studies in the philosophy of religion)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 1–4039–1819–8 (cloth)
1. Bible—Philosophy—Congresses. I. Phillips, D.Z. (Dewi Zephaniah)
II. Von der Ruhr, Mario. III. Series.

BS645.B53 2004
230′.041—dc22

2004042737

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05 04

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham and Eastbourne

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# Preface

In previous volumes in this series, I have thought an introduction was necessary, sometimes a short one only, but sometimes a more ambitious essay. This book is a collection of the papers presented at the 2001 Claremont Conference on the Philosophy of Religion. The chapters in the book are self-explanatory to an extent that made me feel an introduction was unnecessary. A short preface will suffice.

It goes without saying that, culturally, we live at a considerable distance from the Bible. The disagreements begin when we begin to discuss in detail what that distance implies or entails. That much is evident from the first symposium which launched the conference in a context of radical disagreement. Are the tensions between our sensibilities and what the Bible asks us to believe accidental, depending on readings of it uninformed by up to date theology, or are they due to deeper cultural rifts? Behind disagreements on such issues, as the second symposium shows, there lurk fundamental disagreements about the relation of faith and reason. Does a Biblical view of the world have to be answerable to universal canons of reason, or does the Bible offer a message, a viewpoint, which is not the product of our own rational construction? This issue is discussed with reference to Kierkegaard. It is connected with the more specific issue, discussed in the third symposium of the relation of philosophy to the Bible. Must the philosophy itself be subservient to the Bible? What kind of claim is one which asserts the divine authorship of the Bible? What can philosophy say about it? If there were a conflict, is it clear which one would have to go? More specifically, what does philosophy say about the claim that God raised Jesus from the dead? What is the grammar of 'raised'? That discussion in the fifth symposium leads naturally to the topic of the final symposium: Is there an audience for miracles? The discussion of where, in our culture, the difficulty in acknowledging a miracle resides, is but a final application of the question which runs throughout the book: What does it mean to read the Bible today?

During the conference, reference was made to another occasion when a more ambitious attempt was made to bring biblical scholars and philosophers together. The results are recorded in *Hermes of Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology*, eds E. Stump and T. Flint (University of Notre Dame Press, 1993). In that volume we hear that relations between some participants were bad before the conference, and got worse during it. While our conference certainly had its moments, discussion proceeded, for the most part, in a civil way, with honest inquiry as its objective.

The conference went smoothly in other respects too, due to the efforts of Helen Baldwin, Secretary to the Department of Philosophy, University of

Wales, Swansea and Jackie Huntzinger, Secretary to the School of Religion at Claremont Graduate University. I also want to acknowledge the invaluable help given by graduate students during the conference. Special thanks are due to my research assistant, Francis Gonzales, for organising that help and for preparing the Voices in Discussion for publication from my handwritten notes.

The Voices in Discussion consist of notes taken by myself during the course of the conference. They do not claim to be a verbatim account of what people said, hence my not giving names to the speakers. I have aspired, however, to giving as faithful an account as I can of the course of discussions. Many speakers are readily identifiable, but, given participation by those outside the circle of invited participants, some readers have been thwarted in their efforts to trace identities! The Voices do not take into account changes made after the conference. When the same point was made by more than one person, I have not hesitated to place it under a single voice.

The conference would not be possible without financial support. I gratefully acknowledge the generosity of Claremont Graduate University, Pomona College, and Claremont McKenna College in this respect. Most of the royalties from Claremont Studies in the Philosophy of Religion go to the fund which supports the conferences. I am grateful to the participants, not only for their contribution, but for their agreements in making this support possible.

D.Z. Phillips
Claremont

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# Part I

# The Bible and Our World

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# 1

# Hearing the Voice of God

## Two conceptual issues concerning the relationship between the biblical world and ours

*Gareth Moore*

In this chapter I will be looking at two very general problems that may afflict the modern-day Christian reader of the Bible. These are problems which arise when modern Christians read the Bible as a Christian text and as part of their Christian religious practice. There are problems involved in reading the Bible in other ways, even simply as a work of ancient literature, but these I will not go into. I am concerned with problems arising for Christians from reading the Bible as a specifically Christian book. Much of the Bible, the part that Christians traditionally call the Old Testament, is also the Jewish Bible. That is a fact I do not wish to cover over. It may be that different problems, even different philosophical problems, arise for Jews reading the Jewish Bible today from those that arise for Christians reading the Christian Bible. Jews will certainly avoid any problems specific to the Christian New Testament. I speak of the Bible as a Christian book both because I do not presume to speak for Jewish readers of the Bible, and also because I come from a Christian culture, as, I guess, do most of the participants at this conference.

Even with these limitations, there are many philosophical questions to be asked about what we find in the Bible. Here are a few:

1. Is there a unified concept of God in the Bible? Is there a unified concept of anything much in the Bible? What sense does it make to treat the Bible as one book?
2. What does it mean to say that God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1)?
3. What does it mean to say that, in creating and at other times, God *spoke* (Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, etc.)? To whom did he speak? In what language? If God could talk, could we understand him?

4. What does it mean to say that God spoke to Moses face to face (Ex 33:11)? Or that he spoke to him mouth to mouth and that Moses saw his form clearly (Num. 12:8)?
5. Can we say *a priori* which narrative biblical texts might be true and which cannot be?
6. What is the relationship between our theological beliefs and our attitude to biblical texts? Are our beliefs determined by our understanding of the texts, or is the way we read the texts shaped by what we believe?
7. How do we understand the concept of the fulfilment of prophecy? How, for instance, is it possible to see in the birth of a boy called Jesus the fulfilment of a prophecy made over seven hundred years previously and which not only predicts the birth of a boy of a quite different name but also clearly foresees its own fulfilment within a very short space of time? (see Mt 1:18–25; Is 7:10–17). What sort of disagreement is the disagreement between Christians and Jews over whether the birth of Jesus is or is not the fulfilment of the Immanuel prophecy?

Some of these questions have, potentially at least, always been there for religious readers of the Bible. A first-century Christian, as well as a twenty-first-century Christian, could have asked what it means to say that God speaks, or to say that God created the heavens and the earth. But we can also ask whether there are any philosophical problems caused by the distance between the biblical world and ours. We – and by ‘we’ I mean modern (or even post-modern), educated, cultured western liberals – inhabit a thought-world vastly different from that of the ancient near east; does this distance itself create any problems? It is with this kind of question that I will be concerned.

One such question we can ask is: Do our concepts fail to mesh with concepts current in the biblical world in a way that makes understanding biblical texts difficult for us? I will not attempt a general answer to this question, but investigate it by way of an example taken from an area much-visited in philosophical debates on religion: miracles. But my interest will not be in whether accounts of miracles are ever to be believed, but rather to what extent we can understand biblical miracle narratives.[1] A second question concerns the consequences of the recent rise in western culture of an academic, critical study of the Bible apparently divorced from religious concerns. For many years the academic study of the Bible, employing methods such as literary criticism, form criticism and redaction criticism, has treated the Bible in a new way, simply as any other ancient text; in this way it has introduced a way of reading the Bible quite different from that practised by earlier readers and envisaged by the biblical authors. In so doing, it has created a distance between modern educated readers and those who wrote the Bible and read it for most of Christian history. Does this distance create any philosophical problems?

## Problems with miracles

First, miracles. The miracle stories are important in the gospels because they seem to show us something about Jesus, to indicate[2] that he is a divine figure. They show him doing what is impossible to mere mortals, hence they show that he is not a mere mortal. One difference between our world (western, liberal, educated) and that of the biblical authors, a difference that creates a difficulty, is that our world is deeply scientific today in a way that theirs was not and could not be. Jesus walking on water (see Mt 14:22–33) is perhaps intelligible in the context of a worldview in which things are believed to seek their natural place, or at least do not go spontaneously to a place which is not theirs. In that view Jesus, being of heaven, does not tend to sink to the depths of the earth. But for us today the story causes immense problems. It is not only a matter of it being highly unusual for people to walk on water, so that it could never be more probable that a narrative recounting it was true than that the narrator was lying or mistaken, but that walking on water implies contravening some deep laws of physics, laws which are applicable everywhere and which operate at a fundamental level.

When I say that, I say it without knowing in any detail what these laws might be. So I could not substantiate it. The fact that I say this rather expresses the form of my thinking, which might be described as a sort of popular scientism. If I had to try to explain why it is impossible that Jesus should walk on water, I would say something like this: The body of Jesus, as a material entity, has mass, so it enters into mutual gravitational attraction with other material bodies, most notably the earth. That attraction will cause the body of Jesus to move towards the center of gravity of the earth, unless something else gets in the way. But it is a property of water that it does not get in the way of things heavier than it; being a liquid, it gets out of the way. The body of Jesus, like the body of Peter and the barque of Peter, will sink until it displaces an equal weight of water. The water will squish between his toes, it will flow out round his feet, and so on. If he really tries to walk on water, and not on ice or submerged rocks, Jesus must sink. Scientifically, this is no doubt crude, and it might even, for all I know, be completely wrong. It is based on vague memories of the basic science I was taught at school many years ago. The point is, if asked to explain why certain things are possible and others impossible, I will produce some such crude scientific story. And in this I am not alone. Most of us participating in this discussion would, I think, produce some such account of why it is scientifically impossible that Jesus should have walked on water. If my story is wrong, it is because the science is wrong, not because it is the wrong type of story. We would all agree that some kind of scientific account needs to be given of what happens when human bodies try to walk on water, and not, for instance, an account couched in magical terms. Whether we understand much science or not, we all agree that the world is to be understood in

scientific terms to this extent, and if a text tells of an event that we are confident is scientifically impossible, we are by the same token also confident that the narrative is false. While it may make sense to say that there are things in this world that go beyond science, nothing can actually contradict science.

It may of course be possible to speculate that the narrative is misleading in that it omits details that would make the events concerned scientifically possible. There may have been submerged rocks, and Jesus may have walked on them. But if there were submerged rocks, the story loses its miraculous aspect, and we have the feeling that it is robbed of its sense; for did not the story want to imply that there was something extraordinary about Jesus, because he could do the impossible? If the feat Jesus performs is scientifically possible at all, we could in principle describe the circumstances under which it is possible, and we could reproduce the feat by reproducing those circumstances. If there is a special technique involved in performing it, we can in principle discover, learn and explain the technique, so that others can learn it and perform the same feat.

What is true of this particular story is true also of the other miracle stories in the Gospels and elsewhere. If they narrate what is scientifically impossible, they are untrue and fail in their purpose; if they narrate what is scientifically possible, they may be true (though of course they may still be false) but do not show anything of religious significance about Jesus. Take the case of the multiplication of the loaves (Mt 14:14–21; 15:30–38; Mk 6:34–43; 8:1–9; Lk 9:11–17; Jn 6:5–14). Scientifically, bread cannot be produced out of thin air, so if the story means to say that this is what Jesus did, then it is false, and it encourages us to believe nothing special about Jesus. On the other hand, it was once popular to interpret this story as saying that when Jesus and his disciples freely gave out the little food there seemed to be, without keeping it all for themselves, many in the crowd, who had their own secret stock of food, were inspired to a similar generosity and shared their food with those who had none. Interpreted in this way, what the story narrates is possible, and edifying. But it shows no more about Jesus than that he is capable of inspiring others by his example. So either the story pretends falsely that the physically impossible happened, or it does not make a strong enough claim about Jesus to be interesting.

Again, take a story of a miraculous healing. It is written that Jesus healed a paralytic simply by telling him to get up and go (Mt 9:1–8; Mk 2:1–12; Lk 5:17–26). We might at one time have been tempted to dismiss this story on the grounds that such events are medically impossible, but we know now that there are sometimes strong links between mental states and physical illnesses and incapacities. Many think that it is possible to be paralysed for psychological reasons and that a change in psychological state can cause a physical cure (at least a temporary one). If this is true, it makes this healing story believable, but it also makes it less impressive, for

Jesus is shown doing only what other ordinary people, such as therapists and preachers, can do.

Thus the modern mentality apparently confronts the religious believer and reader with a dilemma here: Either the supposed miracle is scientifically impossible, in which case it could not have occurred and did not occur; or it is scientifically possible, in which case the event may well have occurred but is not well described as miraculous. If we accept the first horn of the dilemma, we – including the modern religious believer – have to say that the Gospel account is false, in which case the general plausibility of the Gospel is undermined and the claim for the special status of Jesus receives no support. If we opt for the second horn of the dilemma, we perhaps save the plausibility of the Gospel at this point and others, for now it merely claims that the unusual happened, not that the impossible happened. But if the claim is only that Jesus did the unusual, or that unusual things happened to him, this does not support the extraordinary claims made for him. After all, one does not have to be divine or anything other than merely human in order to do or to undergo the unusual.

This is one possible way of describing the difficulty we, heirs to a scientific culture, might have in reading the Gospel miracle stories. But it seems to me that, while there is a difficulty with miracles, this way of putting it misrepresents the difficulty. An indication of this is that, in the dilemma I have just sketched, the Gospel accounts of Jesus' miracles fail to suggest a special status for him *either way*. If that is so, the rejection of the case for the special status of Jesus is *a priori*, independent of the way the miracle story is read; and that suggests that the story is simply not read properly, to see what it has to say. This is not a difficulty in reading the Bible, but a failure to read the Bible. If we do read the accounts of Jesus' miracles, then it becomes clear that, very often, when Jesus performs a miracle, the disciples' reaction or that of the bystanders is not to ask how he did it, or how this is possible in view of the laws of physics, but to wonder who he is (e.g. the stilling of the storm, Mt 8:23–27) or to wonder at the authority given to him (e.g. the healing of a man with an unclean spirit, Mk 1:21–27). They do not normally suppose that there is some mechanism involved which might be worked by anybody who understands it, or a secret technique which can in principle be learnt by anybody.[3] The fact that Jesus can do this does not reveal the existence of a hidden mechanism or of a secret technique; it reveals who he is. He is revealed as one who has authority. He is often shown commanding – the elements, spirits, illnesses. Only God can do that. People of that period knew as well as we do that in the normal run of events objects and illnesses cannot be commanded. They put their pots on the fire to heat the stew; they did not simply order the stew to be hot. They did not think of heating stew in terms of the exercise of authority, but in terms of – as we might say – the harnessing of natural forces by the application of techniques. But God does not apply natural forces, he does not apply

techniques; he exercises authority over his creation. Created things hear the word of God, and obey. This idea was, apparently, conceivable for them. For them as for us, within the created order, things are acted upon by other things; when one thing changes there is a causal story to be told that explains the change in terms of the action of something else. Where the relation between the heavenly and the earthly is concerned, however, the ancient world permits a shift in vocabulary, a different conceptualisation of events; it allows an event to be explained not by telling a causal story but by telling a story that invokes the idea of authority; they were ready to represent the relationship between creator and creation in terms of command and obedience: the created world hears the word of God. This is of course not only a feature of the miracle stories in which Jesus figures; it is characteristic of the Bible as a whole; we need only look at the first page of Genesis to see its importance.

Here, it seems to me, is a real difficulty when it comes to reading the Bible today. The explanation of an event involving inanimate objects in terms of authority is one that lies outside the scope of the natural sciences, for authority is not a causal relationship, and it does not appear that our science-based culture allows for a non-scientific explanation of an impersonal event. If this is right, then reading those parts of the Bible which speak of the authority of God over creation, or of creation hearing the word of God, are necessarily problematic.

It may be mentioned briefly that a similar difficulty arises with respect to demons. Demons and spirits abound in the Gospels, and it is an important aspect of the ministry of Jesus that he drives them out of people, so restoring them to health (see e.g. Mt 9:32–34; 17:14–18; Mk 1:23–27; 5:1–20; 7:24–30). An important difference between the intellectual world of the Bible and ours is that we (western, liberal, educated) do not believe in demons any more. Questions can be asked about what it means not to believe in demons any more. Is it that we accept that demons may have existed at the time of Jesus but, like dinosaurs, have ceased to exist? Surely not. Is it that we have discovered that demons do not really exist and never did, so that those who did talk of them (e.g. Jesus and the evangelists) were mistaken? If that is so, then we seem faced with the conclusion that Jesus and the evangelists were mistaken, like so many others in the societies in which they lived. Not mistaken on a trivial point, either. Jesus' ability to drive out demons was taken as a sign of his divine authority. Like the wind and the waves, demons had power over men, but they were subject to the authority of God. They, like everything else, heard the voice of God and obeyed, so it was significant that they obeyed Jesus. But in fact if there were none, then Jesus would not have driven out any demons. Those who took him to be divine because they believed he drove out demons were sadly mistaken. Early Christians who took his ability to cast out demons as a sign of his authority were likewise mistaken.

But it seems to me not that we have discovered that there are in fact no demons, but that our world-picture, and in particular our medical language and practice, no longer has a place for demons. Western medicine has made a great deal of progress by employing concepts and related procedures which make no reference at all to demons. Many illnesses can be explained by using these concepts, and many of them can be treated. Such is the success of modern scientific method that even when an illness cannot be explained in modern scientific terms we believe that such an explanation waits to be found. This belief is now so entrenched, we are so certain of it, that it has for us the status of a principle: we believe *a priori* that there is such an explanation, even if we do not yet have it, and we believe *a priori* that it will not be necessary to supplement our existing medical ideas with talk of demons. Though our medical knowledge is certainly incomplete, we know that further research will not reveal the existence of demons and their part in causing illness. At the time when the causes of Aids were unknown and speculation was rife, some doctors thought a virus was responsible, others that drugs widely distributed in gay bars were the cause. No reputable doctor thought it might be caused by demons. This was not an accident: any doctor who suggested it was caused by demons would *ipso facto* cease to be a reputable doctor. There is simply no room for demons in modern medical terminology, no room for the expulsion of demons in modern medical practice. Our medical discourse and practice are organised around impersonal causes of illness and techniques for dealing with them. Demons are, conceptually, personal and form part of an authority structure.[4] We have not discovered they do not exist; we have organised our medical concepts differently. If this is correct, then the proper way to characterise our difficulty with the relevant passages of scripture – if we have one – is not that we find it difficult to believe them, but that we do not understand them because they belong to a different and distant conceptualisation of human malady.

## Biblical criticism

I now come to my second question, that of the relationship between biblical criticism and the traditional pious Christian reading of the Bible. For Christians, the traditional way of reading the Bible has been to read it as part of the life of faith. The Christian Bible was and is read by Christians as a way of instructing themselves in the faith, of discovering the mysteries of God and the will of God, of finding guidance for daily living and strength and comfort in times of trial, and of keeping themselves constantly faithful to Christ.

For the past two hundred years or so there has existed a style of reading the Bible that one might call a critical reading. Biblical scholars have deployed various critical techniques in order to settle as best they can historical and

literary questions about the texts and various facts surrounding them. There is no space here to give an adequate account of the nature of biblical criticism. One eminent biblical scholar has described it as 'in principle, an attempt to establish the *publicly available* meaning of the biblical texts, the sense that they have for readers who have not already made up their minds what they can be allowed to mean'.[5] That is, biblical criticism is concerned with that meaning of the text which is in principle available to anybody who is prepared to read the text attentively and to do the work necessary to answer the questions of interpretation the text may raise. It is concerned, in this sense, with what we might call the surface meaning of the text, its plain sense. It is not concerned to interpret texts allegorically, nor to find some spiritual sense hidden behind the words, nor to impose on the text a particular religious meaning. Its aim is to let the text speak for itself and to listen attentively to it. In order to do this, scholars must tackle subsidiary questions. These are some of the questions they tackle:

1. The date of a text and the social and religious background of its author(s).
2. The literary unity or otherwise of a particular text; for example, is Genesis a unitary composition, or is it put together from pre-existing texts?
3. The processes leading to the creation of a text; for example, did a given text originate as a literary entity, or are there oral traditions underlying it?
4. The interests and beliefs of the author(s) and how these affect the way the text is written; for example, how do the beliefs of St Matthew show up in his gospel, and how do they influence the way he tells the story of Jesus? (It is obviously a help here that there are other gospels that tell more or less the same story, but in different ways.)
5. The literary genre of a text; for example, is a particular narrative to be taken as a historical account of what actually happened, or as an imaginative reconstruction of basically historical events ('faction'), or as pure fiction?

Perhaps the most problematic kind of question biblical scholars set themselves to answer – problematic, that is, for the religious believer – is the relationship between individual narrative texts to be found in the Bible and historical fact. For example, Exodus narrates that the Hebrews were slaves in Egypt; was this actually ever the case? Matthew narrates that when Jesus was born, a special star guided wise men to the place of his birth (2:1–12); did that really happen? Matthew reports that Jesus said: 'Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them' (5:17); did Jesus actually say that? Matthew narrates that Jesus walked on water (14:22–33); did he really? Matthew narrates that after Jesus' death an angel told two women that Jesus had risen from the dead (28:5f), that Jesus spoke to these women (28:9) and that he spoke to his disciples in Galilee (28:16–20); did this, or some of it, really happen?

In order to attempt to answer such questions, the scholars make use of the knowledge amassed by modern researchers in various fields, such as historians, archaeologists and anthropologists, as well as building on putatively established conclusions as to the literary genre of the text in question, the beliefs and intentions of its author and the time and place of its composition. They also of course bring to the problem their own intellectual and spiritual outlook.

There are numerous reasons why questions of historical accuracy might arise, depending on the text concerned. One may be an uneasy fit between the biblical narrative and what we know of the relevant history from other, non-biblical sources. For example, the early chapters of Exodus tell of a series of catastrophes that hit Egypt, culminating in the death of all the firstborn, the exodus of a large population of Hebrews and the death by drowning of the entire Egyptian army. Surviving Egyptian records never mention any of this, which is surprising in view of the major effect such a series of events would have had on the country. This raises the question whether this series of events took place at all. The same question is raised by our knowledge of the way things work in general. An important part of the complex of events that the text narrates, and one which makes possible the escape of the Hebrews, is that Moses, on God's instruction, 'stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left' (Ex 14:21–22). Now, we know that waters do not normally stand up like a wall, and that any wind or other force strong enough to make them do so would also make it impossible for people to stand upright and pass through the middle. We know too that waters do not do anything in response to somebody holding out his hand over them – that sounds like magic – and we know today that magic does not work. An examination of the text itself (and this is more properly the domain of biblical criticism) suggests very strongly that it was written by one anxious to convince his readers of, among other things, the strength of God and to attribute the very existence of the people of Israel to him. He therefore has strong motives for telling the kind of story he does. We know that people's interests and motives have a strong effect on what they say. If our author's motives are strong, that gives him a reason for telling this story even if it is untrue. If we find it difficult on other grounds to believe that the events narrated actually happened, it may be easier for us to believe that the author made it up, or that he significantly embroidered basically unimpressive historical events in order to make his point. Such considerations do not establish that the events narrated never took place, but they inevitably raise the question whether they did.

Some of the same problems arise with respect to some things Matthew says in his Gospel. His story of the wise men (2:1–12) has a fantastic air about it;

apart from anything else, we know that no celestial body can come close enough to earth to guide people to a specific house or village. When the biblical scholars point out to us how concerned Matthew is in the rest of his gospel to present Jesus as fulfilling biblical prophecy, and how important a role prophecy plays in the story of the wise men, we may begin to find it easier to believe that his concerns have led him to fabricate the story than that these events actually happened.

What Matthew says about the resurrection is also fantastic. We know from the facts of human biology that a person cannot come alive again three days after dying. When biblical scholars point out to us that Matthew's major source in writing his Gospel is Mark's Gospel, and that Mark does not have an account of the resurrection appearances of Jesus,[6] we may suspect again that much that is not historical enters into Matthew's story. So important questions about the historical accuracy of Matthew can be raised – important because, apart from anything else, it would seem that the entire Christian religion is founded upon a belief that somebody did come alive again after being dead three days. But there are other problems here too, arising from a comparison with other New Testament texts. Even if we accept the possibility that Jesus did rise from the dead, did he tell his disciples to go to Galilee, and did he meet them there, as Matthew asserts? There is nothing intrinsically implausible about this, but a difficulty is created by the fact that according to Luke, Jesus met his disciples after his resurrection not in Galilee but in Jerusalem, and instructed them not to leave Jerusalem (24:36–49). Matthew and Luke cannot, it seems, both be right, so this again raises a question about the truth of Matthew's account (as of Luke's).

These are just some of the questions scholars pose and seek to resolve when they read the Bible in a critical way. It is clear that there are many problems surrounding these questions, but this is not the time to go into them. What interests me here is that there appears to be a problem in the relationship between the traditional Christian way of reading the Bible and the more recent critical reading. Many people have detected a severe tension or even incompatibility between them. While the religious reading of the Bible nourishes faith, critical reading of the Bible, they suspect, threatens and even destroys faith.[7]

An argument to the effect that there is such a tension, particularly in regard to narrative texts, can be put briefly as follows: A religious reading of a biblical text treats it as – to use a common Christian expression – the word of God, and so as containing a truth. God does not lie, nor does he make mistakes. The text that is the word of God therefore tells the reader something he can rely on and so be safely convinced by. This religious assurance does not absolve the reader of the necessity of thinking intelligently about the nature of the text before him. It might, for instance, sometimes be a religiously legitimate and necessary question to ask whether a biblical narrative text is meant by its author to be understood as an account of something

that actually happened. If we are believing Christians we might properly ask, for instance, whether the narrative of the book of Job is to be read as a putative historical report, or whether it is a fictional narrative, a kind of novel. Biblical scholars can help in answering such questions. But we have no reason to entertain a similar question with regard to the Gospel of St Matthew, which is plainly meant to be taken, on the whole, as an account of actual historical events and has always been so understood.[8] Here, reading the text religiously – accepting it as the word of God, and so finding it convincing – implies believing that it is true, that the events narrated actually did happen. There is simply no room to ask, for instance, whether Jesus really did walk on water or speak to his disciples after his death. A critical reading of St Matthew's Gospel, on the other hand, does make room for such questions. Indeed, it encourages them. An approach to a biblical text which lays emphasis on the author's religious and cultural background, his theological and other concerns, the message he wants to impart to his readers through his narrative, the way he constructs his narrative – all this, which shows us why the author should tell the story he does in the way he does, tells us at the same time why he might well tell that story *even if what he narrates did not happen*, and even if he knows it did not happen. If we are inclined for other reasons to think that a given event (say, Jesus walking on the water) did not happen, an explanation of why the author would have said it did happen, whether it happened or not, will strongly reinforce this inclination. The result is that we tend to be suspicious of biblical narrative texts, so that they no longer carry conviction as a religious reading requires. It follows that a critical reading of the Gospel does not sit easily with a religious reading.

There is reason to think that a similar tension exists also between religious and critical readings of non-narrative texts. Take for example passages in Romans in which Paul expresses moral views. He apparently insists on the shamefulness of same-sex practices (1:26–7), and apparently also insists that everybody should be obedient to civil authorities (13:1–7). It might be a legitimate question for believing Christians to ask whether Paul really means what at first blush he seems to mean in these passages, and again biblical scholars can help in providing an answer; but if and when it is settled that he does mean what he appears to mean, then what he says, for the person who reads religiously, for whom this is the word of God, the text carries conviction, it is taken as true. In this case, it shows that same-sex practices are unacceptable to God and that God wills that civil authorities be obeyed. A critical reading of these passages, on the other hand, might point out the influence of standard Jewish polemics on Chapter 1 and Hellenistic ethics on Chapter 13, presenting them simply as products of their time and place, only to be expected in the circumstances in which they were written. Such historical contextualisation and explanation of Paul's views makes it appear that if he had written at another time or in another

place he might well have said something quite different. But to say that Paul might have said something quite different is to suggest that the value of what he actually did say is not to be absolutised: as it happens, he said this, but he might easily have said something different, so no particular significance is to be attached to what he actually does say. But the religious reading precisely does attach a particular significance to what Paul actually says. It is the word of God, eternal and unchanging, so it cannot be legitimately relativised in this way. Once again, it seems, the religious and academic readings are not easily compatible.

It is even possible to construct an argument to show, not merely that certain conclusions of critical study of the Bible are in tension with a religious attitude to the Bible, but that the very spirit in which biblical criticism of the Bible is normally carried out is incompatible with a religious reading. One might argue as follows. Suppose you are a Christian and read a given biblical text as part of your religious practice, as the word of God. Because it is the word of God, you take it as in some sense true, it carries conviction, you find it convincing. But all reading is also interpretation; in reading the text, you necessarily take it in a particular way. This way of taking it will very likely appear to you simply as the obvious meaning of the text. But it is the text *as understood in this way* that carries conviction, that you find convincing. Let us call this 'obvious' interpretation of the text meaning *A*. The text is the word of God; on the basis of it you are convinced that *A*. Now suppose you discover, on reading a work of biblical criticism, that the text actually means *B*, which is substantially different from and even incompatible with *A*. How is it now possible, given that you are convinced that *A*, to find a text convincing that, as you now know, says that *B*? Or, given that the text is convincing when you take it as meaning *A*, how is it possible even to consider the possibility that the text really means *B* and so actually excludes *A*? In treating a text as the word of God, must not this possibility of seriously reinterpreting the text be excluded? If you are convinced that a text that you take to mean *A* must be true, are you not also committed to saying that it is *A* that must be true and that the text must mean *A* or something very much like it? A religious reading of a text seems to imply a commitment to a given interpretation of that text, a commitment that excludes the possibility that the text be understood in a substantially different way. Are not those who read biblical texts religiously those who have, in Barton's words, 'already made up their minds what they can be allowed to mean'? But this attitude is precisely, according to Barton's characterisation, what biblical criticism excludes. The possibility of interpreting a text in different and perhaps surprising ways is bread and butter to a critical reading.

So there does seem to be a real incompatibility between religious reading and critical reading. The critical reading does not, apparently, merely abstract from a religious reading of a text, it actually excludes it.

## A solution?

We know that in individual human lives a reconciliation between religious and critical reading of the Bible is possible, for there are, and have been since the inception of critical Bible study, eminent biblical scholars who are also devout Christians of profound faith. These people have arrived at some kind of solution of the difficulties adumbrated above. But what kind of solution? The possibility exists that such people are muddle-headed, deceiving themselves, engaging in doublethink or, despite appearances, acting in bad faith. So we have to ask whether there exists a theoretical solution to the problem. Is it as severe as is sometimes believed, or can the critical way of reading the Bible be reconciled with a religious reading? In order to work towards what I think might be a possible solution of the difficulty, I want to develop a little the concept of a religious reading of the Bible by asking what it might mean for somebody to read the Bible as the word of God addressed to the reader personally.

Biblical texts are in one way or another addressed to an audience or a readership. The texts were written to be proclaimed to hearers, or sung in a public liturgy, or perhaps read in private. Often, scholars can only guess at the identity of the original audience that the book addressed. Take as an example the book of Deuteronomy. The greater portion of the book takes the form of an address by Moses to the people of Israel just before the crossing of the Jordan and the entry into the Promised Land. But the book itself is not addressed to those same people at that same moment. The book does not tell us to whom it is addressed, and there is no other direct literary evidence that tells us. If we want to know the answer to that question, we have to guess. Our answer will be based on a number of factors: the date the book was written, the place it was written, the language in which it is written, its literary style, the concerns of its author or authors,[9] and so on. Some of these questions are as obscure as our original question, and any answers we give may turn out to be very tentative. In the New Testament things are less difficult. We can be fairly sure, for instance, that St Matthew's Gospel was written in the first century AD, by a male Christian, and that he wrote for other Christians. Other New Testament texts are explicitly addressed to individuals or groups; for example, St Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles are addressed to one Theophilus (Lk 1:3; Acts 1:1), while St Paul's Epistle to the Romans is addressed to first-century Christians at Rome (1:7).

Things are actually not as simple as this. Even though the addressees of these latter texts are named explicitly in the texts themselves, we still have to interpret this fact. It is not impossible that Theophilus is an invention of Luke, and that Luke–Acts is actually addressed to another, unnamed individual or group. While there certainly were Christians in first-century Rome, we are not constrained to take at face value the apparent fact that Paul addresses his letter to them; it may be a literary fiction, or the present text may represent

somebody else's fiction, or somebody else's guess at who the original recipients of the letter were. But for present purposes we can afford to leave these complications to one side. The important point is that the question to whom a particular biblical text is addressed is an empirical question. Answers to it may be proposed on the basis of evidence internal or external to the text and evaluated accordingly.

So far, a biblical text is much the same as any other text. But people in whose religion the Bible plays an important role may go further. If I am a modern Christian, I may say that, for instance, the Epistle to the Romans is addressed not only to first-century Christians living in Rome, but also in some sense to me. Indeed, it may be argued that it is normally this sense of being somehow addressed by it that gives the text a role in my religion.

If I say that (the Epistle to the) Romans is addressed to me, what sort of claim am I making, if any? It is certainly not an empirical claim in the same way that the assertion that Romans is addressed to first-century Roman Christians is an empirical claim. If I say that Romans is addressed to me, I would probably not support this by any assertion to the effect that I am named in the letter as one of its addressees. If I did, my claim would be an empirical one and could easily be shown to be false. Nor, normally, would I support my claim by identifying myself as a first-century Roman Christian. Given that I was born in London in the twentieth century, this, as Wittgenstein says, would be too big to count as a simple mistake and would perhaps be evidence of mental incompetence.[10]

To say that Romans is addressed to me is not equivalent to saying that it is about me. Romans does indeed contain assertions about people in general, such as 'those who are in the flesh cannot please God' (8:8), and what it says about people in general may be one feature of it that makes me interested in it. But that is not what makes it addressed to me. For the Koran and the Bhagavad Gita also say things about people in general, and may also on that account be of interest to me, but I may have no inclination to say that they are addressed to me.

There is a perfectly unexceptionable, and therefore (for our purposes) not very interesting, sense in which almost any document which comments on the human condition can be said to be addressed to me, and indeed to everybody else. Even though Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a sixteenth-century work and plainly not addressed to a twenty-first-century audience, it would make perfect sense for a contemporary teacher to ask her class: 'What does *Hamlet* say to us?' or 'What does Shakespeare say to us in this play?' To be able to ask and propose answers to such a question is arguably part of a serious literary engagement with the play. But if I am a Christian my reaction to Romans is importantly different from my reaction to *Hamlet*. The essential difference between a human literary engagement with *Hamlet* and a Christian religious engagement with Romans might be put like this: If I say that *Hamlet* speaks to me, this is roughly equivalent to saying that the

author of the play (whom I know to be Shakespeare) speaks to me through *Hamlet*. If, on the other hand, I say that I am addressed by Romans, I may give a partial explanation of this by saying that the author of the text (whom I know to be St Paul) speaks to me through it. But I will also want to say that *God* speaks to me through this text. The voice I hear and listen to when I read this text is not merely that of the first-century man Paul of Tarsus, in whose opinions I am interested, but also that of God, the eternal, the creator of heaven and earth, my origin and final end. It is the fact that I believe that God speaks to me through it that gives the text its importance for me.[11]

If I say 'In Romans, God speaks to me', there are two important non-empirical elements in what I say. We have already noted that it is in an obvious way not an empirical matter for me that I am addressed: I would not attempt to answer the question 'How do you know Romans is addressed to *you*?' in at all the same way as I would attempt to answer the question: 'How do you know Romans is addressed to first-century Roman Christians?' That is one non-empirical element. The other is parallel: I would not attempt to answer the question: 'How do you know it is *God* who is addressing you in Romans?' in the same way that I might attempt to answer the question: 'How do you know it is Paul who is addressing you in Romans?' I will not attempt to find a passage in the letter where God presents himself as its author, as I might point to the letter's exordium as evidence that it is Paul who is addressing the Roman Christians. In saying that God addresses me in this text of Paul, I do not claim either that God is a co-author of the text in the sense that Paul wrote parts of it and God wrote other parts of it, nor that Paul and God collaborated to produce it, mulling over each part of it together to refine their thought and find the best wording to express it.

What might I mean by saying that, in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, God speaks to me, if I do not mean that God put pen to paper to write the work, or that I was one of the original addressees? I might begin to flesh out what I say in the following way: When Paul, in Chapter 1, attacks Gentile idolatry and general wickedness, I might regard myself as condemned by his words. I might see myself as under the condemnation, not of Paul – for he is not speaking to me, and it little matters to me what this man who has been dead two thousand years would think of me – but of God. I might want to say that God accuses me directly today through this ancient text. I might explain myself differently, but I will surely point to features of the text that strike me forcefully. Typically, when God speaks, what he says is striking, and it strikes as true. I do not know this because I have discovered empirically that God does not write insipidly, or that he writes many things which are not at all striking, for I do not discover empirically that God is the author of any text. I have never read a text, found it rather exciting and convincing, and then discovered empirically that it was written by God. Rather, I will not in general say that God speaks to me in a text unless I find some feature

of it arresting and convincing. It is only if it 'speaks' to me in some deep and authoritative way that I will be inclined to speak of God addressing me through it. The word of God is of its nature authoritative. So his word is not only addressed to me, but addressed to me in a way I do not ignore. I may or may not ignore many things which are, as a matter of empirical fact, addressed to me, such as love letters and telephone bills. But I cannot ignore a text which I see as the word of God addressed to me, for I will not recognise any word which I do ignore as the word of God, or will not recognise that it is addressed to me.

There are two important and connected qualifications which must be made here. First, I might initially accept a biblical text as the word of God addressed to me not because I find it convincingly tells me profound things about the universe and my place in it, but just because it is in the Bible. I might do this if I have found that other biblical books have spoken to me profoundly, and in such a way as to convince me that the Bible as a whole contains the word of God. So, even if for the moment I find, say, the book of Leviticus by turns dull and revolting, I might be convinced that a divine message for me lies somewhere in the text. One possible reason why I might react in this way might be that, while some parts of the Bible have on first reading struck me with great force, I have in the past found other biblical books uninspiring in the same way as Leviticus, but have discovered, after prayer, study and more experience of life, that they have come to speak to me powerfully of spiritual things. If for the moment I find nothing in Leviticus, I might express this by saying, not that Leviticus is not the word of God, but that I have not yet properly understood the meaning of the text. In this case, continuing to say that the text is the word of God expresses the belief that it does contain something of spiritual value, something that would carry conviction with me if only I could see it. I can say effectively that God really does speak to me here, but I am unable to hear him. So saying 'God speaks to me in this text' is not merely an emotive reaction to the text, roughly equivalent to: 'How deeply moving/enlightening/spiritual this text is'; it expresses a genuine conviction about what the text holds for me, even if I do not yet see it.[12]

Second, we must not forget the fact that the Bible holds an honoured place in a community of religious believers. If I come to see the Bible as a place where God speaks to me, this will typically not be because I have all alone discovered that the Bible is a set of religious texts and have discovered also that these texts are of great spiritual value. I live in a culture where the Bible is presented as a divine word to human beings. This already creates a space for a range of reactions to the Bible. I will come to the Bible with certain expectations. My actual reaction may be either positive or negative, depending partly on my religious attitudes, but I know, simply by being a participant in this culture, and before I read a word of the Bible, that a different range of appropriate reactions is available to me when I read the

Bible from that available to me when I read the current railway timetable; the two are presented in very different ways in my culture. I might find the Bible inspiring, the word of God, or I may find it barbarous and infantile. Reacting in either of these ways to the Bible would be readily comprehensible in a way that reacting in the same ways to a railway timetable would not be readily comprehensible. That the Bible is a shared text or set of texts is another reason why I might acknowledge a biblical text as the word of God even though it means nothing to me. If I am part of a community of faith that treasures this text as the word of God, and if this community is one I have confidence in, I might accept that it is indeed the word of God, and put my own negative reaction to it down to my personal spiritual failings. I might hope that by penetrating more deeply the tradition of my faith community (by, among other things, learning from teachers respected in the community) I will come to see for myself the spiritual value of the text and so accept it without reservation as the word of God and hear God speaking to me through it.

I have said that, if I find a text uninspiring, I might still accept it as the word of God, saying that I have not yet understood the meaning of the text. Here 'the meaning of the text' may refer to what Barton calls the 'publicly available meaning', the meaning biblical scholars seek to establish. But it is more likely that it is precisely this publicly available meaning that I do understand and find dull or repulsive. The conviction that it is nevertheless the word of God may lead me to seek some other interpretation, some other meaning, of the text. I might, for instance, want to speak in terms of some other meaning lying hidden behind that publicly available meaning, a meaning that cannot be discovered by biblical criticism but only by prayer, Christian living, immersion in the tradition and continued devout reading.

Such a move does two things. First, it creates a space for talk about a meaning of a text other than that publicly available meaning which is the concern of biblical criticism. For the sake of giving it a name, I will call this the spiritual meaning. Second, it creates a distinction between what the author of the text says to his audience and what God says to the reader. What the author says to his audience may be identified with the publicly available meaning of the text, while what God says is the spiritual meaning. In many cases the publicly available meaning and the spiritual meaning will be the same; that is, on reading the text and understanding the publicly available meaning, one will be convinced by it, one will hear in it the voice of God. But the distinction creates the possibility that the two might be different. I might find the publicly available meaning uninspiring, not hear the voice of God in it, yet believe that the text is the word of God to me. This may encourage me to seek a meaning in the text other than the publicly available meaning.

The distinction between what the human author of a text says to his audience and what God says to the reader through it is a commonplace of

Christian thought. The Bible, like many books regarded as spiritual, has long been treated not simply as a book one should read to find its publicly available meaning, but as a work addressed to the individual reader in the circumstances of his or her daily life, a work on which one should meditate and over which one should pray to find a meaning which fits those circumstances. We see the distinction already at work in the earliest surviving Christian writings. According to Paul, it is not just his voice that the early Christian communities hear when they hear his preaching or read his letters: 'we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us' (2 Cor 5:20). In claiming the right to be supported materially by the communities to whom he brings the Gospel, Paul quotes the law of Moses, which says: 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.' (Deut 25:4). The publicly available meaning of this is not difficult to see. But, according to Paul, this is not what God is saying to the early Christians. 'Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the ploughman should plough in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of a share in the crop. If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits?' (1 Cor 9:9–11). While Moses clearly speaks to the Israelites of oxen, God speaks to the Christians of apostles. It is perhaps along similar lines that we can understand how Matthew could find in the birth of Jesus the fulfilment of the Immanuel prophecy: the prophet Isaiah said one thing to his eighth-century audience; God says a different, but importantly related, thing to the contemporary Christian, and to the Jew who has ears to hear.[13]

In more modern times the distinction has been put to work with respect to a central passage of scripture, the account of creation in Genesis 1. The publicly available meaning of the text says quite clearly that God created the world in six days. This is what the author of the text says, and this is what, until the nineteenth century, Christians took God to be saying through the text. The advent of the theory of evolution forced on many Christians a change of attitude to this text. For many, Darwin had simply shown the text to be false, which entailed that it could no longer be thought of as the word of God. Others, because convinced that it was the word of God, distinguished between the letter of the text, its publicly available meaning, and what I am calling the spiritual sense. While Darwin showed the text to be false if understood in terms of its publicly available meaning, his theory did not touch the spiritual meaning of the text. What the text really meant, what God was saying through it, was that the world has its origin in God, or that the world today and always is entirely dependent on God, and so on.

The distinction between the word of God and the human word is a distinction that Christian communities and individual believers can and do still put to work in reading the Bible.

Suppose, for instance, that I am a Christian and that a text presupposes or expresses, as I understand it, moral views which I find repugnant. Since

(with the qualifications expressed above) I only accept as expressing the view of God those texts which carry conviction for me, if a text is morally repugnant to me I do not hear in it the voice of God. It will be, in my view, part of the human dross mixed with the divine gold. For example, if, conscious of the injustice, corruption and inhumanity of many governments, and after thought, prayer and discussion, I finally find unacceptable Paul's view that governments are always to be obeyed (Romans 13:1–7), I will not see this injunction as coming from God. I will not agree that in this text God is addressing me; I will read here only Paul addressing Christians in first-century Rome. I might conclude that this text is simply not the word of God, but it is also open to me look for another way to read this text which will enable me to hear the voice of God in it. I can look for another meaning, not just another interpretation of the publicly available meaning, but a meaning that lies 'behind' the text. If I find one, I will not be claiming that the publicly available meaning is other than I formerly supposed. My attitude will be rather that the true meaning of the text is not to be found in the publicly available meaning, but in the meaning that I have found for it; and that will be the true meaning because it is understood in that way that the text carries conviction for me.

I may find that I cannot with integrity believe that what a non-fictional narrative text says happened actually did happen. If, after thought, prayer and discussion, I do not believe it happened, the text does not carry conviction for me, so I will not hear the voice of God speaking to me through it. Take once more Matthew's narrative of Jesus walking on the water. It may be that, because I believe that it is scientifically impossible for anybody at all to walk on water, I cannot honestly believe that Jesus walked on the water, as Matthew says he did. Then I will not accept that in this text, as so understood, God speaks to me; here I read only Matthew telling a story to first-century Christians. But, once again, it is open to me also to seek another reading of the text that enables me to hear the voice of God in it. If I find one, I may continue to believe that the text read according to its publicly available meaning is not credible, but will consider this as of little or no importance; what will matter is the interpretation according to which it speaks convincingly to me of spiritual things.

If experience of governments and a science-based mentality can cause us not to hear the voice of God in certain biblical texts, an acquaintance with biblical criticism might have the same effect, for reasons I have outlined. So, when I read the story of Jesus walking on the water, I might find it difficult to believe it, not because it is impossible to walk on water (after all, if Jesus is God, he can do anything), but because biblical scholars have convinced me by various arguments that the early church had every reason to make up such a story. I may conclude that, though it is possible that Jesus walked on water, it is unlikely, and that it is more likely that the story was made up. Conceived as a historical narrative, and influenced by biblical criticism,

I consider the story false, and therefore do not accept it, interpreted according to its publicly available meaning, as the word of God. This may lead me to reject the story completely, but I may, because of my general commitment to the Bible as the word of God, seek some other way of reading it that allows me to hear the voice of God in it, that is, which allows me to read it with conviction. This will not be a rejection of the conclusions of biblical criticism, but a development stimulated by the acceptance of those conclusions. Only for me the publicly available meaning of the text will not be all there is, and it will not be the most important thing there is in the text. There is no reason why these possibilities should not be open to me if I myself am a biblical scholar.

What I have been saying here is, in its way, very traditional. None of it shows (or is an attempt to show) that the Bible is actually the word of God, nor that an authentic Christian must be committed to regarding it as such. Nothing here shows, either, that there are not sometimes grave difficulties for a modern Christian who tries to read the Bible seriously, or that those who give up the Bible as a bad job in the face of those difficulties are in some way mistaken. I hope to have shown, however, that there is a way, and a way long familiar to Christians, in which those difficulties might be resolved such that it remains possible, reading the Bible, to hear the voice of God.

## Notes

1. I realise that in visiting this area I risk treading on the toes of later contributors to this conference, whose specific brief is to talk about miracles. I can only hope that this is not so, and apologise if it is.
2. I use the weakest term I can find. It is doubtful that the miracle narratives were intended as *proofs* of the divinity of Jesus, since they were written for communities of Christians, that is, for those who already believed and needed no such proof. On the other hand, if such narratives served to express the faith of believers, they must thereby have served also to strengthen that faith.
3. It has to be said that there are miracle stories which encourage this understanding; see Mk 7:32–35 and 9:14–29. But these are exceptional.
4. There is some evidence that ordinary illness, not attributed to demonic possession, was also thought of in this way, at least sometimes. See Mt 8:5–13, where the centurion expresses his confidence in Jesus' ability to cure his servant by speaking of his own place in an authority structure. Just as he can command his subordinates, so Jesus can, simply by his authoritative word, cure his servant.
5. John Barton, *What Is The Bible*?, London, SPCK, 1991, p. 68.
6. The original ending of Mark was probably at 16:8. The account of the resurrection appearances in Mk 16:9–20 can be shown by critical techniques to be a later composition.
7. The not always good-tempered discussion of this relationship in Stump and Flint, *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology* (University of Notre Press, 1993) is evidence both of this perception and of the passions to which it can give rise.

8. At least, this is the obvious way to take the Gospel as a whole. This does not preclude the possibility that parts of the text are not intended to represent what actually happened.
9. The book may actually be a compilation, put together by one or more people from texts written by others. In that case we would have to distinguish the audience of the final compilation from the audience or audiences to which the component elements were addressed.
10. See *On Certainty*, §§ 66–75.
11. I have above made use of the traditional expression 'word of God' in connexion with reading the Bible religiously. A case can be made for saying that describing the Bible as the word of God in part expresses this sense of being addressed by God.
12. Responding in this way to the book of Leviticus, reacting on the basis of what I have found in other biblical books, goes together with seeing the Bible not as an assemblage of independent texts but as a whole, so that my positive attitude to one biblical text influences my attitude to another. This might give a sense to describing the Bible as a whole as the word of God. If I see the Bible as a whole as expressing the mind of God, and believe that God does not change too much or contradict himself, this would probably lead me to look for a certain coherence between the various books of the Bible, to harmonise differences between them, and to find apparent contradictions problematic.

    But this is of course not the only possible way to react to the book of Leviticus if I find it uninspiring. The fact that I have found other biblical texts spiritually convincing might not lead me to conclude humbly that I have not yet understood Leviticus. Despite the inspiration I find in books like Job and St John's Gospel, I might insist that Leviticus is a work of little or no spiritual significance, and therefore not the word of God. Such a reaction would suggest a less unitary approach to the Bible, one which saw it simply as a collection of texts some of which might count for me as the word of God, others not. If I take this line I will no doubt tend to be less worried by tensions and contradictions, less inclined to search for a coherent biblical view of things.

    If it is possible to take these two contrasting attitudes towards the Bible as a whole, a similar possibility exists with respect to individual books. I may regard each book as a coherent, inspired, whole; if so, then contradictions within a book will be a problem for me. On the other hand, I may be content to admit that each book is a mixture of divine gold and human dross, so that I may find divine inspiration in Leviticus 19:18 while rejecting the following verse as mere human invention.
13. It is possible that such reinterpretation and 'spiritualisation' is at work already in the Old Testament. Barton refers to the law of the ban (Deut 7:1–2), in which God, according to the author of the text, enjoins the Israelites to destroy all the inhabitants of the land they are about to invade. Such passages are alien to modern western religious sentiment and will probably strike us as barbaric. But Barton comments that they 'may reflect less the genuine spirit of the conquest period than the thinking of an age when holy war had already become a symbol of religious reformation, rather than a prescription for actual blood-letting' (op. cit., pp. 104–105).

    In the light of that, it is curious that he goes on to remark: 'From the perspective of any religious conviction that can be held with integrity today, it is hard to see how we can do other than disown these parts of the Bible' (ibid.). If we take the

text in its straightforward meaning, the passage is indeed horrible and certainly incompatible with Christian principles. But if it is possible to read it with integrity as a call to religious reformation, as Barton suggests, then there is no reason why authentic religious believers must disown it. Barton does say, surely rightly, that passages such as these are often scandalous to modern readers; but perhaps modern readers would be less scandalised if they learned to read such passages in the way Barton himself suggests they should.

# 2
# The Hermeneutics of the Voice of God

*James M. Robinson*

The topic "Biblical Concepts and Our World" is brought into focus in Gareth Moore's title "Hearing the Voice of God." As he poses the problem (p. 3), it is not involved in reading the Bible "simply as a work of ancient literature," but "as part of their [modern christians'] christian religious practice." It is precisely this focus on the Bible as intended for religious practice that calls for a more radical approach than would be the case if it were looked upon merely as ancient literature.

The problem has been posed most acutely by Rudolf Bultmann in his essay "New Testament and Mythology: The Problem of Demythologizing the New Testament Proclamation."[1] For Bultmann was both a (dialectic) theologian and a biblical (New Testament) critic. He began bluntly, by laying out antiquity's mythical world picture presupposed in the Bible:[2]

> The world picture of the New Testament is a mythical world picture. The world is a three-story structure, with earth in the middle, heaven above it, and hell below it. Heaven is the dwelling place of God and of heavenly figures, the angels; the world below is hell, the place of torment. But even the earth is not simply the scene of natural day-to-day occurrences, of foresight and work that reckon with order and regularity; rather, it, too, is a theater for the working of supernatural powers, God and his angels, Satan and his demons. These supernatural powers intervene in natural occurrences and in the thinking, willing, and acting of human beings; wonders are nothing unusual. Human beings are not their own masters; demons can possess them, and Satan can put bad ideas into their heads. But God, too, can direct their thinking and willing, send them heavenly visions, allow them to hear his commanding or comforting word, give them the supernatural power of his Spirit. History does not run its own steady, lawful course but is moved and guided by supernatural powers. This age stands under the power of Satan, sin, and death (which are precisely "powers"). It is hastening toward its imminent end, which will take place in a cosmic catastrophe. It stands before/the "woes" of the

> last days, the coming of the heavenly judge, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment to salvation or damnation.

This is something that we could take more readily in our stride if we considered the Bible "simply as a work of ancient literature," since all ancient literature presupposes such a mythological worldview. But Bultmann, like Moore, was, as theologian, primarily concerned with "hearing the voice of God" in the Bible (as his "kerygmatic" theology and book of sermons indicate). Hence Bultmann had to go on:[3]

> All of this is mythological talk, and the individual motifs may be easily traced to the contemporary mythology of Jewish apocalypticism and of the Gnostic myth of redemption. Insofar as it is mytho-/logical talk it is incredible to men and women today because for them the mythical world picture is a thing of the past. Therefore, contemporary Christian proclamation is faced with the question whether, when it demands faith from men and women, it expects them to acknowledge this mythical world picture of the past. If this is impossible, it then has to face the question whether the New Testament proclamation has a truth that is independent of the mythical world picture, in which case it would be the task of theology to demythologize the Christian proclamation.

Moore seems to see the problem of "biblical concepts and our world" similarly when he says (p. 4):

> We – and by "we" I mean modern (or even post-modern), educated, cultured western liberals – inhabit a thought-world vastly different from that of the ancient near east; does this distance itself create any problems? It is with this kind of question that I will be concerned.

Moore (p. 4) has in view, and opposes, "an academic, critical study of the Bible apparently divorced from religious concerns," which hence "has treated the Bible in a new way, simply as any other ancient text." Yet scholarship "divorced from religious concerns" is not constitutive of critical scholarship itself, as the publications of Bultmann, himself a radical biblical critic, document quite clearly. Rather, Moore's criticism of biblical criticism is reminiscent of Bultmann's criticism of nineteenth-century liberalism, which already in his time he considered passé:[4]

> For the epoch of the older "liberal" theology, it is characteristic that mythological representations are simply eliminated as time conditioned and inessential while the great basic religious and moral ideas are explained to be essential. One thus distinguishes between husk and kernel.

In the American cultural heritage, this procedure was classically exemplified in the "Jeffersonian Bible,"[5] composed in the White House by the sitting president, by cutting out (literally, with scissors!) from the Gospels what is miraculous and mythological and pasting together (in four languages!) the remaining uplifting moral and idealistic religious truths.

It may be that today even "the great basic religious and moral ideas" are also neglected by current biblical scholarship, which in many cases is indeed all too superficial. But in any case such ideas are hardly "the voice of God," but only "eternal truths" we should cherish. So Bultmann, though recognizing such an approach as religious, maintained that it too was not involved in "hearing the voice of God":[6]

> The kerygma is here reduced to certain basic religious and moral ideas, to an idealistic ethic that is religiously motivated. But the truth of the matter is that the kerygma is eliminated as kerygma, that is, as the message of God's decisive act in Christ.
>
> Through such interpretation, also, the New Testament proclamation loses its character as kerygma. Here, too, there is no talk of a decisive act of God in Christ, which is proclaimed as the salvation event. The decisive question, therefore, is whether precisely this salvation event, which is presented in the New Testament as a mythical occurrence, or whether the person of Jesus, which is viewed in the New Testament as a mythical person, is nothing but mythology. Can there be a demythologizing interpretation that discloses the truth of the kerygma as kerygma for those who do not think mythologically?

Therefore Bultmann proposed an alternative to "the epoch of the older 'liberal' theology," which is in some ways similar to the proposal of Moore:[7]

> If we may say schematically that during the epoch of critical research the mythology of the New Testament was simply *eliminated*, the task today – also to speak schematically – is to *interpret* New Testament mythology.

That is to say, the problem is hermeneutical, as Moore, like Bultmann, clearly recognizes. But the agreement seems to end there. For Moore does not propose a hermeneutic that can be considered valid today.

## Problems with miracles

Problems emerge as Moore seeks to come to terms with the New Testament itself. For he presents the problems with miracles in an exaggerated, inaccurate way, so as to put it in the service of a high Chistology (p. 5):

> The miracle stories are important in the gospels because they seem to show us something about Jesus, to indicate that he is a divine figure. They show him doing what is impossible to mere mortals, hence they show that he is not a mere mortal.

The problem we should have with the miracle stories of primitive Christianity is not that they show Jesus "doing what is impossible to mere mortals," but rather that they portray him in the way which, in that culture, was quite normal for portraying "holy men," exorcists, and magicians (including a fake magician, Alexander of Abonu Teichos in Paphlagonia in the second century, exposed by Lucian of Samosata), so as to accredit themselves as having special access to the gods. (Alexander charged one drachma and two obols for an oracle, earning thereby 70,000 to 80,000 drachmas per year.) Our ignorance today of the non-Christian literature of antiquity should not free us from facing the reality of the ancient world. In fact, the miracle stories of primitive Christianity show Jesus, as exorcist and faith healer, having the superhuman powers commonly ascribed in antiquity to such primitive physicians. A standard apologetic explanation, to the effect that such miracles took place in the case of Jesus but were fakes in the case of all others, presupposes the deity of Christ, and hence has no force in proving the deity of Christ, since that would involve a circular argument.

Nor is the claim made in the New Testament that this power is unique to Jesus. The Gospels themselves emphasize the point that Jesus' miracle-working ability is carried over in the practice of the church. The disciples are enjoined to "cure the sick there, and say to them: The kingdom of God has reached unto you" (Q 10:9).[8] For the healings are acts of God, not of Jesus as more than a "mere mortal," if that is taken to mean something like an orthodox christology. This becomes even clearer in the Beelzebul controversy (Q 11:19):

> If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, your sons, by whom do they cast them out? This is why they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then there has come upon you God's reign.

That is to say, Jesus recognized as valid, exorcisms performed by "sons" of his opponents. Thus the point is that the exorcisms that Jesus performs, and hence presumably that others perform, are all acts of God, God doing his reigning, "the kingdom of God," and are no more to be attributed to the "deity of Christ" than to the deity of the sons of his opponents. Matt 9:8 ascribes the healing of the paralytic not to a unique power rooted in the deity of Christ, but to an act of God available to other humans as well: "When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to *men*."

Of course one must draw the same conclusion from the "spiritual gifts" listed by Paul (1 Cor 12:4–11):

> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, and to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the same Spirit, to another *the working of miracles*, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

From this text it is clear that, for Paul, the widespread practice of miracles in the primitive church does not prove the deity of Christ, but rather the deity of the Spirit. Such miracles are indeed "impossible to mere mortals," but the inference is false: ". . . hence they show that he is not a mere mortal." For if the Corinthians used their spiritual gifts to argue that they were not mere mortals, as indeed they may have, Paul would have been the first to reject that claim (1 Cor 13:1–2):

> If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

Moore asserts that the modern mind must conclude (p. 8): "Those who took him to be divine because they believed he drove out demons were sadly mistaken." But those who are sadly mistaken are not the primitive Christians, since they did not believe in the deity of Christ because of his exorcisms, in any other sense than they believed in the deity of his disciples and the Corinthian Christian charismatics; mistaken are modern Christians who superimpose on the text of the Bible their orthodox Christology, and as a result have the problem of harmonizing the Bible to fit their own theology.

It is quite inappropriate to define the primitive Christians as "mistaken" (p. 8) because they, living in a mythopoeic culture, believed in the existence of demons, whereas "we (western, liberal, educated) don't believe in demons any more." If we cannot listen to and dialogue with other cultures than our own without such condescending, put-down language, we will only perpetuate the ethnic hostility that is one of the major problems of our day, and never hear the voice of God in such backwaters of civilization as the biblical world that lacked completely "western medicine" (p. 9).

If primitive Christians thought the world was flat, would there really be no hope of "hearing the voice of God" in what they wrote?

## Biblical criticism

Moore's portrayal of "biblical criticism" is that of the outdated alternative of *elimination*, which Bultmann had already transcended in favor of *interpretation*. The exodus is "untrue," as are Matthew's infancy and resurrection narratives (p. 10). Here "(un)true" does not mean theologically (un)true, but factually (un)true, since such events simply did not take place as related. But this is to construe falsely the question of truth with regard to primitive Christianity. For it is the *point* of the kerygma which is indeed the core of Christian faith, to be heard as the voice of God and responded to with the commitment of faith. But the hermeneutical problem for us who live in a post-mythopoeic world is to hear that *point*, and not be distracted by the mythological formulations of that point, as if the kerygma consisted of impossible historical facts whose factuality one simply has to swallow, if one does not want to brand them as "untrue."

Moore's presentation of critical scholarship is a caricature, and, in the degree of crudeness presented here, cannot be documented in the biblical scholarship of today (in spite of its all-too-common superficiality). His is the only presentation written in our lifetime, of which I am aware, that states "that the narrator was lying or mistaken" (p. 5), "the narrative is false," "untrue" (p. 6). Biblical criticism today is much too sophisticated to assume the Bible is a history book that is factually so wrong as to be "false," written by human, all-too-human literalists who were "lying or mistaken." For it is not a history book at all, but a religious book from a mythopoeic culture, and hence must be interpreted as such, as any biblical scholar will tell you.

But it is over against this intolerable characterization, as a straw man, that is set the religious reading, to which the reader of Moore's essay should hence be eager to flee (p. 12):

> A religious reading of a biblical text treats it as – to use a common christian expression – the word of God, and so as containing a truth. God does not lie [!], nor does he make mistakes [!].

This definition of the word of God as something "containing a truth" apparently means something free of factual mistakes or lies. This history-book definition is of course a misunderstanding of what is meant by the word of God. For the word of God is what God addresses to me as an offer of forgiveness in the concrete situation and/or a call to commitment and action, not an infallible eternal doctrine listing facts like the Apostles' Creed that, together with others, can be united into dogma, whose truth can then be demonstrated by theologians and/or philosophers. A message is not accredited

as the word of God because in that factual sense it "contains a truth," not a "lie" or "mistakes." That kind of truth is more likely to be the word of science. Or it is what Bultmann rejected as "the older 'liberal' theology": "the great basic religious and moral ideals" held "to be essential." For no matter how true they may be, they are in any case not "the voice of God."

Moore (p. 16) comes nearer to a valid understanding of the voice of God with the help of *Hamlet*, through which he recognizes that Shakespeare may speak to him. But the distinction is made that "To be or not to be, that is the question," encounters me only as the voice of a (fictional) character of Shakespeare, where one would not expect to encounter God [though one might be surprised!], whereas in listening to Paul "I will also want to say that God speaks to me through this text." In any case, the *tertium comparationis* is that in both cases one's very being is addressed, and to this extent the voice one hears, if not God, is like that of a god. "It is the fact that I believe that God speaks to me through it [the Bible] that gives the text its importance for me." Should it not read: It is the fact that I believe that God speaks to me through this text that gives the Bible its importance for me? Note 11 clarifies: "A case can be made for saying that describing the Bible as the word of God in part expresses this sense of being addressed by God." One should delete from this sentence the qualifier "in part." There is no such thing as affirming the word of God other than, in addition to, being addressed by God in my actual living. The retrospective residue of such an encounter with God cannot be objectified into facts or doctrines that, as such, are the voice of God. Religious truths are as such not the voice of God, but only human opinions about God.

Moore's section on "biblical criticism" (pp. 9–14) concludes with its repudiation:

> It is even possible to construct an argument to show, not merely that certain conclusions of critical study of the Bible are in tension with a religious attitude to the Bible, but that the very spirit in which biblical criticism of the Bible is normally carried out is incompatible with the religious reading. . . . In treating a text as the word of God, must not this possibility of seriously reinterpreting the text be excluded? . . . A religious reading of a text seems to imply a commitment to a given interpretation of that text, a commitment that excludes the possibility that the text be understood in a substantially different way. Are not those who read biblical texts religiously those who have, in Barton's words, "already made up their minds what they can be allowed to mean"? But this attitude is precisely, according to Barton's characterization, what biblical criticism excludes. . . .
>
> So there does seem to be a real incompatibility between religious reading and critical reading. The critical reading does not, apparently, merely abstract from a religious reading of a text, it actually excludes it.

The inference is inescapable: The church would be much better off if its schools of theology would refrain and desist from modern biblical scholarship. Once "the traditional pious Christian reading of the Bible" (p. 9, see also p. 34) has interpreted a text, the reader has a closed mind.

What Moore repudiates in the history of biblical scholarship is the biblical criticism of two centuries ago, which was so ridiculed by David Friedrich Strauss and Albert Schweitzer as to be excluded from polite society, and so would be a disgrace to any biblical scholar today who advocated it. For nowhere in modern biblical scholarship will one find the explanation of the walking on the water that Moore ascribes to biblical criticism (p. 6):

> There may have been submerged rocks, and Jesus may have walked on them. But if there were submerged rocks, the story loses its miraculous aspect, and we have the feeling that it is robbed of its sense.

This was the biblical criticism of the old rationalistic, naturalistic explanation attempted at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But since David Friedrich Strauss dismantled it, by pointing out that it was precisely the miraculosity that scored the intended point (so that the baby would be thrown out with the bath – "robbed of its sense" – if one eliminated the miraculous in favor of a naturalistic explanation), no one has been so stupid as to suggest it again. Similarly the multiplication of the loaves (p. 6):

> when Jesus and his disciples freely gave out the little food there seemed to be, without keeping it all for themselves, many in the crowd, who had their own secret stock of food, were inspired to a similar generosity and shared their food.

We are then confronted with the unacceptable alternatives, either the feedings did not happen, "the gospel account is false, in which case the general plausibility of the gospel is undermined and the claim for the special status of Jesus receives no support," or, "the second horn of the dilemma, we perhaps save the plausibility of the gospel on this point and others, for now it merely claims that the unusual happened, not that the impossible happened." Either alternative undermines the deity of Christ.

This horrible alternative of having to invent a naturalistic explanation to protect "the gospel account" from being branded as "false" was presented in all its ridiculous detail in Christoph Friedrich von Ammon's three massive German volumes, published in 1842–47.[9] They have not been read by anyone, much less repeated, since Albert Schweitzer's devastating critique in his *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, where he summarized von Ammon's position as follows:[10]

> In most cases, however, he is content to repeat the rationalistic explanation, and portrays a Jesus who makes use of medicines, allows the demoniac

> himself to rush upon the herd of swine, helps a leper, whom he sees to be suffering only from one of the milder forms of the disease, to secure the public recognition of his being legally clean, and who exerts himself to prevent by word and act the premature burial of persons in a state of trance. The story of the feeding of the multitude is based on some occasion when there was "a bountiful display of hospitality, a generous sharing of provisions, inspired by Jesus' prayer of thanksgiving and the example which He set when the disciples were inclined selfishly to hold back their own supply." . . . He explains the walking on the sea by claiming for Jesus an acquaintance with "the art of treading water." [Moore, p. 5, corrects this rationalism in the same tasteless style: "The water will squish between his toes . . . ".]

All of this one can read *ad nauseam* in the early chapters of Albert Schweitzer's *Quest of the Historical Jesus* about the "rationalists," but one would search for it in vain in modern biblical scholarship. And it was the fundamentalists of Strauss' day (led by Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg) who welcomed the way Strauss ridiculed the rationalists for explaining away the point of the narratives in a vain attempt to salvage their historicity. To quote Schweitzer:[11]

> The pure rationalists found it much more difficult than did the mediating theologians, whether of the older or younger school, to adjust their attitude to the new solution of the miracle question. Strauss himself had made it difficult for them by remorselessly exposing the absurd and ridiculous aspects of their method, and by refusing to recognize them as allies in the battle for truth, as they really were.

Any New Testament scholar today would be ashamed to suggest such "rationalist" views, knowing he would simply be laughed out of respectable biblical scholarship.

Much the same shift away from the misunderstanding of the Bible as a history book has begun in the Roman Catholic Church, though a century later. A hundred years ago Alfred Loisy was defrocked for maintaining that the infancy narrative in Matt 1–2 is a haggadic commentary without "the slightest historical basis." But then in 1960 a Roman Catholic scholar Myles Bourke published an article in a standard Catholic journal on "The Literary Genus of Matthew 1–2,"[12] which began with reporting without comment on the church's action regarding Loisy, but then ended with his own view, which is in effect the same as Loisy's:

> Admittedly, the gospel presents Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection as events which really happened. But that the author of such a work might have introduced it by a midrash of deep theological insight, in which Jesus appears as the true Israel and the new Moses (thus containing the

> theme of the entire gospel), and in which the historical element is very slight [!] seems to be a thoroughly probably hypothesis.

What had happened in the half-century between Loisy and Bourke was the Encyclical Letter *Divino afflante Spiritu* of 1943, which states:

> By this knowledge and exact appreciation of the modes of speaking and writing in use among the ancients can be solved many difficulties, which are raised against the veracity and historical value of the Divine Scriptures, and no less efficaciously does this study contribute to a fuller and more luminous understanding of the mind of the Sacred Writer.

By knowing "the modes of speaking and writing in use among the ancients," one can conclude that the "genus" of the Matthean infancy narrative is "a midrash of deep theological insight," but "in which the historical element is very slight," and which yet does not present "difficulties, which are raised against the veracity and historical value of the Divine Scriptures." The literary genre is not historiography, to lay out the facts just as they happened, but legend, to edify the religious reader. Matthew's infancy narrative is not "lying or deception," nor "false," but does well what it was intended to do, and so should have our full respect.

Thus if, at first glance, Matthew's "story of the wise men (2:1–12) has a fantastic air about it," this is more a superficial mistake on the part of the reader than a valid criticism of Matthew, as Moore himself points out (p. 12):

> When the biblical scholars point to us how concerned Matthew is in the rest of his gospel to present Jesus as fulfilling biblical prophecy, and how important a role prophecy plays in the story of the wise men, we may begin to find easier to believe that his concerns have led him to fabricate the story than that these events actually happened.

But here it is not "the traditional pious christian reading of the Bible," but rather precisely "biblical criticism" (to reverse the invidious contrast made by Moore, p. 9) that had pointed out the truth of a story, by identifying its literary genre, which is aimed not at making a factual report that can stand up in a court of law, but at introducing the "truth" that one is to "believe," namely that Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy. For one sees that the point of a biblical narrative does not consist in its factuality, and so one can concede that the Evangelist did "fabricate," since the events have not "actually happened" (though one should then refrain from such invidious talk about "fabricating" events). Moore should hence be grateful to critical scholarship for rescuing the Christmas story – as story, and hence still "good news"! And, as a result, one should refrain from the invidious talk about other Christians, be they critical biblical scholars or literalistic laypeople, going beyond the

pale by insulting the Bible as "fabricating" events that are "false," "mistaken," "untrue," "lying," and "deception." We should desist from such language, since it recalls the way heresiologists talked in the early church and the Inquisition in more recent times. We do not want to discredit Christianity any further in our time.

Moore returns in conclusion to the walking on the water to illustrate how non-factual narrations can no longer be heard as the voice of God today (p. 21):

> Take Matthew's narrative of Jesus walking on the water. It may be that, because I believe that it is scientifically impossible for anybody at all to walk on water, I cannot honestly believe that Jesus walked on the water, as Matthew says he did. Then I will not accept that in this text, as so understood, God speaks to me; here I read only Matthew telling a story to first-century christians.

Of course Matthew, like all the Evangelists, was "only . . . telling a story to first-century christians," not to twenty-first-century Christians. But it is generally recognized today, for example by Ulrich Luz, recently President of the Society for New Testament Studies, author of the definitive 4-volume commentary on Matthew, Professor of New Testament at the University of Bern,[13] that Matthew's narration is intended by him as "transparent" to the church of his own time. The stories of Jesus are told by Matthew not with a modern historian's intention to tell it just as it happened ("wie es eigentlich gewesen"), but rather to slant the stories, to the extent they were not already so slanted in oral transmission, to speak to Matthew's pastoral needs in his own time. This can be illustrated by the cluster of miracle stories in Matt 8–9, where it is Luz who has clarified for me the situation:[14]

> It is a striking and significant fact that Matt 8–9 provides an instance of each of the kinds of healing listed in Q 7:22, the summary Jesus gave John's disciples to prove he is the Coming One. When listed in the order of Q 7:22, they are as follows:
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | "the blind receive their sight," | Matt 9:27–31, from Mark 10:46–52 |
> | "the lame walk," | Matt 9:1–8, from Mark 2:1–12 |
> | "lepers are cleansed," | Matt 8:1–4, from Mark 1:40–45 |
> | "and the deaf hear," | Matt 9:32–34, from Q 11:14 |
> | "the dead are raised up," | Matt 9:18–26, from Mark 5:22–43 |
> | "the poor are evangelized" | Matt 5–7, from Q 6:20–49 |
>
> Q itself had made a somewhat inadequate attempt to provide something for John's disciples, or at least the Q readers, to see (or hear or read), in that the Healing of the Centurion's Boy precedes immediately the arrival of John's disciples in Q. But a single undiagnosed healing hardly provides

> adequate documentation for a list of five specific maladies to motivate loyal Baptists to move from John to Jesus. Even Luke recognized this weakness, and so interpolated a verse immediately prior to Q 7:22 (Luke 7:21), to the effect that, when John's delegation arrived, Jesus was in the midst of a series of healings, concluding with the one with which Q immediately begins its list, the healing of the blind. The last in the list of healings, the raising of the dead, may also be responsible for Luke's interpolation of the story of the raising from the dead of the son of the widow at Nain (Luke 7:11–17), just prior to John sending his emissaries to Jesus (Luke 7:18–23). But only Matthew takes the apologetic need literally enough to compose two whole chapters telling in detail each healing story on the list.
>
> Attention was drawn to these two chapters by Luz's rather shocking analysis.[15] He lays out, to his own consternation,[16] the bald facts that Matthew, usually quite conservative regarding the tradition, here not only shifted healings out of their Markan order in a rather capricious way, clearly not interested in presenting them in their historical or even their Markan sequence, but even took a single healing such as that of Blind Bartimaeus, changed it into the healing of two anonymous blind persons, and then told the story twice, once at Jericho where it belongs, and once here at Matt 9:27–31, where Matthew desperately needed it, so desperately as to resort to this disturbing procedure. Why is he so desperate? Because the list of Healings in Q 7:22 puts in first place "the blind see," and no blind persons are healed in Q. So Matthew has to turn to Mark to get a Healing of a Blind Person. Matthew then does much the same with Q's Dumb Demoniac, a story moved forward from its Q position (Q 11:14–15) to be used in Matt 9:32–34. Then, when it is repeated in its rightful Q position (Matt 12:22–24), the poor demoniac becomes blind as well as dumb, perhaps so that one will not notice it is a healing story that had already been used. What could have motivated the conservative Matthew to such drastic measures? His need to prove Q's case that Jesus is the Coming One!

It was a miracle story in this same section of Matt 8–9 that provided the occasion for introducing the main new exegetical method that has been dominant in the last generation, redaction criticism. For Günther Bornkamm, writing in Germany just after the war, when the rescue of the church after the Nazi perversion and the war's destruction was an acute need, pointed out that Matthew, as editor, shifted the message of Jesus stilling the storm (Mark 4:35–41 par. Matt 8:23–27) from Jesus as miracle worker to Jesus rescuing the "little ship of the Church."[17] Since this brief essay introducing redaction criticism has obviously also been overlooked, let me again summarize it here:

It has increasingly become an accepted result of New Testament enquiry and a principle of all Synoptic exegesis that the Gospels must be understood and interpreted in terms of *kerygma* and not as biographies of Jesus of Nazareth . . . The evangelists do not hark back to some kind of church archives when they pass on the words and deeds of Jesus, but they draw them from the kerygma of the Church and serve this kerygma. . . . /

By inserting it [Stilling the Storm, Matt 8:23–27] into a definite context and by his own presentation of it, he [Matthew] gives it a new meaning which it does not yet have with the other evangelists. . . . /

The evangelist . . . puts before it the two sayings of Jesus about discipleship (Matt. 8.19–22) . . . Matthew alone inserts the sayings in this context. And he alone introduces the story of the stilling of the storm with the words ["and when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him"].

Here, in distinction from the account in Mark, Jesus goes ahead and the disciples follow him. The word ["follow"] is the catchword which links the pericope with what has preceded . . . the /preceding sayings about discipleship rather serve to illustrate the meaning of what takes place in the stilling of the storm. . . .

Matthew is not only a hander-on of the narrative, but also its oldest exegete, and in fact the first to interpret the journey of the disciples with Jesus in the storm and the stilling of the storm with reference to discipleship, and that means with reference to the little ship of the Church. . . . /

Finally, it should be noted in our context that in Matthew it is not the disciples but the men who, by their astonished question in 8.27, confirm what has happened. Such "choral endings" are a feature of the style especially of paradigmatic narratives in the Gospels. The ["men"] in our passage, however, are obviously intended to represent the men who are encountered by the story through preaching. . . . The setting of the pericope is thus extended, its horizon is widened and from being a description of discipleship in which the disciples of Jesus experience trial and rescue, storm and security, it becomes a call to imitation and discipleship. . . . /

With all due reserve we are justified in drawing out these connecting links which are only hinted at by Matthew, and seeing in the story of the stilling of the storm a description of the dangers against which Jesus warns anyone who over-thoughtlessly pressed to become a disciple: here is, in fact, the Son of Man who has not where to lay his head. . . . In this sense the story becomes a kerygmatic paradigm of the danger and glory of discipleship.

Thus it is by observing carefully how Matthew edits Mark that one can catch sight of the point Matthew is scoring.

Bornkamm stated the programmatic insight of redaction criticism as follows:[18]

> The particular theology and theme of the first three Gospels goes deeper into the substance of them than is generally recognized, and modifies their message not insignificantly, even though over large areas their traditions are the same. . . . the Synoptic writers show – all three and each in his own special way – by their editing and construction, by their selection, inclusion and omission, and not least by what at first sight appears an insignificant, but on closer examination is seen to be a characteristic treatment of the traditional material, that they are by no means mere collectors and handers-on of the tradition, but are also interpreters of it.
>
> The work begun above all in connection with form-critical research must therefore be continued in a new direction. . . . / Undoubtedly J. Schniewind was right when he characterized the Gospels as 'Kerygma of a definite situation and task'. Yet this widely acknowledged insight must be made fruitful to a degree hitherto unattained, and its significance for the understanding of the Gospels must be worked out in particular and in general.

Critical scholarship of the Gospels has thus pointed the direction for "hearing the voice of God." But Moore (p. 7) reads the story as confirming his high christology, "only God can do that," which would be debunked if the story did not actually happen. Yet it is Moore, not the biblical critic, of whom it can be said that "the story is simply not read properly, to see what it has to say" (p. 9). Moore himself has missed the point of the story, to which Bornkamm had drawn attention.

I would agree with the implicit contention that much of today's biblical criticism is superficial (in contrast to "eminent biblical scholars who are also devout christians of profound faith," p. 15, such as Strauss, Schweitzer, Bultmann, Luz, and Bornkamm). Most of its practitioners in recent times are not academically equipped to discuss what their often rather trivial research means philosophically or theologically. Thus they cannot meet halfway the participants in this colloquium for a fruitful discussion. But the converse is also true: Most of the practitioners of philosophical theology or of the philosophy of religion are not academically equipped to discuss exegetically what their views imply in discussion with ongoing biblical criticism. At best, they have read Albert Schweitzer, and so know where things stood in the nineteenth century. But it is simply an invalid caricature of modern scholarship, and a disservice to the lay public, to superimpose that thoroughly discredited view on the twenty-first century.

To present the need in very specific and concrete terms, in the case of Moore himself: Since your mailing address is in Belgium, your presentation of critical biblical scholarship might be assumed to apply to the world-famous biblical critic of Leuven, Belgium, Frans Neirynck, former President of the Society for New Testament Studies, formerly Dean ("Subregent"), now retired Professor of New Testament at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. But obviously he is not in view in the critique, for it is clear how false such a critique would be if applied to him. Hence the question: Why not use someone like him as the pattern of critical exegesis, rather than a straw man? His volumes of collected essays are in English, and invite your attention![19] To discuss his views would have initiated a real discussion between philosophers of religion and biblical scholars. Instead, the paper presents largely invalid, since long-since superceded, rationales for ignoring biblical scholarship.

## A solution?

Moore does suggest a point of departure for a solution (p. 15):

> In order to work towards what I think might be a possible solution of the difficulty, I want to develop a little the concept of a religious reading of the Bible by asking what it might mean for somebody to read the Bible as the word of God addressed to the reader personally.

But he finds a median position between a no-longer-possible literal meaning of critical scholarship ("publicly available meaning") and simply rejecting the Bible as word of God (p. 20), by introducing a hermeneutic that is not adequate:

> I might speak in terms of some other meaning lying hidden behind that publicly available meaning, a meaning that cannot be discovered by biblical criticism but only by prayer, christian living, immersion in the tradition and continued devout reading.
>
> This move does two things. First, it creates a space for talk about a meaning of a text other than that publicly available meaning which is the concern of biblical criticism. For the sake of giving it a name, I will call this the spiritual meaning. Second, it creates a distinction between what the author of the text says to his audience and what God says to the reader. What the author says to his audience may be identified with the publicly available meaning of the text, while what God says is the spiritual meaning. . . . I might find the publicly available meaning uninspiring, not hear the voice of God in it, yet believe that the text is the word of God to me. This may encourage me to seek a meaning in the text other than the publicly available meaning.

What is advocated here is the hermeneutical method of the Dead Sea Scrolls, exemplified in the *pesharim*, commentaries on Old Testaments books, for example the Habakkuk Commentary, which explains that the literal meaning was all that the all-too-human Habakkuk understood, whereas God himself intended more in the text than Habakkuk could grasp, namely the spiritual view of the fulfillment of the words of Habakkuk in the experience of the Qumran sect. This same hermeneutic is also found in the New Testament itself (except that in this case, of course, the spiritual meaning points to the experience of primitive Christianity).

My objection is to the hermeneutical technique proposed for achieving that spiritual meaning: "only by prayer, christian living, immersion in the tradition and continued devout reading." Let me explain with an anecdote told by my doctoral father, Karl Barth, who polemicized against identifying any kind of religious experience with the work of the Spirit: When asked by an American born-again Evangelical when and where he was born again, Barth replied vehemently: Back in the manger at Bethlehem! For according to Barth's theology of the word of God, there was nothing in Barth's own lifestyle to which he could point as unambivalently divine or inspired, no heartwarming moment he could identify as an action of the Spirit, as documentation for the hour of his personal regeneration.

The Barmen Declaration, which Barth wrote, insisted that the Confessing Church never yield on its right to preach freely the Bible as the word of God. But this commitment to the Bible as the word of God was of course claimed by both sides. Most German congregations were not part of the Confessing Church (in spite of the claims they may have made after the war), but stayed loyal to what was euphemistically called the German Church. Pastors in the German Church preached from the Bible every Sunday, and claimed as the word of God the party line which they proclaimed from the pulpit. This state church defrocked pastors if they had Jewish blood, prayed for victory in the war effort (against atheistic Communism, as they no doubt put it), and of course comforted those whose sons had died at Stalingrad, as having given their lives for the cause of Christianity. But their pious religious experience did not validate their message as the word of God. One may also recall that Neville Chamberlain returned from Munich proclaiming a phrase from the Prayer Book, "peace in our time." But that does not mean his Munich cowardice was the word of God, even if he reached this decision with the Prayer Book in his hands or heart.

If then critical scholars are at times right, and those with the traditional Christian lifestyle sometimes wrong, clearly the problem of hermeneutics must be faced more basically: Modern people often quite rightly cannot hear the word of God in the "publicly available meaning which is the concern of biblical criticism." But it may be only a comfortable self-delusion to find assurance in what can be (p. 19) "discovered . . . only by prayer, christian living, immersion in the tradition and continued devout reading." As

a hermeneutical method this is clearly inadequate. For instances could be multiplied where such a traditional Christian lifestyle was quite misleading.

The Pope was able to reject the appeal of St Francis of Assisi for Papal poverty, since the Pope's prophetess had a vision of the soldiers at the foot of the cross casting lots as to who would get Jesus' robe (John 19:24): "'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.' This was to fulfill the scripture, 'They parted my garments among them . . .'" "My garments" proves that the robe was Jesus' personal property, but as a result of his death it came to belong to no one, so the soldiers could cast lots to see who got the booty. Jesus' private property thus attested in the Bible legitimized the Pope's persecution of the Franciscan "spirituals," who insisted on Jesus' complete poverty, and hence on the Pope's. But the Pope's "spiritual meaning," reached by a very correct variety of religious experience, a revelation to a prophetess, did not legitimize it as "word of God." It was the persecuted Franciscan "spirituals" who more nearly spoke the word of God, before they were put to death by the Church. Any view one wishes to advocate can, with the help of a religious halo, be presented as "scriptural," if one is free to read any meaning one wishes into a given text.

This is the danger that Moore's hermeneutic runs, when he concludes (p. 21):

> I can look for another meaning, not just another interpretation of the publicly available meaning, but a meaning that lies "behind" the text. If I find one, I will not be claiming that the publicly available meaning is other than I formerly supposed. My attitude will be rather that the true meaning of the text is not to be found in the publicly available meaning, but in the meaning that I have found for it; and that will be the true meaning because it is understood in that way that the text carries conviction for me.

What concept of truth is involved, in declaring that whatever "carries conviction for me" is "the true meaning"? The Bible is not a rubber-nosed tool useful to gain the support, for example, of the religious right for any policy one wants to advocate. The Bible should be a text, not a pretext! One should have more respect for the Bible (and for oneself as an intellectual) than to claim biblical support for one's religious insights that are not really based on the Bible. A more responsible hermeneutic is needed.

Moore (p. 23, n. 13) finds that "such reinterpretation and 'spiritualisation' is at work already in the Old Testament." For "the law of the ban (Deut 7:1–2)" is of course "alien to modern western religious sentiment," "barbaric." But "one eminent biblical scholar," John Barton, has argued, as Moore points out, that this command of genocide was unknown at the actual time of the conquest, but rather is to be dated to the time of the composition of the text, centuries after the conquest, when genocide had been spiritualized away: "holy war had already become a symbol of religious reformation." But

what is here overlooked is that it is modern biblical scholarship that makes the distinction between the time of the conquest, from which no documentation has survived, and the writing of Deuteronomy, when a much later, perhaps more pacifistic view may, hopefully, have been intended.

In such a case, the correct interpretation of the Bible, the rejection of genocide and ethnic cleansing, is in fact not achieved by “prayer, christian living, immersion in the tradition and continued devout reading,” but (p. 10) by “one eminent biblical scholar.” For it is right-wing pious Rabbis who, as political advisors to Ariel Sharon, insist that all of the Promised Land be incorporated into the State of Israel. Is the orthodox Rabbinate the wrong variety of religious experience? They surely outdo all of us here in prayer, immersion in the tradition and continued devout reading. Their only deficit is that the Rabbis are Jewish. Is this an instance of the opening comment about what is not to be included in the body of the paper?

> It may be that different problems, even different philosophical problems, arise for Jews reading the Jewish Bible today from those that arise for Christians reading the Christian Bible.

But what about Orthodox Christians? How do we interpret Slobodan Milosevic’s position on Kosovo? He appeared before television with Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and thus during the war gained the support of that church not only in Yugoslavia, but also in diaspora congregations as far away as Southern California. But the burning of incense and the chanting of the liturgy in the Serbian language is not a variety of religious experience that accredits, as the voice of God, his orders to carry out the ethnic cleansing of infidels in Kosovo.

Such an invalid hermeneutic is not limited to confessions distant from our own, but to confessions closer at home:

When the crusaders finally captured Jerusalem, they went to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to thank God that the corpses of the infidels were stacked as high as the walls of the ancient city. Down through the centuries, the crusaders have remained an ideal of Christian piety (“Onward, Christian soldiers!”). But at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre they did not hear or speak the word of God.

When the Germans captured Metz in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the Kaiser wrote his wife that very evening, gratefully thanking God for destroying 60,000 of the enemy (French Roman Catholics) and delivering the city into the liberating (Protestant) German hands.

In America, white male vestrymen, elders, and deacons of main-line Protestant denominations are overwhelmingly of one political party, which nonetheless has great difficulty convincing us that its version of “compassionate conservatism” proclaimed by a self-proclaimed born-again Christian really is the voice of God, since its legislation is often so mean-spirited,

especially regarding the poor and underprivileged, for whom Jesus spoke quite differently – the word of God.

Thus, Moore's conclusion is disquieting (p. 22): "What I have been saying here is, in its way, very traditional.... I hope to have shown, however, that there is a way, and a way long familiar to christians,... reading the Bible, to hear the voice of God."

In sum, we should not be naïve about the piety of the church as a safe-proof hermeneutic: "Prayer, christian living, immersion in the tradition and continued devout reading" did not prevent the Prussians from identifying what they devoutly called "the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation" as the kingdom of God, or the Anglican Church from identifying the British Empire on which the sun never set as the kingdom of God. It was only Albert Schweitzer, who, by means of modern biblical criticism, destroyed that identification of nationalism as the kingdom of God, and ended, hopefully once for all, that version of the "word of God."

Bultmann's own hermeneutics translated the mythology of the ancient world into its understanding of existence, which he then brought to expression in the language of the philosophy of the later Heidegger. That philosophy is no more a live option today in philosophical circles than is Claremont's Process Philosophy, or the Life Philosophy of Albert Schweitzer. In fact, most philosophy today is not oriented to what laypersons assume philosophy does, namely provide secular advice for how to live, but rather limits itself to analyzing how we think and talk, or should think and talk. For this reason, it may well be that the categories into which hermeneutics today should seek to translate the Bible, so that it can be heard as the word of God, relate more closely to other disciplines, such as the current preference for sociology. In any case, even though the born-again George W. Bush named Jesus as his favorite philosopher, Jesus was no philosopher at all, but was primarily concerned with exposing inappropriate social relations among humans, which he proposed we restructure in terms of God reigning among us, "the kingdom of God."

## Hearing Jesus' sayings as word of God

Bourke was able to distinguish Matthew's infancy narrative as edifying "midrash... in which the historical element is very slight" from "Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection as events which really happened." Somewhat similarly, Moore (p. 13) distinguishes between Job ("a fictional narrative, a kind of novel") and Matthew, where non-factuality would create a religious problem (p. 13):

> It might, for instance, sometimes be a religiously legitimate and necessary question to ask whether a biblical narrative text is meant by its author to be understood as an account of something that actually happened....

> [Job] . . . But we have no reason to entertain a similar question with regard to the Gospel of St Matthew, which is plainly meant to be taken, on the whole, as an account of actual historical events and has always been so understood. Here, reading the text religiously, accepting it as the word of God, and so finding it convincing, implies believing that it is true, that the events narrated actually did happen. There is simply no room to ask, for instance, whether Jesus really did walk on water or speak to his disciples after his death. . . . If we are inclined for other reasons to think that a given event (say, Jesus walking on the water) did not happen, an explanation of why the author would have said it did happen, whether it happened or not, will strongly reinforce this inclination. The result is that we tend to be suspicious of biblical narrative texts, so that they no longer carry conviction as a religious reading requires. It follows that a critical reading of the Gospel does not sit easily with a religious reading.

Obviously there must be a better solution than Moore's limiting the hearing of the word of God in Matthew, to "the traditional christian way of reading the Bible" (p. 12), as if the credulous, not to say gullible, reading is the reading of faith. That better solution consists in recognizing the mythological nature of the thought world in which Matthew (and antiquity in general) lived, and not being shocked by this fact, or discrediting mythopoeic cultures as a result, but rather developing a hermeneutic which takes their cultural conditioning, and also our own quite different cultural conditioning, seriously, and seeks to restate the point made in one culture in language intelligible in the other culture.

This seems to become most acute, the more central the mythologically formulated point is. Thus Moore seems able to relativize contradictory details of the resurrection stories, but not the literal factuality of the resurrection itself: "somebody did come alive again after being dead three days" (p. 12):

> So important questions about the historical accuracy of Matthew can be raised – important because, apart from anything else, it would seem that the entire christian religion is founded upon a belief that somebody did come alive again after being dead three days. But there are other problems here too, arising from a comparison with other New Testament texts. Even if we accept the possibility that Jesus did rise from the dead, did he tell his disciples to go to Galilee, and did he meet them there, as Matthew asserts?

But when the task is recognized not as eliminating the mythological (declaring to be "false," a "lie," "untrue," "fantastic," etc.), but rather as interpreting it in a non-mythological way, the objective becomes the positive theological task of understanding what the text means in language that does not carry the excess baggage of a *sacrificium intellectus*:[20]

> Thus, negatively, demythologizing is criticism of the mythical world picture insofar as it conceals the real intention of myth. . . .
>
> If its [demythologizing's] point is correctly grasped it seems absurd to concede the appropriateness of demythologizing for certain peripheral statements in the New Testament, only to contest it for the central statements. As if the problem were not then really urgent! The motive underlying this distinction is clearly anxiety that demythologizing the central statements would lead to abandoning talk about God's act and about a salvation occurrence that takes places in history. But the assumption that such talk must of necessity be mythological talk is to be disputed.

My own work as a critical biblical scholar has moved from the Barthian theology of the word of God and Bultmann's kerygmatic theology to the reconstruction of the Sayings Gospel Q, a collection of sayings of Jesus used in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke,[21] but as such not included in the canon of the New Testament. It was first rediscovered in 1838 by a professor of philosophy [!] in Leipzig, Christian Hermann Weiße,[22] who, though a philosopher, practised biblical criticism as well as any New Testament scholar of his day. This intellectual trajectory on my part from the (Pauline) kerygma to (Jesus') Sayings Gospel Q, as where one might hope today to hear the word of God, was sketched toward the end of my address at the Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense on 25 July 2000. There I tried to state the message of Jesus as found in the Sayings Gospel Q in such a way that one who hearkened might hear the word of God (in spite of the fact that this is the work of a biblical critic, rather than resulting from the variety of religious experience that Moore says would lead to such a desirable outcome).[23] Let me quote that transition I made from the kerygma to the sayings of Jesus in Q:

> The kerygmatic development, via Mark's passion narrative and then the infancy narratives and resurrection appearances of Matthew and Luke, had completely replaced the sayings of Jesus and even the "public ministry" itself, already by the time of the Apostles' Creed in the Second Century CE. For one listens in vain to hear anything about the "public ministry" and the sayings of Jesus in what we all know by heart: ". . . conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven . . .". It was this credal development, excluding the "public ministry" and all sayings of Jesus, which determined what was canonized, namely Gospels culminating in Jesus' death and resurrection, which validated Mark and John, even though they lacked birth narratives. The mutual acceptance of Jewish and Gentile Christianity at the "ecumenical" Jerusalem Council had long since broken

down, with the successful Gentile Christianity rejecting the unsuccessful Jewish Christianity as heretical, in effect no longer Christian. Thus the exclusion of its oldest Gospel from the canon was inevitable.

As the modern secularization and commercialization of Christmas and Easter make clear to thinking Christians, what is at issue is not the trappings, but the substance. Perhaps Q does have the substance of the kerygma, if indeed that substance is more than angels singing carols and moving stones, more than pie in the sky by-and-by. According to Q, the substance is that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, God is here, acting for our good in our lives, taking care of us, and sending us out to care for others, thereby giving our lives ultimate meaning.

Let me clarify the point by reference to a similar point Rudolf Bultmann made on behalf of the kerygma, but which applies more directly to Q:[24]

> It is often said, most of the time in criticism, that according to my interpretation of the kerygma Jesus has risen in the kerygma. I accept this proposition. It is entirely correct, assuming it is properly understood. It presupposes that the kerygma itself is an eschatological event, and it expresses the fact that Jesus is really present in the kerygma, that it is *his* word that involves the hearer in the kerygma. If that is the case, then all speculation concerning the modes of being of the risen Jesus, all the narratives of the empty tomb and all the Easter legends, whatever elements of historical fact they may contain, and as true as they may be in their symbolic form, are of no consequence. To believe in the Christ present in the kerygma is the meaning of the Easter faith.

The truly amazing thing about the Q people is that, in spite of it all, namely Jesus' horrible death, which was more than enough to cancel out all his reassurances about God as a loving Father caring for his people, they turned right around and proclaimed it all over again (just as Jesus had done after the horrible death of John), as what Jesus himself was still saying, as true as ever, in their proclamation in his name.

The Q people, in their central mission of proclaiming the sayings of Jesus, were practicing their faith in his resurrection, even though resurrection language is not theirs, but ours.

I then summarized the message of Jesus, according to the Sayings Gospel Q, in a way that I hoped could be heard as the word of God in one's concrete living (which is where God speaks):[25]

After being baptized by John (Q 3:21–22), and resisting the temptation to resume a worldly existence (Q 4:1–13), Jesus went back to Nazara (Q 4:16), apparently only long enough to break with his past and move to

Capernaum (Q 7:1). This became the base camp for a circuit that initially may have comprised Capernaum, well below sea level on the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee, Chorazin, secluded in the mountains behind it, and Bethsaida, just across the Jordan to the east, in the safer territory of Philip (Q 10:13–15).

What did he do on such a circuit? He set out without any human security. He had no backpack for provisions, no money at all—penniless—, no sandals, no stick—helpless and defenseless (Q 10:4). This hardly makes sense in terms of the history of religions. His was neither the getup of his precursor John the Baptist, nor a Cynic garb.[26] But it does make sense in terms of his message, as echoed in the other archaic Q collections: One is not anxiety-laden about food and clothing, any more than the ravens and lilies would seem to be (Q 12:22b–30). Rather one orients oneself exclusively to God reigning (Q 12:31). One prays to God to reign, and thus to provide bread (Q 11:2b–3). One trusts God as a benevolent Father to know one's needs for bread and fish and to provide them (Q 11:9–10), trusting that God will not, instead, give a stone or snake, but will in fact, in this regard as in others, reign as a benevolent Father (Q 11:11–13). That kind of message of radical trust calls for that kind of radical lack of an alternative, physical security, if it is to be validated as credible in actual reality.

In the case of the Mission Instructions, it is striking that Jesus did not advocate going to the local Synagogue (which would at the time seem to have been rather non-existent in Galilee in terms of architecture), nor address masses on a Mount or on a Plain or by the seaside. (No location is given for the Inaugural Sermon, Q 6:20–49, which in fact seems less meant as an actual scene than as the basic core collection of the sayings of Jesus.)[27] Rather the Mission Instructions were oriented to houses (Q 10:5, 7).[28] One walked from farm to farm, from hamlet to hamlet, from house to house, and there knocked at the door to bring attention to one's presence. To gain admission, one called out: Shalom! (Q 10:5b) If admitted by the head of the household, and thereby accorded the normal hospitality, one designated him as "son of peace" (Q 10, 6a), since God's peace had been bestowed as "performative language" in the Shalom of the opening greeting. If turned away at the door, God's peace left along with Jesus or his disciple (Q 10:6b), to be offered again at the next house where one knocked. But what took place in a house that did take one in was understood as God reigning. This was in fact expressly said to the household while in their home: "The kingdom of God has reached unto you" (Q 10:9b).

God's reign involved the hospitality itself, which was accepted at face value as God's gift, and eaten as offered, without ascetic dietary restrictions such as John and other "holy men" practiced at that time. This makes it

clear that the drastic absence of gear for the journey was not due to an ascetic ideology, but rather was meant as demonstrative documentation for one's trust exclusively in God for such human needs. For, as the other archaic collections make clear, the food offered and eaten in the house was in reality God already knowing one's need and providing for it, as God does for the ravens; it was the answer to prayer for God to reign by giving a day's ration of bread and not a stone.

The needs of the household itself are comparably met: The sick are healed, with the explanation that this in turn is God's reign reaching even to them (Q 10:9). For the healing is done by God's finger, which is God reigning (Q 11:20), irrespective of whether the human involved is Jesus or someone else (Q 11:19). Indeed, it was understood not as human action, but as God's action.

All of this must have been explained by means of such sayings, and by means of the Prayer itself (Q 11:2b–4). In this way "workers" were enlisted for the mission (Q 10:2), and in the process of time such "worthy" houses (Mt 10:13) might well become "safe houses", where workers knew they would be taken in. Indeed they might well develop into what Paul called "house churches" (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Phlm 1–2; Col 4:15). The itinerant "worker" (Q 10:2,7) and the sedentary "son of peace" (Q 10:6a) would be primitive designations for what might evolve from their functions into what we today would call church offices.

This is not to say that Jesus' intent was, in effect, after all to found the church, with which his message of God reigning has all too readily been identified. But he did assume that God's peace could reign in households that would thus transcend the power of evil over their lives and become mutually supportive of other such households. This understanding does not exclude the "eschatological" dimension of God reigning, but brings to expression the concrete reality Jesus envisaged in his message about God reigning already. Thus Q makes clear that Jesus was involved in doing something in Galilee, that he did in effect have a "public ministry" there.

The decision of a member of such a household to become an itinerant worker might well not take place easily. Not only did Jesus leave home, Nazara, and in Q had no further relations with his family. There are even sayings explicitly calling for the disruption of family ties: Jesus came to divide son against father, daughter against her mother, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law (Q 12:53). To become a disciple, one must hate father and mother, son and daughter (Q 14:26). What could be more drastic than to hate one's family and love one's enemies! Even if this "hating" was understood euphemistically as "loving" Jesus more than family members (Mt 10:37), in any case it meant abandoning the family and renouncing one's responsibilities at home.

> Central to the way of life that Jesus envisaged was indeed to love one's enemies (Q 6:27). For this, amplified by praying for one's persecutors (Q 6:28), is accorded the supreme value of being what makes one a son of God, God-like, since God raises his sun and showers his rain on the bad as well as on the good (Q 6:35). The title "son of God" did not begin just as a christological title, borrowed from its usage as an honorific title for heroes in the Hellenistic-Roman world, but, like the title "son of peace," began as a designation for those thus committed to the Jesus movement. This was not merely a pious well-wishing sentiment, but meant in practice turning the other cheek, giving the shirt off one's back, going the second mile, lending without ever asking for anything back (Q 6:29–30).
>
> Q was not easy at all: One must not fear those who can only kill the body (Q 12:4). Rather one must lose one's life (Q 17:33), indeed take up one's cross (Q 14:27). Enlistments must have been rare (Q 10:2), and the drop-out rate must have been devastating. It is not surprising that in such a movement the salt of resolve lost its strength and had to be thrown out (Q 14:34–35). For all practical purposes, the Q movement did die out. But its remnant merged with the Gentile Christian church under the leadership of the Evangelist "Matthew," whereby its text, the Sayings Gospel Q, was rescued, and with it the most reliable information we have about the historical Jesus.

The hermeneutical task of hearing the word of God is to be carried out in encountering such sayings of Jesus, rather than by replacing their public meaning with some pious meaning "hidden" (p. 19) in the *mythologoumena* found in the canonical Gospels and the creed:[29]

> Jesus was not a perfectionist. It was first Matthew who declared (5:48): "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Jesus' ethic was not built on the judgmentalism of a righteous God, such as is reflected in the Woes against the scribes and Pharisees of Matt 23. Rather it is the pity, the forgiveness, the even-handedness of God in dealing with humans that was Jesus' role model for how humans should act toward each other. For there is an explicit correlation between Jesus' teaching about God and Jesus' ethic (Q 6, 36–38):
>
>> Be full of pity, just as your Father is full of pity. Do not pass judgment, so you are not judged. For with what judgment you pass judgment, you will be judged. And with the measurement you use to measure out, it will be measured out to you.
>
> Here Jesus explicitly appeals to God's pity, as the model to be followed by God's people. This he does again and again: He expected a caring heavenly Father to "cancel our debts for us, as we too have cancelled for those in debt to us" (Q 11, 4). The Q people are called upon to forgive

daily, just as they expected from God daily forgiveness. "If seven times a day [your brother] sins against you, also seven times shall you forgive him" (Q 17, 4). And the central appeal of Jesus to love one's enemies is based on God's conduct (Q 6, 35):

> Love your enemies, and pray for those persecuting you, so that you may become children of your Father, for he raises his sun on bad and good and rains on the just and unjust.

To the Q people, nothing was as important as Jesus' revelation of God. It was to score this point that they present Jesus making use of the solemn Hodayot formula of Qumran, to thank God most explicitly: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for you hid these things from sages and the learned, and disclosed them to children" (Q 10, 21). For "no one knows the Father except the Son, and to whomever the Son chooses to reveal him" (Q 10, 22).

But what one learns by thus knowing God is that one is to be kind, forgiving, compassionate, patient, for it is only because God acts in precisely that way to us that we can survive in his presence.

## Notes

1. Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings* (ed. Schubert M. Ogden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). Bultmann's proposal was first presented as a lecture in 1941. His concern at the time was that the necessity of the Confessing Church (to which he belonged) to close its ranks against the Nazi threat would lead to an untenable kind of neo-orthodoxy.
2. Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology*, pp. 1–2.
3. Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology*, pp. 2–3.
4. Ibid.
5. Thomas Jefferson, *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth: Extracted textually from the Gospels in Greek, Latin, French, and English* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904).
6. Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology*, pp. 12, 14.
7. Ibid.
8. It has become customary in the circles of New Testament scholarship to use Lukan chapter and verse numbers when quoting Q.
9. Christoph Friedrich von Ammon, *Die Geschichte des Lebens Jesu mit steter Rücksicht auf die vorhandenen Quellen*, 1842–47.
10. Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarums to Wrede* (ed. James M. Robinson; New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 105.
11. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p. 103.
12. Myles M. Bourke, "The Literary Genus of Matthew 1–2", *CBQ* 22 (1960), pp. 160–75, esp., p. 175. See my essay, "Scripture and Theological Method: A Protestant Study in *Sensus Plenior*", *CBQ* 27 (1965), pp. 6–27.
13. Ulrich Luz's 4-volume German commentary on Matthew is in the EKK series and is being translated into English in the Hermeneia commentary series of Fortress

Press. See already his *Matthew 1–7*: *A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), *Matthew 8–20* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), and also his book (based on the Sprunt Lectures of 1990 at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, VA): *Matthew in History: Interpretation, Influence, and Effects* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

14. James M. Robinson, "The Matthean Trajectory from Q to Mark", in *Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Bible and Culture: Essays in Honor of Hans Dieter Betz* (ed. Adela Yarbro Collins; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), pp. 122–54, esp., pp. 143–44.
15. Ulrich Luz, "Die Wundergeschichten von Mt 8–9", in *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament: Essays in Honor of E. Earle Ellis for his 60th Birthday*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Otto Betz (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans and Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1987), pp. 149–65.
16. See Luz's effort to cope with his resultant conclusion that Matthew invented unhistorical healing stories, which might seem to question Matthew's integrity: "Fiktivität und Traditionstreue im Matthäusevangelium im Lichte griechischer Literatur", *ZNW* 84 (1993), pp. 153–77.
17. Günther Bornkamm, "The Stilling of the Storm in Matthew", in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (eds Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held; London: SCM, and Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), pp. 52–7, first published as "Die Sturmstillung im Matthäus-Evangelium," in *Wort und Dienst, Jahrbuch der Theologischen Schule Bethel* (1948), pp. 49–54.
18. Bornkamm, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, pp. 11–12.
19. See the 45-page "Bibliographia Academia F. Neirynck" by G. Van Belle, in *The Four Gospels 1992*: *Festschrift Frans Neirynck* (3 vols, eds F. Van Segbroeck, C. M. Tuckett, G. Van Belle, and J. Verheyden (2 vols; Leuven: University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 1992) 1, pp. 3–47.
20. Bultmann, "On the Problem of Demythologizing" (1952), in *New Testament Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, pp. 95–30, esp. pp. 99–100. In footnote 12 (p. 126) he lists Werner Georg Kümmel, Helmut Thielicke, and Amos N. Wilder as persons who have suggested the position he here criticizes.
21. *The Critical Edition of Q: Synopsis including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas with English, German, and French Translations of Q and Thomas* (eds James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann, and John S. Kloppenborg; Minneapolis: Fortress, and Leuven: Peeters, 2000).
22. Christian Hermann Weiße, *Die evangelische Geschichte kritisch und philosophisch bearbeitet* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 2 vols, 1838).
23. James M. Robinson, "The Critical Edition of Q and the Study of Jesus" (BETL; Leuven: Peeters, forthcoming 2001; typescript pp. 10–12).
24. Rudolf Bultmann, "The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus", in *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ* (eds Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1964) pp. 15–42, esp. p. 42. The essay was originally an address at the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences in 1960.
25. Robinson, "The Critical Edition of Q and the Study of Jesus" (typescript pp. 31–34).
26. James M. Robinson, "Building Blocks in the Social History of Q", in *Reimagining Christian Origins: A Colloquium Honoring Burton L. Mack* (eds Elizabeth A. Castelli and Hal Taussig; Valley Forge, PA, Trinity Press International, 1996), pp. 87–112, esp. pp. 87–90.
27. It is a remarkable attestation for Matthew's familiarity with the tradition in which he obviously stood that he knew to build into the core collection of the Inaugural Sermon other archaic collections that also comprise the core of Q, so as to produce

the Sermon on the Mount (with the exception of the Mission Instructions themselves, which did not fit that setting). It is thus appropriate that the Sermon on the Mount has been sensed as this core from time to time, as a surrogate for Q itself, beginning with Francis of Assisi, and re-emerging in Tolstoy, Ghandi, and Martin Luther King.

28. James M. Robinson, *From Safe House to House Church. From Q to Matthew, in Das Ende der Tage und die Gegenwart des Heils. Begegnungen mit dem Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt*: Festschrift für Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn zum 65. Geburtstag (eds Michael Becker and Wolfgang Fenske; AGJU 44; Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1999), pp. 183–99.
29. Robinson, "The Critical Edition of Q and the Study of Jesus" (typescript pp. 31–34).

# Voices in Discussion

*D.Z. Phillips*

*A*: I would like to begin by thanking Professor Phillips for asking to write the opening chapter for this conference. It was a great pleasure to respond as best I could to that invitation.

I must also thank Professor Robinson for his vigorous reply to my chapter. But I have to say that, unfortunately, most of the energy exhibited by his reply is misdirected. Indeed, it seems to me that Robinson has got hold of the wrong end of the stick in a major way. On almost every fundamental point, he either ignores or misconstrues what I say in my chapter. I can only assume that this is because I have expressed myself with more than my usual obscurity. If this is so, I must apologize to him and to you all. But Robinson's reply so radically misrepresents what I was trying to say that I feel I must devote my remarks today largely to correcting his thorough misunderstanding of my chapter.

I cannot deal with all the points Robinson raises in criticizing my chapter; some of them, though interesting, are of theological rather philosophical interest and should not loom too large in our discussion, which is often supposed to be philosophical in nature. One could debate, for instance, the use of the miracle stories in the Gospels or the merits of the Q hypothesis, but this would take us too far into areas that are broadly theological rather than philosophical. I will concentrate instead on two or three fundamental misapprehensions of my chapter that seem to me apparent in Robinson's response.

On p. 4, Robinson quotes me as saying:

> We – and by 'we' I mean modern (or even post-modern), educated, cultured western liberals – inhabit a thought-world vastly different from that of the ancient near east; does this distance itself create any problems? It is with this kind of question that I will be concerned.

He then goes on directly to say:

> Moore (p. 4) has in view, and opposes, "an academic, critical study of the Bible apparently divorced from religious concerns," which hence "has treated the Bible in a new way, simply as any other ancient text."

Now, it is true that I pose the question whether our intellectual distance from the biblical world creates any problems for us when we read the Bible. I should perhaps here underline the fact that I make a very restrictive assumption about who "we" are. Not all inhabitants of the modern world are western liberal intellectuals. The questions I go on to articulate may perhaps mean nothing at all to large numbers of people. They are questions which may have an importance for people participating in a certain culture. I certainly do not mean to imply, in posing these questions, that those for whom they are not important are somehow inferior. But, given that restriction, nowhere do I say, in posing this general question, that I "have in view," still less that I oppose, anything that might be called a critical reading of the Bible. Nowhere in my chapter do I say that I oppose modern critical study of the Bible, and nowhere do I imply it. As a matter of fact, and for what it's worth, I personally do not oppose modern critical study of the Bible; I studied and taught a critical approach to the Bible, albeit at a humble level, for somewhat over ten years. I have no idea where Robinson's perception of my chapter could come from, but it certainly seems to have coloured his reaction to it. I can only say that it is no part of my purpose to oppose biblical criticism, or indeed any practice at all, in my chapter. My aim is rather to describe as accurately as I can one or two areas of difficulty and, towards the end, to describe certain ways of reading the Bible which are traditional and which may, as I suggest, show us one possible way out of a difficulty.

Allied to this first fundamental misunderstanding is that which sees everything I say in my chapter as concerned with biblical criticism. So Robinson complains on p. 30 of his response:

> Moore's presentation of critical scholarship is a caricature, and, in the degree of crudeness presented here, cannot be documented in the biblical scholarship of today (in spite of its all-too-common superficiality). His is the only presentation written in our lifetime, of which I am aware, that states "that the narrator was lying or mistaken" (pp. 5–6), "the narrative is false," "untrue" (p. 6).

Anybody reading Robinson would imagine that I am attributing to 'the biblical scholarship of today' the view that a certain unspecified biblical narrative is false, or that the one who constructed the narrative was mendacious. However, if we follow up the correct page references that Robinson gives to my chapter, we discover that no such thing is the case. That section of my chapter has nothing, whatever, to do with

modern biblical criticism. I cannot understand why Robinson thinks it has. Nowhere here do I so much as mention biblical criticism. Such remarks as I have on biblical criticism are reserved to a later section, headed 'Biblical Criticism'. The section to which Robinson refers, headed 'Problems with Miracles' seeks rather to explore a specific kind of difficulty we might encounter reading biblical miracle stories, a difficulty arising from the fundamental role of science in our culture.

Referring to the same passage of my chapter, Robinson expostulates (p. 32):

> All Moore seems to know enough about to repudiate in the history of biblical scholarship is the biblical criticism of two centuries ago, which was so ridiculed by David Friedrich Strauss and Albert Schweitzer as to be excluded from polite society, and so would be a disgrace to any biblical scholar today who advocated it. For nowhere in modern biblical scholarship will one find the explanation of the walking on the water that Moore ascribes to biblical criticism (p. 6)

It is no doubt true that nowhere in modern biblical scholarship will one find the explanation to which Robinson refers; at least, I hope it is. But it is also true that nowhere in my chapter will one find that I ascribe any such explanation to any biblical critic, or to biblical criticism in general. Here again we find at work the misapprehension that my chapter is somehow concerned with attacking biblical criticism; it is not. In the section of it to which Robinson refers here, I am simply not talking about biblical criticism at all.

Robinson does not actually take seriously the questions and arguments I seek to introduce in this section, or indeed in any other of my chapter. This is no doubt what my arguments deserve in general, but is nevertheless a pity in this particular case. Had he done so, it might have become clear that the remarks which he quotes and of which he so disapproves belong to an initial way of posing the difficulty with which I am concerned, a way which I finally reject. My final position, expressed on pp. 7–8 of my chapter, is not that biblical critics hold such and such views, but that the real difficulty with many of the miracle stories is that they embody a conception of the world as subject to authority. It still seems to me that there is a genuine difficulty here for us when we read the Bible today, though one perhaps capable of resolution. Certainly, nothing Robinson says suggests otherwise.

In p. 9 of my chapter I introduce an argument designed to suggest that there is a tension, even an incompatibility, between modern biblical criticism and a religious reading of the Bible. While, once again, Robinson does not actually engage with the argument, which he quotes substantially on p. 32 of his reply, he does react strongly to it:

> The inference is inescapable: The church would be much better off if its schools of theology would refrain and desist from modern biblical scholarship.

Robinson does not explain why he thinks this an inescapable inference; I cannot see why it should be. Robinson's willingness to draw this conclusion and implicitly to attribute it to me is no doubt influenced by his description of my argument as a 'repudiation' of biblical scholarship (ibid.). He is no doubt easily persuaded that it is such by his false conviction that my entire chapter somehow constitutes an argument against biblical scholarship. But in reality the argument to which he refers is no such thing. It is simply an argument designed to suggest an incompatibility between modern biblical criticism and a religious reading of the Bible, as Robinson's own quotation of it says explicitly. Furthermore, the following section of my chapter shows that I resist this suggestion of incompatibility by attempting to introduce the concept of what I call a 'spiritual' reading of the Bible. (The term 'spiritual' is admittedly not a happy one; I would be grateful for suggestions for improvements, if indeed the idea behind it should turn out to have any value.)

There is a further important misunderstanding apparent in Robinson's reaction to this attempt. He finds my suggestion seriously inadequate, which indeed it may well be, but not for the reasons he proposes, for I am not suggesting what he thinks I am. He gives us (pp. 40–42) a series of historical and contemporary examples, briefly sketched, in which my proposal is allegedly shown to justify all sorts of nastiness, and is thereby proved to be a seriously inadequate hermeneutical principle.

I entirely agree with this conclusion; my only puzzle is why it should be thought to undermine my suggestion, for I do not propose any hermeneutical principle at all here, still less one that I set up in opposition to critical study of the Bible, as Robinson seems to think. Let me recall what I actually said in my paper (p. 19):

> I have said that, if I find a text uninspiring, I might still accept it as the word of God, saying that I have not yet understood the meaning of the text. Here 'the meaning of the text' may refer to what Barton calls the 'publicly available meaning', the meaning biblical scholars seek to establish. But it is more likely that it is precisely this publicly available meaning that I do understand and find dull or repulsive. The conviction that it is nevertheless the word of God may lead me to seek some other interpretation, some other meaning, of the text. I might, for instance, want to speak in terms of some other meaning lying hidden behind that publicly available meaning, a meaning that cannot be discovered by biblical criticism but only by prayer, Christian living, immersion in the tradition and continued devout reading.

I tried to make it clear here, obviously without success, that this whole idea of a 'spiritual meaning' only comes into play as what might enable me to accept a given text as the word of God, in the case where I want to accept it as the word of God, even when I can find nothing in the publicly available meaning of the text, perhaps as established by biblical criticism, that speaks to me. It is thus of very limited application, and presupposes that biblical criticism has already done its work. There is thus no question of setting up any hermeneutical principle which would bypass biblical criticism or come into conflict with it, as Robinson seems to think. Robinson does nothing to indicate that any of the cases he cites fall within this restricted category, and there is no reason to believe that any of them do. I had hoped my meaning would be made reasonably clear by the examples I cite, 1 Cor 9:9–11 and Genesis 1. Robinson does not engage with these.

The fundamental error here is to think that I am attempting to set up a hermeneutical principle at all; that would be a theological exercise, and I am engaged in philosophy. My aim is to describe one possible reaction of a person (I speak in the first person) to a biblical text which he finds uninspiring, a reaction which goes together with his calling that text 'the word of God', a reaction which gives a sense to his use of that locution. My remarks are intended as a contribution to a philosophical understanding of what it is to call a text 'the word of God'. They are not a theological thesis concerning how the Bible should be read. My aim is to describe, not to advocate. So I make no claim at all for the theological acceptability of any biblical interpretations that may emerge from such a procedure as I allude to. I do claim in the succeeding paragraphs of my paper, however, that my remarks here do give us a way of understanding traditional Christian practice, a practice that is in principle still open to people today. I also claim that this way of reading the Bible, the search for a meaning below the surface of the text, may help us resolve an apparent tension between a critical and a religious reading of the Bible. Nothing that Robinson says indicates that this claim is false, and I continue to believe it is correct.

Robinson radically misunderstands my paper, then, and has no philosophical light to shed upon it. But, on a more positive note, it seems to me that Robinson and I have a great deal more in common that one might at first think. He makes much of Bultmann's project of demythologisation. From my point of view, such a project can be seen as to an extent a response to difficulties of the kind I try to identify in my paper. Bultmann appears to identify the presence of mythology in narrative biblical texts where the narrative is "incredible to men and women today" (p. 26 of Robinson's paper; though Bultmann is surely wrong in thinking that we find such talk incredible because to us the mythical world picture is a thing of the past; rather, it is a thing of the past for us

because we find mythological talk incredible). I tried to explore some reasons for our finding such narratives incredible in my section on miracles. Bultmann is determined, despite such stories' being incredible, to find the word of God in them. His project of demythologisation can thus be seen as an instance of what I have called a search for the spiritual meaning of texts. However, it seems to me that there are difficulties with the particular line Bultmann takes, as expounded by Robinson, and I will end these remarks by picking out a few of them.

First, Bultmann says: "The decisive question, therefore, is whether precisely this salvation event, which is presented in the New Testament as a mythical occurrence, or whether the person of Jesus, which is viewed in the New Testament as a mythical person, is nothing but mythology" (Robinson, p. 27). He seems to claim here, not that *we read* the salvation event presented in the New Testament as mythical, and so not factual (it is not clear from Robinson's quotation what is the precise event being referred to), but that the *New Testament* actually *presents* it as mythical, and so not factual. That is surely not the case. The problem is that people in the ancient world were ready to believe certain things to be true which we are not ready to believe.

Second, Bultmann says: "contemporary Christian proclamation is faced with the question whether, when it demands faith from men and women, it expects them to acknowledge this mythical world picture of the past. If this is impossible, it then has to face the question whether the New Testament proclamation has a truth that is independent of the mythical world picture, in which case it would be the task of theology to demythologize the Christian proclamation" (Robinson, p. 26). The notion of a world picture has resonances, maybe positive ones, for anybody who has read Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, and it might be interesting to explore these. But we surely have to ask not only whether the New Testament proclamation has a truth which is independent of the mythical world picture, but whether, if so, that truth is the *same* truth as that proclaimed in and through that world picture. How can we know that we have, as it were, correctly translated from one, mythical, world picture to another, non-mythical one? What are the criteria of correctness here? What sense can we make of the notion of translation in this context? Robinson says in this connexion (p. 30):

> it is the *point* of the kerygma which is indeed the core of Christian faith, to be heard as the voice of God and responded to with the commitment of faith. But the hermeneutical problem for us who live in a postmythopoetic world is to hear that *point*, and not be distracted by the mythological formulations of that point, as if the kerygma consisted of impossible historical facts whose factuality one simply has to swallow, if one does not want to brand them as 'untrue.'

But can we really so neatly disentangle the point from its formulation? How will we know when we have disentangled the true point the formulation expresses? How can we be sure *a priori* that elements we assign to the formulation do not belong, for the New Testament (or indeed for the Old) to the point?

Third, with this is connected a difficulty with another of Robinson's own remarks. He asks rhetorically (p. 30): "If primitive Christians thought the world was flat, would there really be no hope of 'hearing the voice of God' in what they wrote?" But this is in fact a real question. Wouldn't the answer depend on the centrality to primitive Christianity of the belief that the world is flat? We can as it happens easily answer Robinson's question affirmatively because the flatness of the world obviously plays little or no part in Christian belief, either primitive or modern. But suppose it had been important to early Christian faith, or even central, to believe that the world is flat? Would not this have to raise genuine questions for us about the truth of early Christian faith? If we could continue to hear the word of God in what they wrote in general, could we hope to hear it in the assertion that the world is flat? If so, how? That is, are there not questions to be asked about the centrality of certain biblical beliefs which we may regard as mythical – centrality not, indeed, to our faith (if we have any) but to the faith of the biblical communities? We cannot assume that because certain beliefs which we regard as mythical are inessential to us, they were similarly inessential to earlier Christians; so we cannot assume that if we jettison those beliefs, we are left with essentially the same faith. And this in turn raises, of course, the question what *counts* as having essentially the same faith.

Fourth, what is supposed to be important in Bultmann's approach, as in that of the redaction critics, as opposed to that of earlier criticism, is that incredible stories are not simply to be jettisoned; they are to be interpreted. They are there for a reason, they have a meaning, they have a point. Quite so; this is an important thing to say. But if all claims to factuality are removed as mythological, why should we *take* the point? I think the Gospel miracle stories are often designed to indicate the divine status of Jesus; Robinson does not. Whatever the truth here, they are surely designed to show *something*: they have a point, and as we saw earlier, it is for Robinson the point that counts. But if what is related in these stories, or something recognizably like it, did not in fact occur, or if the stories do not intend to convey that it did occur, how do these stories make their point? What do they show apart from the ability of people to make up such stories? Robinson quotes Ulrich Luz as saying that Matthew slanted his stories (p. 35); but slanting is quite different from actually making up out of nothing. On pp. 35–6 Robinson gives us Luz's account of how Matthew rearranged and retold healing stories already present in the tradition. And what was the reason for

this? – "What could have motivated the conservative Matthew to such drastic measures? His need to prove Q's case that Jesus is the Coming One!" But, of course, unless the events Matthew describes, or events much like them, actually occurred, Matthew proves nothing at all about Jesus; he proves only that he, Matthew, is capable of retelling and rearranging stories. What might show something about Jesus is that he did certain things, like walking on the water and raising the dead; it shows nothing at all about Jesus that Matthew says he did them. Unless Matthew gives us the impression that these events actually occurred, he cannot give us the impression that he has proved anything about Jesus in recounting them. And then the question arises whether the impression is correct or not.

There are thus serious flaws in what Bultmann proposes, if Robinson's presentation of it is accurate. Questions of the ordinary, simple truth of biblical narratives cannot be dismissed so lightly, and we are still left, it seems to me, with the questions I tried – evidently unsuccessfully – to raise in my paper.

*B*: Since D.Z. Phillips, toward the end of his paper, comments on my paper, a response to those comments may be helpful:

A somewhat relevant little inaccuracy occurs in reporting my view: "Robinson finds the real Gospel message in the Sayings Gospel Q, which is free of miracles." This is factually not correct and hence not my view. Let me quote Q on miracles. Q 11:14: "And he cast out a demon which made a person mute. And once the demon was cast out, the mute person spoke." Q 7:7: "But say a word, and let my boy be healed." Q 10:13: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles performed in you had taken place in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, in sackcloth and ashes." Q 7:22: "Go report to John what you hear and see: The blind regain their sight and the lame walk around, the skin-diseased are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised, and the poor are evangelized." Since Q is basically a collection of Jesus' sayings, it is striking how much prominence it gives to healing miracles. One should not assume Q is preferred because it avoids the problem of miracles.

Phillips reports: "Can miracles be a sign for our times? Robinson's answer seems to be that they can if we search for the theological truth in them. This truth will only be found if we realize that the miracles are not to be understood literally. They were part of a mythological mode of expression. To arrive at theological truth for today, however, we have to realize also that that mythological mode of expression is no longer ours, and we must not be diverted from theological truth by concentrating on it." So far, so good. But then he queries: "My first difficulty concerns Robinson's distinction between the literal and theological meanings of miracles. Robinson criticizes Moore's distinction between the public and

the spiritual meanings of miracles . . . But how different is Robinson's distinction between the literal and the theological?" The difference is one of method. The method advocated by Moore seems to consider any subjective interpretation, done in conjunction with fitting religious practices, as valid. Bultmann's method is that of demythologizing, an effort to bring to expression in modern language what the myth means in a given instance. This can be discussed, debated, and improved, in a scholarly discussion, whereas Moore's procedure seems to invite no more than respect for the other person's religious experience.

Phillips goes on: "It is unclear to me whether Robinson would regard the belief that the inexplicable events associated with miracles actually occurred, as a denigration of the biblical text." My dictionary defines denigrate as "casting aspersions on," "defaming." I would not accuse believers in the literalness of the miracle stories in antiquity, and similar moderns not influenced in this regard by the Enlightenment, of denigrating the biblical text. They have just mistaken a mythological formulation for a factual assertion and to that extent created a problem for themselves, much like Peter jumping out of the boat into the water and almost drowning (Matt 14:28–32), or moderns waiting out the end of the world last New Year's Eve or next New Year's Eve. They are sincere, are trying to honor the Bible, but simply fail to understand myth as a non-literal way to bring truth to expression. (It is not a matter of the Bible not telling the truth, being "false," "mistaken," "untrue," "lying," "deception," and other such idioms used by Moore.)

Phillips goes on: "What, on Robinson's view, is the relation between the miracle[s] and the theological truths he thinks can be found in them?" This is often an exegetical question, and can vary from text to text. To illustrate: In the Healing of the Paralytic (Mark 2:1–12), the forgiveness of sins has been secondarily interpolated into the healing story itself, shifting the point away from Jesus as a faith healer, so as to answer the scribe's rhetorical question: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus' reply uses the miracle to prove Jesus can forgive sins: "Why do you question thus in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, Your sins are forgiven, or to say, Rise, take up your pallet and walk?" Thus Mark's theological point in telling this miracle story is not to prove Jesus to be a miracle worker, but to prove Jesus can legitimately forgive sins. Matthew 9:8 shifts the theological point to document also the church's legitimate ability to forgive sin: "When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men."

In my paper I reported on Myles Bourke's interpretation of the Matthean infancy narratives not as factual, but as "a midrash of deep theological insight, in which Jesus appears as the true Israel and the new Moses (thus containing the theme of the entire gospel)." And

I reported on Ulrich Luz's interpretation of the miracle stories of Matt 8–9 being intended to prove Jesus to be the "One to Come" prophecied by John (Q 3:16), by showing he performed the miracles prophecied in Isaiah (Q 7:22). And I reported on Günther Bornkamm's interpretation of the Stilling of the Storm in Matt 8:19–22, 23–27 "with reference to discipleship, and that means with reference to the little ship of the Church," "a call to imitation and discipleship," "a kerygmatic paradigm of the danger and glory of discipleship."

Such statements distinguishing "between the literal and the theological," that is to say, between "the miracle and the theological truths he [Robinson] thinks can be found in them," are not based, as Moore would seem to imply in his spiritual vs. public meanings, on whether Bourke, Luz, and Bornkamm were in a mood of prayer, perhaps listening in a cloister to a Gregorian chant in the background, or the like, when they made their hence valid interpretations, which we outsiders can only respect, but not discuss academically. Rather, such interpretations are based on the critical, scholarly analysis of the meaning of the text of Matthew. Thus one has to do with a scholarly activity, not a pious practice, hence something that can be included in such a discussion as is to be carried on in the present meeting or in the Society of Biblical Literature.

Phillips points out that the "relation between the miracle stories and the theological truths they convey" cannot be "one between a kernel and a husk." He ascribes that view to me, an ascription I respectfully decline. He poses the rhetorical question: "If the biblical audience for miracles saw a truth and meaning in them which is independent of the mode of expression, where did that truth and meaning come from? Meaning is not something which accompanies words, or something which is contained in them like the contents within a shell. The meaning is found *in* the way the words are *used*. But it is that very use, according to Robinson, that diverts us from the theological truths in miracle stories." No, this is not what I am trying to say. The biblical audience may well not have been diverted from the meaning, since they lived in the same mythopoeic world as did the biblical text, and, without either challenging the miracle's factuality or getting hung up on defending the factuality, heard the theological truths involved. But we can discuss what those theological truths were, without simply repeating the myth over and over again. Yet the myth is never really replaced and discarded. It is perhaps like the many efforts in this conference to interpret Wittgenstein, or Kierkegaard, efforts which use language of our day in the discussion, but never discard the nineteenth-century "husks" in favor of our twenty-first-century "kernel." The text remains the text, and the commentary remains a commentary on that text.

Phillips continues: "My initial puzzle remains unanswered: why were the truths conveyed in *that* way?" The truths were conveyed in Greek,

because they were Greek-speaking people. The truths were conveyed in mythopoeic language, because they lived in a mythopoeic culture. That is simply the way they thought and talked. We are involved in intercultural communication, and both sides in such a dialogue must seek to understand the culture and the resultant language world of the other side, and seek as best we can to move back and forth from one to the other.

Phillips turns to Moore's central story, the Walking on the Water, and asks me, if "the significance of the story would have been transparent to the audience that heard it," "what then was its transparent significance?" Clearly it signified that Jesus had superhuman power over a storm, which itself was an evil wind, that is to say, an evil spirit (in Greek, the same word *pneuma* would be involved), and thus was part and parcel of understanding Jesus as a charismatic holy man through whom God performed miracles and spoke to people.

To take an overview: Jesus' origin is variously described: God, through Gabriel, came to Mary and she conceived. The Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism. He was in the beginning with God, but became flesh. Though in the form of God he humbled himself and took on the form of a servant. Similarly his departure is variously described: He was exalted, lifted up onto the cross, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness; God highly exalted him, On the third day he arose from the dead; he awoke from the dead. He was made alive in the spirit; he was vindicated in the Spirit. He ascended after forty days.

If pressed pedantically, one might argue that all of these formulations cannot be literally and factually true. Certainly they come from different strands of primitive Christianity, and did not originally presuppose one another. But one hears a shared point: Jesus is not just the high water mark of early Judaism, the fruit of Roman highways and aqueducts, the crowning product of the Hellenization of the East since Alexander the Great; and he did not end just as a common criminal on a cross, or wiped out by the forces of evil. Rather he was . . . and here we may do no better than our own non-literal language. Moore would use the word "divine." Since Judaism would never consider a human divine, one might prefer "transcendent." But this is just a euphemism for some of the more explicitly mythological alternatives. Or: Jesus experienced "authentic existence." But existentialism is passé as a scientific language for the humanities. Or: His existence was "eschatological." But the end did not come as expected. Or: The christological titles of early Christianity. But they too are rooted in mythology. Yet all these modern language attempts, like those of antiquity, share a point that we can hear and accept or reject.

Some have said that the term 'demythologizing' should be replaced with 'remythologizing,' since our modern language for discussing ultimate human meaning is not purely objective, scientific, but is, in its own

way, culturally conditioned, metaphorical, parabolic, and mythological. But, since we live in this modern culture, however it is best characterized, it is a conveyer of meaning for us. Hence, we need to dialogue with the *mythologoumena* of other cultures in our own terms and seek to sense the meaning they conveyed then by using comparable (though never identical) meaning familiar to us today.

Phillips queries: "Why miracle stories? What was it about them which made them, for some people, so effective and important a revelation of the divine?" Miracle stories were in the culture of antiquity an indication, indeed a proof, of access to the gods (or demons) in such a way as to be able to use their miraculous power. Miracles were part of the accreditation of the typical holy man, alongside of such superhuman capabilities as extreme asceticism, prophetic powers, and the like. There were professional magicians who had medicinal formulae, unintelligible sounds from barbaric languages (such as Hebrew), exotic drawings, movements and gestures, which were their secrets for bringing into play spirit-world forces. John the Baptist was extremely ascetic, which Jesus was not, but in turn Jesus was a faith healer and exorcist, which John was not. But each in his own way had enough of the credentials of a holy man to accredit himself in that culture. Jesus ascribed his power over demons to God (Q 11:20): "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then there has come upon you God's reign." He had the same explanation for faith healing (Q 10:9): "Cure the sick there, and say to them, The kingdom of God has reached unto you." So his exorcisms and healings were for him part and parcel of his authorization by God to carry on his public ministry. What he had to say was, in his view, also authorized by God. The followers of Jesus, including the Evangelists themselves, stood in this tradition going back to Jesus himself. He was a charismatic "holy man," exemplifying traits convincing in that culture that he was authorized by God to do what he did, say what he said.

Phillips summarizes my paper: "Robinson gives an impressive account of what he takes to be the essence of Christianity in [the] Sayings Gospel Q. At one point it is expressed as follows: 'God is here, acting for our good in our lives, taking care of us, and sending us out to care for others, thereby giving our lives ultimate meaning.' Apart from the miracle of faith, this is a message without miracles. But this leaves us none the wiser about the contribution miracles in the Bible made to that message." Here Phillips simply misunderstands this central statement of my paper, which says absolutely nothing about the miracle of faith, but speaks only of God's action: "... here, acting for our good in our lives, taking care of us," and so on. Are not exorcisms and healings "for our good," "taking care of us"? Is this not the point of an exorcism or faith healing? Or is the point missed if the traditional language is not used? Whoever is "none the wiser about the contribution miracles in the Bible

made to that message" needs to think more deeply about what healings in the ancient world meant for the sick. Surely healings were understood as "acting for our good in our lives, taking care of us." Phillips concludes: "Do we miss the theology in miracles because we miss their spirit too? I have suggested that we do." I agree with this conclusion, which Phillips calls "disappointingly negative," and I can only urge him and all of us to think through Jesus' healings, to sense their spirit, get their point.

Regarding Jesus' word as the voice of God, let me turn to the comments in my paper about Bultmann's statement that Jesus rose into the kerygma, which I reformulated to the effect that Jesus rose into his own sayings, as they were reasserted by his followers in Galilee even after his death. Bultmann said he accepted the formulation of his critics, to the effect that Bultmann's Easter boiled down to the view that Jesus rose into the kerygma – but Bultmann added: "assuming it [his statement] is properly understood." He explained: "It presupposes that the kerygma itself is an eschatological event [i.e. an act of God], and it expresses the fact that Jesus is really present in the kerygma, that it is his word that involves the hearer in the kerygma." I suppose the formulation "really present" is familiar to all of you in reference to the "real presence" of the resurrected Christ in the eucharist, which clearly Bultmann as a Lutheran (not a Zwinglian) had in mind. Where is the resurrected Christ more really present than in the eucharist, and, as a Lutheran would add, in the preached word? Where else do you encounter the resurrected Christ? In the inter-personal encounters of everyday living, when these encounters are recognized, on the basis of the preached word, as such encounters with Christ!

By way of concluding these brief remarks: Modern science, in its rejection of the miraculous in favor of cause–effect relationships, has forced upon us moderns a problem that was not inherent in the ancient world. For we distinguish between miraculous acts of God and non-miraculous acts of God in a way that antiquity would not do. To oversimplify: If an act of God breaks a law of nature, it is a miracle, if it does not break a law of nature, it is not a miracle. But people back then were not as aware of laws of nature as we are. So we might classify the Sermon on the Mount as the non-miraculous word of God, but Jesus walking on the water as a miracle, which hence we know did not happen (Moore, p. 5: "The water will squish between his toes . . . "). Since they had not discovered gravity, they did not know that "the art of treading water" was utterly impossible, as Peter to his surprise unwittingly proved. They assumed walking on water was something a charismatic holy man well might do, just as such a holy man might do non-miraculous acts of God, for example, proclaim the will of God, or reveal the nature of God, or forgive in God's name. All were acts of God, part and parcel of what

God's prophet or holy man might well be expected to do, without our modern breakdown into miraculous and non-miraculous. So we do have a problem with miracles that antiquity did not have. One can only hope that this meeting will help us cope more clearly with our problem of the miraculous.

*C*: It is a rare thing to find myself agreeing, theologically, with B, but I do share his concern that there must be criteria to govern the use of 'spiritual meaning.'

*A*: Your worry is that any reading could be deemed valid. But at that point I wasn't thinking of validity, but of giving meaning to an experience as the Word of God. But this does not mean that there are no constraints. Procedures do not end there.

*D*: Isn't it clear that both aspects are essential? The Word of God is a common language addressed to me. If it is addressed to me, is it addressed to everyone else? Who is to decide, the one who addresses or the one who is addressed? The text is not the Word of God. 'Word of God' is a metaphor used for Jesus Christ. The text must be related back to Christ.

*A*: That is absolutely right. I'm speaking of a Christian *use* of the Bible. If someone said now that God wants us to kill all babies, we would rule it out as the Word of God.

*E*: I think we need to distinguish between meaning and denotation. That book – that is the denotation of 'Word of God.' But the meaning of 'That's the Word of God' is that I live by this book.

*F*: I see no difficulty in what A says about searching for the spiritual meaning. Biblical criticism of this kind goes back as far as Spinoza. People take it for granted that this is the Word of God, but it is sometimes hard to figure about. So A is someone trying to find God's word.

But the biblical criticism he discusses is scientific, and you do not assume that the text is the Word of God. The parameters are determined by a methodological naturalism. I think C was suggesting that it is not hard to take what you read or hear as the Word of God. You do so by interpreting the scripture by scripture.

*G*: You do seem to suggest on p. 18, however, A, that you could learn something in your search which would not enhance your understanding.

*A*: Of course, I learn something which makes me think it repulsive.

*B*: We are forgetting in all this that Jesus is not teaching anything in the miracles, but *doing* something. He is a faith healer.

*H*: That may be so, but we hear of many healings which are said *not* to show something about God. But the healings Jesus performed seem to be an important part of the Gospel story received by the early Church. What was that importance? I have not heard an answer to that question.

*B*: But my point is that Jesus is not trying to prove anything. He was simply caring for others.

*D*: But that does duck the issue of why it was thought important to report his works. We can’t get around the context in which they were performed, a context which has to be interpreted by us.

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# Part II

# Faith and Reason

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# 3

# Faith, History, and Approximation

*Alastair Hannay*

1. Faith has a variable relation to history. Indeed, some of what counts as faith may have none, being concerned only with what is hoped for and not what is supposed to have happened. But even when faith does have this concern with the past, religious belief is not just a matter of believing that some extraordinary events have occurred; it is accepting something that certain events are extraordinarily claimed to signify, for example, an all-powerful Deity in the case of a miracle or an all-loving one as in the case of the Incarnation. History in such a case matters to faith because of the claimed ability of historical events to provide the believer with the content of a religious belief, and typically it does so through revelation and Scripture. The most straightforward cases are utterances in the form of commands, promises, consolations, allegorical narrative, and so on, handed down to us in reports of these. So there are two levels of authority or authoritativeness to consider: those who accept them believe the reported utterances were made *with* authority, but because reports can be corrupt there is also the matter of *their* authority.

Behind a concern with either of these levels of authority lies the assumption that the courses of events that historians try to recapture and record encapsulate a religious message. If they did not, or could not, there would be no religious point in trying to be clear about them. Yet, far from shortening the distance between now and then, the very attempt to achieve such clarity seems to add to it. As critical history proceeds, not only will more than one version of any such event be tabled, thus making unique identification a higher-level task, any version will be endlessly open to revision in the light of further historical investigation. Not only that, the successive readings of the original events over time will interpose themselves between us and the events in a way that makes it tendentious to suppose we are able, least of all better able, to grasp them than those who were witnesses to them, if it is true that they or anything like them occurred.

It might seem that considerations such as these explain the tendency in our time to weaken the focus on history as a source of religious truth. There

is a well-known comment by Wittgenstein that captures this tendency: '[T]he *letter* should not be believed more strongly than is proper and the spirit should receive its due ... What you are supposed to see cannot be communicated by the best, most accurate historian ...'. 'Christianity', Wittgenstein also says, 'is not based on historical truth, but presents us with a (historical) narrative and says: now believe!'[1] Yet the thought that attachment to historical truth may be misdirected is by no means new. The Lutheran confessions include the affirmation: 'One thing is to believe history, another to believe what it means to me.'[2] And surely, simply on reflection, it is natural or logical to suppose that where some special meaning attaches to some historical event, it is the meaning rather than the fact of the event or its detail that should occupy the believer.

Not just because Wittgenstein's remarks on this topic were clearly prompted by his reading of Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, the core of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of what that work says on faith and history. Perhaps the choice owes at least something to what it was about that work that prompted Wittgenstein, as many others, to reflect on these things, but a more practical reason here, if not a thinly disguised attempt at an excuse, is that it is chiefly through my own reading of Kierkegaard that I have any grasp of the problem or acquaintance with its literature. There is a third reason too, namely some disagreement surrounding the reading of this seminal text. Isolating the point of disagreement may throw light on our topic.

2. Some twenty years back, but given a new lease of life by its inclusion in a recently published textbook, Robert M. Adams's 'Kierkegaard's Arguments against Objective Reasoning in Religion' gave a fairly detailed account of those passages in *Postscript* that deal with faith and history. I believe the account is misleading but in a way that is revealing for our topic. I will begin therefore by briefly outlining Adams's criticism of one of the arguments that he finds in Kierkegaard. I will claim that it is not there. (In what follows, instead of Kierkegaard I shall, in deference to that writer's appended remarks on the pseudonymity of the relevant texts, refer simply to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, or just *Postscript*. In quoting Adams I shall refer, as he does, to Kierkegaard.) Adams claims that *Postscript* contains an Approximation Argument (to which I shall refer in this way) designed to show the unsuitability of objective reasoning in regard to historical claims when motivated by a passionate interest in their truth. He claims that it is a bad argument.[3]

The Argument says that where an interest in the belief assumes the scope and intensity appropriate to religious conviction, no possibility of error can be disregarded on normal prudential grounds. In this case any possibility of error at all arouses an anxiety that calls for a decisive choice if the possibility of error is to be disregarded. A notable feature of this Argument is that it recreates in the would-be believer the conditions of philosophical scepticism.

It is just that in place of logical scruples about making an illegitimate inference, what makes the gap insuperable here, however little it may be, is the 'infinite' importance to the would-be believer of the truth of the belief in question. This also allows Adams to construe the Argument in the language of probabilities. When the stakes are 'infinitely' high, a belief which, if one's interest in it were merely historical it would be both rational and unproblematic to maintain in spite of the deficit, calls for a decisive personal choice. The rational case for disregarding the possibility of error has run out and something else – or rather, we, our entire selves – has to take over if the possibility of error is still to be disregarded. Adams points out that the Argument allows Kierkegaard to say what he wants to say in any case, that belief in an eternal happiness based on historical facts is possible independently of the evidence for them. For that is how Christians must believe.[4]

Why is the Argument a bad one? As Adams sees it, the Approximation Argument fails because Kierkegaard does not see that there can be a reason for disregarding the possibility of error that is *not* ruled out by a passionate infinite interest. Instead of the lively risk of the possibility of error being something the religious believer must decisively discount in the absence of objective reasons, objective reasoning can itself dictate that the possibility of error be discounted. To capture such a case he first distinguishes it from another, in which a personal interest that is not yet infinite is at work. What the case shows is how prudence (conclusions arrived at by objective reasoning about what, given certain desires, it is rational to do) can provide a *reason* for disregarding a possibility of error. A woman with a deep interest in her husband's love for her finds, nevertheless, some room for doubt that he really does love her, a tiny doubt but still enough to cause her anxiety. However, given a desire not to be deceived that is at least as strong as her desire not to 'hedge her bets' if he does love her, objective reasoning tells her she should disregard that risk of error. If, say, the tiny amount is a one in one thousand chance, the objective evidence in favour being 99.9 per cent, then in acting upon it there would be nine hundred and ninety times as great a risk of 'frustrating one of these desires'. One may question whether the smallness of the chance of error is as important here as Adams suggests, for one could think of cases where the evidence against was quite massive and still the decision to believe rational. Someone might be unsure as to whether their dead parent had really loved them, where there were not insignificant indications that it was *not* the case that the parent did so. But if it is more comforting to believe the quite slight evidence that exists in favour of the opposite opinion, then the choice to stick by it might still be rational.[5] A caution against wishful thinking is always in place, yet wishful thinking too is subject to a notion of rationality that takes into consideration the situation and general interests of the would-be believer.

Adams, if I read him correctly, claims that Kierkegaard builds the Approximation Argument on this kind of case. What it says is, as we saw, that where

the interest is infinite as well as passionate, prudential reasoning fails to meet our demands. That is so because the doubt ('But what if it isn't true?') will always be too needling to give the practical consideration a chance. What Kierkegaard has failed to see, according to Adams, is that the rational consideration can still be seen to work in favour of the belief the believer is interested in holding. In the crucial case, we are to imagine someone trying to base an eternal happiness on a relation to Jesus and with an infinite passionate interest in whether it is historically true that Jesus declared Peter and his successors to be infallible in matters of religious doctrine. We are to suppose further that the historical evidence makes it 99 per cent probable that he did. Now, although the 1 per cent deficit will indeed make a person anxious, here objective reasoning itself should lead the person to a commitment to the probable conclusion, thus disregarding the risk of error. As Adams says, 'the risk of not disregarding the possibility of error would be greater than the risk of disregarding it';[6] or in other words, the person can take the possibility of error rationally in his or her stride even in the interests of a passionate desire for the truth. It is surely, as Adams says, 'prudent to do what gives you a 99 per cent chance of satisfying your strong desire, in preference to what gives you only a one per cent chance of satisfying it'.[7] Kierkegaard is accordingly mistaken in thinking that the passionate believer must defy objective reasoning in disregarding the possibility of error, however small. What the case shows is that, even in the case of an infinite passionate interest, it can be more dangerous (and therefore imprudent) not to ignore the possibility of error (and so more prudent to do so) than to ignore it.

3. Without devoting too much space here to textual evidence, it is fair to say that some of *Postscript*'s comments can certainly be read in the way Adams requires for the argument he finds there and finds wanting. He quotes two premises: (1) 'certainty with regard to anything historical is merely an approximation', and (2) 'an approximation, when viewed as a basis for an eternal happiness, is wholly inadequate'.[8] From these Kierkegaard might well be said to be concluding that 'objective reasoning cannot justify [a would-be believer] in disregarding *any* possibility of error about the object of faith',[9] so that something subjective has to be coupled in if the need for certainty that faith caters to is to be satisfied.

However, the text indicates that this is to turn Kierkegaard's point around. It is not that faith comes in where normal epistemic reasoning will no longer allay one's anxiety; rather, wherever normal epistemic reasoning is in place we are no longer talking about faith. What is wrong is to start out looking at history. In purely historical terms Christianity is, as *Postscript* says in the first sentence of Book I, a *res in facto posita*. That is how both the historical and the speculative point of view regard it, and what makes them regard Christianity as something the truth of which is to be investigated 'in a purely objective manner'. But the latter is the view that *Postscript* is out

massively to subvert by making the case for a subjective grasp of the object of faith, and whatever that means, it is not a matter of bringing subjectivity to bear on history. On the contrary, the focus on history is misdirected from the start. It is, among other things that indeed follow from this, a diversion that postpones the difficult decision that religious belief is: 'When the subject is treated in an objective manner it becomes impossible for the subject to face the decision with passion.' Note how the passage continues:

> It is a self-contradiction and therefore comical to be infinitely interested in that which in its maximum still always remains an approximation. If in spite of this, passion is nevertheless imported, we get fanaticism. For an infinitely interested passion every jot will be of infinite value. The fault is not in the infinitely interested passion, but in the fact that its object has become an approximation object.[10]

That 'every jot will be of infinite value' for an infinitely interested passion might sound like the point just attributed: no possibility of error will be too small to ignore, the claim glossed critically by Adams in pointing out that it can be irrational not to ignore it. But the passage says other things that, when explicated, present the sentence 'every jot will be of infinite value' in a different light. In the first place, to present an argument of the kind Adams finds implies that, if the argument fails, then faith might very well be based on objective reasoning. But as a contemporary admirer of Kierkegaard, Professor Rasmus Nielsen, puts it, 'approximation is a . . . quantitative category [*Bestemmelse*]', that is to say, 'it is based on degrees of difference within the same quality'.[11] What the *Postscript* passage seems clearly to say is that treating the subject objectively is to treat it in such a way that it *becomes* an approximation object. It is just because it is an approximation object that such an object can never be an object of faith. That is, the passage is not saying that, in the case of any approximation object, there is an unavoidable possibility of error that a passionate interest in its truth can never discount and can therefore only be ignored by an act of faith. It links an interest in every jot with fanaticism, not faith. The smallest jot becomes 'infinitely' important not because an interest in something historical is, in this case, itself 'infinite', but because an infinite interest is wrongly focused on an approximation object. Second, although Adams accurately describes *Postscript*'s faith as a form of decision-making, as we saw, the context he provides for it is that of probabilistic reasoning. Kierkegaard is made to say that an infinite passionate interest makes an otherwise superable possibility of error too vivid to be overcome without a correspondingly passionate commitment to disregard it. Adams's counterexample shows that the passionate interest is actually served by probabilistic reasoning. Yet according to *Postscript* it is a 'misunderstanding to seek an objective assurance' in any case. The way Adams

presents it, the *Postscript*'s comment that '[i]t goes without saying that it is impossible in the case of historical problems to reach an objective decision so certain that no doubt can disturb it' is a way of saying: 'That is why with regard to these problems faith is needed.' In other words, the Approximation Argument has to do with a belief in historical fact *simpliciter*, divorced from what gives it its religious significance, the latter merely supplying the strong desire to adhere to the true historical opinion. Adams says that although the believer's strong desire to adhere to true historical opinion may depend on a belief 'for which no probability can be established by purely historical reasoning, such as the belief that Jesus is God', nevertheless 'any difficulties arising from this point are distinct from those urged by the Approximation Argument, which itself presupposes the infinite passionate interest in the historical question'.[12] But, again, the passage quoted above from *Postscript* links a desire for the true historical opinion that is too strong with *fanaticism*, and that points to what is surely otherwise fairly obvious: the Approximation Argument we find in *Postscript* actually includes the presupposition in its premise. Indeed the presupposition is what is required for the conclusion to follow, as it then does. If (the first premise) faith must be unconditional and global then (the conclusion) for absolutely any approximation object, however closely we can approach it epistemically, there will be zero probability that it is identical with the object of our infinite passionate interest. Accordingly, no practical argument about whether or not to disregard some possibility of error with regard to a claim about such an event will be relevant. *A fortiori*, then, and *pace* Adams, there can never be, in the case of an infinite passionate interest, any occasion for such an interest overruling a practical reason for some possibility of error. And, as for his example of there being a greater risk in not ignoring such a possibility than for disregarding it, that as we noted earlier also treats the historical event *merely* as historical and thus fails to come within range of *Postscript*'s actual Approximation Argument.

The alternative is to read the comment that '[i]t goes without saying that it is impossible in the case of historical problems to reach an objective decision so certain that no doubt can disturb it' as saying: 'That is why such investigations have nothing to do with faith.' That would be something in the nature of a 'grammatical' remark. It might also be taken as an assertion of Fideism, the claim that faith neither needs nor should seek the support of reason, though later we will see that what can be said in support of a grammatical one tempers the claim that *Postscript* speaks for Fideism. That we are meant to read Kierkegaard's remarks here as in some sense grammatical seems to me evident. If anything in *Postscript* can be called an Approximation Argument, it is one whose conclusion is that no historical fact, even one assumed to contain the possibility of an eternal happiness, can be the proper concern of someone passionately interested in that possibility. Again, it is not because in the epistemic nature of the case there is an inexpugnable element of doubt or possibility of error. Even if (*per impossibile*) the fact in

question were presented immaculately before us, and in a way that our doubts would have no chance of surviving, the concern thus appeased would still not be faith. The difference between this and the Approximation Argument is marked. While the latter has a passionate infinite interest, which makes an otherwise superable possibility of error too vivid to be overcome without a correspondingly passionate commitment to disregard it, here what faith amounts to is not our courageously taking a critical possibility of error in our stride, but our *rising above* the question of objective truth and error. Thus the truth that faith addresses is something other than the truth that remains elusive to an objective calculation.

4. That said, it must be admitted that the point is not made in these unequivocal terms in the chapter(s) in question. One may point, however, to a contextual reason for that. The notion of a qualitative as opposed to quantitative change relies on the notion of the leap still to be introduced in the chapters on Lessing that follow. What *Postscript*'s chapter on 'The Historical Point of View' does is point out *that* approximation objects are mistakenly identified as targets of religious belief, and that this has to do with the externality of these objects. It is when the 'subject[-matter]' is treated in an 'objective manner', and the 'object of faith' has thus *become* an approximation object, that the Approximation Argument applies. (So in saying that '[w]hen the subject is treated in an objective manner it becomes impossible for the subject to face the decision with passion', *Postscript* is not implying that the same subject-matter could be dealt within a subjective manner.) The actual Approximation Argument points to this inappropriate objectivity that arises from treating the world of facts as though, among the facts it contained, are facts of a specially religious kind. *Postscript*'s vision, if one may call it that, is that we can never be in a position to know that, or even think it, not at least in conceptual terms. The question then is, of course, on what if not the alleged historical events on which Christianity builds is faith directed?

The question concerns the expression 'the truth of Christianity'. One might think that this expression and 'the object of Christian faith' were interchangeable. However, the former is a more ambiguous expression than the latter. Often one means by it the truth of claims about there being the Christian's God, the Incarnation, and its implications for personal salvation, in other words quite general theological claims of a cosmological kind. Their falsity would be implied by there being no such implications, no such God, or no God at all. But *Postscript*'s question is not about truths of this general kind ('the objective question of the truth of Christianity'), it is about 'what Christianity is'.[13] Along with the infinite passionate interest noted by Adams, the objective truths are presupposed or simply omitted. The truth of Christianity in *Postscript*'s sense is not what can be established, say, in the letter once the letter is established as canonical, but of the manner of one's adherence to what one may immediately grasp in the letter

independently of the precise circumstances of its origin or of the accuracy with which it has been transmitted.

To see more clearly what *Postscript* is denying in this respect it may be helpful to fill in some of the background. The primary target of the chapter of *Postscript*'s Part One from which the discussion so far draws is the Danish theologian Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig. It was not least due to Grundtvig that 'Christianity's truth' had become a topical one in Kierkegaard's time. Two well-known essays which he published in a journal founded by himself and a younger colleague, A.G. Rudenbach, actually bore the titles 'On the True Christianity' and 'On Christianity's Truth'.[14] The question to which Grundtvig proposed an answer was specifically that of the manner of a Christian life. More specifically still, as Grundtvig's own answer to that question indicates, the question was, in what living form is Christianity to be sustained?

Grundtvig read the history of the human race as the working out of the Divine Will. As himself a historian, an earlier fascination with Nordic religion had led him to find important linkages between it and Christianity, and in 1812 he had published the first of several accounts of world history. Influenced by the Norwegian-born philosopher, Henrik (Henrich, Heinrich) Steffens (1773–1845), who was instrumental in bringing Schelling's nature philosophy to Copenhagen in the early century and later taught in Jena and Berlin, Grundtvig saw history as a grand narrative whose course could be divined by suitably inspired (though not necessarily learned) people, who in telling the story could help others to enter livingly into it. In Grundtvig's version, which was not far from Steffens's, Christ formed the point of reference in relation to which all historical personalities and events acquired their significance. Later versions (e.g. the three-volume *Manual of World History According to the Best Sources* published between 1833 and 1844) employ a developmental schema Grundtvig had earlier applied to Nordic culture. It offers a three-stage theory of the generational development of mankind, each stage repeated ontogenetically in individual lives. They are in effect projections onto culture of stages commonly ascribed to individual development: imagination (childhood), emotion (manhood), and understanding (old age). In Grundtvig's account these correspond to Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Present Age. (The latter characterization, under the rubric of the present age's commonsensicality [*Forstandighed*], was to become the critical focus of Kierkegaard's non-pseudonymous *A Literary Review* [1847], among whose main targets was the Grundtvigian answer to the question of how Christianity is to be lived. By then what Grundtvig took to be the 'true Christianity' had become a religion based on a Free Church and its congregation, sustained by the still-living Word of Jesus, whose divine role was to make possible the passage to the 'new person [*Personlighed*]' whose will would, by according with that of God, further God's purpose in history).[15]

The two main sections of the earlier chapter in *Postscript* dealing with the historical point of view, focus on the scriptures and the church respectively. It is pointed out with regard to the former that a philological approach, if undertaken in the spirit of someone who, when the work was brought to its completion, could say 'Now you can base your eternal happiness on these writings', adopts an attitude to Christian truth quite inappropriate to the 'infinite personal passionate interest' to which the response of faith properly speaks – indeed so totally at odds with it that there is in *Postscript*'s Hegelian terminology a 'contradiction' between having such an interest yet deferring adherence to the Christian truth until the successful outcome of a philological investigation. The era of post-Hegelian philosophy was well under way by the time Kierkegaard wrote *Postscript* and he was familiar with the writings of theologians like Strauss and Bauer, as well as that of other writers like Feuerbach. Kierkegaard even applauded what, in a summary of lectures he attended by his contemporary, Hans Lassen Martensen, is called a 'driving [of] the theologians from their purely historical defences'.[16] With his still-Hegelian eye, Kierkegaard could see that the theologians' loss of history could be turned to true religiosity's advantage by depriving people of a form of support that a truly religious person should not need. At the same time, of course, it put out of play an issue about facts that could so easily be decided to the advantage of those already predisposed to atheism. In 1845, when Kierkegaard was writing *Postscript*, the question of Christianity, with whatever variable significance different thinkers attached to it, was still raised within a Hegelian universe of discourse. Local Hegelians persisted in the belief that reasoning will take you some way to the truths of Christianity. These contemporaries form the targets of the chapter on the speculative point of view. As *Postscript* presents it, this point of view *presupposes* the historical investigation of Christian sources, the topic of the first chapter. The task of 'determining' the truth of Christianity 'through a critical examination of the various sources' has to be undertaken before it is possible to determine the 'relationship of the doctrine, thus historically given and verified, to the eternal truth'.[17] In these terms Christianity, as *Postscript* says in the first sentence of Book One, is a *res in facto posita*. That is how the historical and speculative points of view both regard it, and what makes them regard Christianity as something the truth of which is to be investigated 'in a purely objective manner'. As its author puts it: someone looking at, or for, the truth of Christianity in this way is either already convinced of the truth of Christianity 'and in faith assured of his own relationship to it', in which case, he suggests, his interest in the remainder cannot be 'infinite' and in any case would get in the way of his faith (a point also made by Kierkegaard's contemporary, John Henry Newman),[18] or else the 'inquirer' is not 'in faith' but 'objective in contemplation' and 'accordingly not infinitely interested in the outcome'.

Grundtvig's position as seen from the chapter on the historical point of view is complex. Undoubtedly he was personally 'assured' of his relationship to Christianity. But his views led him to believe he had solved any approximation problem with regard to the past. Grundtvig, who had once written of the 'poisoned plant' that rationalism had placed beneath the 'wizened cross', claimed twenty years before *Postscript* to have discovered the 'unshakable and unchangeable foundation of the Christian Church'. What was wrong with the Protestantism of the liberal and rationalist tradition was that it 'makes the written word everything' and the Church into a fellowship of 'bookworms'. Even the 'Word of Jesus' was taken to be just another text to focus the Christian's attention. On the contrary, Grundtvig declared, the Christian Church is a 'society of faith with a creed'[19] in which the Word of Jesus formed the basis of what Grundtvig came to call 'The Church View [*Kirkens Anskuelse*]' (see *Postscript*, Book One, Chapter One, Section 2), as against any view that put reliance on Scriptural authority as such. This was what Grundtvig called his 'matchless discovery', a phrase Kierkegaard several times ironically repeats. In a biological metaphor, suggested by Grundtvig himself, instead of Christian truth being something one deciphers from the Biblical texts in a specialist intellectual exercise prior to attaching oneself to it, it is a continual propagation of Christian life in baptism, the Lord's Prayer, and Holy Communion, as people from all stations acquiesce and participate in the living word.

5. *Postscript* focuses its criticism on two things: (1) Grundtvig's assumption that history reveals the truths of existence to those inspired to see it; and (2) the thought that the eternal is kept alive in history in associative forms through ritual renewals of allegiance to the Word of Jesus. Section Two of Chapter One ('The Church') points out that the Church theory is no better placed than the letter-theology of the Bible theory, of which it is indeed simply a variant. Even if the actual existence of the Church itself needs no proof, as *Postscript* notes a leading Grundtvigian 'dialectician' correctly observes, the authenticity of the words of the Sacrament is quite another matter. What even the experienced dialectician[20] has failed to observe is that the claim that the Church that is present is the Apostolic Church, 'the same Church that has existed for eighteen centuries', is not the same claim as the self-evident truth that the Church is present. 'The moment we make use of the living word to urge the continued existence of the Church through past centuries, the issue is brought back to precisely the same place where it was with the Bible theory', for 'the predicate Christian is . . . more than a present predicate. When predicated of the present it implies a past, and thus involves historicity in quite the same sense as the Bible'. Nor does it help that the words of the articles of confession are few compared with the Bible. There may be less to be wrong about, but a correspondingly greater weight is put on them, every jot will count all the more. The error of the Church theory is that for it too the object of faith

has become an approximation object. *Postscript* notes how Grundtvig's Church theory receives accolades precisely because it is 'objective', a prized word by which 'thinkers and prophets imagine they are saying something great to one another' but is hardly justified even in fields of scholarship for which it is the appropriate ideal, so little do people have *first-hand* acquaintance with their subject. For Christianity, however, it is *altogether* inappropriate, and if the only Christianity you have is objective you are no better than a pagan.[21] The scarcely concealed implication is that Pastor Grundtvig himself is a pagan and so not a Christian. Furthermore, if his interest is truly 'infinite', then he is also involved in the contradiction of possessing an unqualified and global assurance about something his belief in which is always open to discoverable error. Such an interest and the objectivity of the theory are 'incommensurable'.[22] Yet another implication not fully spelled out is that by basing his infinite interest on historical material Grundtvig becomes a figure of fun: 'It is a self-contradiction, and therefore comical, to be infinitely interested in that which in its maximum still always remains an approximation'.[23] The quotation is one we recall from earlier when some account of the status of the alleged contradiction was promised. The notion is said to be related as follows to the object of one's faith being something one's knowledge of which can only be approximate:

> If the historical aspect of the confession is urged as decisive (that it derives from the Apostles, and so forth), then every jot must be infinitely stressed; and since a conclusion can be reached only *approximando*, the individual will be involved in the contradiction of attaching, i.e. of trying to attach, and yet not being able to attach his eternal happiness to it, because the approximation is never completed. (ibid.)

6. Note that, on Adams's account, 'contradiction' here would be a mere conceit; all the word refers to is the idea of trying to derive certainty from the inherently error-prone. Faith becomes no more than a decisive disregard of the possibility of error. One might introduce 'contradiction' on the superficial textual grounds that we are talking here of 'seeking infinite certainty in the infinitely error-prone' or the like. But since on Adams's account the possibility of error can be infinitely small and the certainty achieved by passionately disregarding it a pretty impressive certainty, no real foothold is offered for the idea of a contradictory faith directed at the historical and non-contradictory faith that is not so directed. So the conceit here remains just that and the contradiction a mere play on words.

Second, we can see what is inappropriate about a faith directed at any merely finite state of affairs. A belief directed at anything for which not all the evidence is in and for which the status of the evidence that is in can

always be questioned, is inherently revisable. The proper attitude to an object of such belief is therefore one of tentativeness. That, it can then be claimed, is inconsistent with the 'logic' or 'grammar' or perhaps even the 'psycho-logic' of faith. If you choose decisively to disregard the possibility of error, your decision will project or anticipate facts that later discovery – by yourself or others – might well disconfirm. If they do, and you then uphold your decision, you will be guilty of *bad* faith, which is hardly what we want. Moreover, however immaculately present the object of faith, in evincing a disregard of its inherently approximate character, a believer's infinite passionate faith would be violating *its* logic. It is worth noting here that Adams finds three distinct arguments in *Postscript*: the approximation argument, the postponement argument, and the passion argument. But on the reading to which these remarks of ours seem headed, these will all be aspects of one argument, to the effect that, to be 'true', such decisive believing must be focused elsewhere.

Third, then, we must look in what has been said for some account of where that is. Since all finite objects of belief, whether in the present or the past, are what *Postscript* terms 'approximation objects', there seems nowhere in the world of, let us say, facts, to which to direct one's faith. Not only that, what are we to say positively about the letter, the Scripture? Isn't it still essential in some way to the faith we are discussing, and is *it* not part of the factual world? Should faith not be directed at least in part *there*?

We have already quoted Wittgenstein's remarks suggesting that 'the *letter* should not be believed more strongly than is proper and the spirit should receive its due', that '[w]hat you are supposed to see cannot be communicated by the best, most accurate historian . . . ', and that 'Christianity is not based on historical truth, but presents us with a (historical) narrative and says: now believe!'.[24] The idea here is that the text must be grasped quite otherwise than as an instruction whose authority has first to be verified before the injunction to believe what it says is followed. For, if that were indeed the case, would it not mean that the text must be approached in the prior conviction that it is authoritative whatever it says? In that case, there would be no connection between belief and what is believed.

How then, if we are to be indifferent to the authenticity and exactitude of the text, is the content of belief to be understood in relation to the believing? What one wants to say is something like this: the content is to be grasped in terms of the spirit rather than the letter of what is said or written, or perhaps in the spirit of how it is said, or of the setting in which it is said, and that this spirit has the quality of a life-view. Even if, when understood literally, the narrative is untrue, what it expresses is a way of believing the world as a whole to be. As Wittgenstein said in another context, '[to believe in a God means to see that the facts of the world are not the end of the matter]'.[25] Belief in God is not belief in another fact over and above the facts that form the world. How could it be? A fact of any kind must be contained

within the world; that at least is implied by what we often or even typically mean by 'world'. What is claimed is that the belief affects all facts without either being one of them or there being any sub-group of facts that are the proper reference of the belief. Though not itself a belief in a fact, the belief is such that it gives all facts, or life itself, as Wittgenstein says in the same place, a meaning.

If we grant this still very unresolved thought for the sake of further argument, we can see, from what has been said earlier, that there are now saliently two ways in which the formula suggested by Wittgenstein's remark might be applied. In one of these ways, whatever is additional to the facts is accessible to some form of experience, a channel, so to speak, outside those that deal with the sorting and assembling of facts. If one says, as one might go on to say, that it is open only when the latter channels are turned off, that might make it a mystical mode of access, as has commonly been attributed to the Wittgenstein of the *Notebooks* and *Tractatus*. (If the attribution is correct, it is the way we should read the passages from which the last quotation is taken.) The idea is that you can tune into the meaning that overflows the mere facts by dampening or even altogether excluding the 'noise' of the discursive business of fact-finding and fact-accumulation. We find the notion identically, or at least very similarly, in Schleiermacher. *Postscript* itself offers a variant in what it calls Religiousness A.

In the alternative application of Wittgenstein's formula, if it is a fact that we are having access to the overflow, then this is not among those facts that are available to us in the latter or any other way. It might be a divine fact, but whether it is so is something *we* have no way of divining; it is inconceivable that we should find ourselves having access to them. Since it is not anything that can be rationally asserted or meaningfully (conceptually) thought, there is no circumstance about which we can even pretend that this is what it is like to be having access to the overflow.

7. In these terms, *Postscript*'s objection to Grundtvigianism's 'objectivism' is not that it is a scientific approach to what is not science, but that it takes the truth of Christianity to have been introduced into the world as one set of facts among others. Grundtvigianism perpetrates the conceptual confusion, the grammatical error, of treating factual overflow in factual terms as if it were nevertheless of the world; the overflow is given an inappropriately factual physiognomy. The position *Postscript* develops is one in which the world, so far as we can know, is one of facts alone, out of which some – that for us cannot be apprehended as being more than just accidental – are those on which our faith depends. It is a position that puts the believer in a peculiar relationship to the facts; the manner of a believer's dependence on history when confined to the merely factual is more strenuous than that of one who believes that historical records can include records of divinely inspired facts. The facts may not be the end of the matter, but the facts are all there are to go on.

The point *Postscript* is urging is, again in these terms, that if facts are all there are to go on, then it will be a mistake to direct one's religious concern upon the facts as such. It will be a category mistake, a conceptual confusion. Although the Incarnation is an indispensable element in Christian belief, its meaning is exactly that attention should not be directed at the question of *its* truth or the accuracy of the Biblical narratives relating to it, even at the words of Jesus as reported. Such a concern with the Incarnation and its factual aspect is itself a breach of what the Incarnation means, namely that we should in some way readdress ourselves to the world as a whole, and it is this individual readdressing that answers to our infinite concern.

In finding fault with Grundtvigianism, however, it is not just the fact that it is based, in spite of itself, on the results of an investigative procedure that *Postscript* pinpoints. The objections are also that by having to focus on words at all, whether alive or dead, the believer's attention is diverted from the proper locus of Christian truth, which is in a development of the subject or self. So apart from postponing the moment of passionate commitment in a search that is in principle endless, the very search for something outside betrays a weakness of spirit. This lack of self-reliance, betrayed in the need for support in something 'out there', is also ludicrous. For how can a mere word carry the burden of a meaning that embraces the whole world? Even if the word were authentic, to suppose that faith should be fundamentally a matter of showing allegiance to *it* is absurd; above all because where the question one is trying to answer is, what is it truly to be a Christian? A reply to the effect that it is a matter of the ritual repetition of the confessional through membership of a community or congregation, and that this actually generates facts of the world visibly exemplifying the meaning of life, seems parochial and self-serving.

The externality, in short, detracts from the autonomy of authentic faith, and one might add that the background Grundtvigian assumption, that the temporal locus simply does have an eternal significance, could be regarded as itself a kind of spiritual crutch that enables one to avoid the nihilistic alternative that there is no possible understanding of the eternal in time. One of many caustic comments in *Postscript*'s chapter on the historical point of view has Grundtvig, in the 'immediate passion' of his faith, grasping at 'something certain to cling to'. Another says that if his views really caught on, the popular craving for certainty would lead to widespread adult baptism or 'the repetition of the baptismal rite as in the case of the Lord's Supper, simply in order to make sure'.[26] And what is the clinging for? It serves to 'keep the dialectical away',[27] which, among other things, is to say that by *not* postponing his faith in the way that an interest in certainty in the case of an approximation object demands, Grundtvig is nevertheless putting off the difficult moment when it will be apparent to him that the certainty demanded by his passionate and infinite interest must arise from himself. The mistake is to treat as a limit, or boundary, something that in terms of

what faith really demands is not that. In matters of faith, making something serve as a boundary or limit, be it 'a word, a sentence, a book, a man, a society or whatever...'[28] is the sign of an 'indolent and anxious' streak in man, 'a wish to lay hold of something so really fixed that it can exclude all dialectics', but 'as soon as I take the dialectical away, I become superstitious, and attempt to cheat God of each moment's strenuous acquisition'.

If what *Postscript* sees as Grundtvig's childish spontaneity, and his grasping undialectically at a limit, appeared to him in a comic light (it is suggested in passing that the age of 'letter theology' and its demise might be immortalised in the figure of an 'unhappy slave of the letter in his tragi–comic romanticism' – a counterpart to Don Quixote who, *Postscript* observes, epitomises the close of the age of chivalry – 'for the comic interpretation is always the concluding one'),[29] *Postscript* also finds in such historical-based perspectives for determining Christian truth room for zealotry and fanaticism. Every detail becomes 'infinitely' important, it is, as we recall *Postscript* saying, 'a self-contradiction and therefore comical to be infinitely interested in what at its maximum still always remains a contradiction' but also: 'If in spite of this, passion is nevertheless imported, we get fanaticism.' Though good in a sense, the zealot is comic: 'the ludicrousness of the zealot consisted in the fact that his infinite passion had attached itself to a mistaken object (an approximation object)', while 'the good in him was that he had passion'.[30]

8. We now have in place a scenario in which the points out of which Adams formulates the Approximation Argument appear in a quite different light from that in which he formulates and criticizes that argument. The difference can be illustrated by an example he himself draws on,[31] as though offered by Kierkegaard in support of the Approximation Argument. It is from a later passage of *Postscript*, in a section that (the leap and Religiousness B having been introduced) returns to the idea of an eternal happiness being based on something historical, saying now that it involves a 'dialectical contradiction'. A woman in love 'receive[s] at second-hand the assurance that the man she loved (who was dead and from whose mouth she had never heard the assurance) had affirmed that he loved her'. The passage continues: 'let the witness or witnesses be the most reliable of men, let the case be so plain that a captious and incredulous lawyer would say it is certain – the lover will at once detect the undependability of this report: it is hardly a compliment to the woman to suppose that she would not do so, for objectivity is no crown of honour for a lover'. The parallel example is provided of the man who wants to find out from the historical records the legitimacy of his birth and is unable to share even a hair-splitting and incredulous lawyer's rationally grounded disregard of the possibility of error. Instead, forever denied the certainty they seek, these two people try to give up their passions and console themselves with the eternal (which is 'the very blessedness of love' and 'more blessed than the most legitimate birth').

For Adams this is analogous to the case in which a woman's interest in the hypothesis that her husband loves her makes her want to disregard the very slight possibility that he does not. The woman chooses to disregard the risk of error. But *Postscript*'s cases convert their passion into a form of resignation in which the object of passion is removed from the world of attainable goals. After all, the loved one is by all accounts dead and the reliability of the birth records falls forever short of what is needed – the required confirming experience is, in a way, also dead. But to edit the former story by having the husband not die would bring it into line with the example cited by Adams. He contrasts it with that of someone trying to base an interest in his eternal life on Jesus, and passionately interested in a particular historical question: Did Jesus declare Peter and his episcopal successors to be infallible in matters of religious doctrine? Note, however, that this is a 'plain' historical question; it contains no terms like 'Christ'. These, for Adams, enter already at the level of the desire to adhere to the true historical opinion, it being this that makes the desire infinitely passionate. It is a prior belief ('for which no probability can be established by purely historical reasoning') that generates the hyper-fastidious concern with the epistemic reliability of the plain historical record, the possibility of errors in which can, on Adams's account, still be passed over on the basis of a rational calculation of the probabilities.

The alternative scenario presents the fastidiousness as comic and even a form of fanaticism due to a wrongly focused interest. The later example from *Postscript* too is clearly meant to contrast with a passionate interest that is not yet infinitely passionate. But what makes the interest infinite here is that, now that *Postscript* has clarified the nature of the distinction between Religiousness A and Religiousness B, the would-be believer is seen to face a 'dialectical contradiction'. What then is *this* contradiction? First, a would-be believer apprised of the distinction and interested in an eternal happiness cannot resign this interest and console himself with the eternal, because the eternal is no longer *there* to console him, as it was in Religiousness A. Of the latter *Postscript* says in this same connection: 'let the world's six thousand years of history be true or not be true, it makes no difference to the exister in the matter of his blessedness, for ultimately he reposes in the consciousness of eternity'. But someone apprised of the distinction is aware that he does not repose there (or is aware that he can never grasp the fact that he does). He therefore has nothing eternal to console him, should he give up his concern for his own eternal happiness; he has only something historical to turn to, 'knowledge of which at its maximum is an approximation'.[32] What is 'dialectical' about the contradiction is that it is only upon something plainly historical, a relationship to which cannot help but be approximate, that he can base his eternal happiness, while to be that basis it must be more than just historical.[33] As for what the would-be believer wants to believe, since a maximum probability serves no better than a zero

probability in this respect, for him too the history is really neither here nor there. But with a crucial difference. Unlike the Religiousness A believer, for the Religiousness B believer there is no eternal to sink consolingly back into, only the plainly historical event.

Knowing that the probabilities do not count, the would-be believer then realises that his actual belief, should he manage to sustain it in that case, *cannot* be thought of as a matter of disregarding a possibility of error about that event. In order for it to be the event implied by his belief he must believe the maximally improbable.

9. I said it seemed to me evident that we are meant to read Kierkegaard's remarks as in some sense grammatical. But even if my conversion of Adams's Approximation Argument into a grammatical point is accepted, there are problems with that claim. Grammatical remarks are usually identified as such through an investigation into extant modes of speech and practice, yet it would be absurd to suppose Kierkegaard thought his own remarks should stand or fall through the results of such an examination. Looking historically at Kierkegaard himself, we can see what he says as part of a trend in the grasp of Christian thought, one main strand of which at the time was the flight from history. In the not so distant past Lessing, resorting to the Leibnizian distinction between accidental truths of history and necessary truths of reason on which Kierkegaard builds his notion of a leap, had said history was impotent in relation to the truth of religion; to him the latter must be available to reason and in the form of a morality. Consistently with his reputation as Romanticism's official theologian, Schleiermacher had located the essence of religion in a state of mind, a feeling, that of absolute dependence, thus leaving the history to look after itself. Read horizontally along an historical dimension, at least one way of understanding Kierkegaard is to see him as pushing even further the trend in the direction of religious subjectivity represented by these two thinkers.

If, then, the idea of faith as an unconditional, global belief unaffected by niceties of historical accuracy – the argument as opposed to the Argument – brought *Postscript* within the scope of a Wittgensteinian view of religious discourse, then the route to that result is at least on the surface not a recognisably Wittgensteinian one. Instead of the product of an investigation into religious practices and the uses of religious terms, the faith that *Postscript* ends up defining, as a passionate ignoring of the unthinkability of an indispensable thought, is the outcome of a polemic concerning whether religion can begin with the assumption that we can know ourselves as denizens of a numinous world. It seems quite clear that no description of actual practices would arrive at just *this* result. Moreover, given that religious practices and the utterances that belong in religion, or to religious response, are very diverse, *Postscript*'s selection of just this notion of faith will mean that there is a great deal that it misrepresents.

Second, the notion of the numinous has long lost its foothold among the reflected who engage in current philosophical disputes on religious questions. For that reason the distinctions mentioned at the beginning of this chapter seldom play any central part. Debates are nowadays occupied with more general issues. People ask whether religious utterances are true or false or are subject only to conventionally established conditions of assertibility. Wittgensteinians themselves see this realism/anti-realism issue as misguided, based, as they claim, on a deficient grasp of the grammar of 'faith'. To treat the utterances as the propositions or commands or promises they appear to be is not only to mistake their status as linguistic expressions, but to abstract them from the context of cultural practices of which they are an integral part, and from which their actual significance derives. Praying, for instance, is not an attempt to manipulate the future, it expresses a particular relation to deeply affecting events with analogues in other aspects of our lives, some of them more clearly evident in the practices of other and perhaps more primitive cultures.

Third, although Kierkegaard did see himself as engaged in a kind of anthropological examination of the concepts of Christianity, and that examination did embrace a much wider range of religious responses than that to which *Postscript* carries its reader, it seems clear that he came to think of Christian concepts, when properly analysed in the light of what he saw to be the truth of Christianity, as requiring a radical revision of the concepts we normally use, or of the concepts normally implicit in our linguistic and non-linguistic practices. In a journal entry from 1849 (three years after *Postscript*) under the heading 'Ascending Forms of Religiousness' Kierkegaard writes:

> (A) The individual relates to God so that things will go well with him here on earth – in other words, straightforwardly to have the benefit, in a worldly sense, of the relation with God.
> (B) The individual relates to God to be saved from sin, to conquer his inclinations, to find in God a merciful judge – in other words, in a way that becomes none the less altogether undialectical, the individual deriving nothing but benefit from the relation.
> (C) The individual is called upon to confess his faith in word and deed (self-denial, renouncing finite aims), that faith in which lies his salvation; but the result of the confession will be that the individual suffers, incurs unhappiness humanly speaking. Here the dialectic is an accompaniment to his having the benefit of the relation with God: at any weak moment it must seem to him that harm and misfortune are what come of the relation, since by dropping both the word and deed of his confession he would be rid of much suffering, humanly speaking. But if at some point things become so perverted for the individual as to make it seem that it is he who is doing God a favour (as if God should not make infinite demands, and as if he were not doing infinitely much for the individual, beyond all

> comparison with what the individual now suffers), then the individual is at every such moment ungrateful and risks being presumptuous. In a state of such confusion, I would advise screening oneself from the danger for a moment and admitting the ingratitude, rather than allowing this dreadful alternative in one's venture, blasphemy, venturing in the conceit of doing God a favour. [...][34]

To those whose ordinary concepts derive from a belief in God the comforter, this passage may indicate an ascending scale of alienation from religion rather than an increasing scale of authentic acceptance of the notion of a Deity, in the harsh and unpleasant light of what human beings genuinely lack, or of where they typically fail.

Whatever one's response to this, the scale itself indicates what those who have looked for parallels between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein in the light of what the latter referred to as language-games stress, namely that religious discourse or expression in some wider sense must be subject to its own internal standards of authenticity. To expose it to scientific standards, or to those that apply to fact-finding in general, would be to dismiss religion *in toto* as superstition. To suppose that science had a monopoly of critical standards would be to deprive religious discourse of any notion of *ascent within* religion of the kind Kierkegaard describes. So what we could say is that we have standards of acceptability within the language-game, allowing religious responses to be distinguished from those that are merely superstition. Professor Phillips has engaged this question in ways more penetrating than I have either space here to indicate or the opportunity in terms of my topic to comment upon in any detail. But I can refer in passing to his insistence that defending the distinctiveness of religious belief *vis-à-vis* science will be a futile task unless the former can also be distinguished from superstition within religion. Phillips offers the example of a mother seeking the Virgin Mary's protection of her new-born child whose belief is based on a trust in 'non-existent, quasi-causal connections'[35] in the hope that some long-gone historical personage can if she so desires protect the child, and that personage is seen as a means to an end intelligible without reference to her divinity, say a long, healthy, and prosperous life for which good food, vaccination, non-exposure to pollutants, violent people, fast-moving traffic, and so on, would be alternative means. A religious attitude would require the belief that the protection be understood in terms of the special beliefs and attitudes (wonder, gratitude, humility, etc.) contained in the person of Mary, she being for the believer a paradigm of these. What we can say is that here, instead of the protection determining the result, the holiness of the Virgin determines the nature of the protection. The reversal implied here is put nicely and indeed very pointedly by Kierkegaard in a remark to the effect that prayer alters nothing, least of all God, but it alters the one who prays.[36]

As we have seen, Kierkegaard's (or *Postscript*'s) own example of superstition is the believer's focus on objects knowledge of which, strictly speaking, can only be approximate. The significance of this is not just, as the Approximation Argument alleges, the elusive authenticity of historical reports. Although their authenticity can always be called in question, the records are often good enough; it is just that if you canalise your religious interest into a curiosity into what has been recorded, you will give the records the wrong weight. That the consideration coincides with what Wittgenstein himself says, may tempt us to interpret it in the light of the language-game approach. But if so, we will have to regard these games as internally revisable and, in view of the pronounced conceptual conservatism embodied in the language-game approach, that raises the question of how far such revision can go. Does Kierkegaard's notion of prayer break with some core belief at the heart of religious discourse as such? Or does it represent one way of sharpening a distinction proper to that discourse.

If a language-game approach is merely descriptive, then it should leave things as they are at any one time. But practitioners of the approach seldom abide by the principle that things be left thus. A sorting hand is put on things: what Christians, for example, have in spite of what they themselves assume is an expressive attitude not an instrumental one; the words they base their belief on and in which they express their beliefs are not assertions, because asserting belongs to science and to history and make-believe, but are part of a pattern of behaviour into which the words and concepts are integrated in non-propositional ways. This seems patently an accommodation to science, an attempt to get language-games to fit together in an acceptable overall pattern. If it is, we have to ask ourselves how far authors like Kierkegaard would be party to such a project. He himself nowhere implies, so far as I can see, that religious discourse is expressive *rather than* assertive, or that its assertions are insulated from science by having their own grammar. As far as we can tell, he would insist that the words have a literal meaning even if it is not available to us. He might not resist the kind of pluralism that a purely descriptive approach appears to imply, the kind of heterogeneity of discourses that now in post-modern times has received so much academic support: knowledge being 'understood as inseparable from the discourse of particular communities, religious assertions have as good a claim as anything else, and a better one than most, to the mantle of "truth"'.[37] Its claim to that mantle seems to be something he thought endemic to religious discourse. But, to modify the pluralist picture, we would have to add that, at least from the point of view of the discourse, it is in competition with others for the commanding heights where there is only room for one truth.

The innovations of constructive or reconstructive thinkers are not to be excluded on the grounds that what they recommend is not borne out by insight into actual practice. Actual practice can be criticised, as Kierkegaard

criticised it in his time and we might now, taking the level of religious discourse of presidential candidates as a point of departure not unlike his own. We might choose to see the innovations archeologically, so to speak, as recovering distinctions that have been eroded in the course of time, and not just from the prospector's point of view, another kind of digger, as refining distinctions already there implicitly but not yet brought to light, or into conscious play, in extant language-games. Where the thinkers are themselves serious players in the language-game and their works the expression of personal experience in the area of the discourse in question, what appear to be innovations may be better seen as an elaboration of insight into the deep structure of our linguistic and related practices. The prospective point of view has something going for it too: critical thinkers like Kierkegaard, who certainly see themselves as devoted to unearthing lost resources in the discourse itself, are also responding to new pressures put on a form of discourse, for instance pressures that for the first time require, or allow, responses to be individual rather than collective. If we are struck by what is new in such thinkers, it is worth noting again how close Wittgenstein's remark that 'the *letter* should not be believed more strongly than is proper and the spirit should receive its due' is to the Lutheran confession that reads: 'One thing is to believe history, another to believe what it means for me.'[38]

Finally, the promised comment on fideism. Kierkegaard's *Postscript* version of faith is indeed a form of fideism simply because it is opposed, polemically opposed, to philosophical defenders of faith who claim that faith is not at odds with reason. But three short apologetic comments are in order. First, the definition of 'fideism' just given either usually prescinds from or preempts the kind of discussion that would allow a wider use of the term 'reason' than that traditionally in the safe-keeping of philosophy and science. But once language-game-appropriate standards of criticism are allowed to come into the open, it becomes less clear what is at odds with what. Secondly, any view that tends to give history and faith their different logics and their correspondingly different objects will speak for the rational status of fideism itself even when traditional definitions of 'reason' are maintained. Some good old-fashioned Fideists may have seen more clearly than those who oppose fideisms how faith and scientific or philosophical rationality differ. Thirdly, Kierkegaard himself has given no grounds to suppose that the faith of a historian who is also a believer should not be *enriched* by his or others' research into ecclesiastical history, or by an interest in the authenticity of the Gospels. The point would still be, however, that such a task can never be seen as a way *to* faith. As Kierkegaard says, if either the historian or the speculative philosopher do have faith, it must be there prior to and independently of the history, its truth, and the 'speculative' edifice the Hegelians took themselves to be building upon it. As far as the essential passion of faith is concerned, the edifice is no more than a whited

sepulchre housing if not the inwardly corrupt, as the dictionary has it, then at least the lazy-spirited and inwardly empty, whose fearful outward gaze focuses on externalities and obscures that place in the heart or the will where faith belongs. Not 'rais[ing] the question of a subjective truth, the truth of assimilation', the objective researcher 'lays hold of something so fixed that it excludes all dialectics'.[39] The price of the claim that 'Christianity is spirit, spirit is inwardness, inwardness is subjectivity, subjectivity is essentially passion, and in its maximum an infinite, personal, passionate interest in one's eternal happiness'[40] is that it would be much easier not to have that interest and get along *without* faith.[41]

## Notes

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, rev. ed. by Georg Henrik von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman, rev. ed. of texts by Alois Pichler, tr. Peter Winch, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, pp. 36–37. Regarding the passage from which the first quotation is drawn, Wittgenstein adds in parenthesis, 'I am not sure how far all this is exactly in the spirit of Kierkegaard' (p. 37e).
2. *Confessio Augustana*, art. xx.
3. Robert Merrihew Adams, "Kierkegaard's Arguments against Objective Reasoning in Religion" (*The Monist* 60 [1977], pp. 48–62), reprinted in N. Scott Arnold, Theodore M. Benditt, and George Graham (eds), *Philosophy Then and Now*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, pp. 211–25. Here p. 214.
4. Ibid., p. 212.
5. See Peter Fonda, *Don't Tell Dad*, New York: Hyperion, 1998, p. 496. Of course, it can be said that the desire in this case inclines the would-be believer to regard the paucity of evidence in favour of the belief as due to the parent's inability to make visible what would otherwise have been overpowering evidence for it. The rationality of that move would depend on further evidence about the parent's psychological make-up.
6. Adams, op. cit., p. 214. A small ambiguity is removed by exchanging prepositions, the danger 'in' rather than 'of'.
7. Ibid., pp. 214–15.
8. Ibid., p. 213; parenthetical page references are to the Swenson/Lowrie translation of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941) used by Adams, and to the third edition of Kierkegaard's *Samlede Værker*, by A.B. Drachmann, J.L. Heiberg and H.O. Lange (København: Gyldendal, 1991), bd. 9 and 10. Here p. 25 (9:24). I do not keep rigidly to the translation.
9. Adams, op. cit., p. 214.
10. *Postscript*, op. cit., p. 32 (9:31).
11. See *Søren Kierkegaard Skrifter*, *Kommentarbind* 6, published by Søren Kierkegaard Forskningscenteret, Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, p. 351.
12. Adams, op. cit., p. 215.
13. *Postscript*, p. 331 (10:68).
14. *Theologisk Maanedsskrift*, 4 and 6 bd.
15. Grundtvig's idea of the Church was based on the British liberal market economy which he had studied at close hand in the period following his conviction for libel. Its freedom was to be guaranteed by a State Constitution that served no other

ecclesiastic functions than to guarantee this freedom (see Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990, pp. 212, 236). By freeing the Church and its priests from State interference and allowing people to worship in the parish of their choice, the aim was to bring true Christianity to bear once again on culture.

16. *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, 2nd enlarged edn, ed. Niels Thulstrup, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1969, vol. XII, p. 331.
17. *Postscript*, p. 23 (9:23). See also p. 335 (10:71).
18. Cardinal Newman thought formal evidence was a potential obstacle to justified belief because it 'threatened to make us distrust our spontaneous beliefs and moral commitments, to distract us by epistemological demands that can never be met' (Theodore M. Porter, 'Reason, Faith, and Alienation in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle', in Hans Erich Bödeker, Peter Hanns Reill und Jürgen Schlumbohm, *Wissenschaft als kulturelle Praxis 1750–1900*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999, pp. 412–13). Of Newman's *The Grammar of Ascent*, Porter adds that it 'was written to defang the beast, to show that religious beliefs could meet reasonable standards of certitude and that absolute rigor was scarcely if at all possible in this world' (p. 413). As will be seen, this construal implies a view different from that of *Postscript*, which nowhere suggests that certainty in regard to what was evidentially proven would be appropriate in any case.
19. N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Værker i Udvalg*, II, eds Georg Christensen and Hal Koch, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1940, p. 326. See Bruce Kirmmse, op. cit. *Postscript*, p. 35 (9:34).
20. See the remarks on the Grundtvigian, Jacob Christian Lindberg, an astute theologian who Kierkegaard respected. Even he, *Postscript* points out, resorts to philological questions concerning which variants of the confessional to accept, for example, should one refer to the Spirit of Holiness or the Holy Spirit? (*Postscript*, p. 41 [9:40]).
21. Ibid., pp. 38–42 (9:37–41).
22. Ibid., p. 42 (9:41).
23. Ibid., p. 32 (9:31).
24. See note 1.
25. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks* 1914–1916, 2nd edn, eds G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1979, p. 74e.
26. *Postscript*, op. cit., p. 43 (9:42).
27. Ibid., p. 43 (9:42).
28. Ibid., p. 35 (9:34).
29. Ibid., p. 35 (9:34).
30. Ibid., pp. 32 and 36 (9:31 and 35).
31. Adams, op. cit., p. 214.
32. *Postscript*, p. 511 (10:243).
33. See ibid., p. 512 (10:245).
34. *Søren Kierkegaard*, *Papers and Journals: A Selection*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1996, X 2 A 318, pp. 450–1.
35. D.Z. Phillips, *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970. p. 103.
36. "Den rette Bedende strider i Bønnen", in *Fire oppbyggelige taler* (1844), *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 2000, vol. 5, p. 380.
37. 'Two Concepts of Secularism', Wilfred M. McClay, *The Wilson Quarterly*, summer 2000, p. 60.

38. That these confessions were, as Jack Verheyden notes in his reply, ‘usually in the back of Kierkegaard’s mind when he wrote on matters of theology’ would be a confirmation of this point.
39. *Postscript*, p. 23 (9:23).
40. Ibid., p. 33 (9:32).
41. I am grateful to Camilla Serck-Hanssen and Panagiotis Dimas for helpful comments in the preparation of this chapter.

# 4
# Learning the Historical Truth

*Jack Verheyden*

Alaistair Hannay has presented us a penetrating chapter on "Faith, History, and Approximation," one that opens up a number of different issues on the topic. He centers his chapter on Søren Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and what Hannay finds there about faith in regard to reasoning about the matter of approximation in knowledge. A major theme of the chapter is the examination of an article by Robert M. Adams. I agree with Hannay's overall point against Adams on faith and "normal epistemic reasoning" that Adams has placed Kierkegaard's ideas in the wrong framework and therefore misrepresented them. There are a few matters that come up at times that I would quibble with, but Hannay's basic criticism of Adams is correct. Also, Adams represents that which in principle has been rather widespread in the last half of the twentieth century on Søren Kierkegaard, so that Hannay's careful engagement with Adams has important yield for wider discussion.

My main difficulty with Mr. Hannay is, given the topic of "Faith and History," that he has chosen to deal with the material in Kierkegaard and that he has not dealt with other materials that have been excluded. Perhaps he wants to let Adams set his (Hannay's) agenda, but I think the result does not adequately bring out Kierkegaard's view on "Faith and History." I am alerted to this apparent difference of my view from Hannay's on p. 74. The passage makes a point with which I agree in one sense as I indicated above, but as stated does so in such a way that it clangs a bell that indicates that something serious in the framework is being omitted. The sentence reads:

> It is not that faith comes in where normal epistemic reasoning will no longer allay one's anxiety; rather, wherever normal epistemic reasoning is in place we are no longer talking about faith. What is wrong is to start out looking at history.

The bell clangs because Kierkegaard *has* started out by looking at history. The title of the work that Mr. Hannay is analyzing is the *Concluding Unscientific*

*Postscript* and this is the name by which the book is commonly known. The full title, however, as is given by Kierkegaard, is *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. And the *Philosophical Fragments* (or Scraps) has the rather formidable subtitle, *Is an historical point of departure possible for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure have any other than a merely historical interest; is it possible to base an eternal happiness upon historical knowledge?*

This book of 1844 is one of the earlier attempts to deal with the issue of faith and history, a topic which became veritably *the* topic of Protestant theology in Germany in the last half of the nineteenth century and up till 1914. I am going to rehearse several of the major lines of this little book even though these major lines will be familiar to most of you, although perhaps not as fresh in mind as they are for a Kierkegaard scholar like Mr. Hannay. Doing this addresses not only Kierkegaard, for the *Philosophical Fragments* was one of the pivotal works behind Protestant theology in the era from 1921 to 1965.

Kierkegaard's program in this book that addresses history and faith is to unite philosophical thinking in respect to learning the truth with doctrinal understanding about salvation. This doctrinal understanding is Christian but that designation for it is not used. Instead the book is presented as the hypothetical musings of a Johannes Climacus, a philosophical sort who thinks about learning the truth with the help of Socrates in certain Platonic Dialogues. The Greek view is that truth is inherent in the human and that one learns it by being awakened to it by a teacher. "Thus the Truth is not introduced into the individual from without, but was within him."[1] The teacher's role is to be a midwife, to help the birth into consciousness of that which is latent in the learner. Socrates was quite proficient at that, but it could be done by Prodicus, or the serving maid or the fellow at the market while he and the learner are purchasing some olives, and so on. That is, the moment is merely accidental and could be anytime and anywhere. Now, Johannes Climacus brainstorms. Is it possible to conceive of a way of acquiring a knowledge of the truth where the moment in time has a decisive and enduring significance? If that is to be the case, the situation must be different from the Socratic one. The learner is not just in ignorance, and perhaps searching approximately for the truth, but is in untruth or error. S/he is departing from the truth and polemicises against it. Johannes Climacus says we will call this sin.

To address such a situation, a different kind of teacher is required. If the learner is to acquire the truth "the Teacher must bring it to him . . . "[2] The truth is not latent in the person and available anywhere and anytime. Furthermore, due to the polemical situation of the learner being against the truth, the teacher must also give him the condition for understanding it. To do the latter, however, means that this teacher must be that which created the learner's human nature, that is, the teacher must be the God. The

learner is in a bondage to him or herself and the teacher frees one from this captivity as Savior and Redeemer. Such a teacher is himself the teaching, and conversely, the teaching is the teacher. To use my words and not those of Johannes Climacus, in this scenario truth comes into being. The learner has become a new creature by taking leave of this bondage through conversion and repentance. If such a thing happened, Johannes Climacus says, then the Moment would have decisive significance. It would constitute a real alternative to the Socratic philosophy of learning the truth. It could not just be taught by anyone, anytime, anywhere.

Johannes Climacus continues in the next chapter by looking at the Godward side of this historical moment. Rather than going too far into the mysteries of a formal doctrine of God, Johannes Climacus says he is only a poet and will elaborate the God's resolve to reveal Himself according to a motive of love by the use of a parabolic analogy. Such language is the kind that is widely understandable, so Johannes Climacus essays an imaginative story about a great king who while riding through his kingdom one day came upon a lowly maiden and falls in love with her. She, however, does not know it and the great king, one of such power that every foreign state trembled before him, one before whom every statesman dared not breathe a word of displeasure, sees that he has a problem. The inability of lovers to understand one another strikes at the very heart of love and it is only in equality or unity that an understanding can be effected. The great king understands if he rides up to the maiden's hovel with his legions and rows of trumpets blaring, manifesting all the marks of his power and majesty, that the kind of relationship of love would not be possible. The lowly maiden would be simply overwhelmed. He considers a second option. The union required for love might be brought about by the elevation of the maiden. The great king could bring her to his court, give her a royal title, duchess or something, and in this setting they could live the life of love. But the king sees their love could not be happy this way. The maiden would always know that their relationship rested upon a deception, that she was not really a duchess, and perhaps she was being loved for her artificial title.

The union of the great king and the lowly maiden must be brought about in some other way. Rather than a direct display of his greatness or an elevation of the lowly maiden, the union must be sought through a descent of the great king. He puts on beggar's clothes and wanders by the maiden's hovel. He appears in "the likeness of the humblest"[3] in order to woo the lowly maiden on her ground, so to speak, and enter a loving relationship with her. The great king is incognito. Johannes Climacus says that this parable is a pointer to how the Godward side of the Moment is to be understood. Like the great king in beggar's rags the God would become the equal of the humblest in human form, indeed, he would not have a resting place for his head. The God would appear in the form of a servant because the God's condescension is for the sake of the beloved. "The God must suffer all

things, endure all things, make experience of all things" in His form of a servant.[4] This love is creative since its purpose is to bring about a new creature and liberate it from bondage and destruction. A most important distinction is entered by Johannes Climacus at this point. The great king's beggar's clothes only apply analogically to the God's humanity, not to the form of a servant. "But this servant-form is no mere outer garment, . . . . It is his true form and figure."[5] It reflects and manifests the God's resolve of love to condescend to a learner who is in the situation of untruth.

Johannes Climacus' project of thought on learning the truth in a manner that will be distinguished from the Socratic one is carried forward here with his "essay of the imagination" about the God. Certainly in Kierkegaard's Lutheran tradition there was a recognition of the hiddenness of God, but Kierkegaard's presentation of learning the truth has sounded some new notes in the history of Christian theology. God has a problem of pedagogy. There is a difficulty of communication. "It may seem of small matter for the God to make himself understood, but this is not so easy of accomplishment if he is to refrain from annihilating the unlikeness that exists between them [the God and the human]."[6]

But if there is a difficulty for the God, Johannes Climacus finds one also for the human. He next turns to an exploration of the paradox of the God in human form. The great king in beggar's clothes is a paradox. A paradox is something counter to appearances. It seems to be a contradiction for a great king to be also a beggar. Johannes Climacus says when the God becomes the teacher the paradox goes beyond the parable and becomes absolute because in the latter case the eternal, that beyond time by definition, has had a beginning in time. "The news of the day is the beginning of eternity."[7] The God looks like an individual human being like the rest of us, but as the paradox has the power to teach the learner in untruth. But not everyone will be taught, indeed, most will not. Unless the God gives the condition the learner cannot learn what is needed, his or her spiritual eyes will not be opened to their bondage or error. But to put the learner in possession of this truth the teacher must be human. The one who is contemporary with the historical figure of this teacher and does not receive the condition cannot recognize the eternal in the teacher and so what s/he knows has merely historical significance for her or him. Johannes Climacus says therefore: "We see at once that the historical in the more concrete sense is a matter of indifference."[8] The teacher's appearance would still be an historical event, but it would no longer be an occasion by which a person came to self-understanding. The historical fact for the Moment in time is not a simple historical fact, so why should the accuracy of reports about it be of great importance? Faith is not distilled from the piling up of approximation upon approximation. Johannes Climacus satirizes what he sees as the ridiculousness of attaching discipleship to a mastery of the facts of this teacher's life by projecting a contemporary who tries to obtain a complete biographical

account. The contemporary reduces his sleep to the barest minimum so as to attend the teacher everywhere; he hires a hundred spies to record every movement, a battery of secretaries to account for every syllable that passes the teacher's lips; conferences are held with the contemporary's assistants so that a record of the highest reliability can be obtained. But that will not make this contemporary a disciple! One must recognize the historical made eternal and the eternal made historical. Without the condition given by the God one would only see the servant-form, not that this servant-form is the reaching out of the God in love.

This teacher would not pass through the world in silence about himself, he would tell his fellows that he and the God were one, just as the disciples who come to recognize him would testify to the same reality which they have experienced. The words and actions of the teacher and the disciples about him are the immediate contemporaneity while the presence of the God would be paradoxically hidden from those who will not have received the condition. This indicates that the historical fact or event of the teacher is not a simple one; rather, it possesses a doubleness about it. The immediate contemporaneity is not of decisive advantage in learning this truth because faith embraces what is not directly knowable. The contemporary disciple has the sole advantage of being able to go where the teacher is located, but the contemporary disciple must have faith in that which is not directly discernible. It is the same for the disciple at second hand. For as the historical gives only the occasion for the immediate contemporary to become a disciple, so the testimony of immediate contemporaries of the teacher serves as an occasion for later generations to become disciples when they also receive the condition from the God.

Does this mean that disciples at second hand are dependent on the credibility of the contemporary witnesses? What is of first importance is that the contemporary disciples' witness to the eternal that would be united to history, that in these beggars' clothes there is the great king. This is the historical fact that the disciple at second hand is centrally concerned with. "If the fact spoken of were a simple historical fact, the accuracy of the historical sources would be of great importance. Here this is not the case, for faith cannot be distilled from even the nicest detail. The historical fact that God has been in human form is the essence of the matter."[9] Errors and variety of presentation would not obscure what is crucial. Such petty difficulties should vanish. But Johannes Climacus says there is a limit to this flux of historical detail. If the original generation had witnessed to the fact "that in such and such a year God appeared among us in the humble figure of a servant, that he lived and taught in our community, and finally died," that would be quite sufficient.[10]

The *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is meant to explore the appropriation of the God in time, the teacher who is the teaching. The historical aspect of "Faith and History" is cut off from the subjectivity which appropriates it in

Hannay's wrestling with Adams and other issues he takes up in the chapter. To focus only on the "passionate and infinite interest" of faith apart from its object, the eternal made historical, runs the danger of making Kierkegaard's position one of Promethean subjectivity, something that has been done often enough.

I have a quibble or so with Hannay's chapter which I will mention in passing. On p. 78 he says that "the primary target of the chapter of *Postscript's* Part One is the Danish theologian . . . Grundtvig." I cannot agree with that. More germane to the conference than my difference from Hannay on the matter is that of which Grundtvig more generally can remind us. My knowledge of Grundtvig is too slight to discuss him. But what he lifts up in his work, the Christian religious community, can be quite important. It also exposes a weakness of Kierkegaard because Kierkegaard only speaks of the church as a place of proclamation and virtually never of an involvement of life together. Kierkegaard himself went to church virtually every day but he seemed to have learned about Christian faith from his family, especially his father. And there is nothing unusual in that. Most people come to Christian faith through parents, friends, and other personal benefactors who have commended themselves to the believer as trustworthy, committed, and personally involved in that faith.[11] The radical individualism of Kierkegaard's writings invites the conclusion that Grundtvig may have had hold of something of which Kierkegaard could well have taken more positive account.

The rehearsal of the *Philosophical Fragments* above brings out some aspects of Kierkegaard's view that are worth comment. Breaking out of Johannes Climacus's hypothetical musings, the history that Kierkegaard discusses in this book reflect a view of Jesus Christ that is compatible with the Chalcedonian formula of two natures. This was affirmed in the Lutheran Confessions which were usually in the back of Kierkegaard's mind when he wrote on matters of theology. But in the modern world there have arisen within Christian theology many figures who have held that the Chalcedonian formulation is not consonant with the New Testament, the Gospels in particular. Greek philosophical categories have been imported into the discussion in such a manner that they threaten (or worse) the humanity of Jesus. The union of "truly God" and "truly man" in one person is surely consonant with the paradoxical doubleness of the historical fact in the *Fragments*. If one revises the Chalcedonian formula, the result may change the view of "Faith and History" significantly. Such a position is found in the theological works of Friedrich Schleiermacher who combines both the observations just made, that is, he thought Chalcedon went beyond what the Gospels present of Jesus Christ and that the role of the life of the Christian religious community is a crucial aspect in dealing with faith and the history of Jesus Christ. His different manner in handling these issues I think will sharpen an understanding of Kierkegaard's position by contrast.

One of the very earliest attempts to wrestle with the question of the relation of the Christology of the Christian church to historical knowledge was performed by Schleiermacher in 1805 in the small work entitled *Christmas Eve Celebration: A Dialogue*. After spending the bulk of this writing in analyzing the mood of Christmas through the dialogue of a group of family and friends gathered to celebrate Christmas, Schleiermacher closes by having the three men present discuss the meaning of the holiday in a more reflective fashion. The first figure to speak is a man named Leonhardt and his statement reads like an early version of the sociological interpretation of religion associated with the name of Emile Durkheim. (I have in mind Durkheim's theory of collective effervescence and the ritual of the religious community.) Leonhardt sets out to extol the Christmas festival but does it by holding that the life of Christianity is virtually created out of its festive occasions. Scriptural narratives and formal doctrines are too remote from common, uneducated folk to have a decisive impact upon religious life. For instance, belief in the miraculous arises from the moving impressions which festivals make in the present. This origination of belief in miracles finds illustration in the case of miracles attributed to the saints by the Roman Catholic Church. It is the holy days set up to honor the saints which give rise to belief in the saints' miraculous activities. Festivals, therefore, instigate belief, and the Christian Church reflects this process in regard to the Redeemer: "Indeed rites so much more effectively serve this purpose than words that not infrequently it was for the sake of festive rites and traditions, after their true significance had been lost to view, that false histories were fabricated and even came to be believed."[12] Often only through such traditions does history itself come to be made. Actual historical occurrences have very little to do with the nature of Christianity, so that the activity of Jesus on earth is not particularly pertinent. Since it is dubious whether Jesus had an institutional church in view during his life, "... the life of Christ receded far to the background of early proclamation, and as most people now believe, was only told fragmentarily and by persons removed from the actual events, subordinates."[13] In fact, the reports which we have of Jesus diverge so greatly that every report undoes the others. What one is able to affirm regarding Jesus indicates that he was much more like John the Baptist than as presented by the apostolic testimony. The real heart of the matter turns upon something symbolic. "In short, since what might be experienced and historically valid regarding the personal existence of Christ, has become so precarious because of the diversity of views and doctrines, therefore, if our festival is primarily to be seen as the basis of a continuing common faith in Christ, it is thereby all the more to be extolled."[14]

Leonhardt is answered by the second speaker, Ernst, who says that he does not wish to controvert Leonhardt directly. While Ernst says he is not so skeptical about some of these historical questions as Leonhardt, he approaches the entire matter from a different angle. What interests Ernst is

the new life in which Christians participate, a new life which is experienced in a mood and disposition so well symbolized by the Christmas festival. The mood is that of joy and the disposition one of giving to others; these characterize the nature of Christian life, a life which is communal in its very fabric. The efficacy of Christian redemption provides stability and continuity to what otherwise would be only a series of temporal changes. This new life is experienced as a joy which has the power to overcome certain antitheses to which human life is subject, such as the opposition between time and eternity, appearance and being, and particular sorrows and joys. Christian joy overcomes these oppositions, not by removing them, but rather by bestowing a more embracing harmony which transcends these antitheses. This joy provides a new context which transforms the contrasts into a new experienced shape and unity.

The key point which Ernst makes is that *for one who participates in such Christian life* it cannot have been arbitrarily contrived, nor can it have been spontaneously produced out of itself; rather this communal result requires an inner foundation, a common ground which is the source of the heightened existence shared by Christian people. The very nature of the experience of those who constitute the Christian community is that they begin with the separation of natural and spiritual aspects of living, and that they obtain the integrated harmony – so far as they do – which brings joy not out of their own power but from a ground beyond themselves. Precisely for this reason the Christian community must use the language of grace and redemption; this redemption does not come as the report of a forensic decision but through the bestowal of historic influence as this is made concrete in personal relationships. Consequently, the inner ground of the experienced life must lie in a person who possessed this new life in its fullest perfection and has imparted it to others from the resources of his own person. In the context of this new life and its idea of a Redeemer, the slightest historical traces (note that these are required) of the origins of this community are sufficient to convince the Christian that this beginning is in one who himself participated in this new life and communicated it to others. Leonhardt's problem is that he is looking at the wrong kind of history. The smallest particle of lower or critical history is enough for a person caught up in the experience of the Christian community to hold to the community's real ground in a historical Redeemer.

The third speaker, Eduard, picks up on this same point and says that Leonhardt has sought out the substance of Christmas in respect to external historical truth. Eduard wants to look inward at the more mystical Gospel – that of John, who shows only subordinate interest in particular events and whose real concern is with the spiritual meaning. In language reflecting the metaphysical idealism of the time, Eduard develops some of the same antitheses of time and eternity, appearance and being to which Ernst had referred in more restrained fashion. Ernst's concern is what might be termed

"anthropological" or, as we often loosely say today, "existential." He attempts in principle to stay close to the experience of the Christian community and what he finds required is the ground of its new life in an individual person. Ernst apparently has little need to speak directly of God in his comments on Christianity, but Eduard wants to consider the same experienced new life "... from the perspective of the divine"[15] or out of the divine principle. Christian joy and this individual Redeemer require explanation: how can an individual person possess this highest perfection of existence so as to bestow it on others, and what constitutes the human situation so that something historically communicated from one in the past can have such telling significance?

Eduard begins with the opening verses of the Fourth Gospel, "the Word became flesh." Flesh is finite, sensible nature, while the Word indicates thinking or coming to know. The human in itself, that is, the human in its essence, that which constitutes a person, is life's coming to know itself in its eternal being amid the ever-changing flow of becoming. But when people fail to understand themselves in this essential manner, falling into a state of pure becoming, they thereby bring about a disunity of their nature from what they truly are. As a result, they are lost and given over to confusion.

Redemption arises for people when they come to love all becoming, including themselves, in the eternal, willing to be nothing other "than a thought of eternal being!"[16] The basis for this redemption transpires when people recognize that being has united itself to temporal process, and that this union is not something fortuitous but is an eternal relation exhibited in one who is the Son of Man. Jesus Christ is the human-in-itself even as an individual, and as such makes known the union of being and becoming. He is the point from which humanity-in-itself may be formed in each person. This common ontological participation which is recognized in the fellowship of the church is expressed in Christianity as love.

Schleiermacher here presents a view of faith and history that moves from the actuality of new life in the Christian religious community to affirmations about the history from which it has arisen. It certainly is not a view for those who adhere to a "hermeneutic of suspicion" but is advanced to clarify the bases of Christian faith and life for those who participate in its new life. In Schleiermacher's developed theology in *The Christian Faith* and in his lectures on *The Life of Jesus* he has more to say about the picture of Jesus in the New Testament and how this picture in union with the Christian community communicate Christian religious self-consciousness. Some of these lines of interpretation reappear in the christological section of Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology*. Here it is the experience of New Being that is mediated to the community by the picture of Jesus Christ. For those influenced and transformed by the picture it can only have arisen out of a personal life in which the New Being has appeared. We cannot guarantee that the name

of this person was Jesus of Nazareth but it is historically absurd that it is anyone else. Tillich continues the type of argument on faith and history that is found in the speeches of Ernst and Eduard in the *Christmas Eve*, using New Being rather than joy, and essential humanity and eternal God manhood instead of the human-in-itself. I have never found Tillich referring to the little dialogue.

Both Schleiermacher and Tillich have reservations about referring to Jesus Christ as God in the manner Kierkegaard often did as the God-man. Rather, Jesus Christ is the Son of God, one in whom the human consciousness is completely and intensively oriented to God and completely directing in; and one in whom, according to Tillich, essential humanity as united to God appears under the conditions of existence without separation and distortion, thereby creating New Being. Both made ontological claims about Jesus Christ. Both of these men think one needs to know more about the history of Jesus Christ, whether in historical critical judgments in Schleiermacher, or in the New Testament picture for Tillich, than the bare statements of Johannes Climacus at the close of the *Fragments* that it would be sufficient if we had the notice that God has taught, lived among us as a servant, and died. But the younger Schleiermacher in the *Christmas Eve* whose Ernst says that the slightest historical traces of external history would be enough for the internal history of the religious community deriving from Jesus, appears close to Johannes Climacus in that respect, however different the frameworks of the two writers surely are. Both Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard relate a minimal history to the movement of Christian faith and experience under the affirmation of the uniting of eternal being to historical time in Jesus Christ.

## Notes

1. P. 11 PF.
2. Ibid., p. 17.
3. Ibid., p. 39.
4. Ibid., p. 40.
5. Ibid., p. 39.
6. Ibid., p. 31.
7. Ibid., p. 71.
8. Ibid., p. 73.
9. Ibid., p. 130.
10. Ibid.
11. Cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Faith on Earth*. Yale University (New Haven, 1989).
12. Christmas Eve, pp. 71–72.
13. Ibid., p. 73.
14. Ibid., p. 74.
15. Ibid., p. 82.
16. Ibid.

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Kierkegaard, Søren. *Philosophical Fragments*. Trans. by D. Swenson and H. Hong. Princeton University (Princeton, NJ, 1962).

Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *Christmas Eve*. Trans. by T. Tice. John Knox (Richmond, VA, 1967).

# Voices in Discussion

*D.Z. Phillips*

*I*: My paper makes heavy weather of Adams' reading of Kierkegaard. But I do think he gives the whole work a wrong slant. My criticisms show the influence of Wittgenstein on my thinking.

Adams finds logical defects in Kierkegaard's treatment of approximation. He doesn't see that he is making grammatical points. According to Adams, Kierkegaard argues that because an infinite interest involves an infinite risk, it requires a passionate stance in which you convince yourself that something is true.

Perhaps Adams is right. Perhaps Kierkegaard is making a grammatical remark without realising it. How do you defend a grammatical remark?

Why give so much attention to Grundtvig? They had been political opponents, but he held views similar to those of Adams. What Kierkegaard opposes in Grundtvig is first his claim that history reads truths to those who read it in the same way; and, second, his view that 'the eternal' is kept alive in rituals.

Grundtvig saw history as the working out of the divine will, and called biblical critics 'the fellowship of bookworms'. There should be a living church with a creed, but one which found eternal significance in history. Compare the discussion of the view in Knuuttila's paper. Gadamer emphasises the need for continual reinterpretation. Grundtvig sees it more as a matter of renewed acts of allegiance.

Kierkegaard was opposed to these emphases on the Church and the Bible. The longevity of the Church does not guarantee its authenticity. In church and Bible faith is placed in approximate objects.

A number of questions can be asked. First, are we clear about what Kierkegaard is saying? Second, what is in favour of a grammatical reading of him?

Grundtvig says that eternal facts can be read off history and kept alive by the Church. But even if faithful records are kept, do these bear truth on their face? For Kierkegaard, Grundtvig is undialectical. He implies that he is a pagan.

Faith cannot be dispositional for Kierkegaard. It must be renewed without limit – this is why the interest is infinite. Grundtvig is making a grammatical mistake. To be infinitely interested in an approximation results in the ludicrousness of the zealot.

Approximation is not to be understood in an epistemic context; this diverts us form the truth. Kierkegaard's comments are best understood as 'grammatical'. This has to do with their innovative nature, though they've had a polemical history.

In the end I am not content to see Kierkegaard simply as a grammarian of various modes of thought. I see him as part of 'the flight from history'. Lessing has said that history is impotent.

So I see Kierkegaard in the light of his predecessors, adding one more step towards subjectivity. So simply seeing him as grammarian, in Wittgenstein's sense may be problematic.

*J*: For Kierkegaard very little history is enough. But why is it needed at all? For him Platonism was not enough. It did not lift him, despite its talk of the divine. Kierkegaard emphasised the scandal of the eternal in history. So history is part of the message. So God must come down.

I have a question for *I*. You use infinity in connection with Kierkegaard. In the nineteenth century, what was the background to talk of infinity? If you are interested in infinity that does not mean that your interest or passion is infinite. A finite being cannot have infinite passion. What does Kierkegaard mean by 'infinite'?

*K*: Before *I* answers, I want to say 'Yes' to your general point. It is wholly congenial to Kierkegaard's parable of the king and the maiden which I made use of.

*I*: You ask what Kierkegaard meant by 'the infinite'. One might say that a biblical critic has an infinite interest in the details of the Bible, but that is not Kierkegaard's use. But neither is it that which is involved in a bomb disposal expert on a mission saying, 'God help me to get back.' It is rather a matter of his saying, 'Whether I get back or not I've acted in God.' He has placed himself in the hands of the infinite – the ordering of priorities is out of his hands.

*J*: In German nineteenth-century thought, there is an emphasis on the infinite value of the individual. See, for example, Harnack's *Essence of Christianity*. But the human soul is not infinite.

*D*: One must pay attention to the different grammars Kierkegaard is trying to elucidate. There is not just one relation of faith and history. It depends on the context.

How did faith arise? Can you turn to history to justify faith? It has a relation to history, but not one of proof.

Grundtvig is unacceptable to Kierkegaard because he seems to be saying that you have historical facts and then add religiously significant facts.

For Kierkegaard this would still be history. Unless you have the right perspective you won't see history from a Christian point of view, and that is where faith comes into play.

*K*: Correct.

*I*: For Lessing there is a logical gap between the truths of history and necessary truths. Kierkegaard sides with Lessing, but not for his reasons. Lessing doesn't make much of history, but Kierkegaard does. He was also influenced by Goethe's idea that revelation can come to one in a flash. And so he raised his question: how can a historical point of departure be essential for an eternal consciousness?

*D*: K has said that Kierkegaard neglects the community in the *Postscript*, but doesn't he put this right in *Works of Love*?

*K*: After the *Postscript* a review commented that he had not said much about responsibility in action. Kierkegaard said that his next book would rectify that, but I don't see that. When he discusses other stages in life there is an emphasis on what is received from others, but in the religious stage I find this lacking. The emphasis is on the relationship between the individual and God.

*H*: In that respect I want to mention the disanalogy between the parable of the king and God. The king does have big battalions, but he chooses to appear in lowly form, whereas you want to say that the beggar's clothes, like the nakedness of God in Michelangelo's 'Creation of Adam', is meant to show something essential about God.

*K*: Being a servant is of the essence of God.

*I*: Also God, unlike the king, cannot deceive.

*H*: That is why I emphasised the disanalogy. If one says that God chooses to come in beggar's clothes, it looks as if he could have done otherwise, in which case one separates his nature from his love – a point Feuerbach was right to emphasise.

*K*: But God must choose to love if love is to be free and not constrained.

*H*: I think that we assume too readily that if something is not chosen, it must be constrained.

*F*: I have a question for K which takes us back to the issue of faith and history. Let us grant that you only need to know a little history. The teacher has to present truth, but there are conditions for receiving it. Faith is a gift. If that is right, a little history is enough, because hearing the Gospel is the work of the Holy Spirit.

*K*: I think that is his view. The *Postscript* is thematized in the way it is since the affirmation that faith is the work of the Holy Spirit leads people not to do anything. That's why he speaks of a leap – there must be a response. He warns of the unfortunate consequences of passivity.

*F*: I also have a question for *I*. On your last page you discuss Fideism and the view that faith is opposed to reason. Then you say that Kierkegaard

has no reason for saying that the believer couldn't have an interest in history. But he could still say this is not a way to faith. Is your view that a fideist can't give arguments?

*I*: Rather than say that the fideist is against reason, Kierkegaard, I think, is pointing out that reason is a complicated phenomenon; that there are different kinds of reason.

*F*: Isn't it more complicated still? Isn't he saying that if faith and reason clash, reason goes? But did he really mean that? Or did he mean by 'reason' what Hegel meant by it? Similarly, Tertullian is not saying believe the absurd, but, rather, that if what you believe clashes with the standards of Greek philosophy, so much the worse for Greek philosophy.

*I*: That would fit in with his lifelong polemic against philosophy.

*L*: In this session we realise that Kierkegaard wants to defend faith against the incursions of reason in his own time. Faith has a paradoxical nature. It may involve a radical negation of historical arguments.

But in the first symposium we saw how historical search is motivated by a desire on the part of people like Mack and Crossan to go back to the primitive nature of Christianity by denying a high Christology and getting back to the sayings of Jesus. Subsequent developments in the Church is said to have been politicised, and so on. But, then, what room is left for the notion of a continuing community of faith?

*B*: When you try to reconstruct the sayings of Jesus in the Jesus Seminar, the question of God remains. Has there been an encounter through these sayings without which I would not be the being I am? The existential encounter is an essential part of being a Christian.

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# Part III

# Biblical Authority and Philosophical Method

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# Biblical Authority and Philosophy

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I shall begin with a discussion of the concepts of authority and revelation. After some remarks on the terms 'divine authority' and 'divine revelation' I argue that they are often used synonymously. This is understandable when it is assumed that the bearer of authority communicates something. Some philosophical questions associated with divine and biblical authority are briefly sketched in the Section 'Authority, Revelation, and Faith'. In section 'Authority, Interpretation, and Experience', I argue that there is a classical conception of biblical authority often dismissed in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion which mainly concentrates on the questions of epistemic justification or warrant. In the last section I deal with the question of biblical authority and the criteria of truth.[1]

## Authority

In his paper 'An Analysis of Authority' J.M. Bochenski (O.P.) treats authority as a triadic relation in which $x$ is the bearer of authority, $y$ is the subject of authority and $g$ is the field in which $x$ has authority over $y$. The terms $x$ and $y$ stand for conscious beings and $g$ for meanings which can be communicated. Whenever we have an authority relation $A(x, y, g)$, if $x$ communicates to $y$ by asserting an element of $g$, $y$ as a general rule accepts it as valid simply because it is communicated by $x$. Accepting something as an authoritative statement is to accept it as put forward by somebody who is regarded as a legitimate guide of one's intellectual or volitional behaviour in a certain area and is in this sense one's authority. The authority relation is irreflexive (nobody is an authority for himself or herself), asymmetric (if $x$ is an authority for $y$ in $g$, $y$ is not an authority for $x$ in $g$) and transitive (the authority of an authority in the same field is an authority). The field of authority is twofold: it is either a class of propositions which state how things are, or a class of rules prescribing what should be done. In the former case the authority is termed epistemic authority and in the latter deontic authority.[2]

Bochenski is mainly interested in the formal properties of the generalizations of the three variables with two kinds of quantifiers in connection with the matrix A($x$, $y$, $g$), but he also makes some philosophical remarks about authority in communicative practice. Accepting an epistemic authority is said to be based on the more or less justified assumption that one learns things from the authority who is more competent in a given field. Consequently it is believed that the probability of the propositions communicated by the bearer of epistemic authority increases in relation to the state of knowledge of the subject of the authority (p. 74). Bochenski adds that everybody is a subject of someone's epistemic authority in some field – specification of knowledge has developed to the extent that this can be regarded as obviously true (p. 76). Furthermore, he maintains that everyone is an epistemic authority in at least one field for everyone else, namely all our inner states and personal feelings (p. 67). He apparently means that in this area we have no better source of information than the subject. This principle implies that there is no human authority which could be regarded as an authority in all fields. Bochenski states that God, as distinct from human authorities, is an authority in all fields for all subjects different from him (p. 70).

The deontic authority is described as follows. The authority of $x$ is accepted by $y$ in field $g$ when $y$ desires an event $e$ and acceptance of the rules in $g$ and communicated by $x$ is necessary in order to realize $e$ (pp. 77–81). Every authority is either an epistemic or deontic authority, there being no other type. Epistemic and deontic authority sometimes coincide, but no deontic authority has a rule in its field prescribing the acceptance of a proposition as true or probably true (pp. 70–73, 85).[3] Bochenski remarks that he discovered the distinction between an epistemic authority and a deontic authority by analysing the concept of authority with logical tools. In his view this 'illustrates the fruitfulness of logical analysis performed with formal tools' (p. 71). The other side of the coin is that there are various problems in Bochenski's analysis which are caused by his overestimating the explanatory power of the logical analysis and underrating the philosophical explication of the meanings of terms. This notwithstanding it is of some interest to compare his view of authority and Christian conceptions of 'special' revelation. In Christian literature 'special' or 'supernatural' revelation refers to extraordinary divine activity. 'Natural' revelation refers to God's knowability through natural intellectual faculties without an additional revelatory act.[4]

## Authority, revelation, and faith

Bochenski says that God could be defined in terms of authority as follows: 'God is the entity which is an authority in all fields for all subjects different from Him' (p. 70). He apparently means that if people have a right conception of God and his actions and attributes, such as omniscience, omnipotence, and benevolence, and if they believe that God communicates a descriptive

or prescriptive proposition to them, they should accept it. If God's communicating meanings to human beings is understood as his revealing things to them, the concepts of divine authority and divine revelation are closely connected in Bochenski's analysis. Let us have a closer look at this matter.

According to the traditional propositional view of revelation, the Bible contains a propositional message which God the Revealer wishes to communicate to human beings. Faith is the Christian's response to it. An alternative traditional view is that revelation takes place through the self-revealing and faith-evoking actions of God within history; the Bible is a witness to God's revelation, but it is not the primary medium of revelation. Theologians and philosophers of religion have often drawn a related distinction between an intellectualist propositional view of revelation, which is said to be particularly exemplified by the Thomist-Catholic tradition, and the more existential and dynamic non-propositional view, which is associated with protestant theology. As far as revelation is regarded as a communicative act between revealer and receiver in both approaches, the distinction is somewhat misleading. The propositional revelation is to a great extent about divine action in history, and God's self-revealing activities, which are constitutive of Christianity, are recorded propositionally in the Bible.[5] The adherents of both views can say that in the Bible God speaks through divinely inspired authors and that through this message God reveals himself to the believers. Furthermore, in both traditions there are various opinions about what is revealed, the whole of the Scriptures or parts of them.

Independently of whether the revelatory activity is understood as God's communicating propositions to mankind or as God's expressing his will through historical acts, as such it is only potentially revelatory. The content of what is revealed must be intelligible and must be received and understood.[6] From the point of view of the accepting receiver the divine revelation is an authoritative communicative act. To have a divine revealer is to have an acting divine authority and *vice versa*. In fact there is no difference between these concepts when they are treated in the manner described above. However, the terms 'divine authority' and 'divine revelation' are not synonymous, since one could have a divine authority without any communicated message, but this does not hold true of a divine revealer.

According to Bochenski, 'no deontic authority whatsoever – not even divine authority – has in its field a rule prescribing the acceptance of a proposition as true or probable true' (p. 85). I assume that the background of this remark is that in Bochenski's view epistemic attitudes are not under voluntary control in the sense that one could take up the propositional attitude one chooses at will.[7] As far as an authority is a deontic authority, its prescribing the acceptance of *p* would not increase its epistemic probability. I think that this is not a very convincing point. If God is the authority of the believers in all fields, as Bochenski says, and if he is their authority in the sense of the classical Christian conception of God, the question of whether God has put

forward a prescription as an epistemic authority or as a deontic authority is superfluous, since he is both anyway.

Some theologians draw a distinction between original revelation and dependent revelation. The former takes place when God makes a person immediately aware of his redemptive activities in history. The original revelations are reported in the Bible, particularly in the message about Jesus as the Christ. The latter kind of revelation is becoming aware of God's reality and activity through the message about the original revelation.[8] It is commonly thought that the revealed content, whether original or dependent, is ambiguous from the point of view of receivers. Understanding a proposition is sufficient for being justified in believing it only when the proposition is self-evident.[9] No human understanding of revealed divine matters fulfils this criterion. As some people accept them as revealed truths and some do not, the acceptance itself is regarded as divinely influenced in traditional theology. This is an intriguing theological topic. Vincent Brümmer describes it by saying that the glory and the holiness of Yahweh as revealed in history are impressive characteristics which are discerned only by those who are impressed. Those who are impressed believe that their being impressed is part of the revelatory event.[10] Ingolf Dalferth writes about God's revelatory act: 'Without the acknowledged working of the Spirit in the receiver it is not a revelation; and this is acknowledged only when Jesus is confessed to be the Christ.'[11]

Let us have a look at the conceptual background of this question. If it is true that in the same potentially revelatory situation the beliefs of one person are changed while those of another with a similar epistemic history are not and if beliefs are not chosen voluntarily, the change is not a standard doxastic change. Religious persons may have a special affection which accompanies a religious thought and which they regard as a sufficient basis for believing that the thought about God is true (*testimonium Spiritus Sancti*). The acceptance itself can also be regarded as the testimony. How certain one can be of a supernatural causation of this kind? In the twelfth century it became an official view of catholic theology that the supernatural activity is not guaranteed in these cases. It was stated that one cannot know with certainty whether an act of the soul is caused by the Holy Spirit or not. This implies that there is no supernatural mental event without a humanly indistinguishable natural counterpart, though it was thought that the belief about the presence of grace has high probability when certain conditions are fulfilled.[12] Luther and Calvin associated the doctrine of the testimony of the Spirit with becoming personally convinced of the truth of the Bible, but this reformatory principle of certainty did not make the evidential aspect of the notion of testimony less problematic.[13]

When people refer to experiences of God as a basis of religious doxastic attitudes, certain mental events are given a supernatural interpretation. There is an extensive discussion of whether one is justified in regarding 'of God' experiences as veridical. Independently of their philosophical background

most writers think that there are problems in speaking about experiential evidence for religious belief. The impressive evidence, to use Brümmer's term, may convince somebody 'that his Redeemer lives', but it is another question whether a report of this experience is evidence for other people who possibly wonder whether they have a Redeemer who lives. Gary Gutting ends his book *Religious Belief and Religious Scepticism* with the remark that we have very good reason to believe that at least some religious experiences are veridical and hence that there is a good and powerful divine being who has revealed himself to human beings. Gutting states that experiences provide us with access to God but hardly with accounts of God.[14] There are lots of philosophers who do not agree with Gutting's view, since they think that a natural account of all allegedly supernatural experiences is available, but there are also theologians, predominantly followers of Karl Barth, who think that all evidentialist statements about God are religiously misguided. This is also stressed by the followers of Kierkegaard and Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion.[15]

Discussions of revelation and authority in the analytically oriented philosophy of religion are largely concentrated on comparing faith with non-religious belief attitudes and on the epistemic themes associated with this setting. Since the content of faith is taken to consist in doctrinal accounts of God, of his relations with human beings, of moral ideas, and of afterlife, biblical authority is understood in a pretty abstract manner as being the ground on which the doctrinal systematizations are based. As far as reading the Bible (*lectio divina*) is the central religious activity in Christianity, it is not a far-fetched suggestion that biblical authority should be also discussed from this point of view. Taking this course brings with it new questions which are predominantly tied up with the themes of understanding and interpretation. While interpretational queries are often dismissed in the analytic discussions of religious authority and revelation, which deal with the doctrinally edited content of faith, they form the main topic of hermeneutical philosophical theology and the continental philosophy of religion. In the next section I shall discuss some aspects of the concept of biblical authority as far as it is relevant to the devotional reading of the Bible.

## Authority, interpretation, and experience

Gregory of Nyssa, one of the Greek Cappadocian Fathers, describes the Christian spiritual ascent in his *The Life of Moses* by summarizing the events of Moses' life and giving them an allegorical interpretation.[16] The history of Moses and the Israelites becomes a symbol of the journey of the soul to God. Following the Alexandrian exegetical tradition, Gregory thought that the mystical level of the Scriptures was accessible to the Christians who, by ascetic purification, meditative efforts, and the special influences of the grace, have acquired non-natural spiritual senses which provide them with

insight into meanings beyond the range of the literal. In the Alexandrian school there were some principles for finding spiritual interpretations which are also employed in *The Life of Moses*. An allegorical reading is often obviously meant ('The law does not instruct us how to eat'), but it must be sought as the intended interpretation where something seems to be out of place in a revealed law, something morally wrong is enjoined in the biblical text or a literal sense would be unworthy of God.[17] Let us have a look at Gregory's discussion of one episode in the story of the exodus.

In dealing with the death of the firstborn of the Egyptians, Gregory writes:

> It does not seem good to me to pass this interpretation by without further contemplation. How would a concept worthy of God be preserved in the description of what happened if one looked only to the history? The Egyptian acts unjustly, and his newborn child is punished in his place, who in his infancy cannot discern what is good and what is not . . . If such a one now pays the penalty for his father's wickedness, where is justice? Where is piety? Where is holiness? Where is Ezekiel, who cries: 'The man who has sinned is the man who must die' and 'a son is not to suffer for the sins of his father'. How can the history so contradict reason? (II. 91)

The killing of the firstborn took place in the Egyptian houses in which the entrance was not marked by blood. The Israelites safeguarded their houses with the blood of the lamb. Gregory states that through these narratives the Scriptures teach two things. First, when an impulse to evil is aroused in the soul, one should immediately repel it. This is killing the firstborn. Second, safety and security consist in marking the upper doorpost and the side posts of the entrance with the blood. This refers to the three parts of the soul: the rational, the appetitive, and the spirited. A soul which is anointed with the blood of the lamb has a rational part which grasps the truth, a spirited part which is courageous, and an appetitive part which rises to participation in the good. Gregory continues:

> Do not be surprised at all if both things – the death of the firstborn and the pouring out of the blood – did not happen at all to the Israelites and on that account reject the contemplation which we have proposed concerning the destruction of the evil as if it were a fabrication without any truth. For now in the difference between the names, Israelite and Egyptian, we perceive the difference between virtue and evil. Since the spiritual meaning proposes that we perceive the Israelite as virtuous, we would not reasonably require the first fruits of virtue's offspring to be destroyed, but rather those whose destruction is more advantageous than their cultivation. (II. 100)

While the Egyptians were downcast at the fate of their firstborn, Moses led the exodus of the Israelites. He had previously prepared them to take the

wealth of the Egyptians away with them. Gregory says that the lawgiver did not enjoin those in want to rob the Egyptians, which would be inconsistent with the laws.

The loftier meaning is therefore more obvious than the obvious one. It commands those participating through virtue in the free life, also to equip themselves with the wealth of pagan learning by which foreigners to the faith beautify themselves. (II. 115)

One interesting feature of Gregory's hermeneutic is that the stories in which something morally problematic is associated with God or with Moses are declared allegorical without literary historical truth. The so-called moral criticism of the Bible seems to be a much older approach than some biblical scholars of our time believe it to be. It is remarkable that Gregory usually explicates the spiritual meaning as directly relevant to religious asceticism and the search for perfection of his time. He also employs the concepts of Platonic philosophical psychology as the theoretical framework of interpretation. He probably did not mean that what is revealed is Plato's doctrine of the tripartite soul rather than the Stoic doctrine of Chrysippus and his followers. These are minor things. The deeper divine truths pertain to the ascent of the soul to God and, since Gregory believed that the deeper truths about this matter are understood by special spiritual senses, he took it for granted that the Scriptures are written from this point of view and that their symbolic language is congenial and understandable to the advanced Christians who (with the help of grace) have reached this spiritual level. Variations of this notion were very influential in the monastic tradition in which central biblical texts were understood as metaphorically articulating those religious experiences and affections which were constitutive of the spirituality of the interpreters. There are several examples of this approach in the *Conlationes* of John Cassian. He stated that we understand a psalm wholly only when we experience the same affect of the heart which the original author had and become in this way, as it were, co-authors of the psalm:

> For then the Holy Scriptures lie open to us with greater clearness and, as it were, their very veins and marrow are exposed when our experience not only perceives but actually anticipates their meaning and the sense of the words is revealed to us not by an exposition of them, but by the texts themselves (*per documenta*). For if we receive the very affect of the heart in which each psalm was sung and written, we become like their authors and anticipate their meaning rather than follow it.[18]

The role of experience and affect in interpretation was particularly explored in Bernard of Clairvaux's monastic theology, which concentrated on the restoration of God's image in us and on the union of the soul with the Word. Learning through experience is the theme of Bernard's *Sermons on the Canticle of Canticles*. Bernard read the Canticle as an allegory about God's

relation with a soul and its spiritual union with Christ, which is realized through charity. In his remarks on religious emotions, Bernard discusses the special form of self-consciousness which is created through the affective experience of being immediately influenced by God (*sentire intra se actitari*) and which leads to divinization (*sic affici deificari est*).

Bernard thought that in order to understand the dialogue between the bridegroom and the bride in the Canticle one should have some personal knowledge of love. The whole book is a poetical description of the experience of being affected by desire and divine love which is not understood at all by people who have no interest in religious matters. Like John Cassian, Bernard assumed that understanding biblical texts often consists in becoming more and more involved in the affections which are expressed in the inspired texts. Through meditating on these texts Christians learn the new modes of affection which tie their souls closer to divinity, if they receive the grace of being so affected. The biblical authors are religious teachers and authorities because of their experiences.[19]

Some formulations of John Cassian and Bernard of Clairvaux are strikingly similar to Wilhelm Dilthey's view of the role of lived experiences (*Erlebnis*) in the hermeneutical disciplines. Dilthey thought that what distinguishes hermeneutical understanding from scientific explanation is that real understanding does not take place through an objectifying attitude toward an external object, but through sharing experiences (*Einfühlung*). Historical texts are articulations of human experiences and the ground of understanding is re-experiencing the original experience. 'By transposing his own being experimentally, as it were, into a historical setting, the interpreter can momentarily . . . reproduce an alien life in himself'.[20]

It is well known that Dilthey was influenced by Schleiermacher's hermeneutical view and by older Protestant theories. It seems to be less known that similar ideas can be found in early medieval monastic thought. This is not very surprising, because of Schleiermacher's Platonist inclinations. A remarkable aspect of the monastic view is that the content of the biblical authority is not merely God's nature, will, and action, but also involves articulations of the modes of experience of inspired authors. Teaching spiritual passions and paradigms of experience is not simply the task of an epistemic or deontic authority. Learning this dimension is based on a third authority relation which could be called spiritual authority. Spiritual life is what Aristotle called a practice, an activity which does not have a goal which is separate from it and which cannot be learnt without participating in it under the guidance of those who are familiar with it. Biblical spiritual authority is essentially human, since its field is the devotional relationship of a human soul to God. Its acceptance involves a notion of the exemplariness of the experiences expressed and articulated in meditatively significant works.[21]

No very sharp mind is needed to realize that in the monastic interpretation of the Bible there are problems which are partially associated with the

conception of deeper meanings and spiritual senses and partially with the metaphoric nature of reproducing an alien life in us or reconstructing past creative processes. Taking leave of Schleiermacher and Dilthey and following Hegel und Heidegger, Hans Georg Gadamer argues in his *Wahrheit und Methode* that hermeneutic philosophy should be built on a dialectical conception of understanding.[22] Interpreting historical texts takes place in our time, place, and conceptual structure. Instead of finding fictitious original meanings, which in fact are always influenced by the later ideas of interpreters, people should let the text speak to them and reconsider the things which are dealt with in them. As for the history of philosophy and theology, Gadamer stresses that the historical and rational reconstructions of meaning are complementary and, furthermore, that understanding the texts is participating in the tradition in which these texts are continuously reread and reinterpreted. To be conscious of the history of interpretation can raise one's consciousness of the historical and contingent nature of one's own preconceptions, which is no bad thing for philosophers. From the hermeneutical point of view, to have biblical authority is to belong to a tradition in which the Bible is read as the word of God and understood in various ways in various historical circumstances. The word remains living in its being integrated into new human attempts to understand one's being in the world. There is no unchanging point of reference which would form the content of the revelation of biblical authority. If this content has any identity, it has it in its continuous reinterpretation.

The adherents of the hermeneutic philosophy (Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur) have stressed that all human orientation is interpretative understanding, but this has not been anything new to most historians of thought and the effect of this approach upon the methods of the history of philosophy and theology has not been very significant. Serious scholars in these areas regard the historical and systematic approaches as complementary, but they also think that it is important to keep the historical and contemporary perspectives separate. There are lots of ancient and medieval philosophical texts which are not systematically interesting, but there are also highly powerful works which are continuously found fascinating because of their message, without any deep disagreement about the main lines of meaning. Perhaps the old hermeneutics did not attend to the historicity of the modes of human experience and understanding, but Gadamer and his followers exaggerate this point. In reading ancient philosophical works we often understand pretty well what is probably meant and we think about the significance of the points separately. This also applies to reading the Bible to a certain extent.

## Biblical authority and the criteria of truth

As Jesus Christ has been one of the most central figures of Western culture, one may find it surprising that his sayings and acts are not very much

discussed in philosophical works – even studies in the philosophy of religion or Christian philosophy have been more interested in Christian doctrines and practices than in Jesus as a historical individual. One reason for this fact is that the Christian faith has been largely shaped by the letters of Paul which do not include the Jesus stories of the Gospels. Another related reason is the unphilosophical nature of the Gospels telling about him, and the tradition of reading them as witnesses of the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity. The Gospels are also found to be problematic historical sources. They were themselves based on existing traditions and the writers seem to have exploited their relevance to the actual situation of readers.

A critical historian without theistic presumptions may describe the emergence of the picture of Jesus as the Christ as follows. Jesus preached a coming Son of Man without identifying himself directly with that figure and looked for a great historical change to be brought about by Divine intervention. This did not happen and his followers began to believe that Jesus was the Son of Man and that he had been raised to heaven from where he would return to declare the Kingdom of God. The belief in the resurrection probably preceded the new conception of the Son of Man. The Kingdom was then spiritualized and Jesus was transformed into the self-declared Son of God. Legendary accounts of miracles and exorcisms increased and changed a charismatic rural healer into an omnipotent heavenly figure. The idea of divine incarnation was developed simultaneously. The notion of the assumption at the baptism was changed into the idea of a supernatural birth and then to the pre-existence of a divine person. If the mainstream picture of critical exegetes is of this kind, what should one think about the relationship between the historical picture and the religious teaching of the universal revelation in Jesus the Christ?

In *Hermes and Athena* (1993), edited by Eleonore Stump and Thomas P. Flint, several biblical scholars and philosophers of religion discuss the methodology and results of historically oriented biblical scholarship. Michael Dummett, Peter van Inwagen, and Richard Swinburne put forward a basically similar argument against the relevance of allegedly neutral secular biblical studies to faith. Michael Dummett writes that virtually nothing suggested by New Testament scholarship with respect to what the church has presupposed has been conclusively demonstrated. It consists almost entirely of hypotheses which are judged to be more probable than others. But since probability is a relation between a proposition and a body of evidence, judgements of probability depend crucially on underlying assumptions. 'What is probable if there is no God, or if Christ and his disciples were misguided fanatics, becomes quite improbable if Christianity is true.'[23]

These philosophers think that many biblical scholars mistakenly suppose that it is a mark of rationality to approach biblical texts without any assumptions about whether there is a God and whether he is likely to intervene in human history, or to question the reliability of certain propositions

essential to Christianity in this way. Peter van Inwagen argues that if one has good reason to accept certain things about the past and if some of them are not established by the methods recognized by historians, why should one cease to believe them? He concludes that once users of the New Testament have satisfied themselves that critical studies do not undermine their grounds independent of such studies for believing in its reliability, they need pay no further attention to them.[24]

Keith Ward is one of the dogmatic theologians who have recently evaluated the results of non-religious biblical studies in a more detailed way. He says that for critical historians they are possible and, if there is no God, even probable accounts of the genesis of Christian belief.[25] For those who believe in God things look different. Ward writes that a person who has found God in Christ cannot adopt a purely critical attitude to the New Testament documents. 'There must rather be a basic attitude of trust in the general reliability of the witnesses to that original historical person in whom one's faith is grounded.' To have such an attitude means that one is disposed to believe the testimony unless there is very good reason not to do so. Because of this basic trust one does not find it right to say that the apostles saw God in Jesus, although he was unaware of having such a role. One believes that 'the general depiction of Jesus as one who saw himself called to a uniquely authoritative mediating role in the Divine purpose for Israel is correct'. Jesus himself must have believed that he was the emissary of God in a unique way.[26]

Ward takes it for granted that one can gain an experience of the risen Christ by reflection upon the gospels and participation in the life of the Church. This is the first point in his list of seven factors which may lead one to accept the principle of trust in the scriptural witness to a veridical disclosure of God in Jesus. Richard Swinburne claims that there should also be an independent guarantee of the reliability of the scriptural interpretation of Jesus and that one finds it in authentication by the church. Swinburne argues that Jesus founded the church and, because God authenticated Jesus' teaching that the church would be the vehicle of his teaching through the resurrection, he thereby guaranteed that its interpretation would be basically correct.[27] These authors do not see the reliability of the Gospels as a very important special question, if formulated from the point of view of secular historical studies, because they think that the presuppositions of those studies are quite different from the grounds of faith. Ward writes that 'the principle of trust will change the balance of probabilities, particularly with regard to the fundamental character of those testimonies upon which human salvation is said to depend'.[28] Related ideas are put forward by reformed epistemologists and the philosophers influenced by them, though they do not share the positive evaluation of natural theology typical of the approaches of argumentative theists.[29]

Anders Jeffner calls the principle of trust which figures in the above quotations the principle of the *prima facie* truth of biblical assertions. He has

nothing good to say about it.[30] Jeffner thinks that theologians participate in various activities in which they use various criteria for the truth of assertions. First, most members of a society characterized by a science-based technology use scientific criteria to a limited extent. Second, all modern theologians play the role of the biblical scholar to some extent and a set of criteria which the theologian has in common with his colleagues in other academic subjects belongs to this role. The same applies to the theologian as a Church historian or social scientist in the religious field. Third, there are some criteria of truth which form part of the role of the doctrinal theologian who is supposed to say something true about God and our relationship to him. It is here that many theologians appeal to the Scriptures. A problem in this account is how the various criteria of truth might be applied coherently.

Jeffner distinguishes between three different approaches to the question of the criteria of truth. According to the Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion, we have to accept that there is a basic diversification of life and correspondingly assertions are not simply true or false, but true or false in a certain context. There are different basic kinds of activity in which a given use of language and given criteria of truth are interwoven. One of them is to think and act religiously. The conflict between criteria that we often experience can be reduced to an illusory desire for unity where none is to be found. Another way of defending the use of special criteria of truth in theology is based on the idea that some special cognitive ability conferred upon human beings by God which makes it possible for them to establish that God speaks to them. This is represented by the Barthians. Third, according to integrative theories there is a common human ground where we can discuss and justify the criteria of truth used in different areas of cognitive life.

As for the Wittgensteinian view, Jeffner simply says that it is impossible to abstract a religious way of thinking, speaking, and acting, in which the coordination of different criteria presents no problem. His evaluation of the Barthians is more hostile. It is impossible to argue against their line of thought – your arguments can always be declared irrelevant because the Holy Spirit has not given you the necessary supernatural cognitive ability. This is intellectually unfair in Jeffner's view: 'But even if it is meaningless to argue, we are perfectly free to dislike this theory from a moral point of view, as I do very much indeed.' As for the integration model, Jeffner believes that the classical tradition of natural theology is the only model which can combine the various criteria of truth in a satisfactory manner. Its basic theological criterion is religious experience, which Jeffner regards as evidence in the same way as Gutting does. It justifies references to the Christian tradition as a qualified criterion. The theological idea of the *prima facie* truth of biblical assertions is confused in Jeffner's opinion. No reasonable theory indicates when other criteria will override. His conclusion is that the *prima facie* truth of the Bible is not a justifiable criterion of truth. Correspondingly there are no justifiable conceptions of biblical authority or biblical revelation except

in the sense that the Bible includes reports of religious experiences which can be veridical.

Biblical authority in the sense of practical spiritual authority is not dealt with in these discussions. Perhaps the authors think that it does not make sense without an acceptable epistemological basis. My view of this basis is as follows. The studies of the Bible in which the theistic assumptions are given an important role do not add to the probability of the truth of Christianity. They only show that when people have a certain theological conception, they can construct a coherent and logically possible interpretation of the picture of the historical Jesus and other themes in the biblical documents. Most Christians think that some kind of theological realism is essential for faith, but not all of them find such constructive responses to historical uncertainties intellectually or spiritually satisfactory. Their faith is incompatible with atheism, but it does not make them believe in philosophical theism or be sure about Jesus' sayings and deeds and resurrection outside their religious commitment. In order to be Christians, even they should probably hope that much of what is said about Jesus is objectively true and that grace would increase their faith.

Independently of their various supernatural views of the birth of faith, most classical theologians have thought that it involves voluntary assent which is influenced by grace. Since natural non-religious belief is not a voluntary attitude, this could be taken to mean that one hopes to be in the condition of having knowledge or belief, analogous to natural epistemic or doxastic attitudes, with the qualification that there is something mysterious in all revelatory statements. People who take the Bible as their spiritual authority hope that many of the things they read are true. There are lots of Christians who say that they believe that the religiously significant parts of the Bible are true. Others would not call their committal attitude simply belief, because it is different from their doxastic attitudes towards finite matters. They think that it is some kind of hope or volitional faith.[31] I do not see why Christians should make any stronger claims in argumentative philosophical contexts.

## Notes

1. I am grateful to Alvin Plantinga for his remarks on the first version of this chapter; they led me to reformulate some passages. It is in order to state that I do not argue for any particular conception of the epistemology of revelation in the Section on 'Authority, Revelation, and Faith'.
2. J.M. Bochenski, 'An analysis of authority' in F.J. Adelmann (ed.), *Authority* (Boston College Studies in Philosophy 3), Chestnut Hill: Boston College, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1974, pp. 56–66, 70–71.
3. I disagree with Bochenski's view that there are only two kinds of authority; see the Section on 'Authority, Interpretation, and Experience'.

4. For some discussions of revelation in philosophical theology and Christian philosophy of religion, see G. Mavrodes, *Revelation in Religious Belief*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1988, R. Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1992, K. Ward, *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994, N.M. Olivetti (ed.), *Filosofia della rivelazione*, Padova: Cedam 1994, R. Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995.
5. Cf. L. Van den Brom, 'Models of revelation and language' in V. Brümmer and M. Sarot (eds), *Revelation and Experience* (Utrechte Theologische Reeks 33), Utrecht: Faculteit der Godgeleerdheit 1996, pp. 66–68.
6. It is commonly thought that the divine act of revelation cannot be said to be completed unless it be apprehended as such; see J. Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought*, New York: Columbia University Press 1956, pp. 104–105, and further references in M. Sluys's doctoral thesis *Must Divine Revelation Produce Understanding*? (Uppsala 2000). Sluys argues that revelation does not necessarily include the production of understanding in a recipient.
7. Epistemic voluntarism is criticized, for example, in W.P. Alston, *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1989, pp. 113–52. Alston argues that one cannot believe that *p* without its at least seeming to one that *p* is more probable than any envisaged alternative. Eleonore Stump finds Alston's view too narrow in 'Wisdom: Will, Belief, and Moral Goodness' in S. MacDonald and E. Stump (eds), *Aquinas's Moral Theory*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1998, pp. 28–62.
8. 'While Peter encountered the man Jesus whom he called the Christ in an original revelatory ecstasy, following generations met the Jesus who had been received as the Christ by Peter and the other apostles. There is continuous revelation in the history of the church, but it is dependent revelation. The original miracle, together with its original reception, is the permanent point of reference, while the Spiritual reception by following generations changes continuously.' P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, London: SCM Press 1988 (1951), p. 126.
9. See also R. Audi, 'Self-evidence', *Philosophical Perspectives* 13 (1999), pp. 205–28.
10. V. Brümmer, *Theology and Philosophical Inquiry*, London: Macmillan 1981, pp. 210–13, 273–75.
11. I. Dalferth, *Theology and Philosophy*, Oxford: Blackwell 1988, p. 40.
12. A.M. Landgraf, *Dogmengeschichte der Frühscholastik*, vol. II, Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet 1953, pp. 57–74; cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-1, 112.5.
13. For the views of Luther and Calvin, see E. Herms, *Luthers Auslegung des Dritten Artikels*, Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr 1987, pp. 58–65, P.W. Butin, *Revelation, Redemption and Response: Calvin's Trinitarian Understanding of the Divine–Human Relationship*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995, pp. 58–60.
14. G. Gutting, *Religious Belief and Religious Scepticism*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1982, p. 171–72.
15. See D.Z. Phillips's discussions of Kierkegaard's view that one must become a Christian while understanding that Christianity is not plausible; Phillips, 'Authority and revelation' in N.M. Olivetti (ed.), *Filosofia della rivelazione*, Padova: Cedam 1994, pp. 683–84.
16. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, translation, introduction and notes by A.J. Malherbe and E. Ferguson (The Classics of Western Spirituality), New York,

Ramsey, Toronto: Paulist Press 1978. I quote this translation with some minor changes.

17. Op. cit., pp. 5–9.
18. *Conlationes*, ed. E. Pichery (Sources Chrétiennes 42, 54, 64), Paris: Cerf 1955–59, 10.11 (vol. 2, 92). Cf. U. Köpf, *Religiöse Erfahrung in der Theologie Bernhards von Clairvaux*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr 1980, pp. 212–13.
19. Köpf 1980, pp. 188–223. There are some recent works on the educational programs of ancient philosophical schools which combined theory, exercises, and therapy. These traditions influenced monastic spirituality. See P. Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, Paris: Études Augustiniennes 1987, M. Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994.
20. W. Dilthey, *Selected Writings*, ed. H.P. Rickman, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1976, p. 258; quoted in G.L. Bruns, 'On the Tragedy of Hermeneutical Experience' in W. Jost and M.J. Hyde, *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in Our Time*: *A Reader*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1997, p. 75.
21. I do not discuss the social aspect of spirituality and biblical authority nor the questions of orthodoxy, heterodoxy and the church's teaching authority. Some aspects of this topic are dealt with in J. Tarkki, *Questioning Religious Authority*, D. Th. diss, Helsinki 1994.
22. H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr 1965 (*Truth and Method*, trans. J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall, New York: Continuum 1989).
23. M. Dummett, 'The impact of scriptural studies on the content of catholic belief' in E. Stump and T.P. Flint (eds), *Hermes and Athena*: *Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1993, pp. 18–19.
24. P. van Inwagen, 'Critical Studies of the New Testament and the User of the New Testament' in Stump and Flint (eds), p. 164.
25. Ward 1994, pp. 236–38.
26. Ibid., pp. 241–43.
27. Ibid., pp. 243–46, Swinburne 1992, p. 113.
28. Ward 1994, p. 256.
29. A. Plantinga, 'Advice to christian philosophers', *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984), pp. 260–61, R.J. Feenstra, 'Critical Studies of the New Testament: Comments on the Paper of Peter van Inwagen' in Stump and Flint (eds), p. 196.
30. A. Jeffner, *Theology and Integration* (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Doctrinae Christianae Upsaliensia 28), Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell 1987, pp. 31–45.
31. Cf. R. Audi, 'The dimensions of faith and the demands of reason' in E. Stump (ed.), *Reasoned Faith*. *Essays in Philosophical Theology in Honor of Norman* Kretzmann, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1993, pp. 70–89. Audi uses the term 'volitional faith'.

# 6
# Comment on Knuuttila's "Biblical Authority and Philosophy"

*Alvin Plantinga*

Professor Knuuttila's rich and multi-faceted chapter invites much by way of comment; I shall restrict myself to just one of the topics he treats. According to a conception of faith common to Aquinas, Calvin, Luther, and many others, faith involves a belief in what Jonathan Edwards calls the "great things of the gospel." Of course such belief is not all there is to faith. The book of James tells us that "the demons believe and they shudder" (James 2:19); but the demons do not have faith.[1] So what is the difference? What more is there to faith than belief? What distinguishes the Christian believer from the demons?

The shape of the answer is given in the text just mentioned: the demons *shudder*. They *believe* these things, but *hate* them; and they also hate God. Perhaps they also hope against hope that these things are not really so, or perhaps they believe them in a self-deceived way. The devils also know of God's wonderful scheme for the salvation of human beings, but they find this scheme, with its mercy and suffering love, offensive, and unworthy. No doubt they endorse Nietzsche's notion that Christian love (including the love displayed in incarnation and atonement) is weak, whining, resentful, servile, duplicitous, pusillanimous, tergiversatory, and in general unappealing.

The person with faith, however, not only believes the central claims of the Christian faith, but also, at least paradigmatically, finds the whole scheme of salvation enormously attractive, delightful, moving, a source of amazed wonderment. She is deeply grateful to the Lord for his great goodness and responds to his sacrificial love with love of her own. The difference between believer and devil, therefore, lies in the area of *affections*: of love and hate, of attraction and repulsion, desire and detestation. All of this is closely connected with the middle part of Knuuttila's chapter, where he nicely outlines the way in which, as he puts it, for the monastic tradition "the content of the biblical authority is not merely God's nature, will, and action, but also involves articulations of the modes of experience of inspired authors" (p. 120).

Still, it *is* part of faith, so thought of, to believe the great things of the gospel. Further, most classical Christian theologians also think of the work of the Holy Spirit as necessary for acquiring faith. Faith is a gift, and a very special gift at that. An essential element of one's coming to faith, on this way of thinking of the matter is supernatural activity on the part of the Holy Spirit. Knuuttila summarizes some views lying in this neighborhood:

> Vincent Brümmer describes it by saying that the glory and the holiness of Yahweh as revealed in history are impressive characteristics which are discerned only by those who are impressed. Those who are impressed believe that their being impressed is part of the revelatory event. Ingolf Dalferth writes about God's revelatory act: "Without the acknowledged working of the Spirit in the receiver it is not a revelation; and this is acknowledged only when Jesus is confessed to be the Christ."

Now Knuuttila himself expresses some doubts about the epistemological adequacy of views of this kind. Since I accept a version of this position, I would like to explore these doubts, in an effort to see whether the views in question can be defended against them.

Knuuttila points out first that "if in the same revelatory situation the beliefs of one person are changed while those of another with a similar epistemic history are not and if beliefs are not chosen voluntarily, the change is not a standard doxastic change" (p. 116). It is not exactly clear what a *standard* change is, but on the view in question, certainly, a necessary condition of the acquisition of faith is the special activity of the Holy Spirit, so that the change in question presumably would not be standard. Knuuttila goes on to say that a religious person might believe that the change in question is directly caused by God, or that they "have a special affection which accompanies a religious thought and which they regard as a sufficient basis for believing that the thought about God is true (*testimonium Spiritus Sancti*)" (p. 116). But the question, says Knuuttila, is "How certain can one be of this?" He points out that according to official Catholic theology "supernatural activity is not guaranteed in these cases," and that "one cannot know with certainty whether an act of the soul is caused by the Holy Spirit or not" (p. 116). This implies, says Knuuttila, "that there is no supernatural mental event without a humanly indistinguishable natural counterpart . . ."; that is, for any phenomenology accompanying the work of the Holy Spirit in someone's heart, it is possible that the same phenomenology accompany the presentation of a candidate belief that is not from the Holy Spirit at all. Just as there can be perceptual illusions, so there can be, as we might say, pneumatic illusions.

Now I'm inclined to think Knuuttila believes, or partly believes that this constitutes an epistemic problem for the view in question. In any event, I'd like to register my belief that if it does constitute a problem, it is one that bedevils all or nearly all of our other belief-forming processes. Certainly the

same holds for perception; there is no merely phenomenological way of distinguishing veridical from unveridical perception. It also seems to hold for our knowledge of elementary truths of logic and arithmetic, and other allegedly self-evident propositions: in any of those cases, the phenomenology that accompanies the grasp of a true proposition of this kind could also accompany the grasp of a false. So this infirmity, if infirmity it is, is one that is very widely shared.

Knuuttila goes on to suggest that,

> According to Luther and Calvin, what is certain is God's salvific activity. This was not a very satisfactory solution to the problem which became existentially significant through the reformatory principle that the faith induced by the Holy Spirit saves.

I was not quite clear how to understand this suggestion. According to Calvin, faith is a "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence towards us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."[2] Let's suppose that the benevolence Calvin mentions here involves salvation; then in paradigmatic cases of faith (and I take it that what Calvin offers is an account of cases of that sort) the believer has certain knowledge of God's salvific activity, and has such knowledge with respect to her own case, that is, has certain knowledge that she herself is a beneficiary of that salvific activity. Now Knuuttila points out that according to Reformed ways of thinking, "the faith induced by the Holy Spirit saves," and he suggests that there is a problem here for the view in question. But I find it hard to see just what the problem might be. The believer has certain knowledge of God's salvific activity on her behalf; as a matter of fact her having this knowledge is itself a necessary condition of the salvific activity in question. Well, this may not be an exact account of the view in question, but even if it is, where is the problem? Is the idea that there is something untoward in my having knowledge that I am in a certain condition S, where my having knowledge that I am in S is itself a necessary condition of my being in S? But is that in itself problematic? Suppose a teacher always informs those to whom she gives a certain prize, so that a necessary condition of winning the prize is knowing that you have won it. That could certainly happen; and could not it also happen that a pupil knows that he's won the prize? But in that case the pupil knows that he's won the prize, where knowing that he's won the prize is itself a necessary condition of his winning the prize.

Next, Knuuttila asserts that "There seems to be no need to postulate any special meaning for revelatory statements which would be accessible only for those who come to accept them". That is perhaps true, but the view in question does not postulate any such special meaning. Instead, the claim is that those in whom the Holy Spirit works will be moved to accept the

proposition expressed by the revelatory statements in question. It is not that such a person has a special interpretation of those statements; what those revelatory statements mean is fairly straightforward and it is fairly clear what propositions they express. The difference here between believer and unbeliever is rather the former *believes* these propositions; they seem to her to be true, and as a result she accepts them, takes them to be true, assents to them.

Knuuttila goes on: "Understanding a proposition implies accepting it or assenting to it only when the proposition cannot be false in any understandable manner. No human understanding of revealed divine matters fulfills this criterion" (p. 116). I find myself at something of a loss to see what this criterion is. What does the 'cannot' mean here? Is the idea that I cannot accept a proposition unless I cannot understand how it could be false? But that seems mistaken. I accept the proposition that George W. Bush won the recent US presidential election, even though I can certainly understand how it could be false. It would be false if he had not received a majority of the electors' votes. So what is this criterion?

Perhaps Knuuttila means this: I cannot accept a proposition unless I cannot understand how it could be false *given my evidence* for the proposition. This is suggested by the immediately ensuing discussion, where Knuuttila points out some of the problems with arguments for elements of Christian belief from religious experience:

> Independently of their philosophical background, most writers think there are problems in speaking about experiential evidence for religious belief. The impressive evidence, to use Brümmer's term, may convince somebody 'that his Redeemer lives', but it is another question whether a report of this experience is evidence for other people who possibly wonder whether they have a Redeemer who lives.

Here it seems to me we must make some distinctions. First, according to the position under consideration and the position I mean to defend, it is not the case that religious experience, or statements recounting it, are taken to be *propositional evidence* for the truth of the relevant propositions. Perhaps the Holy Spirit works in my heart: as a result I find myself convinced of some central element of Christian belief. But it is not or anyway need not be that this conviction is acquired by way of an argument, either explicit or implicit. It is not that I say to myself: "I've got this impressive experience; I find the teaching in question moving, delightful, awe-inspiring; it seems or feels to me as if it is certainly true; therefore it is true." That would be a pretty unimpressive argument. Nor, of course, could I construct a decent argument from *your* testimony that *you* find the teaching in question impressive, delightful, or obviously true. It is rather that, upon having the experience in question, I acquire the belief directly, without benefit of

argument. The same holds for perception (or memory, or simple *a priori* beliefs). When I am appeared to in that characteristic way and I acquire the belief that there is a lot of snow in my backyard, I do not acquire it by way of argument: I do not say to myself "Things look to me that characteristic way, so probably there is a lot of snow in my backyard." No; I form the belief immediately upon having the experience in question. And the same goes for the experience or phenomenology accompanying the working of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps there is a special phenomenology there and perhaps not; but if there is, I do not argue from it to the truth of the belief I acquire. The experience in question functions more like a *cause* or *occasion* of the belief than as a premise for it.

Knuuttila suggests that a believer might think the belief in question is directly caused by God, or that she "may have a special affection which accompanies a religious thought and which they regard as a sufficient basis for believing that the thought about God is true" (*testimonium Spiritus Sancti*, p. 116). But this seems to me not the way in which such belief is ordinarily formed; at any rate it need not be formed in this way. Instead, such belief can be formed in the basic way, as a direct response to the experience in question. So the question Knuuttila brings up next, namely "How certain can one be of this?" is to be understood as follows: "How certain can one be that the belief in question really is caused by the Holy Spirit? After all, the Prince of Darkness can appear as an Angel of Light." But this question does not automatically arise here anymore than in the context of perception or memory or *a priori* knowledge. In those cases too we can ask whether the experience really does guarantee the truth of the belief that is formed; but we do not ordinarily ask the question, and are epistemically speaking none the worse for that.

Of course that is not to say that I *cannot* raise such questions or that they are never appropriate, or that I can only and automatically accept the belief in question. Of course not. I find myself believing, on the basis of my experience, some central Christian affirmation: you point out that people often make mistakes in this area, citing the fact that there are many different religions with inconsistent beliefs: what makes me think mine are true and those inconsistent with it false? I must then face your question. Or I may come to *doubt* some teaching I accept: perhaps you propose an argument against it, an argument that I cannot fault. In a word, one can acquire *defeaters* for beliefs generally, and of course also for Christian belief.

Now it looks to me as if Knuuttila proposes three defeater-candidates for Christian belief accepted in the basic way. First, there is the fact that even if the Holy Spirit does work in my heart, convincing me of the great truths of the Gospel, still, as Christians of all sorts have themselves pointed out, it is possible to be mistaken as to whether a given impulse to believe is indeed the work of the Holy Spirit. The Prince of Darkness can appear as an Angel of Light; the Father of Lies can speak with the tongue of an angel. Second

and related to the first, there is no good argument from religious experience to Christian belief. And third, there are on offer *naturalistic* accounts of allegedly supernatural experiences. But none of these, I think, is automatically a defeater for Christian belief, even if when the latter is accepted in that basic way. As we have seen, the fact that Satan can appear as an angel of light is not automatically a defeater; the same goes, of course, for the point that there is not a good argument from religious experience to Christian belief.

The same goes for the fact that there are available naturalistic accounts of allegedly supernatural experiences and religious belief generally. Perhaps the most popular naturalistic accounts of religious belief are projective theories of religious belief – in particular of theistic belief. These theories – proposed, for example, by Freud, Marx, Durkheim, and others – seek to explain theistic belief in terms of our projecting into the heavens something like an idealized father. And our question is this: does my knowledge of the existence of such theories constitute a defeater for Christian belief? Are these theories reasons for responsible and informed contemporary Christian believers to give up belief in God, or at any rate accept it less firmly?

I cannot see how. According to Marx, theistic belief arises from a sort of cognitive disorder produced by a disordered society; according to Freud, it is produced by cognitive processes that are aimed at psychological comfort or survival rather than truth. Now if I *believed* these things, then perhaps I would have a reason to give up theistic belief, or to hold it less firmly. But why should I believe them? Is there a rationally compelling argument for one or another of them? Freud and Marx certainly give no reasons for thinking these theories true; they blandly announce them. More important, their explanations of theistic belief really presuppose that theistic belief is false; it presupposes atheism. But if I am aware of that, how can these theories constitute a defeater, for me, of theistic belief? If theistic belief is false, then perhaps the Freud and Marx thesis would be a good way to explain it; but of course I do not believe that theistic belief *is* false. Freud and Marx's declarations, therefore, do not give me a defeater for theistic belief. What they announce might be a defeater, if I came to believe it, but they provide no reason at all for my believing it. Accordingly, I should think a person can easily be apprised of Freud and Marx's views here, but continue to accept theistic belief in complete rationality.

So none of these proposed defeaters of Christian belief, as far as I can see, has much by way of prospects, even if the Christian belief in question is taken in the basic way. Nor, as far as I can see, do any of these proposed defeaters cast doubt on the Calvinist/Lutheran/Thomistic suggestion with which we began, namely, that Christian belief is a gift, and is to be attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit. So I am inclined to conclude that this suggestion can be defended against the sorts of objections to which Knuuttila draws our attention.

## Notes

1. Perhaps this needs qualification; perhaps the demons do not believe all that the believer does. The content of faith is plausibly *indexical*: a person *x* has faith only if *x* believes or knows that God is benevolent towards *x herself*. But perhaps the devils do not believe that God is benevolent towards *them*. They know that God is all-powerful, all-knowing and perfectly good, and that he has arranged a way of salvation for human beings; but perhaps they reject the belief that God is benevolent towards them. (Note, incidentally, that the author of *James* sometimes (in Chapter 2, e.g.) seems to use the term 'faith' to mean mere cognitive or intellectual assent.)
2. *Institutes* III, ii, 7 (p. 551).

# Voices in Discussion

*D.Z. Phillips*

*J*: I began with Bochenski because I liked his distinction between the bearer of authority, the subject of authority, and the field in which it is exercised. There is a long tradition, of course, of discussing revelation and authority. Some receive the revelation and some do not. Is that because it is ambiguous? How do you know that the revelation is true? Philosophical theology is more theology than philosophy and it may wrestle with this issue, but philosophy, as such, is not religious.

In the second part of my paper I spoke of spiritual authority. I think this shows itself in what Aristotle called practice. The end is not separate from the activity itself. This is how it is with the good life. You can't learn it from guide books. You must participate. The practice is authoritative.

In the third part of my paper I raised the issue of truth. How is this related to authority? Objectivity is still relevant. Is it enough in religion to hope things are true? Do we need to use 'know' in relation to God?

I have three small comments on F's paper. First, he asks whether I doubt that assent is caused by the Holy Spirit. What I doubt is whether one's understanding is improved by the Spirit. Second, when he speaks of the testimony of the Holy Spirit what does 'testimony' mean? Third, he says that Luther and Calvin are puzzled by the medievalists' denial of certainty. Patristic theology says one should not be proud of one's certainty. Luther and Calvin don't want faith to be a matter of probability, but what is meant by 'certainty'? They wanted to say they were sure they were saved. It seemed to them that if you could not be sure that your faith was the work of the Holy Spirit, you could not know you were saved.

Is understanding the same as believing? That only seems to be the case with necessary propositions.

*C*: Hope is a part of faith, but surely it is not sufficient. Belief is essential.

*J*: That sounds too logical. Do you believe that God exists? Believer says, 'Yes.' What does the philosopher say? No? Religious language is not

philosophy, but it presupposes some kind of realism. The difficulty is in not turning this into a metaphysical theory.

*C*: What I mean is this: I may hope for peace between Israelis and Palestinians, but that doesn't affect the situation. An element of belief is crucial.

*J*: But in philosophy there is no common audience for that belief. Philosophy is independent of faith.

*A*: In Plantinga's paper there is a reference to special affection. How can one be certain? Who is the 'one'? Does it refer to the person having the experience? Such people are often certain. Suppose I see in a flash that there are four persons in the trinity. You may say you are certain, but you don't have a right to it. It is subject to some kind of authority, whether it be that of the Church or a text. So a community may rule out a claim to certainty. So these are criteria.

*F*: What an individual may know is the great things of the Gospel.

*J*: Luther says that a man is saved by grace without his effort. How can he say that? Suppose two brothers do good deeds. Only one of them is saved. Isn't it only God who knows the elect? Suppose someone shows a natural love of divine things, but does not speak of grace. What follows? Only God knows.

*F*: Aquinas says faith is not knowledge but certainty. Calvin says most of us cannot be so certain.

*J*: Can you be sure? Do signs, good deeds, give more than probability?

*F*: There is a distinction between knowing you are saved and knowing the great things of the Gospel. You could be sure of the latter, but not whether you are saved.

*D*: 'Revelation' is a success word. We can't say 'God revealed himself and no one noticed.' So revelation and interpretation are intimately connected. We may say that the pictures in the Bible are inspired, but they still need to be unpacked for our time.

*J*: Isn't that work said to be done by the Holy Spirit? It takes place within one.

*D*: It is not a matter of the Spirit making me certain. What is important is that I am addressed. Belief, here, is indexical.

*M*: It may be said that a Cartesian demon always deceives us. But then we could say that a beneficent angel always counteracts the demon. For every true proposition there would be no undefeated defeaters.

*F*: There are warrant defeaters. I may see rows and rows of barns, but, in fact they are facades. But, then, there are rational defeaters such as those proposed by Freud and Marx. They say it is irrational to believe.

*M*: So how much doxastic freedom is involved?

*F*: In many ordinary cases it is impossible not to believe if one's faculties are functioning properly. But religious belief comes to us more like an invitation. We have a chance to turn it down.

*H*: Let me link what I said earlier about hope with the present discussion. 'Hope' has a variety of uses. One can hope for a successful outcome to

a conflict. But there is also a hope which is a perspective one lives in. In this sense a Christian may say that there is hope for the most horrendous murderer. This is not a prediction about the murderer having a change of heart. One may be pessimistic about that. But he is not written off as a person. Some people may not have this attitude of hope.

Again, people may have the kind of hope Freud and Marx criticised. These are infantile hopes, such as a pie in the sky religion. Surely such hopes can be criticised with good reason.

*F*: I don't see that defeaters need be successful even in the latter cases, as long as they aren't impressed by Freud and Marx. They will go on regardless.

*H*: But if you make defeaters person-relative in that sense, self-deception is denied as long as it is not recognised. A person is defeated in his or her self-deception. That is the sense in which self-deception defeats us.

*L*: Lots of people say they are saved. Why deny it? Do we have the information, which would enable us to do so? People have different beliefs. They bring in philosophical theories to defend them. They may even hope that some of their beliefs are not true, such as the belief in hell. It seems to me that many of these beliefs are mysteries and there's a lot we don't understand about them. In philosophy we may say, 'I am a Christian and hope they are true', but in Church we confess that they are true.

*N*: A physicist friend tells me something about sub-atomic particles. So I have testimonial evidence. Is that a proposition or not?

*F*: If I ask someone his name and he says, 'Tom', I accept it. Most people tell the truth about their names. But with the physicist I'd be more cautious, if only because they keep changing their minds.

What of the testimony of the Holy Spirit? I don't reason like this: The Holy Spirit tells me x; what the Holy Spirit says is true; Therefore x is true. It happens immediately.

*N*: So the Holy Spirit doesn't tell us propositions?

*F*: The Holy Spirit convinces us of propositions, but I don't conclude that on the basis of propositions.

*N*: Kant says that there are some things we shouldn't do even if it is said that God says it. Abraham's readiness to sacrifice Isaac would be an example. So the voice of the Holy Spirit is not self-authenticating. There could be more evidence for rejecting what is said than for accepting it.

*F*: Look, I was just giving an account of a way of thinking. I then cast around to see how I came to think in this way. I don't look for historical evidence, inductive arguments and the like.

*N*: What would destroy your faith?

*F*: I don't know. I might go mad. What would convince me that I don't exist? Not much.

*O*: It seems to me that F ignores important differences. He says that when he sees snow in his backyard he is appeared to in a certain way. This

seems to create a gap between the appearance and the snow. If I see a bright light I'm dazzled, and if I hear a loud noise I jump. These are primitive reactions to sights and sounds. But you admit that you can have the phenomenology, the appearance, even when there is no snow in your backyard. This does not seem to do justice to realism with respect to the snow, as I did justice to the realism of the bright light or the loud noise.

*H*: May I add that I think that these difficulties are the result of the Cartesian inheritance in empiricism. As long as belief is thought of as a mental state there will be no answer to these difficulties. Reid, like the empiricists, is still locked within a Cartesian circle.

*F*: Well, maybe that's where we are. Maybe we are all within the Cartesian circle.

*D*: Is the same to be said of our belief in God?

*F*: Because God is the Creator, we have not merely belief, but also trust.

*P*: J seems to suggest that belief in God presupposes philosophical realism. This leads him to say that although within religion one would confess the truth of the belief, philosophically one could only hope it is true. But this dichotomy is a consequence of accepting philosophical realism.

*J*: There is a long tradition of presupposing realism in a discussion of religion. This discussion is not religious. So I do have a view about what belongs to religious practice and what belongs to philosophy. But I do think realism is presupposed by religious practice. I am sympathetic to the view that spirituality is the core of religion, but I still think a question of objective truth is involved. I do not emphasise it very much. That is why I said that in philosophy it remains a matter of opinion. Some want to go further and say that religious belief depends on a Christian philosophy, but that claim is not very convincing.

# Part IV

# Looking for Jesus and Finding Christ

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# 7

# Looking for Jesus and Finding Christ

*Rowan Williams*

A little before Christmas 1999, Channel 4 screened a programme on 'The Real Jesus'. It was a curious mixture of scholarly commonplace and ambitious speculation; its fundamental premise was that the picture of Jesus presented in the New Testament had to be seen as the result of a successful battle for ideological dominance, in the wake of which considerable tracts of historical material about Jesus of Nazareth had been effectively suppressed. Since the suppression had been so drastic, the suppressed portrait had to be reconstructed from scattered 'non-standard' traditions, and from the simple expedient of taking the opposite view from that of the biblical texts as they stand – as well as reading those texts with a particularly keen eye for things that do not quite fit, or that suggest an argument with an absent opponent.

It was not a specially coherent programme, but it made a strong impression because of its assumption that the 'standard' picture was in some sense the product of a careful and far from innocent process of editing and rewriting a simpler historical story – something that appeals to an age that is systematically suspicious and more prepared than most previous ages to take it for granted that a text is before all else a bid for power, an attempt to form, even coerce, the reader's perceptions in the interest of the group for whom the writer speaks. In this respect, the programme represented a widespread strain in the modern practice of interpretation: we read more 'politically' than in the pre-modern period, expecting to have to *resist* some aspects of what we are reading, so that we do not have wool pulled over our eyes. A text represents someone's victory; if it has lasted, it must have prevailed over a majority of readers or listeners, it must have secured the popular vote or at least have driven out its rivals.

But this, of course, presupposes an even more fundamental perspective. Philosophies, life-systems, structures for making sense of the world, are necessarily adversarial, necessarily grouped in patterns of opposition or mutual exclusion, so that the survival of *x* means the suppression of *y*. Thus, even if evidence for a counter-position is lacking, we can reconstruct a fair amount of it by working out what the received account does not say or denies. And

if the contemporary reader finds difficulty with a text – as we expect a contemporary reader *will* – there is always a bit of a temptation to suppose that the voice suppressed in the background of a text is a voice less unlike my own than the voice represented in the text itself. It used to be said that earlier modern readers of traditional, including biblical, texts looked down a well and saw there the reflection of their own faces; for the late modern and postmodern reader, it is more a matter of looking for such a reflection in the opposite of what is immediately seen, as if the text were a photographic negative of the reader's face.

This in itself should give us pause before we simply accept the implied method without challenge, and the acute interpreter will want to note a couple of reservations before we proceed any further. First, the conflict of systems is only very rarely a contest between two precisely opposite claims, what emerges is not simply one of two neat alternatives. And second, the symmetrical pattern that would allow us to think that what the text does not say is what I as reader would want said is based on a mistake: what the text does not say is as much part of a difficult and foreign past as the text itself. There is no necessity that it be a frustrated modernity. Both kinds of reservation about the simple interpretative structure we started with rest on a single intellectual warning, that ideas do not always come in pairs. Because Hegel argued that thinking was dialectical, that is, that it advanced by position and counter-position and synthesis, generations of scholars have tried to apply this to the actualities of intellectual history. They rather miss the point (and sometimes Hegel himself misses it too . . .) that the dialectical principle is an observation about all mental activity, not a way of slicing up the history of ideas into black and white opposites.

Our television programme, fairly untroubled by the sort of considerations just outlined, proceeded on the assumption that, if the existing text claims divine authority for Jesus, the suppressed and more 'authentic' version will have stressed his humanity and denied such divine authority, or that if the text before us emphasises the resurrection, the suppressed account must have denied it, and so on. There is quite a bit that could be said about the actual complexities of early Christian literature here – noting, for instance, that what little we know independently of 'non-standard' reflection in the first Christian century quite strongly suggests that the chief contenders with the standard view were not beliefs about Jesus as a human prophet but theologies in which he was unequivocally viewed as an angelic power visiting the earth. But I do not want to elaborate on this too much, because I am more interested for our present purposes in the deeper matters of methods and goals in reading the New Testament, and in the issues underlying the notion that there is a 'real' Jesus to be uncovered from under the debris of twenty centuries of piety and dogma. How exactly did these conventions of interpreting arise, and what is their real intellectual seriousness once we get beyond the simplistic versions often current?

The search for a Jesus independent of the Church's faith began in an era when traditional authority in general had become suspect, when claims to be the recipients of a revelation were automatically to be resisted because they implied a claim on behalf of some to have possession of a knowledge that could not be equally available to all. At a time when the universality of human reason was passionately defended, claims like this could only appear offensive and oppressive, ways of justifying the irresponsible exercise of power by some over others. But if the Church's language about Jesus was not to be taken as truthful and normative, it had to be possible to show what it was that it was distorting or misrepresenting. To put it at its most positive, the search for a Jesus of history was an attempt to make the Church's language *accountable* to something beyond itself, at its most negative, it sought to oppose historical reality to theological fiction. In the early stages of research, many of the available models of historical reconstruction were themselves naive and uncritical, illustrating all too vividly the assumption that historical truth must be the antithesis of theological language and thus also thoroughly consistent with modernity. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Albert Schweitzer's epoch-making study of nineteenth-century reconstructions and his own presentation of an utterly strange and disturbing historical Jesus changed the shape of the debate for good, and issued a warning against smoothing over the unavoidably alien character of the past – a warning that a fair amount of recent scholarship sometimes seems to have overlooked. Later in the twentieth century, Bultmann took the further step of saying that an extensive scepticism about the historical Jesus was not only compatible with belief but positively required by it. His position is still ignorantly presented by some conservative commentators as if he were concerned to undermine the historical reliability of scripture in the interests of doctrinal or ethical liberalism. The truth is more that he believed New Testament faith to be possible in our age *only* if the New Testament's own definitions of faith were allowed to prevail over the untheological and sub-Christian attitudes encouraged by most of the Church's history. A historical record that was the object of faith would bind Christian belief to matters of reasoning and evidence and would remove the life-threatening risk of commitment to the crucified, the risk which is the spiritual heart of Paul's Gospel.

Bultmann would be a subject for a whole series of reflections and expositions, but let me simply note that his intense focus on the Jesus 'constructed' in the faith of the first generation of believers provoked increasing unease among theologians and New Testament experts – especially the latter, who, not unreasonably, thought he was forcing the textual evidence into a very rigid theological (Lutheran) mould. From both sides, new perspectives began to appear: theologians who insisted upon the historical basis of faith so as not to appear to retreat again into a private notion of revelation, New Testament interpreters who developed new tools for unscrambling gospel

texts, often with equally sceptical or more sceptical results, but without Bultmann's theological priorities. A 'new quest' proceeded, gradually evolving into what has become a widespread trend in the last two decades: in brief, this trend would regard the gospels as giving a bare minimum of historical record, but would be relatively optimistic about reconstructing a picture of the 'real' Jesus – from contemporary evidence, from highly sophisticated probing of the history of traditions about Jesus as they appear in the texts we have, including the non-standard or apocryphal ones, even from general methodological insights about the kind of society first-century Palestine must have been. Quite a lot of the television programme I mentioned made use of this 'third quest', though not in a particularly consistent way. The activities of the 'Jesus Seminar' in the USA have made this style of investigation familiar in the media.

The many problems around the methods of the Jesus Seminar and some comparable approaches have been much discussed in recent years, and there have been impressive scholarly rebuttals of some of the more extravagant claims made. But once again, I am interested in the underlying issues. The point I have been trying to make in this short overview of the discussion since about the end of the eighteenth century is this: the most influential forces in the study of the history of Jesus for two centuries have assumed that what stands between us and the truth about Jesus is those reactions to the history of Jesus canonised by the Church on the basis of the gospels, if we could somehow disregard and get round behind those reactions, we should be able to see the truth, and we should also be able to decide for ourselves what reactions to Jesus might be appropriate. Because the Christ of the Church's faith is seen as legitimising an oppressive and unchallengeable authority, it is clear that there is something corrupt about this picture; we must be liberated from this if we are not to become the victims of a successful bid for power. In other words, we need to be aware that the agenda of a good deal of New Testament scholarship has been linked with a broader agenda often described as 'emancipatory', designed to challenge traditional forms of communal authority. It is not simply a series of disputes about the relative historical reliability of the gospels. Bultmann is largely negative about the gospels as an historical source, but is convinced that the response they embody to the historical Jesus of Nazareth is a truthful one, though cast in cultural terms that are no longer available to us; we have to translate into equivalent contemporary language (this is the process of 'demythologising', so regularly misunderstood). Others, as I have noted, would share this negativity, but would go on to say that we are in a position to reconstruct a more reliable history which makes it clear that the theology of the gospels is a highly elaborate and self-conscious construct emerging from the political struggles of the earliest communities. It is hardly worth asking whether it is a 'truthful', let alone an adequate response; to understand it at all is to understand it as the victorious ideological strategy of a specific moment in time.

Suppose, then, that we have arrived at what is believed to be a plausible version of the history of Jesus purified, so we believe, of the deposit of the Church's response. In terms of recent scholarship, this may be a Jesus consumed with prophetic concern about the end of the age, or a Jesus indifferent to the end of the age, a wandering philosopher given to aphorisms about the contradictions of human experience, or a Jewish revivalist. Never mind for the moment which seems most likely. Our problems are far from done with. What we now face is a set of first-century phenomena to which we can only react as twentieth-century observers. What we see we shall make sense of within the interpretative grid of modernity or postmodernity; what a phenomenon meant, in any strict sense, to a contemporary observer is a highly complex and elusive matter. We are bound as historians to try, to some extent, to bracket out what are presented to us as obvious or natural contemporary responses, to the degree that we think they stand in the way of a more historically adequate assessment. These are the commonplaces of early modern historical method, which of course still survive in the sort of discourse we have been thinking about in biblical study.

But historians themselves have become more cautious about assuming that this is a self-evidently satisfactory way of going about things – hence the ever-increasing interest in the inaccessibility of a scientifically 'real' history prior to all interpretation. A person or event in the past is not most 'real' when entirely isolated from the reception and effect of their presence. History has also to be concerned with how contemporaries read and assimilated the phenomena of their day. And here we approach a major point of principle: the 'real' must not be assumed to be what can be clinically isolated before interpretation can get its hands on it. Every piece of evidence, even the archaeological record, is already interpreted before the modern observer gets there, it is part of a culture, a scheme of making sense that prevails in a period or place. To put it in plainer terms: we know what we are told, and tellers are telling us what they see from a particular vantage point. Part of the job of historical interpretation thus becomes the business of working out how a person or event makes possible various readings and responses. The truth about such a person or event has to take in this admittedly more nebulous question about what is made possible and how or why. The relations and consequences set up by a cluster of historical phenomena become part of what is studied, what we seek to understand.

I think it will be clear by now why I think the search for the 'real Jesus' is a lot more complicated than Channel 4 might suggest. It will not do either to say that the suppressed voices in early Christian speech are necessarily more truthful (let alone more congenial) than the victorious ideology, or that there is a set of historical data innocent of response and understanding which can be presented to us for our contemporary assessment. Suppressed voices too have interests, biases, specific standpoints, and they belong no less in the foreign country of the past than do the standard texts we have;

and the notion of what philosophers have come to call 'the view from nowhere' as a model for historical knowledge is insupportable. History, like other intellectual enterprises, is a way of talking and listening, and does not ultimately allow us to 'freeze' the process by appealing to an impersonally fixed set of common objects. When the historian looks for objectivity, this is not, for most historians today, a picture of the past undistorted by interest, bias, interpretation, but *a way of proceeding* as an historian that seeks to recognise how interpretation works, in the period under review and in the mind of the scholar. Objectivity is the habit of challenging unexamined assumptions, but not a guarantee of impersonal purity of perception.

But we are now left in more confusion than ever, it seems, about the significance for the believer of the history of Jesus. Do we say with Bultmann that it is of no importance? If we do, how do we avoid the risk of an uncritical acceptance of one particular theological perspective and the problems over authority entailed in that? If we give to Jesus' history a specific significance for the shaping of belief, how do we avoid the situation where Christians are dependent on the rather chaotic world of New Testament scholarship for guidance on what they must believe and do? And, given the warnings already entered against the idea that there could ever be a settled and 'objective' account of the biography of Jesus as an isolated individual, how do we locate ourselves amongst the variety of possible responses that study of the basic texts displays to us? In what remains of this address, I want to suggest first what general or methodological principles might help us move forward on this, and, second, what specifics about first-century history might turn out to be of importance for belief today.

The first point is a development of my remarks, a few minutes ago about what this or that historical phenomenon 'makes possible'. If we ask what was distinctive about the phenomena surrounding Jesus of Nazareth, in the most general sense, one obvious answer would be to say that these phenomena made possible what we call *faith*. That is, in relation to Jesus, certain observers of his historical career began to speak of their experience in terms of a distinctively radical trust in God – in some cases, a conviction that because of God's acceptance they could understand themselves as enjoying a relation to God as secure as that ascribed to Jesus. They expressed this in terms of God's not being bound by any system of law or of human expectation in God's relations to humanity; and they assumed that this entailed different possibilities and conventions about how human beings were to live together. Forget for a moment debates about the different voices competing for dominance in an imagined spectrum of early Christian communities, whatever account is given of this, the texts of the New Testament quite simply put before us this set of effects, over a period ranging from about twenty to about sixty-five years after the death of Jesus. This means that an adequate account of the history of the beginnings of the Christian movement needs to raise the question about what in the life of Jesus provided the conditions

for such beliefs to arise. This question may not be answerable in exact historical terms; such answers as there may be are bound to be stepping across a gap in the fossil record, an absence of direct and uncontestable contemporary evidence, and so will have to presuppose various processes of transmission and development; and there will be no real possibility of answering in historical terms, which of several possible lines of response and interpretation was defensible or correct, as that is not the province of history. But what is important here is that there can be no discussion of a 'real' Jesus that does not raise this issue, even indirectly; whatever the events were, they began a process one of whose outcomes was the New Testament. Unless we claim, arbitrarily, that faith as defined in the New Testament was a conscious invention that happened to attach itself to the figure of Jesus by a series of historical accidents, the process requires investigation.

Thus a methodology that takes seriously a question like this will tell us that a full understanding of faith cannot bypass entirely issues about the history of Jesus. Some sort of genealogy of interpretation needs sketching; Bultmann's passionate confidence that there was a clear initial message that was rendered into the mythological language of the day, and that this message had very little indeed to do with the records of Jesus' speaking or acting, does not do justice to the fact that interpretations are learned in the interactions of speakers, none of whom begins by possessing a simple and comprehensive vision. If we are to understand faith, we must at least acquire a little familiarity with how trust in God was thought about in the period, what language was actually available for describing relation with God (and thus what it is in Christian language that is new), what ideas were current in connection with definitions of belonging to God's people, and so on. Faith cannot be preached in a vacuum; and while the gospels give a schematic account of matters like this, the summons now to faith is materially strengthened by some awareness of context. Not that faith waits on scholarship before it can be proclaimed, only that this proclamation, in clarifying from generation to generation what exactly is being talked about, needs some narrative filling out – and if historical scholarship can offer material for this, so much the better.

Thus (to the second point) we might want to say, for example, that it is important to know that address to God as 'Abba' was not unknown, but not common, and that language about 'participation' in divine life (as found in John's Gospel) was problematic in the Jewish context, except in relation to certain angelic powers regarded as having delegated authority from God. We might also underline the fact that in a period of foreign occupation and rule by a mixture of compliant native clergy and military administration, issues about divine authority and political authority in Palestine were complicated; and that the different options for defining Jewish identity stood in fierce competition. We could go a step further and say that the gospel narratives would make no sense at all if we supposed that potentially embarrassing

aspects of the story of Jesus, sometimes rather at odds with what we know about the practice and interest of many early communities, were not grounded in some continuous tradition. So, to take, an obvious example, it is unlikely that stories about Jesus' regular consorting with politically compromised figures ('tax collectors and sinners') have no foundation. Likewise, given the evident awkwardness about Jesus' predictions of a coming crisis, and the various efforts at reinterpreting these within fifty or so years of his death, it is unlikely that these are pure Church creations. These are not meant as historical *grounds* for a particular theology, only as conditions without which the gospel narratives would appear bizarrely self-subverting compositions. More might be said (and I shall be trying to say some of it a little later), but considerations like these are the sort of thing I believe would have to be in the background of any account of a 'real' Jesus: necessary but not sufficient conditions, if you like.

Not quite a wild goose chase, then? No, to the degree that these stand as a reminder that there are some things that have to be around for any discourse about Jesus to 'count' as being about him: you cannot say absolutely anything you like and still claim to be talking of him. And this is a useful reminder to the language of Church-based theology: there is, just as the early moderns wanted there to be, something to which theological language makes itself responsible, something that can call it to account. I think, you see, that this element of the modern protest against authoritative doctrine represents an important recognition that, even if the reality of Jesus is not to be discovered independently of response to him, including and especially the responses embodied in the biblical record, this reality is, equally, not *absorbed* into that response. To say that certain aspects of first-century Palestine belong irreducibly to the narrative, and that Jesus' story cannot therefore be told as if it could have happened anywhere and anytime, is to emphasise that what we have is indeed *response*, not simply creation. And this in turn – as with any serious human response – tells us that there is something in the datum that is not captured in the response. Faith that is generated in relation to Jesus acknowledges, in the bare fact of reading four different gospels, that there is in Jesus a dimension not contained, this is a face coming to light at the mouth of a cave, the light falling this way and that, but never turning a full glare into the unreachable darkness.

The images of pilgrimage and wild goose chase come from a nineteenth-century essay which long before most of these issues had really been noticed, let alone addressed, by biblical scholars or theologians, dealt with rather frightening authority with the matter of faith and the 'real' Jesus. Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* was published in 1844, and it sets out to perform a 'thought-experiment': if it is true that we actually learn the truth – rather than recover it from the depths of our own being, as Plato's Socrates suggests – truth must be given by 'the god', by what stands outside

the world of human speech and understanding; starting from here, what should we need to say about 'the god' if we wish to make sense of the simple fact of learning in time? The result, one of Kierkegaard's intricate and teasing works, is an invention of Christianity entirely from first principles – which, of course, Kiekegaard believed impossible. The point of the exercise is to show that the valuation of history and change involved in the Christian narrative and the Christian definition of faith requires a fundamental rethinking of what we mean by learning and knowing.

Learning involves our reasoning capacity being brought to a place of utter denial and negation, the 'absolute paradox' by which reason's yearning to know comes up against what reason cannot master but must receive. The encounter gives not simply knowledge but the condition for knowledge; it changes the learner. This means that the paradigm case of learning must be when 'the god' is encountered directly in the world of time, as a set of phenomena in time. But if the learning is purely gift, creating the conditions for its own reception, the god's presence in time must be anonymous. The change cannot come as a natural result of what is apparent in history; the historical events provide the occasion for the change, but the change is not compelled by evidence that anyone might ponder and draw conclusions from. In this sense, exactly how much historical knowledge is needed for the change to occur is irrelevant. There is no advantage in being directly contemporary with the god's manifestation; one contemporary sees more than another, one sees and believes, one sees and does not. Believer and unbeliever may have the same information, yet one responds simply as to an historical datum and the other does not. So the 'follower' in a later generation has nothing to complain of and must beware of a sort of nostalgia for the supposed immediacy of being a contemporary, an immediacy which is wholly illusory, since there is nothing to see that would make belief simpler. The person in pursuit of pure contemporary 'reality' where the god is concerned, 'even though he gives his junket a holy name, and even though he preaches about community to others so that they may join the pilgrimage, in crowds, he will hardly discover the holy land (in the sense of immediacy), since it is to be found neither on the map nor on earth . . . And even though he gives himself no rest . . . and runs faster than a horse can run or than a man can tell lies, he still is only running on a wild-goose chase and misunderstands himself, like the bird catcher, for if the bird does not come to him, running after it with a lime twig is futile' (*Philosophical Fragments* and *Johannes Climacus*, edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong, Princeton 1985, pp. 70–71).

So for the later follower or believer, the witness of the contemporary or near-contemporary has to be the occasion for faith just as the phenomena of the God's earthly life was the occasion for the contemporary; and the witness is bound to be as ambiguous as those phenomena, lacking in a compelling and unchallengeable manifest authority. Were it otherwise, the change

could not be a gift. Putting this into the terms we started with, you could take this to mean that the development of the modern and suspicious readings of the gospels simply accentuates an awareness that the witness is ambiguous; this is not the only possible, perhaps not even the obvious response to the history of Jesus. It is the one that makes the highest claim, or that points to the most comprehensive reworking of human understanding of God and ourselves, but it cannot say that events oblige such a conclusion, or indeed that this is a matter of *conclusions* at all. If we ask what makes us think that it is more than the successful competitor in ideological wars, the only thing we can say is that this account, like others, has to have some constraints of an historical nature, and that its very loose ends, its very ambition, should warn us against dismissing it in these reductive terms. We can and we should resist the muddled thinking that assumes truth is what is prior to all effects and relations, as I have said, and the even more muddled thinking that assumes truth to be the opposite of what has proved historically sustainable. But the 'third quest' of the historical Jesus undoubtedly leaves us with sheerly historical uncertainties; they may be contested historically (and I believe they can and should be), but if Kierkegaard is right we cannot expect a resolution that will make faith easier, nor should we.

Is faith in Jesus then an utterly unpredictable matter, unrelated to evidence, reason, historical probability? The answer lies, I suppose, in what it is that might prompt us to approach the gospel text with more than an historical interest. In Kierkegaard's scheme, the story of the god among us is, as we noted earlier, the paradigm case of learning: the very shape of the story brings us before the absolute paradox and our reason surrenders in order to find its fulfilment. If he is right, then everything depends, in our reading of the gospels, on whether the story displaces or decentres us, whether we read it as an address to us, a call to dispossession; whether in fact the centrality in the gospels of an image of violent rejection and death proposes to us that there is no way of reading other than one that assimilates that risk in some way into our reception of what is said. As Kierkegaard intimates, exactly *how much* historical detail we take on is going to be less important than this fundamental reading disposition. We can debate for ages with the proponents of secular and sceptical readings, and there are, as I have said, plenty of areas where critical dogmas should be challenged; but until we begin to ask about the underlying presupposition of a reading, we are not yet talking about issues of faith. Bultmann was right at least about this, that questions of faith are trivialised when they are translated as questions about the credibility of the Bible as an historical record.

We might approach the gospel texts in expectation of meeting the saving paradox if we have been accustomed to read in the context of worship. To challenge once again a simple version of Enlightenment suspicion, it is not to be assumed that when a text is read in worship, it becomes simply an ideological tool; the question is a fair one, even at the most pragmatic level,

of how a text makes possible its own use in such a specialised context. But it may also be that we can learn how to read the gospel text by our encounter with those lived 'readings' of it that are to be seen in the lives of believers. We encounter a life in which the sense of some pivotal change prompted by an unsought gift is manifest; we look for the source of this way of understanding oneself and find it in a practice based on the reading of the gospel. In other words, we see what it concretely is for someone to be dispossessed by the narrative of the god among us. And if we then approach the record in the light of this, aware that this text has been the occasion of an encounter with the paradox in someone's biography, we are more likely to be coming in such a way as makes our own dispossession possible; or, as Kierkegaard would put it, the 'condition' of faith has been given by the god through the witness of the follower. Coming to the text like this does not, of course, entail that certain critical questions are disallowed in the abstract, or that we receive miraculous assurance of historically doubtful propositions; only that it has become possible for faith to occur in response to the witness, that is, for the change in understanding of God and ourselves to happen.

The answer to questions about the 'real' Jesus is thus both simple and very complex. There is no path to a secure portrait of Jesus independent of how he has been responded to; and the issue of whether the response embodied in the gospel is an adequate, proper or even compelling one turns out to be an issue of whether we have seen plausible readings in the lives of believers that prompt us to come empty-handed to the gospel witness – whether we come to this reading allowing (at least) that the reading may be of more than historical concern to us. Part of the 'reality' we seek is that the history of Jesus did indeed begin the process that led to the definition of faith in the Christian sense; the issue is whether we are willing to participate in, not merely to note the presence of this aspect of his reality. If we can arrive at a more nuanced idea of the context in which Jesus was first perceived to embody Kierkegaard's paradox, we shall gain by it, but it will not ground or compel belief. Thus to see that Jesus triggers a new vocabulary for God, whether directly or at a generation's remove, or to see how he is perceived to have revised the definitions of God's people, gives some flesh to the perception of him as agent of the radically new teacher of a truth in which his own specific reality is an aspect of what is imparted. And the narrative of trial, cross and resurrection comes into its own in this context, testing the reader's capacity to hold to the new creation in the face of total historical failure. At this point, Kierkegaard's insistence on the absolute invisibility, the non-representable character of 'the god' in history receives its most potent illustration; and it's worth noting – though it would take a good deal longer to elaborate this point – that the resurrection stories would pose no problem different in kind for Kierkegaard from the problems of any narrative concerned with the fact that the first believers believed. The strangeness of the resurrection stories, the lack of evidential appearances to an indiscriminate

public or to Pilate and Caiaphas, the difficulty of recognising the risen Jesus – all these factors fit with Kierkegaard's perspective. Certainly in the Acts of the Apostles, Peter and John before the priestly court can in effect only say that they have believed: they must now be the occasion of faith, not the demonstration of divine power in some kind of public triumph.

The question is finally whether we can grasp at all that issues about the 'real' Jesus are for some going to be bound up with issues about the reality of themselves. We can reconstruct several historical Jesuses, and we can argue about their relative plausibility; it is not a waste of time. Christians can quite properly enter the lists against versions of Jesus' life that would make the whole of the subsequent development unintelligible (there are more of these now than in Kierkegaard's day). But apologetic of this sort takes one only to the point of allowing that the response of faith to Jesus is not purely and simply an ideological invention of the second or third generation (and a really committed Kierkegaardian might still say, 'But it remains true that Jesus has made it possible . . .'; my problem would be that the object of faith increasingly becomes an object constructed in thought, whereas Kierkegaard is insistent that the material form of an historical person has to be the occasion for the initial radical shock to the self). What it does not do is to put us, the readers and observers ourselves, 'in question'. For that, we have to read with a suspension of the safe distance that allows us to discuss all this as an historical matter; we have to stand with those other readers for whom life and death are the issue. 'For the god's love, any other revelation would be a deception' (*Fragments*, p. 33).

# 8

# Looking for Jesus and Still Finding Christ

*Stephen T. Davis*

## I

Rowan Williams has provided a stimulating and thoughtful essay for this conference. I will make occasional references to his chapter, but since there are only a few points where I disagree with him (and those will emerge in due time), this chapter is more of a response than a point-by-point reply. What I want to do is carry on with a basic theme of Williams' chapter and push the idea further.

I agree with Williams that in general there has been an adversarial relationship between those who engage in the "Search for the Historical Jesus," on the one hand, and teachings about Jesus that we find in the New Testament and in the church, on the other. Indeed, in H.S. Reimarus (1694–1766), often considered the founder of the "Search," this is quite explicit. He wanted to discover who Jesus was by entirely rational means. This meant, for him, using the tools of historical research unhindered by dogmatic considerations or ecclesiastical control. This ideal continues to the present day; the Jesus Seminar, as we all know, makes much of its total freedom from church teachings. Its members – so it insists – are "just scholars"; that is, they are "free of ecclesiastical and religious control."[1]

The assumption of much of this work has been, and continues to be, that at least much of the New Testament and certainly the Church got it wrong about Jesus. And at some points it is doubtless true that New Testament scholarship for the first seventeen centuries was deficient. How so? It was based *uncritically* on the assumption that the historical Jesus *is* the incarnate Son of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Its knowledge of the first-century Roman and Jewish milieu of the New Testament was far less complete than ours (think of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi library). It knew little of comparative studies with other sacred texts of the era. And its uncritical assumption of biblical unity caused it to miss much of the rich variety of theologies in the New Testament.

But here is the question I want to ask as a kind of *Gedankenexperiment*: What if it turned out that the Church, at least in broad outline, got Jesus right? I do not mean: What if church teachings politically win out over the forces of reason and scholarship? I mean: what if it turned out, by the best use scholars could make of the historical-critical method itself, that the New Testament and church picture of Jesus is correct or very probably correct? What if Jesus really believed himself to be the Messiah and Son of God? What if he really did heal people and turn water into wine? What if he really did say, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30) and "Whoever has seen me has seen the *f*ather" (John 14:9)? What if he really did die believing that his death was an atoning sacrifice "for our sins"? What if he really was alive after his death by crucifixion? What if he really did intend to found a church? (Note that these are items that in principle *could* be demonstrated by historical-critical scholarship as currently practiced in academia. I have intentionally avoided claims like, "God raised Jesus from the dead" or "Jesus was God incarnate," which could not.)

If all this occurred, would it make any difference? Would it make any *religious* difference? What, indeed, if we looked for Jesus and found Christ?

## II

There are many ways of being religious in the world. The various religions of humankind seem so diverse as to have little in common with each other aside from what Wittgenstein called family resemblances. Zen Buddhism has little in common with Islam; Advaita Vedanta Hinduism is not strikingly similar to Christianity.

Let me distinguish between two sorts of religions: *historical religions* and *nonhistorical religions*. The historical religions are those that essentially depend on God or divinity acting in human history in certain ways. The crucial idea is that our salvation or liberation or enlightenment (or whatever term is preferred) essentially depends on the truth of certain claims about things that happened in the past. Certain events, brought about by God, must have occurred. The discipline that we call history is crucial for these sorts of religions. If historians could prove that Mohammed never lived (and thus was not God's final prophet and thus did not receive the Koran from God), Islam would be in some difficulty.

The nonhistorical religions are simply those that do not essentially depend on divine activity in history. Typically, they would be religions that revolve around a group of wise teachings to be followed, a pattern of life to be emulated, a set of rituals to be observed, a code of rules to be obeyed, or a level of spirituality to be achieved. There may or may not exist stories that anchor these teachings or patterns in history (like, say, a founder who produced the wise sayings). The point is that the soundness or validity of the religious

way of life being recommended is thought to stand on its own; it does not essentially depend on those stories being true.

The distinction between the historical and the nonhistorical religions is not hard-and-fast. Indeed, we can observe tendencies on the part of some adherents of historical religions to try to move them toward being nonhistorical. A rabbi friend once told me that he had no strong feelings about whether the children of Israel were ever actually rescued from Egyptian slavery or even whether Moses ever existed. What *did* greatly concern him was that Jews live according to the Torah. One obvious motivation for this sort of move is clear: historical religions are vulnerable to falsification in ways in which nonhistorical religions are not. If Christianity depends upon the New Testament picture of Jesus being essentially correct, then Christianity is vulnerable to the results of historical scholarship in ways in which, say, Taoism is not.

Christianity is not only a historical religion, it has almost always had a prescriptive character as well. Part of its essential nature seems to be the conviction that the historic revelation it claims to have received from God is intended for and is to be shared with all people. Not all religions are prescriptive in this sense. But throughout history Christians have felt themselves under an obligation to make prescriptive statements to people along the lines of "You must do X" or "You should believe Y." Most of the beliefs that are recommended for acceptance are part of (or are said to be entailed by) what is believed to have been revealed in history. So, again, the historiographical task of the Christian thinker is crucial.

## III

But – so you might be wondering – how on earth could it ever be shown, via the historical-critical method, that the New Testament and the church were essentially correct in their assessments of Jesus? Well, there are two ways in which we might imagine something like this as occurring. (I am not predicting that it *will* occur.) The first is that it might happen negatively. That is, we can imagine all the contemporary non-orthodox pictures of Jesus – those of Crosson, Mack, Borg, the Jesus Seminar, the Q Seminar, and so on – facing objections that they cannot answer, collapsing of their own weight, and being abandoned by scholars. Scholars might come to believe that the canonical Gospels are simply more reliable than Thomas, Q, or other real or reconstructed ancient documents.

In one sense we can be certain that these and other currently popular views of Jesus *will* disappear, just as those of, say, Reimarus, Strauss, Renan, and Schweitzer have pretty much disappeared from the radar screen as viable scholarly options. But given the tension noted earlier between the church view of Jesus and the Search for the historical Jesus, this virtual certainty can be of little solace to the orthodox. For it is also a virtual certainty that current

nonorthodox views of Jesus will be replaced, in due time, by other nonorthodox ones. Indeed, one thing that seems to characterize the current "Search" is its eager willingness to entertain almost any ideas about Jesus, however bizarre, except orthodox ones.

But the triumph of the church view of Jesus might also happen for positive reasons. We can also imagine orthodox historical-critical scholars simply making a better case. Obviously, since this is a situation I am merely *imagining*, I cannot make such a case here. Nor, as a philosopher and not a scripture scholar, am I the one to do so. I can only sketch out in broad outline what such a case might possibly look like.

First, it might be convincingly argued that Jesus had a "high" view of his own vocation and status – as more than a prophet, or as more even than the messiah, or as more even than a "Son of God" (in the sense in which that term was applied to kings and other special men). Perhaps this much could be argued, even on the basis of sayings that many radical scholars now accept as authentic or probably authentic (e.g., Matt 8:22; Mark 2:27–28; 7:14–15; Luke 11:20). In other words, it might be argued that Jesus was in some robust sense conscious of himself as divine, or became so at some point in his career.

Second, it might be argued that Jesus' lofty view of his own aims and vocation best explains why he was crucified. It cannot sensibly be denied that there existed a man Jesus who was crucified, and that he was crucified primarily because of things that he did and said during the last week of his life. And it may well be that thinking about that fact is one good way of figuring out what his aims and vocation were. (Obviously, his other recorded words and deeds can help us here too.) I mention this point because on some contemporary views of Jesus it is not easy to see why some of his contemporaries would get worked up enough about him to want to kill him, let alone succeed. This certainly seems to be a problem for the somewhat tweedy, koan-spouting, counter-cultural Jesus of the Jesus Seminar. People might well have taken such a Jesus as something of an eccentric, maybe even as an oddball, but hardly as the kind of person who must be killed.

Third, it might be argued that the view of Jesus found in the New Testament and in the church does a better job than current nonorthodox views of Jesus in explaining the rise of the church. It is obvious that there is this phenomenon called first-century Judaism. And there is also this phenomenon called first-century Christianity. Now, how do we get from the one to the other? What exactly is it that explains the rise of faith and the existence of the Christian movement? On some contemporary views of Jesus, this constitutes a puzzle in the extreme. But if Jesus really performed miracles, claimed to be divine, and was raised from the dead, an explanation seems close at hand. In other words, perhaps the NT does a better job of explaining first-century phenomena than, say, Thomas or Q.

Fourth, it might be argued that worship of Jesus was widespread and primitive in the Christian movement. Early Christian prayers were addressed to

Jesus (one preserved in Aramaic – 1 Cor 16:22; see also 2 Cor 12:8; 1 Thes 3:11–13; 2 Thes 2:16–17; 3:5; Acts 1:24; 7:59–60), doxologies were addressed to Christ or to Christ and the Father together (Rom 16:27; cf. 2 Cor 1:20; 2 Tim 4:18; 2 Peter 3:18; Rev 1:5–6, 13; cf. 7:10), and hymns of praise were sung to Christ (Phil 2:6–11; 1 Tim 3:16; cf. Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is worshipped (*proskynesis*) by Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (28:9) and by the eleven disciples on the mountain (28:17). There seems to have been no one in the early church who questioned or contested the transition from prayer and thanksgiving to Jesus to actual worship of Jesus (Acts 13:2).

And so the argument might be advanced that the best explanation of early Christian worship of Jesus is that Jesus himself was at least implicitly conscious of being divine and communicated his awareness of his own vocation and status to his followers. (This is not to claim, of course, that Jesus thought of himself in the credal terms arrived at centuries later – terms like, hypostatic union, Second Person of the Trinity, etc.)

Finally, it might be argued that Jesus actually lived again after his crucifixion, called God *Abba*, claimed to have authority to forgive sins and to reinterpret Sabbath and dietary laws; and pushed the idea that he himself would be the eschatological judge who would decide the final status of all human beings.

What I am imagining, then, is that on the basis of arguments like these (or other better ones), the practitioners of the historical-critical method reach the conclusion that the view of Jesus found in the New Testament and in the church is largely the correct view of Jesus. That is, I am imagining the end of the historic tension between the Search for the Historical Jesus and the Church's Christology.

## IV

If all this happened – and it is a very big "if" indeed – what would be the result? What difference, if any, would it make? Would it make Christian faith easier, or not? And here is where I must mention one of my central differences with Rowan Williams. He says, "Bultmann was right at least about this, that questions of faith are trivialized when they are translated as questions about the credibility of the Bible as an historical record." I am puzzled by this statement, especially since Williams had earlier warned us that "a full understanding of faith cannot bypass entirely issues about the history of Jesus." He had also (quite correctly, in my view) pointed out that anyone who denies that the history of Jesus is important, risks uncritical acceptance of some particular theological perspective.

Perhaps Williams simply means that Christianity is far more than *just* believing that certain creedal statements are true. If so, he would certainly be right. And of course there are undoubted Christian folk who do not claim to know or even believe various Christian assertions. If that is what Williams

means (and that is surely not what Bultmann meant), he is of course correct.

In any case, it seems to me that Williams is sending mixed signals about the importance or relevance of history for faith. But perhaps the problem is simply that I do not understand his position; perhaps the above quotation about Bultmann being correct is quite consistent with what he says earlier about the importance of history for faith. I will return to this point momentarily. First, let me sketch out two theses of my own on the matter of faith and history.

*Thesis 1*: If our only source of knowledge of Jesus were the historical-critical method, the life and teachings of Jesus would have little religious significance, and Christianity would be in deep trouble.

This is an *a priori* theological assertion. By it I mean that if the religion of Jesus has religious significance – is, in some important sense, "from God," does have the power to save us – we would expect that God would find ways of communicating and passing on information about it quite apart from the historical-critical method. Indeed, it is almost ridiculous to suppose, on these assumptions, that the truth about Jesus would be unknown until a small group of scholars discovered it nearly twenty centuries afterward. It seems that God would have taken steps to ensure the protection and preservation of that message (say, by stating it in a text), would have taken steps to ensure that it would be properly interpreted (say, by creating a tradition of interpretation like what the church fathers called "the rule of faith"), and would have taken steps to ensure its authoritative interpretation and application by creating an institution (the church) designed to do that very thing.[2]

*Thesis 2*: It is important for the church that its message, and especially its christology, be solidly anchored in history.

Without any firm historical basis for its claims about Christ, Christian teachings devolve to the level of myth. Indeed, we use the word "myth" precisely for those stories about the past that cannot be anchored in history. Now the word "history," as we all know, can mean either something like *what actually occurred in the past* or it can mean something like *the best accounts historians can give about what actually occurred in the past*. Here I am using the word "history" in the first sense.

Note, for example, that Paul (contrary to what is sometimes claimed) anchors Christian belief and practice in past events – not in myth, philosophy, poetry, or ideology, but in the actual life and teachings of Jesus. Note his careful distinction between his own teachings and Jesus' teachings (1 Cor 7:10–12). Note the institution of the Eucharist, with it remembrance of the

Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:23–26). Note the phrase "as of first importance," followed by a list of people who saw the risen Lord (1 Cor 15:3–8). Paul apparently believed that salvation depends upon certain claims about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus being *true* claims.

Note also 1 Corinthians 15:6: "Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died." The phrase, "most of whom are still alive," is intriguing for several reasons. I will mention but one reason: it seems clear that Paul is in effect saying, "If you do not believe me, go ask one of them." That is, he seems to be opening up his own theological reflections on the resurrection of Jesus to historical verification or falsification. (Note also Luke 1:1–4.)

So far as William's point about Bultmann is concerned, I would reply that it is indeed absurd to imagine that Christian faith is exhausted by, or can be totally reduced to, the historical credibility of the Bible. But there are some historical claims made by the Bible – e.g., that Jesus was raised from the dead – that in my judgment Christian faith cannot do without. The credibility of the Bible's claims on this point (and others) is crucial. We still have to do historical research.

## V

Now all of this presupposes something that is at least in some tension with something that Williams alludes to at more than one point in his chapter (pp. 142, 144), namely, the alien nature of the past. This is a second point where I disagree with him – or at least I disagree with him if he wants to push hard on the point. What I have been presupposing, and would want to argue for, is that past events can be understood from the perspective of the present and that texts from the past can be properly interpreted. To put it crudely, maybe the past is alien, but it is not *that* alien.

Of course I agree, as Williams insists, that there is no "scientifically 'real' history prior to all interpretation." I would put it this way: texts from the first-century Jewish milieu are alien in that they were written in a language that is different from ours, were produced in a culture different from ours, and at points presuppose knowledge of events and persons (as well as perhaps a worldview) that we lack. This creates a barrier to understanding, but I want to argue that the barrier is not impenetrable. As someone who has taught ancient philosophy for years, I am convinced that teachers and students alike can come to understand texts like the *Phaedo* and the *Nichomachean Ethics*. Sometimes it takes great effort, not the least of which is expended in learning to read the Greek language, but it can be done. I also cite by way of illustration the very painstaking and skillful work done at this very university in publishing, translating, and commenting upon the Nag Hammadi documents.

Who am I arguing against here? Well, perhaps it is the view expressed by some folk who describe themselves as postmodern, that texts – especially

texts from the ancient past – have no stable meaning, and accordingly that meaning is something that is created by the reader rather than intended by the author or established by the text itself. I do not know whether Williams buys into these theses, but I hope not.

## VI

If the scenario I am imagining came true, would it make any difference? If historical-critical scholars largely accepted the New Testament picture of Jesus as accurate, would it make any difference for Christian faith? Yes, it would. In my view, there would be both positives and negatives.

If Christianity is a historical religion, then the study of its history matters crucially to it. We can see this insight at work at all shades of the theological spectrum. It is obvious with those on the conservative side; they are always arguing that historical-critical scholarship, when practised aright, supports the New Testament and church picture of Jesus. But it is also true on the liberal side. John Hick, in his recent Christology, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*,[3] argues that proper historical research supports the picture of Jesus that he paints. To Hick, Jesus was "God incarnate" only metaphorically. Literally, he was a man who was acutely aware of and extraordinarily responsive to God; he was an agent of God's activity on earth; he embodied in his life the divine ideal of self-giving love; and his teachings make God real to us and challenge us to live in God's presence. And the Jesus Seminar equally argues that authentic historical-critical scholarship establishes its view of Jesus. He was, the Seminar says, something like an itinerant teacher of religious philosophy; he was full of provocative and pithy sayings and parables, and he had almost no connection to Jewish apocalypticism, and no big controversy with the religious leaders.

My point then is that almost everybody who paints a picture of Jesus – conservative or liberal – tries to anchor it in history. Bultmann was of course something of an exception to this point. In some of his writings, one gets the impression that he gives up on finding Jesus and moves directly to the church's Christ.[4] But most scholars try to show that "this is the actual Jesus." So in one sense almost everybody "looks for Jesus and finds Christ," where "Christ" broadly means the object of one's religious devotion or emulation. Almost everybody struggles mightily to connect the "Christ" they believe in or follow or at least admire with the "Jesus" who lived. This is a natural and understandable strategy.

So if historical-critical scholars came to accept the New Testament and church picture of Jesus, that would be a positive in that the Christian Church's position will have received some degree of confirmation. The other, nonorthodox, views will have been refuted. There will have been provided a firm historical foundation for Christian belief. For those of us who see ourselves as orthodox Christians, all this sounds nice.

But I see two negatives as well. First, how long would the orthodox consensus that I am envisioning last? Things change so quickly these days in historical-critical scholarship (and indeed in most areas of scholarship) that we could confidently predict that the consensus would be short-lived. Soon it would again be the case that intelligent scholars would be calling orthodox beliefs about Jesus outmoded, pre-critical, gullible, credulous, and obscurantist.

Secondly (and much more importantly), I smell a rat even while the orthodox consensus has its imagined fifteen minutes of fame. I fear Christians and non-Christians alike might get the impression that the historical-critical method is our *only* source of information about Jesus Christ. There are of course many people who hold this view. But for Christians to hold it would spell disaster. What about the teachings of the church? What about the teachings of what Calvin called the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit? What about the teachings of one's own mother or pastor? What about one's own experience of Jesus in, say, the eucharist? I would argue that unless and until somebody shows that those teachings are mistaken, it is rational for Christians to accept them, even if they are not confirmed by historical-critical research.

This indeed would be my solution to the conundrum posed by Williams. Does the history of Jesus have significance for Christian faith? He and I both reject the roughly Bultmannian line that it has no importance. But, Williams asks, "If we give to Jesus' history a specific significance for the shaping of belief, how do we avoid the situation where Christians are dependent on the rather chaotic world of New Testament scholarship for guidance on what they must believe and do?" The answer (from the point of view of the believer) is that we have other sources of information about Jesus than the currently assured results of historical scholarship.

As noted above, Christianity is a historical and prescriptive religion. As such, it cannot avoid the messy and underdetermined world of history. It must contend with historical issues, and with historians, whether they agree or disagree with Christian claims. To try to establish Christian claims through historical research alone is futile. Historical-critical research is a very valuable tool, and for historical-critical scholars, it is the only tool they have got, or will allow. Christians claim to have others: communal satisfaction in reading, coherence with tradition, and fit with religious experience. Combine historical research with those three, and you have got a powerful instrument. It might just allow you to look for Jesus and still find Christ.

## Notes

1. Robert W. Funk, *et al.* (eds), *The Five Gospels* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), p. xviii.
2. E. Stephen Evans has argued similarly in his "Methodological Naturalism in Historical Biblical Scholarship," in Carey C. Newman (ed.), *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel* (Downer's Grove: IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), p. 202.

3. John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age* (Louisville: Westminister John Knox Press, 1993).
4. Perhaps at this point Bultmann was being influenced by Martin Kahler (1835–1912), who argued that we cannot get behind the data and find the real Jesus, and that "the real Christ is the preached Christ." Martin Kahler, *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ*, trans. By Carl Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), p. 66.

# Voices in Discussion

*D.Z. Phillips*

*Q*: My purpose is twofold. First, I want to pick up some methodological concerns connected with the search for the historical Jesus. Second, I wanted to understand what it means to say that Jesus is the occasion of faith, rather than the object of faith.

Jesus was not the only person in the Judaic tradition to claim that he was the Messiah. Zevi Shabbetai in the seventeenth century claimed to be the Messiah. We have more historical evidence about him than we do about Jesus. He was a practising Jew who converted to Islam. This created a dilemma for his followers. If he converted to Islam he did not die a practising Jew. Alternatively, if he was a practising Jew he did not convert to Islam. Can we argue thus: if he did not convert he was the Messiah, and if he did he wasn't?

The Rabbinic establishment said that if he converted, he was not the Messiah. So a historical fact had theological implications. But what of those who still claimed he was the Messiah, and that he was performing some great eschatological event and redefining religious categories? We can see that there is an interweaving of history and faith, so that the dichotomies 'History doesn't matter', 'History does matter' are seen to be too simplistic. For this reason I am not happy with C's conception of purified descriptive data (see pp. 154 and 157–59). Did Jesus actually believe he was divine? Did he actually walk on water? Suppose you established these claims with respect to someone else. What would be the resulting theological agenda?

I want to elaborate on my relation to Bultmann expressed on pp. 157–58. What if I am saying, 'It is highly likely that Jesus walked on water', 'It is highly likely that he turned water into wine'? The implication seems to be that I have to say 'It is highly likely that Jesus was God incarnate'. Here D.Z. Phillips' strictures on Richard Swinburne and Alastair Hannay's observations on Kierkegaard are relevant. Does the ascription of divinity to Jesus give us a piece of information about him? This is what

I mean by the difference between treating Jesus as an historical occasion of faith, and treating Jesus as an historical object of faith.

On p. 159f., C challenges the notion of the alien character of the past. What I'm protesting about is a conception of the past as a series of discrete epistemic objects. This is a conception often shared by liberals and conservatives alike. Sometimes I am seriously at a loss about the past. Sometimes I get there, but sometimes there is a serious breakdown. When I wrote about fourth-century theological disputes, many people thought I had listened wrongly. But I didn't know instantly what it looked like. It isn't a matter of epistemic lumps floating around in clear water. Sometimes there is no proper hesitation about the past. I feel this when I see nineteenth-century classics made palpable for twentieth century on television. History does matter – History doesn't matter. Philosophical theology must be hermeneutical and I don't think Bultmann would have disagreed. Jesus is the occasion of faith, not the reserved concern of history.

*C*: I did not want to make the issue of whether Jesus walked on the water an 'if and only if' matter. History can only tell us what is highly likely and that is why other knowledge of God is possible and essential. I do not want to deny that the past is often alien. That is one of the lessons Peter Winch taught us.

*H*: But C, don't you think it is difficult to find a mode of expression in relation to Jesus' divinity, either in the third or the first person which is aesthetically, morally, or religiously credible if it is imagined as being made in his own lifetime. What I mean is this: Can you imagine a conversation in Nazareth where one person asks, 'Who's that striking looking young man over there?' and is told, 'Why, that's Mary's boy, doing really well – excellent apprentice and Son of God'? It's like trying to say, 'I am humble.' The saying of it is self-refuting. Isn't it imagined scenes like this that are justifiably lampooned by Monty Python? Surely, these titles are conferred on Jesus after his death. It takes the Passion to realise these things.

*C*: I accept that that view would not affect belief in a high Christology. I think the claims for his authority were explicit, but I accept that they might have been implicit.

*Q*: There is the interesting question of how much anonymity can be allowed. Is it enough to say 'God has walked on earth' and that is that? Kierkegaard would say so, and emphasises anonymity. Dostoevsky, on the other hand, emphasises a kind of Gestalt that triggers the discernment. What is important is that Jesus does become the occasion for faith.

*N*: I think Jesus claimed to be divine and it was said of him, though I don't know which came first.

*J*: History is significant in Christianity because God is said to have come down to us. If the incarnation is not there, what difference would it make?

*Q*: You wouldn't need it if the point was to convey the essence of some truth. But if you say Christianity has to do with community, with the shaping of it, that community begins in history. The salvific core comes out of a particular relationship, so history is involved.

*C*: History is the arena in which we are lost, so it also has to be the arena in which we are saved. God has freely decreed this way of salvation. The basic difference between Socrates and Christianity is that the former denies that you do wrong knowingly, whereas Christianity asserts this.

*F*: It is important to Christianity whether Jesus was really alive after his death. If there was a successful defeater of this belief, it would be a defeater for the Christian faith.

*Q*: In my original paper I said that certain negatives can be established. If Jesus' bones were found I'd become a Quaker.

*D*: There is a difference between a historical question: 'Did Jesus rise from the dead?' and 'God raised Jesus from the dead.'

*C*: I see them as referring to the same logical possibility.

*Q*: I too think there is a difference between saying Jesus was raised, and saying that Jesus rose.

*C*: I have already said that I wouldn't think it inimical to the Christian faith if Jesus didn't have a consciousness of being the Messiah, but as I read the Gospel I believe he did.

*Q*: But you can't treat his divinity as an isolated fact – that is senseless.

*F*: If Jesus did not claim it why is the later attitude natural? There are many Christologies, why pick a private one? We are told that politics determined the later choice and so the conception is tainted from the start.

*L*: Q and C are trying to meet difficulties for which we need a new description – a theological sociology of meaning. We have to decide on which basis a development is legitimate. That's what the new discipline would give us.

It would have to face the issue of the indigenisation of theology and what is excluded, for example, an Asian Christology. We need to update Newman's attempt to come to terms with this. The Roman Catholic Church has a conception of the 'sense of the faithful'. But has systematic theology addressed this issue?

*C*: I, too, would give your answer: fidelity to scripture and fidelity to tradition.

*L*: But then we must beware that we don't say that whatever the community says is true.

*C*: Right. Whatever Christologies people come up with must be in accord with scripture and the main councils of the Church. You can be alive to the political wranglings and still see God in it all.

*A*: How do you believe historical statements in religion. I find Wittgenstein's remarks in *Culture and Value* very helpful. The Church takes a historical narrative and then says 'Now believe it!' This can be understood in two

ways. The first way is like any statement in a history book. It is up for grabs. The second way is to be told that Jesus was alive after death. You are told, 'Believe it!' In *On Certainty* the belief would be said to be held fast by a whole system. A whole way of life surrounds it, such that if bones which purported to be those of Jesus were discovered, the reaction must be, 'That's a forgery. I don't know who's responsible, but someone must be.'

*B*: There is a considerable scepticism about the Christological titles. They come from pagan sources and are then loaded on to Jesus. They divert us from the real Jesus. The real Jesus is not the Jesus of the creeds. What is important to note is that these show, not what he claimed, but what was done to him; that he was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was dead and buried and rose again from the dead. This is not the real Jesus. He was not a teacher, not a rival to Plato. We need to learn that in America, with our emphasis on 'the teachings of Jesus'.

Jesus didn't claim to be God, but he did God. If God takes care of you as he takes care of the ravens and the lilies of the field, then he takes the shirt off his back for you – that's an act of God. Jesus wasn't teaching religious truths, but pointing out God. Therein lies his divinity, not in the pagan titles we give him. I'm putting matters in these blunt terms, so that we may see what is at stake. We need to get back to those monosyllabic points that we are sophisticated enough to avoid.

*K*: The titles may be pagan, but they are put to use in the New Testament. Jesus thought he was the Messiah. That word is a lower one in Jewish tradition than what it becomes in Christianity. The most prominent title in the New Testament is 'Son of Man.' It is used seventy-five times and seventy three of those are on his lips. 'Son of Man' was a heavenly term. 'Messiah' was more earthly. So a spiritual one comes in an earthly one.

The idea that one can get to the actual Jesus by historical research, behind the interpretation of the early church, is an unpromising basis for faith. Tillich referred to dependence on 'the priesthood of all New Testament scholars'. Tillich was hardly a defender of creeds, but he thought they gave a picture of faith. It is not constructed out of history.

# Part V

# The Resurrection: The Grammar of 'Raised'

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# 9

# The Resurrection: The Grammar of 'Raised'

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When this title was given to me by Prof. Phillips it was immediately clear to me (from my long appreciation of his writings, and especially of his reading of Wittgenstein[1]) what sort of 'line' on the resurrection he might like me to explore. Whether this chapter will provide exactly what he intended is perhaps more doubtful: I shall deliberately leave it an open question for discussion whether the argument I pursue would have met with Wittgenstein's favour – a matter, I suspect, of some exegetical subtlety. For what concerns me in this chapter is not only the *language* of 'resurrection' (although if we have learned anything from Wittgenstein we know that we cannot bracket this away: it is intrinsic to our investigation), but what, within this category, we may more focusedly call the *epistemic conditions* for 'seeing' the risen Christ.

What I hope to illuminate by my speculation (a little less elusively, perhaps, than does Wittgenstein in his celebrated discussion of the Last Judgment[2]), is the epistemic *reason* for the believer seeing the world in a different way from the non-believer, in being able to give meaning, that is, to the language of 'encounter with the risen Christ'. My suggestion is that this difference between the believer and the non-believer, whilst certainly hinging on what Wittgenstein called the 'grammar' of religious belief (and involving thereby a consideration of the life-forms and 'practice' that necessarily attend it), nonetheless cannot finally be explained except by an account of a transformation of the believer's actual epistemic *apparatus*.[3] We are in the realm here of what some patristic and medieval writers called 'the spiritual senses': the transformed epistemic sensibilities of those being progressively reborn in the likeness of the Son. As far as I know, Wittgenstein never reflected explicitly on this subject matter, this possibility of senses-beyond-senses; but we shall have reason to conclude, as we go along, that he had at least some intimations of this possibility.

My argument will proceed thus. I start on familiar territory, with a crude sketch of two approaches to the resurrection which have dominated the theological scene in the modern period – let us call them the 'Lockean' and the 'Barthian' approaches, as a convenient shorthand. At first sight they

look like extreme competitors, mutually exclusive alternatives; but on closer inspection they are revealed more as two sides of the modernistic coin. Moreover, while each has apologetic strengths, each too has rather notable theological weaknesses; and neither can give a convincing account of certain subtle features of the New Testament appearance narratives which seem epistemologically determinative. In order to escape through the horns of this dilemma, we are in search of a third (putatively 'Wittgensteinian'?) alternative, which does justice to the narratives, practices and 'forms of life' that sustain a spiritually mature response to the 'resurrected' life. It is here that the tradition of 'spiritiual senses', reaching back to Origen in the third century, may help us fill out this picture: according to this view, it is not just *referring* that may differ in differing contexts, but even *perceiving* (here I extend an argument of Hilary Putnam's in relation to a 'realist' reading of the late Wittgenstein and its significance for religious claims[4]). In short, the reception of religious truth does not occur *on a flat plane*: even within the ranks of 'believers' the understanding or perception of the 'risen Christ' will have variations of depth. We have focused too much in the era of 'secularism', I shall argue, on the great gulf apparently fixed between the 'believer' and the 'non-believer' (and even some of Wittgenstein's conversations seem to get stuck here[5]); yet epistemic and religious transformation surely does not stop with conversion or baptism, and we need to be able to give an account of this.

Finally, I shall deliver a last speculative aside about the relation of these arguments to questions of *gende*r, and draw some lines of connection with suggestive themes from current feminist epistemology, as well as from other pre-modern theological material. This is not – I should underscore with some emphasis – an 'essentialist' suggestion: not, that is, an argument that women (*qua* physically or genitally female) have responded more sensitively to the 'risen Christ' than have men. Rather, I am drawing attention to the way that theological and philosophical traditions in Christendom and the modern West have from time to time valued some forms of epistemic response over others; and how, more or less unconsciously, the forms of response needed to access the 'risen Christ' have on occasions been associated normatively with women or with stereotypical 'femininity'. That this line of argument is no mere aside or afterthought will, I trust, emerge in the course of my exploration.

So much by way of preliminary overview. I now turn to the more detailed exposition of my thesis.

## Two sides of the modern coin: the resurrection as 'historical' or 'a-historical' event?

As has often been remarked, two characteristic ploys for explicating the status of the resurrection as 'event' have dominated in the modern period, and

still continue as major competitors in the field.[6] The first is the approach that attempts to reign in resurrection faith to the standards of Lockean 'probabilism': the rational basis for such a belief is adumbrated, the evidence carefully surveyed, and the degree of appropriate firmness of belief on the basis of that evidence calculated. When the Humean *dicta* about the miraculous are added to this (and interpreted in a non-reductive mode), we have the principle that 'the wise man [*sic*] proportions his belief to the evidence', conjoined with the concession that a 'miracle' (in the new, modernistic sense of a non-repeatable violation of a 'natural law') may be appropriately believed if and only if the disbelieving of it would prove 'more miraculous' than the believing of it.[7] These are, by any accounts, tough criteria of adjudication to bring to the inconsistent, fragmentary, and elusive testimony of the New Testament texts: the situation might seem desperate from the outset. Yet those contemporary writers such as Wolfhart Pannenberg and Richard Swinburne who (from rather different starting points) continue to attempt an historically demonstrated case for the resurrection in this mode are propelled by a fundamentally *apologetic* conviction: that the resurrection of Jesus, if it is to be rationally believable, must be subject to the *same* level of critical scrutiny that we would accord to any (secular) 'historical' event.[8]

Whether this conception of the apologetic task is a strength or a weakness may here remain a moot point; more important for our immediate purposes in this essay is to reflect on the features of the New Testament texts that make this Lockean/Humean modernistic re-reading distinctly *odd* from the perspective of achieved resurrection faith in biblical style. Even Thomas the Doubter, the one potential British empiricist of the New Testament scene one might feel, drops his pre-announced conditions for belief instantly on encountering the risen Christ face to face (John 20:24–29). (John's text, be it noted, gives no hint that Thomas actually put his hands in the wounds: it is the patristic tradition from Ignatius of Antioch on, and the more haunting visual realism of the already modern Caravaggio that mislead us here.) Thus it is that both Pannenberg and Swinburne, in their different ways, have trouble doing justice to the more alluring and mysterious features of the 'appearance' traditions: the priority given to women witnesses, the suggestion that they were not at first believed, the uncertainty about the events at the grave itself and whether fear, awe and confusion dominated, the difficulties in even recognising the risen Christ.[9] To turn these features to *good* account on a Lockean reading is a *tour de force*;[10] whether one would even *want* to do so is of course the pointed question precisely raised by the 'Barthian' objector.

In the famous words of Barth's *The Epistle to the Romans*, 'If the Resurrection be brought within the context of history, it must share in its obscurity and error and essential questionableness.'[11] The 'Barthian', in other words, is no less in search of foundational *certainty* than the 'Lockean' approach which he rejects; he merely choses not to risk letting it reside in philosophical ratiocination or historical evidences. His 'foundation' is the risen Christ himself,

encountered in the unspeakable *Krisis* of judgment, so elusive that his revelatory presence intersects history only as a tangent touches a circle.[12] By appealing to the pure paradoxes of Kierkegaardian thinking, the early Barth protects the resurrection from the probings of secular historiography (an apologetic gain, seemingly); but at the same time he wraps it in total epistemological obscurity (an apologetic loss, one might counter). If one is not already one of the elect, the *cognoscenti*, it is unclear how one could do anything about it (and indeed even to try would be to convict oneself of works-righteousness); the leap into the void ('Genuine faith is a void . . .'[13]) is on this view more truly like lurching beyond Kant's boundary into the *noumenal* realm than being progressively lured by the 'dazzling darkness' of the pre-modern apophatic tradition. I am not of course the first to read Barth as the reverse-side of Kantian epistemology.[14] But it remains ironic that Barth – as we have seen – accuses those who approach the resurrection as a 'historical' event of falling into 'obscurity'; for nothing, it seems, could be more epistemologically obscure than the early Barth's own 'a-historical' alternative.

Strangely too, or so I would argue, it is some of the same features of the New Testament appearance texts that cause trouble for this 'Barthian' approach as they did for the 'Lockean'. It is especially the narratives that chart a *change* of epistemological response that are noteworthy here, or else indicate the possibility of simultaneous and different responses to the same event (such that some vital shift is again required for recognition of the risen Christ to take place). Significantly these features arise in more than one strand of the 'appearance' traditions: the interaction between Mary and the 'gardener' in John (where Mary has to 'turn' several times before she recognises Jesus (John 20:11–18)); the lovely story of the walk to Emmaus in Luke (in which it was possible to walk all that distance without recognising the risen Jesus, until he broke bread (Luke 24:13–35)); the strange possibility of simultaneous recognition and 'doubting' in Matthew (Matt 28:17); the obscurity and fear as apparent preconditions for resurrection belief in Mark (Mark 16:1–8); the only gradual recognition of Jesus by the lakeside after the miraculous catch of fish (John 21:1–14): not all of these intriguing features, surely, can be explained away as merely redactional or apologetic embroidery? And if not, what do they tell us about the epistemological conditions under which the risen Christ *comes to be* apprehended – a matter on which the 'Lockean' answers inadequately and the 'Barthian' seems not to answer at all? To this – rather subtle – question we now turn with a speculative suggestion. Thereafter we shall consider whether Wittgenstein could possibly have approved of it.

## The resurrection and the spiritual senses: a suggestion

The doctrine of the spiritual senses has its Christian inception in the work of Origen (c.185–254), although Origen builds the theory entirely from his creative scriptural interpretation.[15] The promotion of the idea that there is

a realm of 'spiritual' sense, different from, and superior to, the gross physical senses, is seemingly motivated not merely by a Platonic distaste for the material world (although this is undeniably a strand in Origen's thinking), but at least as much by the desire to explain the progressive *transformation* of the self's response to the divine through a lifetime of practice, purgation and prayer. In other words, our perception of God, and thus too our grasp of doctrinal verities, does not occur on a flat, or procrustean, bed, but is appropriately open to its object only to the extent that the faculties have been progressively purified.

According to Origen this process involves three stages, all engendered and sustained by ever-deepening meditation on Scripture: *ethike* (being appropriately formed in the moral life), *physike* (learning to see the world from the perspective of the 'forms'), and *enoptike* (contemplation of the divine itself).[16] The climax of the 'enoptic' stage is a deep communion with the eternal Word;[17] and, following the rabbis, it is Origen's insistence that the ultimately indispensable metaphor for this union is an erotic, 'sensual' one – the language of the *Song of Songs*, on which Origen wrote a notable (and notably beautiful) commentary.[18] It is this pressure – itself Platonic – to unite the noetic and the erotic, that gives Origen's Christianized Platonism its special flavour: sometimes Origen will talk of the spiritual senses as the 'faculties of the heart',[19] for with them love – properly purged – finds its integration with mind and its final resting place in the Logos (Christ): 'after realising the beauty of the divine Word, we can allow ourselves to be set on fire with saving love, so that the Word itself deigns to love the soul in which it has encountered longing for it'.[20]

Although Origen did not specifically devise this theory to answer the problem of the recognition of the *resurrected* body, it is noteworthy that in his debate with his famous interlocutor Celsus, Celsus explicitly chides Christianity for a reliance on material sense knowledge because of its belief in a resurrection of the body.[21] And it is precisely in answering this charge that Origen sketches out his doctrine of the spiritual senses. Yes, he responds, the resurrected body is indeed described via sense knowledge, as Scripture shows us; but this is *transformed* sense knowledge, the sense knowledge of the 'inner' self, which uses the language of the physical senses only figuratively.[22]

Origen himself, then, draws a sharp disjunction between the 'inner' and the 'outer' senses:[23] there is no *clear* sense in which the latter gives meaning to the former, except by an exceedingly paradoxical use of metaphor. Nonetheless, the metaphor remains hallowed and indispensable; the *language* of 'divine sensuality' is irreplaceable in charting the ascent to union with the resurrected Christ, even if Origen remains notoriously squeamish about the final redeemability of physical matter itself. Here, indeed, there is an interesting contrast with Origen's important fourth-century follower in the 'spiritual senses' tradition, Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330–95); for Nyssa's subtly adjusted

views seem to allow for some point of *continuity* or development from the physical to the spiritual in the spectrum of purgation of the senses. Thus it is that Gregory can write in the 'Prologue' to his own Commentary on the Song of Songs (in other respects deeply dependent on Origen's): 'I hope that my commentary will be a guide *for the more fleshly-minded*, since the wisdom hidden [in the Song of Songs] *leads to* a spiritual state of soul.'[24] Doubtless this modification reflects the autobiographical difference between Origen's stern vision of celibacy (possibly involving actual castration) and Gregory's own later move from married to monastic life.[25] Whatever the explanation we might prefer, the difference is non-trivial epistemologically, since on Nyssa's view the toe-hold for spiritual perception is precisely *in* the physical, a possibility that is rendered problematic by Origen's sterner disjunction. Nyssa's strongly apophatic sensibilities also make the treatment of spiritual 'sight' quite differently nuanced from Origen: the hegemony of visual perception is completely toppled, for him, in the dark intimacy of the embrace by Christ. Either way, however, we should note that the gender implication of the privileged use of the allegory of the Song of Songs is that the 'Bride' (feminine), when suitably prepared for the nuptial embrace of the Bridegroom, becomes the supreme knower and recogniser of Christ – a point to which we shall shortly return.[26]

Origen's and Gregory's teaching on the spiritual senses was a strand of thought curiously neglected in the West until the medieval period (when it was richly recast by Bonaventure and others);[27] it then took another turn in Spanish counter-Reformation spirituality, where Ignatius of Loyola's rules for the 'discernment of spirits' became more a *spiritual* means for making well-considered vocational decisions in response to Christ than a complete lifetime's *epistemological* programme.[28] (Already we see the seeds of the modern divide between 'spirituality' – now fixed as a noun – and emergent secular epistemology.) In Calvin and the Protestant divines, however, the spiritual senses tradition transmuted into a discussion of the (generalized) *sensus divinitatis*, the inbuilt capacity for human response to God which has become tragically besmirched by sin and has to be refurbished by the graces of the Holy Spirit.[29] What we note in this shift into the early modern period, then, is a an apparent loss of the subtle *multi-leveled* aspect of the pre-modern spiritual senses tradition. For Origen, as we have seen, there are distinct and different levels of perception, depending on one's spiritual maturity and (concomitant) epistemological capacity; for Calvin, this necessarily élitist and progressivist model is replaced by a theory of double predestination. It is not that some people get only so far in their perception of the divine and others a little further; rather, some people receive intellectual revelation and the affective graces of the Holy Spirit, and others do *not*. It is a significant difference, and one which I now wish to explore. For whilst the Protestant strand of this story has recently received important philosophical attention from 'Reformed' epistemology,[30] the earlier, Origenist (or, better,

Nyssan) reading of the spiritual senses has seemingly yet to be evaluated as a serious current epistemological option.[31] Let me here make a few preliminary, if somewhat speculative, suggestions.

How might this tradition of the spiritual senses throw light on our initial discussion of the epistemological problem of the resurrection narratives? My suggested response to this is threefold. First, we note how this tradition is capable of explaining a range of *different* responses to the risen Christ, even amongst the faithful. Not all responses are equally deep; and the closest recognition (involving dark 'ecstasy' in Nyssa or actual mingling with the Word in Origen) will often – in the era of the church – involve long years of moral and spiritual preparation, prolonged *practice* in 'sensing' the presence of Christ. Second, then, this approach also indicates how seeking and recognising the resurrected Christ requires a *process* of change, one only rarely achieved suddenly;[32] it will involve an initial 'turning-around' morally, then practice in seeing the world differently, then only finally the full intimacy of 'spiritual/sensual' knowledge of Christ. What happens in this process is a transformation of one's actual epistemic capacities through their 'purgation' (understood somewhat differently, I have argued, in Origen's and Gregory's case). Third, this approach stresses the absolutely crucial significance of the integration of the affective and the erotic in any adequate understanding or 'knowledge' of the risen Christ; it does not set the affective/erotic and the noetic off *against* each other as disjunct alternatives, or even as a complementary duality.

If we now apply these insights to the intriguing features of the New Testament resurrection narratives to which we have already drawn attention, it must be readily acknowledged that the links, suggestive as they are, involve a miraculously speeded-up version of the epistemic transformations described in Origen's schema where the New Testament narratives are concerned. Nonetheless, allowing for this difference (occasioned, we must surmise, by the extraordinary events of Easter?), the points of connection are striking. The first feature just delineated indicates how doubt and faith could strangely coexist in response to an 'appearance' of the risen Christ (Matthew 28:16–17); or how it might be difficult, *initially*, and prior to some change in one's normal demands for perceptual evidences, to recognise the risen body (John 20:24–28). The second feature, correlatively, underscores how some 'turning' in one's posture or attitude, some difference of perspective or visual angle, or transformation of the nature of physical 'touch', might be required in order so to grasp the resurrected reality (John 20:11–18). And the third feature, finally, would suggest that a narrowly noetic investigation would take one *nowhere* in this quest; that the evidences of the 'heart', and of orienting and worshipful practices of the body, could not be neglected if Christ-as-risen were to be apprehended (Luke 24:28–35). Such are the suggested (if speculative) points of connection.[33]

Now let us ask whether Wittgenstein might possibly have intuited some of these same points; and – further – what we might conceivably make of this line of approach as a *contemporary* religious epistemological option, especially in relation to the subtle question of recognising the risen Christ.

## Wittgenstein and resurrection epistemology

In this (necessarily brief) section, I wish to focus primarily on some characteristically dense and rich remarks made by Wittgenstein in the year 1937, and enshrined – in English – in the volume *Culture and Value* (hereafter *CV*).[34] Not only does Wittgenstein here make his only direct remarks about the resurrection (*CV* 33e); but the surrounding *obiter dicta* are, from the perspective of the particular epistemological questions I have so far opened up in this chapter, extraordinarily apposite. Indeed the speculative novelty of my undertaking here is a hermeneutical one: I suggest that we read the remarks on the resurrection *in the light* of the surrounding aphorisms. It will be worth quoting an excerpted number of phrases and sentences before drawing out their apparent (combined) significance:

> The *edifice of your pride* has to be dismantled. And that is terribly hard work (*CV* 26e).
>
> The way to solve the problem you see in life is to live in a way that will make what is problematic disappear (*CV* 26e).
>
> Christianity is not a doctrine, not, I mean, a theory about what has happened and what will happen to the human soul, but a description of something that actually takes place in a human life (*CV* 28e).
>
> . . . a man who is not used to searching in the forest for flowers . . . will not find any because his eyes are not trained to see them . . . And this is no wonder for someone who knows how long even the man with practice, who realizes there is a difficulty, will have to search before he finds it. When something is well hidden it is hard to find (*CV* 29e).
>
> Religion says: *Do this! – Think like that!* – but it cannot justify this and once it even tries to, it becomes repellent; . . . It is more convincing to say: "Think like this! however strange it may strike you." Or: "Won't you do this? – however repugnant you find it" (*CV* 29e).
>
> Everything that comes my way becomes a picture for me of what I am thinking about at the time. (Is there something feminine about this way of thinking?) (*CV* 31e).
>
> Kierkegaard writes: If Christianity were so easy and coy, why should God in his Scriptures have set Heaven and Earth in motion and threatened

> *eternal* punishments? . . . what you are supposed to see cannot be communicated even by the best and most accurate historian . . . (*CV* 31e).
>
> In religion every level of devoutness must have its appropriate form of expression which has no sense at a lower level. This doctrine, which means something at a higher level, is null and void for someone who is still at the lower level; he *can* only understand it *wrongly* and so these words are *not* valid for such a person (*CV* 32e).
>
> Christianity is not based on a historical truth; rather, it offers us a (historical) narrative and says: now believe! But not, believe this narrative with the belief appropriate to a historical narrative, rather, believe through thick and thin, which you can only do as the result of a life (*CV* 32e).
>
> Queer as it sounds: The historical accounts in the Gospels might, historically speaking, be demonstrably false and yet belief would lose nothing by this . . . This message (the Gospels) is seized on by men believingly (i.e., lovingly) (*CV* 32e).
>
> . . . I cannot utter the word "Lord" with meaning. *Because I do not believe* that he will come to judge me; because *that* says nothing to me. And it could say something to me, only if I lived *completely* differently (*CV* 33e).
>
> What inclines even me to believe in Christ's Resurrection? It is though I play with the thought. If he did not rise from the dead, then he decomposed in the grave like any other man. . . . But if I am to be REALLY saved, – what I need is *certainty* – not wisdom, dreams or speculation – and this certainty is faith. And faith is faith in what is needed by my *heart*, my *soul*, not my speculative intelligence. For it is my soul with its passions, as it were with its flesh and blood, that has to be saved, not my abstract mind. Perhaps we can say: Only *love* can believe the Resurrection. Or: It is *love* that believes the Resurrection. . . . What combats doubt is, as it were, *redemption*. . . . So this can come about only if you no longer rest your weight on the earth but suspend yourself from heaven. Then *everything* will be different and it will be "no wonder" if you can do things that you cannot do now (*CV* 33e).

The immediate feature that strikes us, first, in considering this collocation of remarks, is the forceful rejection of what I earlier termed the Lockean/Humean approach to religious belief in general, and the resurrection in particular; and this, as is well known, is even more forcibly stressed in the *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*.[35] Religious beliefs and doctrines are not to be demonstrated by 'evidences'. Embracing them is more like the adopting of a whole new way of life, or 'picturing' differently, or making a particular narrative central to one's

existence, than coolly adjudicating on their likelihood with the 'speculative intelligence'.

The most obvious alternative, then, is the Kierkegaardian (and 'Barthian') lurch to another sort of 'certainty', the certainty of 'faith'. And since Wittgenstein here, and indeed elsewhere,[36] makes no bones about his attraction to both these thinkers, it is natural enough to box him up as a consistent devotee of this line of thinking. Here is the 'normative' side of his view of religion that he is nonetheless loath to own up to:[37] faith has its certainties which are *given*, not 'justified' (*CV* 29e); the move *to* faith is obscure and better not probed (it cannot in any case be brought about by 'works' (*CV* 32e)); it has nothing to do with ordinary 'events' or secular 'history' (*CV* 31e, 32e); its occasion cannot be willfully or mentally triggered: 'love' and the speculative intellect find themselves in problematic disjunction (*CV* 33e); 'faith' involves, *in se*, unshakeable 'certainty' (*CV 33*e). None of these sentiments would seem compatible with the spiritual senses tradition we have just outlined.

Yet the suggestive remarks that *surround* these more obviously 'Kierkegaardian' purple passages are worthy of further probing; for a number of them do not seem so easily compatible with what we earlier termed the 'Barthian' perspective on resurrection belief. Some, indeed – if I am right – show distinct marks of coincidence with the pre-modern spiritual senses tradition (especially when backed by cognate remarks in the same volume and elsewhere from the same period), and stand thereby in at least a problematic relation to the 'Barthian' alternative. Let me expatiate briefly. I shall comment on four such 'marks', the first being the most significant and thus here treated at some greater length than the others.

This first clue comes in the noteworthy passage on *CV* 32e: 'In religion every *level of devoutness* must have its appropriate form of expression...', and so on (my emphasis). Here Wittgenstein explicitly addresses – and embraces – the possibility that people at different levels of spiritual maturity or understanding or practice (the German is *Religiosität*) might contrue the force of religious language differently. Indeed, for one at a lower level, some language could actually have little or no such force ('these words are *not* valid for such a person'). We can readily see how this might apply to someone seeking insight into the somewhat elusive doctrine of the resurrected body of Christ. Yet this idea of a sliding scale of 'levels' of 'devoutness' is surely hard to square with the disjunctive Kierkegaardian *Either/Or*, or with dramatic 'leaps' into 'faith'. (Even if, as Kierkegaard avows, the 'certainty' of faith may paradoxically continue to be attended by nagging doubt, his model is hardly compatible with the idea of structured epistemic *levels*).[38] Rather, the sliding-scale approach suggests, in the spirit of the pre-modern tradition we have been considering, a subtle range of *differing* possibilities of religious and epistemic responses to the divine, even within the ranks of the faithful. And it is here that a link with Putnam's recent 'realist' re-reading of the later

Wittgenstein's thought on religion may be significant and inviting. Let me give a brief *résumé* of Putnam's argument in order to extend it.

Putnam argues first – and to my mind convincingly – against the view that Wittgenstein's appeal to 'picturing' in religious language somehow suggests a non-cognitive view of such language.[39] On the contrary (and this will shortly be significant for our assessment of the subliminally gendered dimension of resurrection belief), Wittgenstein begins to aver strongly in lectures during the 1930s that 'pictures' are intrinsic to much of our thinking, and no less religious thinking; nothing is implied thereby about such thinking being non-cognitive or merely 'emotive'.[40] More ingeniously, Putnam then goes on to argue (via a subtle interpretation of the *Lectures on Religion*[41]) that even the concept of 'referring' in the later Wittgenstein is a 'family resemblance' notion: that 'referring' is mastering the technique of the appropriate use of a word, but such use (appropriately) *differs* in differing realms of discourse. Thus 'there isn't some thing which can be called referring', even though there may be 'overlapping similarities' between one sort and another.[42] So the suggestion that Wittgenstein's notion of religious language involves complete 'incommensurability' with other forms of language also fails to convince. It is not that Wittgenstein thinks that, when the religious person and the non-religious person 'talk past' one another, one is being non-realist and the other (incommensurably) realist, or one failing to 'refer' and the other succeeding. On the contrary, concludes Putnam, no 'language game' (or, better, in the case of religion, *set* of language games[43]) is in worse shape than another, epistemologically speaking, because of its failure to provide a 'transcendental guarantee'; for at the base of any such language game is an appeal to 'trust' which is as unavoidable as it is challenging.[44]

Putnam leaves us thus suspended; yet although he has – to my mind – convincingly routed the 'non-realist' interpretation of Wittgenstein's religious views, he has not said as much as he might about the problem of apparent incomprehension between religious and non-religious folk (a matter from which he starts, and which is pointedly raised in the *Lectures*[45]). Nor, we note, has he explicated the intriguing words in *CV* 32e about 'levels of devoutness' and their relation to 'meaning'. It is not just religious and non-religious people who 'talk past' each other, it seems, but even different parties of those within the churches; and of this Wittgenstein seems willing to give some account in *CV* 32e. My suggestion, then, is that we read this important passage as a further epistemological counterpart of the fluid theory of 'referring' explicated by Putnam. Just as 'referring' has no *one* ('essential') meaning from a 'family resemblance' perspective, so too 'perceiving' seemingly has no *one* meaning either. We 'perceive' at different 'levels', according to the development of our 'devoutness'. If this is indeed Wittgenstein's meaning (and it does seem to be the 'plain sense' of the text), then we are extraordinarily close to the central insight of the spiritual senses tradition.[46] The closest contemporary counterpart in today's epistemological scene might be found in the analysis

of so-called 'proper functioning';[47] yet in Wittgenstein's case, if I read him aright, this is a 'layered' understanding of types of functioning, one which involves not only the removal of sin for its full effect, but some actual change in the perceptual capacities.

There are other hints, too, of such an alliance with the spiritual senses tradition: further features of this section of *Culture and Value* fit uneasily with the Kierkegaardian perspectives that are otherwise explicit. For when Wittgenstein talks, secondly, of the necessity to 'dismantle one's pride' (stressing that it is 'hard work'), or to lead a life of a '*completely* different' sort as a precondition of belief, or to train one's eye to look 'with practice' for the right things, one is struck by the *progressive* nature of the epistemological undertaking and its accompanying preparatory moral seriousness. (And, as I am suggesting, may we not read these comments in *relation to* the surrounding remarks on religious matters?). Here, it seems, is no sudden lurch into 'certainty', sweeping aside all human cooperation or preparedness, but more truly a progressive unfolding of insights based in patient moral transformation. The picture is akin to what we now term a 'virtue epistemology'.

Further, and thirdly (and relatedly), the insights about living a 'picture',[48] or relating, unshakeably, to a particular narrative (*CV* 32e), are worth comparing with an important passage a little later in *Culture and Value* (from the year 1946), which we must certainly acknowledge as self-consciously 'Kierkegaardian':

> I believe that one of the things Christianity says is that sound doctrines are all useless. That you have to change your *life*. (Or the *direction* of your life) (*CV* 53e).
>
> The point is that a sound doctrine need not *take hold* of you; you can follow it as you would a doctor's prescription. – But here you need something to move you and turn you in a new direction. . . . Once you have been turned round, you must *stay* turned round. Wisdom is passionless. But faith by contrast is what Kierkegaard calls a *passion* (*CV* 53e).

The pressing question that confronts us here is whether Wittgenstein himself, having located the significance of 'turning' (the reminiscence of Mary Magdelene's 'turning' at the graveside is not insignificant: it involves the possibility of seeing differently), and then having used Kierkegaardian *rhetoric* to describe it, could himself ever satisfactorily account – either personally or theoretically – for the possibility of such an unexpected event. Again, his casting around for antecedent preparations for such an eventuality – moral transformation, focus on a 'life' or a 'narrative', or (elsewhere, late in *Culture and Value*) the preparations of 'suffering'[49] – seem to give the lie to a *consistently* 'Kierkegaardian' or 'Barthian' account of faith. We have at least here a hermenuetical *aporia*: a Protestant rhetoric of pure and unmerited grace vies

with intimations of a more ancient 'Catholic' spirituality of progression into holiness.

Fourthly, and finally – and again paradoxically – it is perplexing, in the light of the Kierkegaardian disjunction set up between 'love' and 'speculative intelligence' in relation to the resurrection specifically (*CV* 33e), and between 'wisdom' and 'passion' in relation to doctrine generally (*CV* 53e), to find Wittgenstein also insisting that redemption can only occur 'if you no longer rest your weight on the earth but suspend yourself from heaven' (*CV* 33e).[50] For what can this mean, if the 'passions', and 'flesh and blood' (ibid.) are precisely what is at stake (*not*, as Wittgenstein insists, a disembodied mind)? Does this not imply some *transformation* of the passions, of 'flesh and blood', in order that their natural earthiness be precisely 'suspended from heaven'? Wittgenstein does not tell us; but the question-mark remains in the air, and intriguingly resummons the notion of 'levels' of different forms of response.

To sum up the results of this necessarily dense section: I have been arguing that the epistemological remarks that surround Wittgenstein's analysis of resurrection belief in *Culture and Value* are worth reading in relation to it; and that if we do this, we find a certain tension between the (occasionally explicit) avowals of 'Kierkegaardianism' and strands of thought more compatible with a 'spiritual senses' approach such as outlined above. Whilst there is nothing in Wittgenstein's text, of course, to suggest the Platonizing overtones of Origen's particular reading of the spiritual senses, other points of continuity are striking, and give the lie – or so I have argued – to a *consistently* 'Kierkegaardian' or 'Barthian' understanding of faith.[51] (Indeed, we may perhaps speculate whether this tension may have been a contributing factor in Wittgenstein's notable inability to embrace faith in any robust sense for himself.[52]) Yet here, as we have seen, is a view of faith profoundly sensitive to its differing 'levels' of intensity, perceptual/tactile response, and spiritual and moral maturity. Here is a view of faith rooted in 'practice', involving *particular* forms of vision and a 'layered' understanding of doctrine's possible 'meanings'. Here is a view of faith that involves 'turning around' and coming to perceive ('picture') *differently*.

Why then, finally, does Wittgenstein speak of such 'picturing' as 'feminine'? (*CV* 31e)? It is to the neglected question of the 'gendered' nature of the 'grammar' of resurrection belief that we turn, finally.

## 'Femininity' and the resurrection

Wittgenstein's aside is elusive as it stands, and there is no intrinsic reason – we must admit – to connect the supposed 'femininity' of 'picturing' with the resurrection specifically. Nonetheless, there are reasons why such a gendered connection could be illuminating. Let me mention four such reasons.

First, there is the obvious New Testament evidence for the primacy of women's testimony in witnessing to the resurrection, and the apparent

scepticism or delay involved in some of the male disciples' response. It is a commonplace of New Testament scholarship to acknowledge the apparently apologetic massaging of the Lukan and Johannine traditions to allow for an earlier response from Peter and John.[53] More likely is it, however, that the women (and especially Mary Magdalene) were the initial recipients of 'appearances' (whether of angels or of Jesus himself) and their witness at first treated with some scepticism: it was, after all, fragmentary, awestruck and somewhat incoherent, and apparently attended by strong elements of 'fear'.[54] Further, a woman's witness was, in Jewish law, regarded as less convincing and reliable than that of a man. Yet it was in all probability women who were first enabled to 'see' the risen Christ.[55]

In the hands of later tradition, however, 'femininity' and the resurrection are treated as correlative for another reason, which seems to build, gender-stereotypically, upon this memory. As Thomas Aquinas puts it in a notable but neglected passage in the third part of the *Summa* (*ST* 3a, 55, 1 ad 3), it is women's supposedly greater capacity for 'love' (shown in their fidelity to Jesus at the crucifixion and their early presence on Easter morning) that will guarantee them a quicker share than men in the beatific vision. It is here that we are reminded not only of Wittgenstein's insistence that 'love' rather than dispassionate intellectual curiosity is what responds to the resurrection, but also of the rich exegesis in the spiritual senses tradition of the *Song of Songs*, where, as we explicated earlier, it is also only the 'feminized' soul that can fully respond to the embraces of the Bridegroom, the exalted and heavenly Christ.

A third suggestive point of connection is raised by Wittgenstein's acknowledgement that his 'picturing' epistemology is not quite *normative* in the epistemological terms of his day; that it smacks of a form of 'feminized' subversion of normal ways of thinking about reference and meaning. A creative link may be made here with recent developments in feminist epistemology,[56] which has incisively challenged the hegemony of the 'recognition-of-hard-objects-at-five-paces' model for normative epistemological discussion, a challenge that draws attention instead to the *contextual* significance of any '*S*-knowing-*p*', and to the varieties of types of possible 'knowing', personal as well as cognitive. Unsurprisingly, these feminist writers find themselves drawing on occasions on Wittgenstein.[57] 'Knowing' can take many forms in 'the stream of life';[58] and if a culture dubs some of the more subtle forms 'feminine', it may well be more a sign of the lesser significance it grants to them (as personal, affective, hard-to-grasp) than necessarily connected with a spuriously 'essential' nature of 'woman'.

Fourthly, and finally, we do well to connect here with the insights of contemporary French feminism (especially with the work of Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray), which – utilising the distinctions of Jacques Lacan's linguistic theory – dubs 'semiotic' that style of speech that subverts or destabilises the ordered 'symbolic' language of normative 'masculinist'

culture.[59] 'Mystic speech', from this perspective, is unsurprisingly often a mode of subversive 'female' utterance;[60] and 'woman's' association with the fearful events of death and birth also links her with the 'semiotic' – with what is repressed in the efforts at stabilising cultural order.[61] From this (gendered) viewpoint, is it surprising that the 'grammar of raised' has proved so elusive to the *modernistic* bias in philosophy, with its demand for stiff foundational universals? Or that alternative visions of epistemology might fall – as Wittgenstein self-described – under the suspicious rubric of 'feminine'? Or again, and finally, that poets – ever in the vanguard of the 'semiotic' – should have proved in this period so much more successful in evoking the subtle responses of resurrection belief than their theologian counterparts?

One cannot do better, surely, than the late-lamented R.S. Thomas, whose poem 'Suddenly'[62] remarkably encapsulates what I have tried to express in this chapter about the complexity and subtlety of 'seeing' the risen Christ:

As I had always known
he would come, unannounced,
remarkable merely for the absence
of clamour. So truth must appear
to the thinker; so, at a stage
of the experiment, the answer
must clearly emerge. I looked
at him, not with the eye
only, but with the whole
of my being, overflowing with
him as a chalice would
with the sea. Yet was he
no more there than before,
his area occupied
by the unhaloed presences.
You could put your hand
in him without consciousness
of his wounds. The gamblers
at the foot of the unnoticed
cross went on with
their dicing; yet the invisible
garment for which they played
was no longer at stake, but worn
by him in this risen existence.

## Conclusions

I have in the course of this essay presented a number of intertwined theses. In the first place, I have suggested that the apparently disjunctive modern

choice between an approach to the resurrection in the spirit of Locke and Hume (on the one hand), or Kierkegaard and the early Barth (on the other), is a false one, which does not in any case do justice to some of the more alluring and subtle features of the New Testament narratives. Secondly, my brief exploration of the 'spiritual senses' tradition – rooted in Origen's thought but finding a less harshly dualistic reading in the writing of Gregory of Nyssa – attempted to sketch out a third alternative in which *transformation* of normal sense perception becomes the requisite of resurrection belief. Turning thirdly to the work of Wittgenstein I have tried, admittedly more speculatively, to indicate a strand in his thinking that is redolent of this 'spiritual senses' tradition, and which I believe stands in some tension with his acknowledged – though sometimes baffled – attraction to the thought of Kierkegaard and Barth. Finally, in feminist vein, I have suggested a number of ways in which the elusiveness of 'seeing the Lord' has at times been associated with 'woman', 'femininity', or the 'semiotic'; and how this gendered dimension of the 'grammar of raised' is seemingly intrinsic to our continuing difficulties in expressing the reality of a risen Christ who cannot finally be *grasped*.[63]

## Notes

1. See *inter alia*, D.Z. Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer* (New York, 1966); *Religion Without Explanation* (Oxford, 1976); *Belief, Change and Forms of Life* (Basingstoke, 1986), esp. the important pp. ix–xiii on common misunderstandings of Wittgenstein's significance for philosophy of religion; and, more recently, *Philosophy's Cool Place* (Ithaca, NY, 1999).
2. L. Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (Berkeley, 1966), pp. 53–59. Here Wittgenstein confronts the issue of whether the believer and non-believer can even understand each other. For a sensitive recent reading of this problematic discussion, see H. Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), Ch. 7 (and see my further discussion of Putnam's treatment, *intra*).
3. I have been greatly helped here by Ingolf U. Dalferth's brief, but penetrating, account of the evocations of 'grammar' in Wittgenstein, and its ontological significance, in his paper, 'Wittgenstein: The Theological Reception', in *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy*, eds D.Z. Phillips and Mario von der Ruhr (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 23–29; see also idem, *Jenseits von Mythos* (Freiburg, 1993), Ch. 6. The *novum* of what I am going to suggest here lies not in ascribing ontological import to Wittgenstein's views on religion in general, but in my hypothesis about a malleability in the faculties' capacity to respond to certain kinds of divine reality.
4. See Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*, Chs 7–8.
5. See again the discussion of the Last Judgment (n. 2, above); and also – taken by itself – the section on the resurrection in *Culture and Value* (Chicago, 1980), pp. 32e–33e. (For an extended discussion of the meaning of this passage in context, see *intra*.) D.Z. Phillips' treatment of the problem of the apparent mutual incomprehension between believers and unbelievers, which starts from Wittgenstein, concludes – rightly in my view – that 'there is no sharp line between belief and unbelief' (*Religion Without Explanation*, 187). A facile reading of Wittgenstein, however, might easily come to the opposite conclusion.

6. This is evident in the recent compendium volume on the resurrection, eds S.T. Davis, D. Kendall, S.J. and G. O'Collins, S.J., *The Resurrection* (Oxford, 1997). Here some contributors remain firmly fixed within the framework of 'historical' discussion of Jesus' *post mortem* existence, whilst Barth's alternative perspective is also aired (see Ch. 12). Peter Carnley sets the tone for the quest for a third alternative, however, when he writes (ibid., 40): 'I . . . think the task of providing an epistemology that can account for the Christian claim to identify the presence of the raised Christ as a religious object in present experience, rather than just engage in what I think is a somewhat futile quest for the historical resurrected Jesus, is the most important challenge facing resurrection theology today. . . . It is understandable that it is the area that most theologians of the resurrection put into the too-hard basket.' What follows is my attempt to respond to this challenge.
7. D. Hume, 'Of Miracles', from *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section X, reprinted in R. Wollheim (ed.), *Hume on Religion* (London, 1963), see pp. 206, 211.
8. The (now-classic) treatment of this theme by Pannenberg is to be found in his *Jesus – God and Man* (London, 1968). Richard Swinburne, from the rather different perspective of British analytic philosophy of religion, shares Pannenberg's concern to subject the resurrection events to the scrutiny of secular historiographical method, even though – in his more recent work – he admits the importance of a prior commitment to theism in the assessment of the evidence: see his *The Concept of Miracle* (London, 1970); *The Existence of God* (Oxford, 1979), esp. Ch. 12; *Revelation* (Oxford, 1991), esp. Ch. 7; and 'Evidence for the Resurrection', in eds S.T. Davis, D. Kendall, S.J., and G. O'Collins, S.J., *The Resurrection*, Ch. 8. I subject the views of Pannenberg and Swinburne to critical scrutiny in my 'Is the Resurrection a "Historical" Event? Some Muddles and Mysteries', in ed. P. Avis, *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (London, 1993), Ch. 6, arguing that whilst it does seem an initial apologetic duty to assess the resurrection narratives from the standpoint of critical historiography, the conclusion can only be that of an alluring question mark.
9. I provide a more detailed examination of these characteristics of the New Testament 'appearance' narratives below, *intra*. For a useful analysis of how these features of the narratives have been treated by recent New Testament scholars, see G. O'Collins, S.J., 'The Resurrection: The State of the Questions', in eds S.T. Davis, D. Kendall, S.J. and G. O'Collins, S.J., *The Resurrection*, Ch. 2, esp. pp. 13–17.
10. Pannenberg's is surely the most sophisticated and tenacious attempt to do so: see my account of his attempt in *Jesus – God and Man* in 'Is the Resurrection a "Historical" Event?' (see n. 8).
11. K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London, 1933), 204, commenting on Romans 6: 8–11. There is a sensitive recent re-evaluation of the role of 'history' in Barth's *Romans* in B.L. McCormack's *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* (Oxford, 1995), Ch. 3.
12. Ibid., p. 30: 'In the Resurrection the new world of the Holy Spirit touches the old world of the flesh, but touches it as a tangent touches a circle, that is, without touching it.'
13. Ibid., p. 88.
14. This is a persistent theme, for instance, in the work of David Tracy: see, for example, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York, 1975), pp. 27–31.
15. Karl Rahner traced some important aspects of the history of the spiritual senses tradition in his first major theological publications. See his 'The "Spiritual Senses" According to Origen' (originally in a longer version in French in *RAM* 13 (1932), pp. 113–45), and 'The Doctrine of the "Spiritual Senses" in the Middle Ages' (also

originally in *RAM* 14 (1933), pp. 263–99), both now in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 16 (London, 1979), Chs 6 and 7. In the first essay Rahner gives a well-documented account of the scriptural passages Origen draws on to support his position (see ibid., pp. 82–89, esp. p. 83 n. 12). Also compare the important treatment of the spiritual senses in vol. 1 of H.U. von Balthasar's *Herrlichkeit* (orig. Einsiedeln, 1961): Eng. tr., *The Glory of the Lord* I: *Seeing the Form* (Edinburgh, 1982), pp. 259–308.

16. Origen assigns these three stages to scriptural meditation on Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, respectively. For a detailed account of Origen's three-stage theory of ascent see A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford, 1981), Ch. 4.
17. As Louth's account (see n. 16) well illustrates, this undertaking is for Origen conceived in essentially Platonic vein, as an escape from the material: 'So the mind, purified and passing beyond everything material, so that it perfects its contemplation of God, is made divine in what it contemplates' (*Commentary on John*, XXXII. xxvii; cited in Louth, *Origins*, p. 73).
18. Available in English translation, along with two *Homilies* by Origen also devoted to the subject of the *Song*: ed. R.P. Lawson, *Origen*: *The Song of Songs – Commentary and Homilies*, *ACW* 26 (New York, 1956).
19. *De Principiis* 1, II; discussed in Rahner, 'The "Spiritual Senses" According to Origen', 85.
20. From the *Prologue* to the *Commentary on the Song*, as translated in Rahner, 'The "Spiritual Senses" According to Origen', 95.
21. See *Contra Celsum* 1.VII.
22. Ibid. The subtle question of how this 'figure' conveys the passion of the physical whilst also (purportedly) abstracting completely from it is well discussed in Louth, *Origins*, pp. 67–70.
23. See the *Song Prologue* (tr. Lawson, 29): 'if anyone still bears the image of the earthy according to the outer man, then he is moved by earthly desire and love; but the desire and love of him who bears the image of the heavenly according to the inner man are heavenly'.
24. Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, tr. Casimir McCambley (Brookline, MA, 1987), 35, my emphasis. (Oddly, Gregory's crucial contribution to the spiritual senses tradition is not singled out for discussion in Rahner's seminal study.)
25. On the subtlety of Nyssa's views about virginity and celibacy (granted his early marriage), see the important and suggestive article of M.D. Hart, 'Reconciliation of Body and Soul: Gregory of Nyssa's Deeper Theology of Marriage', *Theological Studies* 51 (1990), pp. 450–78.
26. This theme has been importantly explored by Verna Harrison, 'Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology', *JTS* 41 (1990), pp. 441–71. Harrison's view of gender, however, owes much to a Jungian theory of 'complementarity', which arguably Nyssa himself does not espouse: compare my 'The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation and God', *Modern Theology* 16 (2000), pp. 61–73.
27. This development in the medieval West is covered by Rahner in 'The Doctrine of the "Spiritual Senses" in the Middle Ages' (see n. 15); and also by H.U. von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1982), pp. 284–308.
28. Illuminatingly discussed by von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, pp. 297–98 (though he does not explicitly draw the distinction between 'spiritual' and 'epistemological' that I essay here).

29. See J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, orig. 1559, tr. F.L. Battles (Philadelphia, 1960), III. ii. 7, and so on.
30. See the discussion by A. Plantinga in *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford, 2000), Chs 8 and 9.
31. I made a first attempt to adumbrate this approach in my 'Response' to W.P. Alston in eds S.T. Davis, D. Kendall, S.J. and G. O'Collins, S.J., *The Resurrection*, pp. 184–90.
32. That is not to say that the full *consciousness* of recognition may not come 'suddenly': for this theme in Plato and Origen, see Louth, *Origins*, pp. 70–1. Also compare the R.S. Thomas poem, 'Suddenly' quoted at the end of this essay.
33. A very original and suggestive reading of the resurrection narratives by a New Testament scholar, along somewhat similar lines to mine, is to be found in M. Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord* (Minneapolis, 1994). Sawicki draws on Bourdieu's notion of 'practice' (rather than appealing to Wittgenstein's epistemology) in order to give content to the *conditions* of 'practice' under which the early Christian communities could come to know the risen Christ.
34. L. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (Chicago, 1980).
35. See n. 2, above; and ibid., pp. 57–9, for Wittgenstein's rejection of Fr. O'Hara's appeal to 'scientific' evidences for religious belief.
36. On Wittgenstein's attraction to Kierkegaard, see Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*, pp. 144–50. On the rather more ambiguous evidence about Barth, see the discussion in F. Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* (Oxford, 1986), p. 152.
37. I.U. Dalferth makes a telling point about Wittgenstein's unwillingness to *own* the normative side of his views about religion in 'Wittgenstein: The Theological Reception', op. cit., pp. 32–33.
38. On the possibility of the co-incidence of certainty and doubt in Kierkegaard, see Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*, p. 145; and ibid., on the closeness of some of Wittgenstein's views to Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton, N.J., 1941), esp. pp. 25–48. The drama of doubt and certainty is however a paradox not easily subsumed into a graded theory of 'ascent'.
39. Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*, pp. 154–57.
40. See ibid., pp. 158–61.
41. Ibid., p. 160, citing Wittgenstein's *Lectures*, p. 67.
42. Ibid., p. 167.
43. Putnam occasionally falls into the trap of referring to a whole religion as 'a language game' (e.g., ibid., p. 173); compare the excellent discussion in P. Sherry, *Religion, Truth and Language-Games* (London, 1977), Ch. 2, which reminds us that Wittgenstein himself did not use the terms 'language-game' or 'form of life' for anything as large as a whole religious system, but rather for much smaller elements within such.
44. See Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*, p. 177.
45. See again Wittgenstein, *Lectures*, pp. 53–9.
46. I am abstracting here from the attendant Platonism of Origen's version of the theory, with – as we have seen – its notorious disjunction between *nous* and *soma*, a disjunction that Wittgenstein's philosophy of mind of course stringently questions. It is this feature of Origen, not the rather subtle aspects of his spiritual senses doctrine, which causes Fergus Kerr to point to Origen as the ultimate progenitor of the Cartesian tradition fundamentally brought into question by Wittgenstein: see Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, p. 168.
47. See esp. the treatment of an 'Extended Aquinas/Calvin Model' along these lines of 'proper functioning' in Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, Part III.

48. Wittgenstein acknowledges (*CV* 32e) that 'pictures' too can have different valences at different times, depending on one's spiritual state: 'at my level the Pauline doctrine of predestination is ugly nonsense . . .'
49. *CV* 86e (from 1950).
50. Note that the Kierkegaardian disjunction between 'passion' and 'intelligence' is not the same as the Origenistic dualism between 'mind' and 'body'. Here Wittgenstein seems to be embracing the former, yet simultaneously reaching out for a non-dualistic understanding of the transformative capacities of the enfleshed self – a possibility that reminds us more of some aspects of Gregory of Nyssa's rendition of the spiritual senses tradition than of Origen's.
51. See again my remarks and citations in n. 46. It goes beyond the scope of this essay to chart *all* the twists and turns of the spiritual senses tradition as aspects of it were recast in scholastic (and much later, neo-scholastic) religious epistemology. The inheritance with which Wittgenstein may have been somewhat familiar, from his upbringing and continuing interaction with Catholicism, is the type of neo-scholastic reflection on levels of 'rational' and 'super-rational' knowledge found in (e.g.) J. Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge* (New York, 1938). It is not part of the thesis of this paper that Wittgenstein was directly cognizant of the patristic form of the spiritual senses doctrine.
52. On this see Ray Monk's pertinent remark: 'Still there is a persistent and nagging doubt about how Wittgenstein expected, or hoped, . . . redemption to come about – whether, so to speak, it was in his hands or God's' (R. Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London, 1990), p. 412).
53. See Luke 24:11 (expressing strong initial disbelief of the women by the male disciples), compared with the added variant text at this point, which has Peter immediately coming to verify the women's tale; and John 20:2–10, which (unconvincingly?) interrupts the story of Mary Magdalene's first encounter with the risen Jesus by insisting that both Peter and John also came early to the tomb.
54. This is especially emphasized in the Markan account: see the famous last sentence of Mark (16:8).
55. For a contemporary feminist account of the significance of this likelihood, see E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York, 1983), Ch. 4, esp. pp. 138–40. For an incisive recent account of the probable primacy of Mary Magdalene's witness to the resurrection, see G. Theissen and A. Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis, 1998), pp. 496–99.
56. See, e.g., eds L. Alcoff and E. Potter, *Feminist Epistemologies* (New York, 1993), and esp. Lorraine Code, 'Taking Subjectivity into Account' (ibid., Ch. 2), for the critique of epistemology which fails to acknowledge the primary significance of 'knowing' other *people* as a condition for re-identifying objects.
57. See ibid., pp. 9, 17, 23, 163–65; and compare the account of Wittgenstein's objection to viewing 'the self as a detached spectator' in F. Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, p. 134. Kerr does not himself make a connection to feminism, but his points are exactly parallel to the ones wielded by Lorraine Code (n. 56) in explicitly feminist mode.
58. See Wittgenstein's *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. II (Oxford, 1980), p. 687: 'Words have meaning only in the stream of life'.
59. For a succinct account of this theory of language and of Kristeva's and Irigaray's versions of it, see C. Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Post-Structuralist Theory* (Oxford, 1987).

60. See Luce Irigaray's justly famous essay, '*La Mystérique*', in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985), pp. 191–202.
61. See Julia Kristeva's equally renowned article, 'Stabat Mater', in ed. T. Moi, *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 160–86.
62. R.S. Thomas, *Laboratories of the Spirit* (London, 1975), p. 32. Worth comparing with this 'semiotic' evocation of the spiritual senses is the equally remarkable poem on a similar theme, 'The Transfiguration' by Edwin Muir: *Edwin Muir: Collected Poems* (Oxford, 1960), pp. 198–200. It starts:

    So from the ground we felt that virtue branch
    Through all our veins till we were whole, our wrists
    As fresh and pure as water from a well,
    Our hands made new to handle holy things,
    The source of all our seeing rinsed and cleansed
    Till earth and light and water entering there
    Gave back to us the clear unfallen world.

63. I am very grateful to John Privett, S.J., for allowing me some space and solitude in Faber House, Cambridge, MA, whilst writing this essay during a sabbatical year funded by the Lilly Foundation; and to Ludger Viefhues, S.J. and Heinrich Watzka, S.J., for some stimulating conversations on Wittgenstein.

# 10
# The Resurrection: The Grammar of 'Raised'

*Ingolf U. Dalferth*

One of the striking (though in a sense not very surprising) features of a certain strand of present-day Anglican thought is the strange hope in salvation from the abyss of modernity and modern theology by some version of Christian Platonism. Its proponents wish to break with the pseudo-alternative of so-called 'Lockean' and 'Barthian' approaches in much recent theology which are said merely to embrace or to oppose secular tendencies without setting their own agenda. The beginnings of both aberrations are traced back through the ambiguities of the enlightenment to the failures of Scotist and Reformation thought to embrace an authentic Orthodox Catholicism and Patristic Platonism. And one hopes to find an antidote against the ills of modernistic theology by focussing not on biblical faith and its critical appropriation in the Protestant traditions but on the recovery of a genuine Patristic Orthodoxy with its Platonist theology, anthropology, and – as in the present case – epistemology.

There is much in Sarah Coakley's stimulating chapter that deserves comment. But since there are only a few points on which I do not disagree, I have to be selective. Instead of giving a point-by-point reply, I shall concentrate on her main argument. To my mind it offers a false solution to a misconceived problem. To show this I shall look first at the way she sets up her problem (I–II), then at her attempted solution (III–V), and finally give some hints of an alternative way of answering the question posed to us (VI).

There are two strands of her chapter that figure prominently in her discussion but which I shall largely ignore. The first is her rather far-fetched attempt to interpret Wittgenstein's aside about 'levels of devoutness' (*CV* 32e) in the light of the 'spiritual senses' tradition. There are much more likely explanations for Wittgenstein's use of this phrase, given his close acquaintance with Roman Catholicism or his knowledge of Bunyan and Kierkegaard. Moreover, to interpret Wittgenstein's remarks '*in the light* of the surrounding aphorisms' is just 'speculative' (p. 176) and not very illuminating since this context, as so often with Wittgenstein's aphorisms, is not due to Wittgenstein but to the editor. The whole discussion does not contribute

anything substantial to the main problem and argument of her chapter, so I shall ignore it.

The same is true of her elusive feminist remarks sparked off by Wittgenstein's aside 'Everything that comes my way becomes a picture for me of what I am thinking about at the time. (Is there something feminine about this way of thinking?)' (*CV* 31e). There is indeed a gender issue here that may pay exploring. For Wittgenstein it is 'something feminine' to have a malleable mind, to allow everything to impress itself on you (he talks of 'eine gewisse Weiblichkeit der Einstellung' – 'a certain femininity of attitude' towards everything that comes one's way[1]). He sees 'something feminine' in assimilating everything to one's own views, in being unable to distance oneself reflectively from one's way of looking at the world, in experiencing reality as a mirror of one's own thoughts rather than allowing one's thought to be corrected by what comes one's way. None of Sarah Coakley's four comments (pp. 181–83) touches any of these points of Wittgenstein's remark. So again I shall ignore them. What she writes on these issues in Wittgenstein contributes neither to a better understanding of Wittgenstein nor to the main problem and argument of her chapter.

## I

In her attempt to illuminate 'the *epistemic conditions* for "seeing" the risen Christ' (p. 169) Sarah Coakley seeks a way beyond the alternative of either a 'futile quest for the historical resurrected Jesus' or a Wittgensteinian account of the resurrection in terms of the 'grammar' of religious belief. The first fails because it pursues a wrong question in a mistaken way, the second because it confines itself to preliminary answers and fails to ask the really important questions. A convincing account of the resurrection cannot contend itself with elucidating the grammar of 'raised' in Christian life and practice. What we want to know – or what she wants to know – are 'the *epistemic conditions* for "seeing" the risen Christ' (p. 169). To understand what Christians mean by *Christ's resurrection* or by *living in the presence of the raised Christ*, is not enough. We must explore whether there is any substance in the claim of Christians to identify the presence of the raised Christ in their own present experience. What, if any, are the epistemic conditions for such a claim to be true?

In her response to this challenge Sarah Coakley does not pause to ask what Christians mean when they speak of 'seeing' the risen Christ. She takes the metaphor at face value to be descriptive of a perception – not of a visual perception of a physical object, to be sure, but of a 'spiritual perception' (p. 174) of the risen Christ. Just as we can inquire into the epistemic conditions for seeing a chair, so she we must be able to inquire into the epistemic conditions for 'seeing' the risen Christ. There are many different varieties of types of seeing, perceiving, referring, or knowing in differing contexts (pp. 170, 179) as

she makes quite clear. They all 'can take many forms in "the stream of life"' (p. 182). And they all involve the seeing, perceiving, knowing subject in a variety of ways. Yet for all this variety, *perceiving the risen Christ* is just as much a case of *seeing* as *perceiving a physical object*, it differs only by being not *visual* but *spiritual*. And just as we can specify the epistemic conditions for visual perception, so we must try to specify the epistemic conditions for spiritual perception.

## II

Let me pause here to comment on a few points. First, despite of all her references to Wittgenstein, Sarah Coakley's interest in the varieties and levels of seeing is not Wittgensteinian. Aristotle and even Plato had as much a taste for the subtleties of different usages of terms as did Wittgenstein, but they pursued different questions and drew different conclusions from their analyses. It is one thing to pay attention to differences because you look for common underlying structures; another, because you want to save individual phenomena from conceptual oversimplification. A third, because you seek to find overlapping similarities of phenomena in different contexts. And a fourth, because you are interested not in differences but in analogies between the epistemic conditions for different sorts of knowing or seeing.

It is analogies that Sarah Coakley is interested in: What holds for visual perception must hold, in a different way, also for spiritual perception. But why should it? The principle of analogy applied here is problematic, to say the least, and its use seems to be governed by the even more problematic principle that for every x there must be a sufficient explanation (or reason or account of the conditions of the possibility) of x. But this is not a very promising epistemological route to take. To design a different set of epistemic conditions for every case or variety of seeing or perceiving is hardly illuminating. As Leibniz pointed out to Pierre Bayle: It is very bad explanation to explain each phenomenon in terms of a particular principle, evil in terms of a *principle of evil* (*principium maleficum*), *coldness* in terms of a *principle of coldness* (*principium frigidum*), *visual perception* in terms of *epistemic conditions for seeing physical things*, *spiritual perception* in terms of *epistemic conditions for seeing risen persons* and so on. To explain in this way is not to explain at all, but simply a more complicated way of restating the problem.

Before we start casting about for epistemic conditions for analogical cases of seeing, we must make sure that what we seek to understand are such cases. But to be called 'spiritual perception' is not enough for qualifying as candidate for epistemic conditions. What must be shown in the first place is that 'spiritual perception' is *perception*, that *'seeing' the risen Christ* is *seeing* in some sense of seeing for which it is not totally inappropriate to ask for epistemic conditions. And here I part company with Sarah Coakley.[2] Before we inquire into the epistemology of *'seeing' the risen Christ* we must understand the *language*

used in this phrase. It clearly is not descriptive in the sense of seeing a physical object. But neither is it descriptive in the sense of seeing a spiritual object. It rather is not descriptive at all.[3] Description is only one of the ways in which language can be used meaningfully, as she is well aware. But if *'seeing' the risen Christ* is meaningful and not describing a physical perception, why should it be taken to describe a *spiritual perception*? Only if we assume that there is such a thing as *spiritual perception* is it plausible to inquire into the epistemic conditions of '*seeing' the risen Christ*. Not however if we understand the phrase as the metaphor which it is. By moving too quickly from 'the *language* of "resurrection"' to the '*epistemic conditions* for "seeing the risen Christ"' (p. 169), Sarah Coakley first creates a problem that is then difficult to solve. Or as Bishop Berkeley said in 1710, in the introduction to *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, 'we have first raised a dust and then complain we cannot see'.[4]

The way in which she sets up the problem is not unlike the fallacy committed by G.E. Moore in his *Principia Ethica*. He correctly notes the difference between the use of the notions 'yellow' and 'good', but then wrongly concludes that just as 'yellow' denotes a natural property so 'good' denotes a moral property. Not every use of 'seeing' denotes a sort of seeing, or a seeing analogous to our 'normal' seeing. When the resurrected one is praised for being 'seen by angels' (1 Tim 3:16) we are not invited to conclude that angels have eyes, or that Christ is of a non-physical corporeality, or that there exists a distinctive angelic way of perceiving that is different from human and divine perception, or that the angelic members of the heavenly court observed Jesus' risen body being installed at the right hand of God. None of this is impossible, however improbable we may find it. But all of it misses the theological point of this phrase in 1 Tim 3:16 because it ignores the particular context of the hymn in which it occurs and the context in which this hymn fragment occurs. It isolates the phrase and seeks to understand it literally on the basis of its terms. Since it impossible to make sense of anything in isolation, it adduces other contexts and establishes new intertextual relations by interpreting it against the background of very different views, questions and traditions. It thus allows us to arrive at a meaning that is not impossible. But by giving a literal reading of this metaphor in isolation it fails to do justice to its doxological character in 1 Tim 3:16 and misses the point of its particular use there.

## III

But let me return to Sarah Coakley's argument. In her attempt to describe the epistemic conditions for 'seeing' the risen Christ, she turns to the 'spiritual senses' tradition for help. But what in Origen and, in a different way, in Gregory of Nyssa, is a *theological account* of the 'progressive *transformation* of the self's response to the divine through a lifetime of practice, purgation

and prayer' (p. 173) transmutes in her into an *epistemological version of the Pilgrim's Progress*, a real change of the believer's epistemic capacities in the course of her life.

Origen's account of the five 'spiritual senses' of the believer[5] is intimately linked to his Platonist view of language, psychology and anthropology. It is the outcome of his creative theological interpretation of certain biblical metaphors in the light of Proverbs 2:5 ('Then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the sense [knowledge] of God') and Hebrews 5:14 ('But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil'). Using these verses as hermeneutical rules Origen reads the biblical metaphors in a realist or Platonist way as describing a sense of the divine that goes far beyond the physical senses.

This only makes sense if you share the presuppositions of his Christian Platonism, including his views of language, psychology and anthropology. One cannot appropriate his theory of the 'spiritual senses' without taking account of these presuppositions. And I wonder whether Sarah Coakley would like to take all or any of them aboard. She turns to the 'spiritual senses' tradition in a very different, post-enlightenment context preoccupied with epistemological rather than theological questions, and focussed on a kind of epistemology that has little in common with the Platonist psychology of the 'spiritual senses' tradition. But you cannot change the context and keep the content of this tradition, you cannot appropriate the 'spiritual senses' without their concomitant Platonism. Divorced from its Platonic context, the 'spiritual senses' tradition is devoid of meaning and in need of radical re-interpretation.

In order to correct the shortcomings of what she terms the 'Lockean' and 'Barthian' approaches to the resurrection it is not enough simply to recall and restate Origen's and Gregory's views. What is required is a critical re-interpretation of their insights against the background of the modern divide between 'spirituality' and epistemology. Simply to contrast what she calls the 'Protestant rhetoric of pure and unmerited grace' with 'a more ancient "Catholic" spirituality of progression into holiness' (pp. 180–81) is not enough. What needs showing is why and in what sense the 'spiritual senses' tradition is supposed to provide a solution to the problem under discussion.

If the 'Lockean' and 'Barthian' approaches are nothing but 'two sides of the modernistic coin' (p. 170), then her own appropriation of the 'spiritual senses' tradition is no less modernistic. It is addressed to the *modernistic problem* of giving an account of the '*epistemic conditions* for "seeing" the risen Christ' (p. 169). And she holds, in a surprisingly uncritical way, that the 'difference between the believer and the non-believer . . . cannot finally be explained except by an account of a transformation of the believer's actual epistemic *apparatus*' (p. 169). Despite all her references to Wittgenstein and to the need to integrate 'the affective and the erotic in any adequate understanding or

"knowledge" of the risen Christ' (p. 175), both her questions and answers move within the narrow circle of post-Cartesian subject-object-epistemology. Her emphasis is not on the *objects of perception* as physical or spiritual, that is, as material bodies that decay or as spiritual bodies that are imperishable because they are made of a more lasting sort of non-physical material. The reasons are obvious. If to say that a body is *non-physical* means that it does not have standard physical properties such as colour or weight or spatiality or visibility, then it would be impossible for such a body to be seen, at least in the sense of visual perception. Therefore she focuses on the *subjects of perception*: Just as we have physical eyes for visual perceptions, so believers must have a spiritual eye for spiritual perceptions. The difference between believers and non-believers is reduced to their different epistemic *apparatus*, and this is proposed as a way beyond the impasse of 'Lockeanism' and 'Barthianism'. Instead of a 'Lockean' probabilistic account of the resurrection as a more or less credible miracle 2000 years ago, we are invited to understand *'seeing' the risen Christ* in terms of an epistemic miracle in the believer here and now.

Now I do not think that she wants us to take her rather crude sketch of the 'Lockean' or 'Barthian' approaches too seriously. But even then it is difficult to see which 'Lockean' or 'Barthian' should ever have held that 'religious transformation . . . stop[s] with conversion or baptism'. The often repeated charge that Barth's view of revelation "leaves almost no room for a conception of free, creative, and *distinctive* human response",[6] can hardly be sustained with respect to baptism which, for Barth, is precisely a *free human response* to the salvific self-presentation of God. And baptism is not the only distinctive human response. There is a life *after* baptism, even for Lockean Anglicans and Barthian Protestants. Baptism is not the end, but the beginning of a new life.

Yet there could not be a new beginning without a life *before* baptism. Christians are not born Christians, they become Christians, and they become Christians not by what they do but by what is done to them. So even if the tradition of 'spiritual senses' could be adduced to describe Christian life after baptism, it fails to give an account of the change from human life before to Christian life after baptism. In this important respect the 'spiritual senses' tradition is theologically defective.

But even with respect to life after baptism it cannot be reduced to an epistemological option. The 'spiritual senses' are not 'the epistemic *reason* for the believer seeing the world in a different way from the non-believer' (p. 169). They rather are a theological shorthand expression of the very differences between them. They *state* the differences, but they do *not explain* them. On the contrary, they are what needs explaining. Believers see the world in a different way not *because* of their spiritual senses, but these are a way of stating *that* they see the world in a different way. Again let me briefly elaborate a few points.

## IV

Throughout the chapter the phrase 'religious transformation' is used ambiguously. It can be used to refer to someone *becoming religious*, or to someone *living a religious life*. The first is presupposed by the second, but it is different from it. It is one thing to *become a believer* (i.e. change from a *non-religious to a religious life*), another to *live a life as a believer* (i.e. change e.g. *from a beginner's life to a more intense or fuller religious life)*. The two are intimately related, but they need to be distinguished. The *change from non-faith to faith* is different from *changes that take place in the life* of faith or of non-faith.

It is a typical modernist move (cf. Leibniz, or Schleiermacher) to try to turn disjunctive contrasts into a sliding scale between minimum and maximum positions. But while there are all sorts of sliding scales in the life of faith and of non-faith, there is no continuous way from non-faith to faith. Nobody will deny that believers live 'at different levels of spiritual maturity or understanding or practice' (p. 178). But this does not make non-believers a sort of believers, those with not quite so deep a response to the risen Christ.

So before we play off so-called Protestant views that 'some people receive intellectual revelation . . . and others do *not*' (p. 174) against an Origenist (or Nyssan) reading of the spiritual senses tradition and its transformational account of religious life, we must ask whether they seek to answer the same questions. And clearly they do not. The problem of *how to become a believer* is different from the problem of *how to live a life as a believer*. The distinction between levels of devotion is a distinction *within religious life*, not a description that explains how we move from non-faith to faith.

Part of the problem here is personal identity over time. For every believer there was a time when she or he was not a believer, and every believer is involved in a permanent process of change – hopefully for the better, but you never know. Every believer can truthfully assert 'I was once a non-believer', and in doing so assert at the same time 'I am *the same person* as the non-believer in question' *and* 'I am *not the same person* as that non-believer'. But there is no contradiction here. The believer is *the same person* as the non-believer she was because her current life is *numerically identical* with her earlier life as a non-believer. And she is *not the same person* as she was because her present life is in some sense *qualitatively different* from her earlier life.[7]

We do not have to go into details to see that great qualitative change is consistent with numerical identity. But it does not follow that all changes in a numerically identical life are qualitative changes (i.e. changes in a person's features or qualities), that all qualitative changes are of the same sort, or that all changes are effected in the same way. Besides *qualitative changes* there are also *existential changes*, that is, changes of a life's direction, sense and orientation. Existential changes such as being married, becoming a citizen of the United States, becoming a parent, joining an order and so on precede qualitative changes in a person's life but are themselves more than mere

changes in a person's qualities or features. They place a person with all her qualities and features in a new social or existential context in which she can and will live a different sort of life. Some existential changes such as joining the freemasons depend on a person's own decision, other such changes such as being appointed successor to the throne of England or being made heir to Bill Gates' fortune are effected by what others decide for a person.

Conversion and baptism are existential changes of a life, not mere qualitative changes in a life: They place everything a person is and does in a new perspective and horizon. A person does not change in any noticeable way by being baptised, but her whole life is given a new sense and direction by being incorporated, through a symbolical act, into the life of Christ. Her life will show continuities and discontinuities before and after baptism. But unless we pay particular attention to the discontinuities we shall not understand what she has become through baptism. And unless we pay attention to the differences between, on the one hand, the continuities between her former life and her new and, on the other, the new continuities that have been made possible and inaugurated by her baptism, we shall not be able to understand her new life.

To become a Christian is to be changed from a life of non-faith to a life of faith by being incorporated through God into the life of Christ, and living a Christian life of faith is seeking to be conformed better and better to the image of Christ. Both changes, if they take place at all, take place in a numerically identical life. Both can be described as 'spiritual transformation' because they depend on the presence and activity of God the Spirit. But they are importantly different. The first is an absolute change across the existential gulf of a disjunctive Either/Or, the second is a gradual change that comes in degrees. The first is a change that happens to me by the things done to me by God. The second is a change that requires my free cooperation with God in that I allow myself to be changed and enlarged in the way I live my life. With respect to Jesus the first is symbolised by such metaphors as *resurrection*, the second by metaphors such as his *eternal life with God*. And since, according to Christian faith, Christ's resurrection is the kind of resurrection we can all hope for, the first change is expressed with respect to the believer by the enacted metaphor of *baptism*, the second by the enacted metaphor of *sanctification*. Both are *enacted* metaphors because they are lived out in the *life of faith*, and both are *metaphors* because the life of faith is seen as the transformation of each individual life into conformity with Christ by being opened and enlarged to the presence of God by the Spirit.

Thus to *become a Christian* and to *live a Christian life* may both be called 'spiritual transformations'. But they are as different as the paradigms in Christ's life in terms of which they have been understood in the Christian tradition. The paradigm for *becoming a Christian* is the *change from the cross to the resurrection* that is utterly and exclusively due to God. The paradigm

for *the Christian life*, on the other hand, is *Jesus' way to the cross* that is due to the perfect conformity of divine and human will.

Only if we are confused about this, the 'idea of a sliding scale of "levels" of "devoutness"' can be misunderstood to be 'hard to square with the disjunctive Kierkegaardian *Either/Or*, or with dramatic "leaps" into "faith"' (p. 178). Kierkegaard is much subtler than this. Just because he insists on the disjunctive *Either/Or* with respect to faith and non-faith, he can devote books such as *Works of Love* to a varied and subtle description of different levels and aspects of 'devoutness' in Christian life. Christians differ in a myriad of ways from each other in the way they live their lives. And yet, as Kierkegaard insists, 'the Christian must understand everything in a different way from the non-Christian'. So he for one did not have a problem of combining a very diversified and multifaceted view of the life of believers with a disjunctive *Either/Or* between believers and non-believers. And neither did Barth.

## V

The other problem is to take *religious transformation* to be *epistemic transformation*, that is, 'a transformation of the believer's actual epistemic *apparatus*' (p. 169). For Sarah Coakley '*transformation* of normal sense perception becomes the requisite of resurrection belief' (p. 184): You cannot 'see' the risen Christ without 'some actual change in the perceptual capacities' (p. 180). Paul not only became a follower of Christ on the route to Damascus, he arrived there – in a truly 'miraculously speeded-up version of the epistemic transformations described in Origen's schema' (p. 175) – with a different epistemic *apparatus* from the one he had when he left Jerusalem.

If this makes any sense at all, it is a misleading way of making an important point. What is it that believers possess while non-believers lack it? Believers, we are told, do not merely see, perceive, think *differently* (rather than see, perceive, think *something different*), but they see, perceive, think in terms of a *different epistemic apparatus*. They perceive not something that non-believers do not but they perceive *in a different way* and hence perceive *everything* differently. This, I think, is an important point but it is lost by the way it is explained: *Perceiving in a different way* is said to mean an actual change in epistemic outfit. You cannot see the risen Christ unless you acquire the Christian 'epistemic *apparatus*' (p. 169).

But this is not very helpful. Reference to supposedly different epistemic outfits of believers and non-believers does not explain anything but merely restates their difference. A dualistic or Manichaen account of the difference between good and evil in terms of THE GOOD and THE EVIL does not explain anything but merely restates the difference. Similarly a dualistic or 'spiritual senses' account of the difference between believers and non-believers in terms of their different epistemic *apparatus* does not explain anything but merely restates the problem.

Part of the problem here seems to be a confusion of two different tasks of epistemology. Sometimes epistemology is meant to give an account of the actual workings of our cognitive apparatus: To state the epistemic conditions for seeing an apple is to give a causal account of how we acquire the respective beliefs. But in a more specific sense epistemology is a philosophical account of the *truth* or *validity* of a belief or set of beliefs, and for this to describe how we acquire them is not enough.

So what exactly are we supposed to find out when we are told to focus on 'the *epistemic conditions* for "seeing" the risen Christ' (p. 169)? If we are to describe 'the epistemological conditions under which the risen Christ *comes to be* apprehended' (p. 172), we look for a factual answer of how this belief is acquired. If the problem is to clarify the *conditions of the possibility and/or validity* of this belief, we are expected to give reasons for it to be valid, or true, or more likely true than not. But *giving reasons* for a belief is different from *acquiring a belief*, and *describing the believer's actual epistemic apparatus* is different from *giving reasons for the validity of the believers' way of seeing the world*. If *seeing in a different way* and *having a reason* or *being justified for seeing in a different way* are to be distinguished, then reference to a *different epistemic apparatus* may help to explain the first, but will not provide an answer to the second.

Yet even if we ignore all this, are we still at a loss of how non-believers can overcome their lack of the 'spiritual senses'? Is it something they can acquire by practising the right sort of 'perceiving'? Or is it more like a natural disposition that some have and others do not, just as some have an ear for music while others do not? Then it is not open to everyone to acquire 'spiritual senses' and being a believer becomes a rather elitist thing for the few religiously gifted ones.

Reference to a progressive purification of our cognitive faculties through a lifetime of practice, purgation and prayer is of little help here. 'Purification' is not a better or more accessible metaphor to understand what is meant by 'epistemic transformation'. What we need to know is in which respect and of what non-believers need to be 'purified'. And here two answers seem to be suggested: *epistemic deficiency* and *sin*.

If the answer is *epistemic deficiency*, that is, a lack of a certain kind of knowledge, then it cannot be a mere lack of information. For what is there that believers know and non-believers would not or could not know? Believers and non-believers, as we have seen, differ not in what they know but in the way they know it. So it cannot be further information that turns a non-believer into a believer.

The difference seems to be more akin to knowing something in a *third-person mode* or in a *first-person mode*. Belief in God is *personal* or it is not belief in God. In *personal* belief what is believed is related, directly or indirectly, to one's own self (D.H. Mellor). '*God is judge*' is an impersonal belief, 'God is *my* judge' a personal belief; 'Mary is John's friend' is an impersonal belief, 'Mary is *my* friend' a personal belief and so on. John's statement of his

personal belief 'Mary is *my* friend' is only true if the impersonal statement 'Mary is John's friend' is also true. Personal statements have no other truth-makers than impersonal statements. For in general, for any X, statements of the forms 'I am X', 'X is my friend' and so on are made true respectively by being said by X, by a friend of X and so on. And those are all impersonal facts about who says what, is related in a certain way to whom, and so on. That is to say, we do not need a personal reality to make personal statements true, no more than we need a negative reality to make negative statements true ('Mary isn't John's friend'). But we need personal beliefs in order to live and act in our world: Unless I know that Mary is *my* friend, I will not act and behave towards her as a friend. And unless I know that God is *my* judge, I shall not live in a way that is appropriate to the truth of God being my judge. Whether I believe this or not does not make a difference to the truth of 'God is my judge'. But it makes a difference to my life, and it is that difference that distinguishes the believer from the non-believer.

Understood in this way, the point of the metaphor of 'purification' seems to be that I need an 'epistemic transformation' to open my eyes to the reality in which I live. But how can this be achieved? Obviously not by being told about it. What is needed is not more or better information, but the relevant personal beliefs. And to come to hold those non-believers need to be purified not of an epistemic deficiency but of *sin*, that is, the incompetence or unwillingness to see God as *their* God and to *see themselves* as God's creatures.

But then, if the answer is *sin*, Sarah Coakley's 'third alternative, in which *transformation* of normal sense perception' through a lifetime of practice, purgation and prayer 'becomes the requisite of resurrection belief' (p. 184), is not an alternative at all. For whatever we can do there is one thing we cannot: *purify ourselves of sin*. The whole point of the Christian faith is that this is something which we are not only unable to do but have no need to do because God has done for us what we could and would not do ourselves: to overcome our sinful separation from God. This is not something we can achieve ourselves, not even through a lifetime of practice, purgation and prayer. It is solely due to God whose Spirit ruptures a human life and makes it aware of God's presence. No continuous '*process* of change' (p. 175) can replace the basic discontinuity of a life that is changed from being self-centred to becoming God-centred by God himself.

The problem, therefore, is not that the Protestant project of 'Reformed' epistemology with its attention to the '(generalized) *sensus divinitatis*' has to be corrected or replaced by 'the earlier, Origenist (or Nyssan) reading of the spiritual senses . . . as a serious epistemological option' (pp. 174–75). The problem is rather not to mistake the *sensus divinitatis* or the 'spiritual senses' for an epistemological option at all. Believers and non-believers do not differ in their epistemic *apparatus* or capacities but in the way they *use* their capacities in their lives. Christians possess no mysterious 'senses-beyond-senses' (p. 169),

they merely possess the sense of using their senses in a way that takes into account that they live in the face of God.

Once again the argument hinges on the ambiguity of a term. It is one thing to understand *'spiritual transformation'* as a *supernatural change of our cognitive capacities*, a *mysterious transformation of the epistemic powers of the human spirit*, quite another to understand it as a life *being transformed by the Spirit of God*. In the first sense something is changed *in us*, in the second what is changed is *our relation to God* (or rather *God's relation to us*): Not *we* are different, but *we live our life in a different way vis-à-vis God*. The change is not a change *in* our life but *of* our life, not a qualitative change in the believer but an existential change and re-orientation of a believer's life vis-à-vis God. Christians perceive the world in a different way from non-Christians, not because they have acquired a spiritual eye which others lack but because they use their common epistemic capacities in a different way. They perceive the world in a different way because they *understand themselves in a different way*. And they understand themselves in a different way because they have become aware of living in the presence of God.

There is no need to speculate about believers' 'senses-beyond-senses' in order to make sense of the dynamics of a Christian life of faith. To become aware of God's presence is not merely to acquire a personal belief about God but about one's own existence in the presence of God. When Paul became aware of God's presence on the route to Damascus, he at the same time realised how mistaken his life was when judged in the light of God's presence, and he could only continue to live by changing his life completely. And as for Paul, so for everyone: To become aware of God's presence is to become aware of living in God's presence, and you cannot become aware of this without re-orienting your life completely. There is no awareness of God without such self-awareness, and his self-awareness affects everything the believer feels and sees and does. Believers see and relate to the world in a different way because they see and relate to themselves in a different way. You cannot believe in God (as your creator, for example) without holding a corresponding belief about yourself (as God's creature), and to come to hold these personal beliefs requires a fundamental change of life or conversion. What is at stake here is not a cognitive change that leaves everything else untouched but a fundamental re-orientation of one's whole life.

Now Sarah Coakley agrees that you cannot become aware of the resurrection without a total change of life, and she quotes R.S. Thomas 'I looked at him, not with the eye only, but with the whole of my being' (p. 183). But for her '*seeing' the risen Christ* is still a case of *seeing*, so that '*transformation* of normal sense perception becomes the requisite of resurrection belief' (p. 184), a transformation to whose subjective subtleties feminist epistemology is supposedly more sensitive than traditional 'hard-objects' epistemology. But *'seeing' the risen Christ* is not merely different, it is not even analogous to seeing something or someone, your parents, friends, neighbours and so on. You cannot 'perceive'

the risen Christ as you perceive a colleague on your way to town, but neither can you perceive him as an elusive Nicholas Cage hovering over the City of Angels. Not, however, because the one is a visual perception whereas the other is spiritual, but because *'seeing' the risen Christ* is a metaphor for a radical rupture and re-orientation of a human life that makes it impossible to continue to live in the same way as before. It throws 'into question our habitual and conventional ways of perceiving, patterning, and participating in "reality"'[8]. It frees us from our past and liberates us for a new life full of promise.

Of course, if we are to live this new life it must somehow answer to our basic human need for pattern, order and regularity. Thus we must restructure the patterns of our life on the basis and in the light of this rupture.[9] Not, however, by integrating it into the previous continuities of our life but by creatively construing retrospective *a posteriori* continuities in the light of the radical discontinuity experienced. God is typically not 'perceived' by an awestruck subject in a momentary *Now*, but by looking back on one's life, or the life of others, from a vantagepoint that opens our eyes to how God is and was present in and to our life even where we did not notice it. 'Perceiving God' is neither a direct nor an indirect visual nor a mysterious spiritual perception of God but a process of re-experiencing and re-interpreting one's life in the light of God's presence. It is a retrospective experience not so much of *God*, but rather of *our life in the face of God*.

The difference between Sarah Coakley's and my account of *'seeing' the risen Christ*, therefore, is not that 'perceiving' has more than one meaning and that we '"perceive" at different "levels", according to the development of our "devoutness"' (p. 179). The point is rather that *'seeing' the risen Christ* is not a case of seeing at all, but a metaphorical way of expressing the fundamental change of life brought about *not* by the believer herself, but by what happened to her *through God*. To *'see' the risen Christ* is to die to one's old life and to begin to live a new life in which one 'sees' the world, God, oneself in a different way. It is not a change *in* a life, but *of* a life, a change that re-orients a life fundamentally from self-centredness to God-centredness and thus changes one's outlook on everything, on God, the world, oneself, and on the others.

It is here where I see the major deficiency of Sarah Coakley's chapter. Her whole argument hinges on the disjunction of either 'dramatic "leaps" into "faith"' (p. 178) or a '*process* of change' which involves 'an initial "turning-around" morally, then practice in seeing the world differently, then only finally intimacy of "spiritual/sensual" knowledge of Christ' (p. 175). But what looks like mutually exclusive alternatives turns out on closer inspection to be two sides of the same self-centred option. In both cases the focus is on the human subject which either 'leaps' into faith or ascents through the progressive 'purgation' of her epistemic capacities to union with the resurrected Christ (p. 173). The human subject is the centre of activity, whether in sudden acts or in gradual processes. There is no place for passivity and utter dependency in

this account, the radical passivity that lies beyond the sliding scale between the poles of activity and passivity, spontaneity and receptivity. Conversely, God is presented as merely initiating human responses in a life of worship, not as the one who responds to 'the utter differentiation of the worshipping human being from God' that 'simply awaits God's response and is utterly dependent on it'.[10] But with this she misses the decisive point of the New Testament grammar of 'raised'.

## VI

According to the logic of the gospel as outlined in the New Testament *seeing the risen Christ* is not something we do but something done to us. We find ourselves to be changed and enlarged by something beyond ourselves, something initiated and performed not by us but by God. The central point of the New Testament grammar of 'raised' is that the sole initiative and exclusive agency lies with God. You do not begin by turning-around morally but you find yourself turned-around existentially. You do not change yourself but you find yourself being changed. Christians do not confess a faith that they have but which 'has them' and in which they find themselves placed by God.

Put in a nutshell, the grammar of 'raised' in the New Testament is, in David Ford's apt words, 'God acts; Jesus appears; the disciples are transformed'.[11] This transformation is a change not *in* the world but *of* the world and of *the disciples' place* in the world. Thus the grammar of 'raised' is not the grammar of an isolated miracle in the world but of God's way of ending the world. Jesus did not raise himself, but was raised by God. The risen Christ was not 'seen' by the disciples, but disclosed to them by the Spirit. In each case all the activity lies with God: The dead Jesus 'simply awaits God's response and is utterly dependent on it'.[12] The disciples did not recognise the risen Jesus before he disclosed himself as another, and the other was acknowledged as God (cf. John 20:28).[13] They could not do so or publicly testify to his resurrection without being given the Spirit who opened their eyes and mouths to the truth of the salvific presence of God – not any 'spiritual' eyes or mouths, but the very eyes and mouths that they had before. To receive the Spirit is not to receive a new epistemic outfit but to be placed in a new perspective in which everything is seen and experienced in the light of God's presence as creative love. In each case *God* makes all the difference – with respect to Jesus who comes to be 'seen' as the Son, and with respect to the believers who come to 'see' themselves as creatures of the Spirit.

On the other hand, when the texts focus not on God's presence and activity but on Jesus or on those who 'see' the risen Christ, they speak quite differently. In the case of Jesus they portray his cry of dereliction, his speaking and breathing for the last time, his physical and mental death, his burial. And when they speak of the disciples they describe fear, bewilderment, doubt,

joy, awe, amazement and confusion, 'the difficulties in even recognising the risen Christ' (p. 171). The reasons are obvious.

All those who had experienced Jesus death at the cross knew: *Jesus is dead*. But some of them also had to admit, on the basis of their so-called appearance-experiences: *Jesus is alive*. The conflict of certainties and the cognitive *aporia* created by this are obvious. How could they be solved? There are three easy ways to escape through the horns of this dilemma, and they all are championed to the present day. One can claim (1) that Jesus was *not really dead*; or (2) that he is *not really alive*; or (3) that the one who died and the one who is experienced as alive are *not really the same*. Christians rejected all three of them. They insisted on Jesus' death as well as on the identity of the Crucified one with the one who had appeared to them. And they did so without falling into absurdity by confessing: *Christ was raised from the dead by God*.[14]

But they could not leave it at that and propagate the resurrection as an isolated miracle. The resurrection was not something that happened *in* the world but *to* the world: it ended its old ways and opened up a new life with God. In the light of this they understood the second claim '*Jesus is alive'* as claiming 'Jesus is alive *in and with God*.' The life at stake here is not a life leading to death but the divine life overcoming death; and this means for Jesus, as for all believers, a *new life*. They also understood the first claim '*Jesus is dead*' in a new light as 'Jesus died *for our sins and our salvation*: Jesus' death is not merely a historical fact but has divine or soteriological meaning. In short, 'the resurrection' became the decisive point of reference for a completely new Christian universe of meaning, a total revolution of the understanding of human existence, the world, and God. In this universe of meaning life became interpreted in the light of God's life, and God's life in the light of how God was seen to have disclosed himself in the cross and resurrection of Christ.

Consider 1 Corinthians 15, 3ff., for example. Paul quotes the (Antiochian) tradition which he has received 'that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelf. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.'

It is against this background that the New Testament grammar of 'raised' has to be understood. Six points are important here:

1. The term 'raised' is a *credal predicate*, and all credal predicates speak of *God's activity*. Not only is God the only agent here, God's life is also the eternal life into which the Crucified is confessed to have been

resurrected: He died as we all die, but through God he lives with God in eternity.

2. All credal statements about Jesus Christ refer *to the same person*. It is *the same one* who has died and who was raised and appeared to those quoted in 1 Corinthians 15. It is not the case that *Jesus* died and someone *very similar to him* appeared to the apostles, but *the same one* is said to have died on the cross and was raised from the dead.

A second point of grammar of 'raised' therefore is that *the predicate '– raised' has the same referent as the predicates '– died on the cross'* and '*– was buried*'. To speak of *resurrection* only makes sense against the background of a real life (the life of Jesus) and an undeniable death (the cross). It is not the coming into existence of someone for the first time, but a raising *again*, a re-vision and restoration of a life lived and ended in death. And the point of this restoration is not a miraculous return into this life leading towards death, but an integration of the life lived into God's eternal life.

3. The historical facts on which the creed is based are the *death of Jesus at the cross* and *the Easter appearances*, *not* the *resurrection* or the *empty tomb*. The latter is quoted as a secondary but as such inconclusive evidence for the truth of *Jesus is alive* by some New Testament writers. The former is the Christian answer to the cognitive *aporia* posed by the incompatible experiences *Jesus has died* and *Jesus is alive*.

A third point about the grammar of 'raised' therefore is that the predicate cannot be used to make historical statements: *Jesus was raised from the dead* is not a historical truth and the resurrection not a historical event. Not only should 'the wise man proportion his belief to the evidence', he should also adduce only evidence that is relevant to the sort of belief in question.[15]

4. For both statements, *Jesus has died* and *Jesus is alive,* evidence is cited in the creed quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15: *Jesus has died* is true because he died (at the cross) and *was buried* (and you do not bury people who are not dead). But even more importantly, as Paul quotes, because he 'died *for our sins in accordance with the scriptures*' (1 Cor 15:3b): Jesus' death is soteriologically significant, and for this reason not something to be denied, ignored or denigrated by Christians.

On the other hand, *Jesus is alive* is true because he *appeared to Peter*, to *the twelve*, *to more than 500 brethren, to James, all the apostles and to Paul himself.* None of these 'appearances, in anything like the sequence Paul lists, is depicted in the four Gospels. Moreover, not one of the Gospel resurrection appearances is identical with those listed by Paul. Paul did not know the Gospel resurrection stories, for the simple reason that they had not yet been invented, and the four evangelists, who wrote twenty to fifty years after Paul, either did not know his list of appearances or chose to ignore it. Perhaps most surprising of all the difference is Paul's failure to mention the legend of the empty tomb, which was, for the writer of the earliest Gospel (Mark), the only public, visible evidence for the resurrection'.[16]

Note further, that Mark's account, that is, the oldest Christian narrative describing the discovery of the empty tomb, ends with the women running away from the tomb in terror and in their fear saying nothing to anybody. This is not a particularly convincing 'evidence for the primacy of *women's testimony* in witnessing to the resurrection' (p. 181, my italics) or for 'women's supposedly greater capacity for "love" . . . that will guarantee them a quicker share than men in the beatific vision' (p. 182). The important and interesting feature of the original ending of Mark is rather that it depicts fear and silence on Easter morning and lacks a resurrection appearance. For this is a significant rhetorical point of Mark's Gospel: The story ends with Christ's death and burial. The resurrection is not part of the narrative but rather something like the *Amen* to which the listener or reader is to be provoked by the gospel story. Without the *Amen* the gospel is just a story as many others. Only through the *Amen* I appropriate it personally as presenting and revealing God's love towards us. To react by *Amen* to it is not a matter of weighing evidence and calculating probabilities but to find myself unable to react otherwise. This is why you cannot say *Amen* to the gospel story and *not thank God* for opening your eyes to the truth of it. This is why faith cannot be forced on anyone. And this is why Christians cannot confess their faith in God without confessing God to be the author of their faith.

To put this again as a point about the grammar of 'raised': The resurrection is not a miraculous event in Jesus' afterlife but a self-determining act of God and as such a revelatory event in the disciples' life. *There is no resurrection without God who raises from the dead by partaking in the death of human life and making it partake in his divine life*. And *there is no resurrection without faith in the resurrection* – not because *faith produces it* but rather because *faith is produced by it*.

5. The *resurrection* is not a historical event that followed Jesus' *death* and preceded the *Easter appearances*. It presupposes the consummation of Jesus' life at the cross, but it is not temporally later than his death as is the French Revolution or this conference. The term 'resurrection' is not the description of an event in history but a metaphor of the divine judgement about Jesus' life and death disclosed to the disciples through the spirit in the aftermath of the crucifixion. From what they experienced on Gol'gotha and in the appearances they concluded that Jesus was raised from the dead *by God*. And they came to see the resurrection as the divine ratification of Jesus' teaching of the coming of God's kingdom of justice and the victory of the way of love over the way of hatred and death.

Understood in this sense the resurrection is in principle beyond the historical methods in terms of which we can describe and determine the facts of Jesus' death and the occurrence of appearances to some of his followers. *The predicate '– raised' is used in the Creed not to describe a historical fact or event, that is, something in principle accessible to historical method or direct or indirect observation*. There not only were no witnesses of the resurrection in

fact, there could not have been any in principle: The resurrection of Jesus is not the sort of thing that could have occurred as an event in this space-time universe. It was not the total oddity of 'a corpse coming back to life in a reversal of all the laws of biology'.[17] But neither was it, contrary to what Keith Ward holds, 'the appearing in this space-time universe of a form of being which, having been generated in this universe, has transcended space-time'. It was not something that happened *in* the universe, but *to* the universe: It showed God to relate to it in such a way that death is overcome with life, despair with hope, sin with salvation, evil with good. God did not avoid pain and death; he overcame them. Hence 'nothing, as Paul put it in the light of the cross and the resurrection, nothing, including our own suffering and death, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:38–39)'.[18]

6. A final point about the grammar of 'raised'. Metaphors using this predicate refer to a fundamental change in a life, an eschatological re-orientation from old to new that is exclusively attributed to God. On the human side they signify an existential change across the abyss of utter incompetence, destitution and passivity. There is virtually *nothing* we can contribute. Whatever response there is in human life presupposes this eschatological turnaround, the turnaround effected by God responding to our incompetence to respond.

The New Testament grammar of 'raised', therefore, is neither a *grammar of an individual miracle in history* nor a *grammar of a miraculous epistemic improvement of believers*. It is the grammar of the divine way of ending the world through an unending act of love. To live one's life in terms of this grammar is to live in the sense of the presence of the God who ends the world and each individual life by transforming evil into good, death into life, injustice into justice. Or, as the Creed puts it, Jesus died *for our sins* and was raised *for our salvation*. The grammar of 'raised' is the grammar of *God being for us*. And in this sense it is the divine grammar of *the truth of our life*.

## Notes

1. L. Wittgenstein, Vermischte Bemerkungen. Eine Auswahl aus dem Nachlaß. Herausgegeben von Georg Henrik von Wright. Unter Mitarbeit von Heikki Nyman, Frankfurt am Main 1977, p. 65.
2. And such writers as Stephen Davies, 'Seeing' the Risen Jesus, in: Stephen Davies, D. Kendall, G. O'Collins (eds), *The Resurrection. An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, Oxford 1997, pp. 126–47. To ask 'what sort of seeing was involved in seeing the risen Jesus' (p. 127) is putting the cart before the horse because it assumes what has to be shown in the first place: that the problem before us is a case of 'seeing' at all. Before we can even begin to inquire into different sorts of seeing (normal vision, subjective vision, objective vision) we must have reason to assume that those who are presented as saying 'We have seen the Lord' speak of some sort of vision at all. It is not enough to cite the New Testament evidence, assume it to be a literal description of a vision, discuss the arguments for or against it, and

conclude that the most likely truth is: 'the risen Jesus was a physical body that was objectively present to the witnesses in space and time, and he was accordingly seen in a normal sense of that word' (p. 146). Before anything like this can be convincing we need a careful exegetical and hermeneutical analysis and discussion of the language used in the New Testament. We shall simply miss the point of what is being communicated if we ignore the different ways of speaking and genres of writing in the New Testament, the imagery used by different writers in different traditions and settings, the varieties of credal, narrative, argumentative, doxological, epistolary, liturgical, apologetic and many other contexts that determine the sense of what is being said and the point of what is communicated. Scripture is not a handbook of dogmatic propositions or a collection of historical evidence for doctrinal debates. In order to understand a phrase or fragment of a biblical text it is not enough to show that it can be construed in a literal way that is not self-defeating, impossible or absurd. What needs to be shown is not whether a phrase can be understood in a literal sense but whether this is how it is to be understood if we want to understand the text in question. When language is 'on holiday', excluding the impossible is not enough to arrive at the truth (cf. p. 147). Philosophy of religion must become hermeneutically much more sensitive before it can be argumentatively convincing.

3. I have argued this more fully with respect to the New Testament language of resurrection in I.U. Dalferth, *Der auferweckte Gekreuzigte. Zur Grammatik der Christologie*, Tübingen 1994, pp. 54–84.
4. G. Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, 1710, ed. G.J. Warnock, Glasgow 1962, p. 46.
5. Origen, *De Principiis* 1. I c. 1 n. 9. Cf. K. Rahner, Die geistlichen Sinne nach Origenes, in: *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. XII, Köln 1975, pp. 111–36; Die Lehre von den 'geistlichen Sinnen' im Mittelalter, ibid., pp. 137–72.
6. R. Williams, Barth on the Triune God, in: S.W. Sykes (ed.), *Karl Barth. Studies of his Theological Method*, Oxford 1979, pp. 147–93, 189.
7. Cf. T. Merricks, The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting, in: M.J. Murray (ed.), *Reason for the Hope Within*, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK 1999, pp. 261–86.
8. T.W. Jennings, *Beyond Theism. A Grammar of God-Language*, New York/Oxford 1985, p. 55.
9. Cf. I.U. Dalferth, *Theology and Philosophy*, Oxford 1988, Ch. 18.
10. D. Ford, *Self and Salvation. Being Transformed*, p. 213.
11. Ibid., p. 212.
12. Ibid., p. 213.
13. Cf. ibid., p. 172.
14. Cf. I.U. Dalferth, *Der auferweckte Gekreuzigte*, pp. 61ff.
15. Cf. I.U. Dalferth, Volles Grab, leerer Glaube? Zum Streit um die Auferweckung des Gekreuzigten, *ZThK* 95, 1998, pp. 379–402.
16. R. Helms, *Gospel Fictions*, New York 1989, p. 130.
17. K. Ward, *Religion and Revelation. A Theology of Revelations in the World's Religions*, Oxford 1994, p. 301.
18. J. Sanders, *The God Who Risks. A Theology of Providence*, Downers Grove 1998, p. 108.

# Voices in Discussion

*D.Z. Phillips*

*R*: I wanted to argue against a disjunctive choice between a view that we must seek dispassionate evidence for the risen Christ, and the mere acceptance of it advocated by Kierkegaard and Barth. I suggested that an epistemic change is needed in the perceiver. This attempt to unpack the spiritual senses goes back to Plato and is also attempted by Gregory of Nyssa. I am trying to bring this tradition into an epistemological context. These insights may be Wittgensteinian, but do not sit easily with Wittgenstein's more Kierkegaardian moments.

I also wanted to emphasise that my reference to feminism is not an afterthought. I want to link it to the mode of perception I'm explicating.

You are right to explore the difference between Catholic and Protestant conceptions of grace. There are differences, of course, between Aquinas and Luther.

I don't know why you say I am turning to the subject in a selfish way. I quote from you, and take myself to be exploring a spiritual possibility which is important. I do want to say that there is not disjunction between the leap of faith and development. I'm trying to bring into the twenty-first century a rich resource from religious epistemology.

*S*: I am concerned about the way biblical criticism is being referred to in this conference. For me, it is a way of analysing the text, trying to understand the experiences of people. What kind of meaning is in the narrative with which I am confronted? What is the grammar of the text? But I don't go about this by going beyond the text to its historical foundation. All we have is the narrative in the text.

*D*: I agree that the biblical critic helps us to see what the text is. You say there are reports of experiences. But of what sort? If we take 'seeing the risen Christ,' how are we to read it? Can we go from the first to the third person assertions? Theological topics must be related to their context. We must do this with 'raised.' To understand 'raised' we must look to the grammar of 'raised' in the New Testament. So that's why I'm asking my questions.

*S*: Yes, let's take the meanings one at a time.

*R*: Suppose you were asked which one of these you would stake your life on?

*S*: The one I can appropriate in my own life.

*C*: That is a necessary condition for truth, but not a sufficient condition.

*S*: It would be for me.

*T*: I agree with S. The term 'critical method' is misleading. There are historical issues that biblical critics investigate and they glean information. But it is still misleading to label biblical criticism as historical criticism. If I'm working on Job or Romans – I'm not working to prove whether Job existed. If there is a special epistemology involved it may be akin to Gadamer's hermeneutics.

The Bible gives you narratives, not claims. People appear in stories, but we make claims that are more than the stories. Jesus doesn't make these claims. For example, simply to say 'Jesus is divine' is heretical. It must be complemented by saying that he is human.

In relation to the Jesus Seminar, there is no reason why people can't get together to grade sayings in terms of probability. But that work is not typical of biblical criticism. A small group explores the question: are there sayings we don't know about? But then the Jesus Seminar makes exaggerated claims which should be seen as part of the story. At first biblical criticism seemed to challenge orthodoxy, but by now is seen to be in conformity with it.

Bultmann tried to combine theology and biblical criticism, but it all depends on his methodology.

R asked S whether she would stake her life on the account of the resurrection. But you don't have an account. You have different accounts – so how can you stake your life on it? You may stake your life not on a Biblical narrative, but on what a church makes of it, which may be according to a principle not stated in the Bible.

*D*: Agreed, but the stories continue today. Jesus doesn't make a claim, but we are asked what we make of him. We have stories of the resurrection, not an account. Believers, on the basis of revelation experiences say, 'He is alive.' Instead of saying 'He is dead,' they say 'He died for us.' We are raised into god, into a new life. This is the grammar of faith.

*R*: How does that Barthian view do justice to the narrative of the resurrection?

*B*: I endorse the feminist movement for the simple reason that the audience it addresses needs it. But some of your claims R, would harm its case. In the text, the risen one appears to men first. What is more, given Roman law, is it not the case that women risked far less than men in being at the foot of the Cross? But none of this shows a greater love either way.

*Q*: The terminology of the paper and responses to it worries me. Talk of epistemic apparatus gives the impression of new mechanics.

*F*: New software.

*Q*: What is it to come to a new epistemic habit? D draws a sharp distinction between epistemic deficiency and sin. In overcoming sin you reconstruct yourself, but not through acquiring new facts. Think of Lear and Othello. Wittgenstein says that what makes belief possible may be suffering. Simone Weil asks how you would understand providence if you were the survivor of a genocide. If we go this way, D's Lutheran objections may be hard to maintain. If we go from talk of apparatus to habit, we'd move forward. There may be no sharp distinction between what comes from God and what comes from me. 'It's all human,' / 'It's all divine' is a false dichotomy.

*D*: I overstated my case to bring out what is at stake. Talk of apparatus is misleading, I agree, but R does seem to take up Origen in this way. In Bonaventure matters are quite different. What we have is not a change in capacities, but in how these capacities are used. It is not a miraculous change in one's epistemic outfit, but in how we use our capacities. We are not talking about different cognitive capacities, but of how we behave in a change of life.

The Resurrection changes our perspective. It is not in history, but changes history. That is its grammar.

*R*: I'm not happy to change from capacity to perspective. Capacities themselves are transformed.

*J*: In the monastic mystical tradition there is talk of spiritual senses, the awareness of divinity in one. They speak of the sweetness of the taste. But who is present? Sometimes they say it is the second person of the Trinity, sometimes the Holy Spirit, but not the resurrected one. So spiritual senses are not aware of the resurrected body. Where is that? It is said to be in heaven, but present in the eucharist. But the body is human, not divine. The use of sexual imagery suggests direct contact, but that is a metaphor.

*R*: Bernard of Clairvoux would not have used it as proof of contact with the risen Christ, but why can't I do so as a contemporary speaker?

*C*: I want to respond to what S and T said as biblical scholars. They suggest that no one spends time worrying about the truth of assertions. Why say that? Liberals as well as conservatives appeal to the Bible in making their claims. Further, Biblical claims are not mere appearances or accounts. I can have reports of Lincoln's assassination, but I must ask whether they are credible or probable. The Bible is full of claims. Paul says that all have sinned. That's a claim.

*F*: I want to defend R against D. I found her paper a gem. Taken one way, there need be no epistemic transformation when I see the risen Christ. I may see that my mother loves me. When I see the risen Christ I see that the great things of the Gospel are true. It need not be meant literally. So whether it is a new process or not, what is essential is that the Holy Spirit has been at work. In that way, it makes sense to speak of an epistemic transformation, one that is not brought about unaided.

*R*: No, I do mean seeing the Lord literally. I want to ask what that means today. The 'seeing' may be anonymous. You may not be aware of doing so. This is part of the point of the parable of the sheep and the goats. We may see Christ through transformed others. I agree I don't fill this out.

*F*: There is a distinction in the Protestant tradition between regeneration and sanctification.

*R*: Perhaps we are seeing an agreement between a Thomist and a Calvinist as against D's Lutheranism.

*D*: No, my point is that 'seeing the Lord' must not be taken out of context. It is a change from being self-centered to being God-centered. The introduction of spiritual senses by R smacks too much of Platonic metaphysics.

*R*: Would it be an irredeemable taint to find Plato there?

*D*: Not at all, but is it the New Testament?

*R*: I am trying to go beyond an Enlightenment conception of 'seeing,' but it needs more working out.

*E*: It isn't a metaphysical matter, but a literal one. But does the literal imply special faculties? In the stories of post-resurrection appearances we are told that Jesus appeared to 500. We are told the dead walked around! Why try to detach 'the risen Lord' from the account?

*H*: What is important philosophically is not to make all this a war over labels – the label 'seeing.' What we need to be clear about is the grammar of 'see.' For example, could any passer-by have seen 'the risen Lord,' or is the seeing internally related to belief? The latter view would not be a downgrading of 'seeing' but a clarification of its use. But we should not argue as though we all know what 'seeing' means, the only question being whether anyone saw the risen Lord.

# Part VI

# Is There an Audience for Miracles?

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# 11
# Is There an Audience for Miracles?

*Walford Gealy*

This chapter is in two unequal parts. The longer first section contains criticisms of the ways in which philosophers, in the Western tradition, have dealt with the concept of a miracle. In the second part, a personal response is made to a recent discussion, on the conditions of intelligibility, in which some attention has been given to the concept of a miracle. It is only in a brief conclusion, and in the light of the preceding discussions, that the question of whether or not there is an audience for miracles is finally addressed.

Our understanding of the concept of a miracle cannot be divorced from religious thought and practices. Even the common, contemporary, secular usage of the concept, which is usually devoid of any religious significance, may be shown to be derived from the religious uses of the term. Within the Hebrew/Christian traditions there is a multiplicity of contexts within which the talk of miracles is commonplace. In some Christian traditions there is an emphasis on the life, history and continuity of the Christian community, and on the role of saints in particular. In this context, it is in connection with the lives of these saints that alleged miracles figure prominently. In another, rather different Christian tradition, which is more immediately Biblically orientated, the Hebrew/Christian scriptures themselves are the primary source of information about miracles. Both these traditions have been influenced, to a greater or lesser degree, by changes in world-views over the centuries, particularly during the last century (the Twentieth), when the prestige of science reached an all-pervasive and dominating influence on our culture. Religion, as a consequence, has been relegated from its pivotal status in Western culture and largely demoted to the periphery of peoples' lives. Hence it is appropriate to ask the question: is there an audience for miracles?

It is important to remember that the Hebrew/Christian scriptures are ancient documents that belong to worlds that are, in so many ways, different from our world and, even more significantly, from our comprehension of it. The use of the plural term 'worlds' is deliberate; for it took, approximately, a thousand

years for these scriptures to be formed, and it must not be assumed that there were no changes in world-views during this time – even within the same religious tradition and culture. Indeed, there were changes, of some significance, in those religious conceptions of the world. In the earliest times, the world was viewed by the ancient Hebrews from a polytheistic perspective. Even if it were maintained that these early Hebrews were monotheistic in their belief from the very beginning, they were so only in one particular sense of monotheistic – in the sense that they believed that they ought to *worship and obey* one God. But the belief that it was religiously correct to give singular allegiance to one God did not mean that those Hebrews did not believe in the reality of other gods. The world around them was awash with polytheistic faiths which dominated agricultural life and practices in 'the land of promise' where the Hebrews had settled. And it was from these surrounding peoples that the Hebrews learnt how to tend their fields and crops and, at the same time, how to bow in worship to fertility deities. Is it no wonder that, during these early centuries of the existence of the Hebrew people, their identity was threatened through their assimilation into Canaanite life and practices and especially so through religious syncretism. This threat remained real for centuries, arguably until the Babylonian exile.

It may only be possible for us, three thousand years later, to *imagine* how the peoples of those distant polytheistic cultures understood their world. Perhaps we shall never be able to fully understand that world as they perceived it. But we know some things about some of its institutions and practices. We know, for instance, that there were professional seers, as well as those who practised sorcery, witchcraft, magic and divination – all of whom claimed to possess remarkable powers. It was a world full of 'signs and wonders'. In such a world, there would be a permanent audience for miracles. It would seem that the primary problem that such audiences had, was not whether there were miracles, but which miracles were to be believed – that is, which miracles were to be accepted as true signs from the deity or deities that they followed. Hence, it is a significant fact that one of the few references to miracles in early Hebrew law is a warning against the danger of being allured away from true faith by workers of signs and wonders. 'When a prophet or dreamer appears among you and offers you a sign or a portent and calls on you to follow other gods whom you have not known and worship them, even if the sign or portent should come true, do not listen to that prophet or that dreamer... That prophet or dreamer shall be put to death...'[1] We need to note the severity of this judgement – the false prophet 'shall be put to death'. This, indeed, was no trivial matter. Whatever was regarded as 'the truth', or 'true faith' in this context, was not thought of as a matter of conjecture or speculation. It was, rather, a matter of life or death.

Over a thousand years later when the New Testament was written, the Hebrew view of the world was thoroughly monotheistic and theocentric. All other gods were mere idols and there was no more to their reality than

the materials from which they were made.[2] 'The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who dwell therein.'[3] Nevertheless, this shift from polytheism to thoroughgoing monotheism does not mean that this later religious conception of the world is nearer to our world-views than it was to that of the early Hebrews. The Jewish world-view that forms the background to the myriad New Testament miracle stories is almost as strange as that of the early Hebrews. It was still a world that was perceived to be largely dominated by unseen powers of darkness. The most common miracle recorded in the Gospels is the casting out of evil spirits. It was a world in which there were legions of evil spirits that roamed around seeking abiding places in human hearts. These spirits appeared to have a prince, who allegedly, not only had the power to tempt the Son of man, but who was able to offer to him, conditionally, the kingdoms of the world – which implies that they were, apparently, his to give.[4] Indeed, in this world-picture, humanity is perceived to be in the grip of the 'commander of the spiritual powers of the air',[5] and Christians were said to wrestle not against 'human foes, but against cosmic powers, against authorities and potentates of this dark world, against the superhuman forces of evil in the heavens'.[6]

This picture, however, only partly represents how that world was understood – the darker side of that world. It is not even the dominant picture, despite the role attributed to the powers of evil. For, paradoxically, life for religious believers was a matter to be celebrated in worship, and in regular religious feasts and festivals. The Book of Psalms is full of exhortations to bless, to praise and to 'sing unto the Lord'. 'Great is the Lord and worthy of all praise; his greatness in unfathomable.'[7] Of course, there was sin and sadness, darkness and even despair; but there was also the firmness of the conviction of religious faith, that love and joy, light and hope will vanquish over all.

Despite the apparent strangeness of some Hebrew/Christian scriptural language, particularly the way it refers to evil and demonic powers, the continuity of the Christian church and its practices, together with its emphasis on the sacredness of these scriptures, mean that religious believers are constantly reminded of these ancient conceptions of the world. And to the extent that the scriptures are read, often in devotion as spiritual nourishment for believing souls, the religious believer will find it hard, if nigh impossible, to detach herself wholly from certain aspects of those early conceptions of the world that form the background to these scriptures – conceptions that are, in some ways, profoundly at odds with our modern science-dominated understanding of the world. Familiarity can certainly be a bad thing, for believers tend to forget that those religious world-views, are no longer meaningful to, or have little, if any, role in the lives of vast sections of society. Yet it is also true that however intellectually sophisticated a religious believer may be, if her faith is deeply scripture-orientated, then the New Testament world-view will be entertained as, in some sense, real.

It may even be believed that it is our preoccupation with science that blinds us to the truth or the reality of that world-view. Hence, it *may* be true to assert, that to the extent that that conception of the world is still espoused by religious believers, then there *might be* an audience for, at least, some types of miracles.

But in what sense is that New Testament world real to the believer? Its reality lies in its spirituality. Despite the oddity of parts of the language, its core message of love, hope and joy strike a chord in the believer's heart. There is a song in the believer's soul. There is the constant exhortation to join in the singing, 'O glorify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.'[8] And the believer is carried away by the Lord of the dance. So however different a contemporary world-view may be, it seems that it is not always able to disrupt the rhythm of this music of the soul or destroy the celebration of life. It may be a dangerous thing to admit, but the strength of an inner spirituality can prove more resilient than any intellectual conviction, particularly so in a cultural climate of scepticism, relativism and insecurity.

However, my primary reason for drawing attention to the nature of the kind of world-views that we have in the scriptures is to underline the fact that it was in that kind of conceptual and cultural background that the concept of a miracle is rooted. And if we are to understand the concept at all, we must first understand how it was used in its original religious context. This is not to maintain that the meaning of the concept has not, or cannot change. But in order to appreciate the nature of any change that may have taken place, we need to understand the root use of the concept. Indeed, my contention is that the belief in such religious world-views is a *sine qua non* of the belief in miracles. Evidently, some beliefs that were commonly held in that world – particularly beliefs about the nature of the natural world, such as the belief that the earth is flat, or the belief that the universe is made up of three tiers – are no longer sustainable. Nevertheless, certain central religious beliefs, such as the belief in God, in his revealed purposes, in obedience to his will, in bending the knee, in total dependence upon him, in the fragility of human life, in the wonder of life and salvation, and so on, are indispensable for believing in the possibility of miracles – at least in some religious sense or senses of this concept. Indeed, it is probably the case that the closer the religious believer's world-view approximates to that which is reflected in the New Testament, the stronger is the belief in the possibility of certain kinds of miracles. This does not mean that believers in such a world-view *necessarily* provide a contemporary audience for *all kinds* of miracles, for such believers may hold that there are theological reasons for maintaining that *some kinds* of miracles belong to special and specific religious contexts, and that the present does not form part of such a context. Nevertheless, such religious believers may always form a *potential* audience for miracles. And, in some sense or senses of miracles, there may even be a belief in both their permanence and their necessity.

It is also of further and, perhaps, of greater importance in the context of this chapter, to appreciate what was *not* prevalent in those early world-views. For part of the case to be presented in this chapter is, that those who have been most mistaken in their analyses of the concept of the miraculous are precisely those who have failed to appreciate what was *not* part of those scriptural world-views. In particular, it seems to me that it is of paramount significance to recognise that there was nothing like Greek speculative thought or curiosity, or Greek philosophy, or science, in that world. Most, if not all, of the Old Testament had been written before there was any significant contact between the Hebrews and the Greek world.[9] And perhaps the only hint of anything Greek that we have in the New Testament, despite the fact that it was written in that language, is in the Prologue to the fourth Gospel – which, it is often claimed, is amongst the last of the writings of the New Testament.[10] Yet, when we look at the way both philosophers and theologians in the history of Western thought have analysed the concept of a miracle, they have, without exception I believe, conducted their analyses in extraneous, alien terms – either of some Greek metaphysical notions, or of some concepts that had their roots in the prevailing science of their day. But if the genesis of the talk about miracles belongs to a different world, and to a different conceptual understanding of the world, it is rather remarkable that the analyses of the concept of a miracle, should have been conducted at all in such ways. Were not such analyses an open invitation for conceptual confusion to prevail? Is it not an oddity that, since the rediscovery of some of Aristotle's works in the West, some of the most influential of Christian thinkers should have thought it constructive, and even necessary, to employ Greek metaphysical concepts to elucidate the Hebrew/Christian scriptural concept of a miracle? Is it not equally strange that some of the most eminent philosophers of the modern period should have thought it essential to make use of scientific concepts, such as 'laws of nature', in their analyses of the same concept? And even more incongruous is the belief that is currently in vogue among some religious believers, that we have now a novel inkling into the workings of the divine based upon, and derived from, the indeterminacy principle in modern quantum-physics! How outrageous! One would have thought that in order to understand Biblical concepts it would have been intellectually prudent to attempt to analyse such concepts in terms of the *religious* understanding that was prevalent at those times, and in those cultures in which the concepts were in vogue. To attempt to understand such a concept as a miracle in alien or more modern terms was to invite confusion.

It is possible to think of objections to this line of reasoning. First, that the traditional analysts of the concept of a miracles did not refer merely to alleged miracles in ancient texts, but to miracles that were real in the life of the Church in their time – in which case there was no chasm between recorded scriptural miracles and witnessed contemporary miracles. It is true that the Christian Church has not denied at any time either the scriptural miracles or miracles

in the lives of saints. But it is also true that the Christian community is renowned for its conservatism, and that it has done its utmost to resist any change in its world-view. The Church, throughout its history, has done its utmost to preserve, as far as it was possible, the New Testament world-view. The religious establishment has resisted change. The problem has been with individual intellectuals, both within and outside the religious community, who adopted various and different world-views from that presented in the New Testament, and who as a consequence modified theological concepts like that of a miracle. This is not to imply that such intellectuals were necessarily rebellious. Indeed, the intention of many was to defend the Church and its doctrines and such thinkers have been held in high esteem for their efforts – even though it is here contended that they were mistaken in what they did.

Secondly, it might be objected that what these philosophers and theologians were doing was to translate ancient ideas into contemporary terms in order to make the old forms of thinking more intelligible. This appears plausible enough – to the extent that such scholars were aware that what they were doing was translating, and that the translated truth would be a genuine reflection of the original truth. But my contention is, and what I intend to show is, that what we have in the historical analyses is not a version of the concept of a miracle as it was understood in scriptural times, but a different version, one that was so transformed that it no longer meant the same as the original concept. And this kind of treatment of the concept of a miracle is not at all unique. Indeed, it is true of most, if not all, theological concepts when they become embroiled in metaphysical schemes or are integrated into some scientific world-views. We only have to take a glimpse at the effects of Hegelianism on theology to appreciate how violently theological concepts can be twisted and distorted by being assimilated into such philosophical systems.

It is worthwhile examining how particular philosophical presuppositions can lead to unsatisfactory accounts being given of a theological concept like that of a miracle. Indeed, I have not as yet discovered, in the history of Western philosophy, a single satisfactory account of the concept. The root of this discontent lies in two facts. First, Western philosophy, throughout the ages, has been metaphysical in character. It has attempted to give a unified and all-embracing account of the nature of 'what is'. Not only is this kind of system-building rejected *per se*, but its errors are compounded by a failure to distinguish between an all-embracing metaphysical world-view on the one hand, and an all-pervading religious world-view on the other hand. The former world-view is a completely spurious intellectual construction: the latter is an authentic and integral part of a religious reverence for what is. Secondly, going with the error of metaphysical system-building is the error of logical essentialism. By 'logical essentialism' I mean the belief that every concept has an essence. This essence ensures that, in whatever context a particular concept is used, the concept will have the same meaning. So the central logical question, as opposed to the epistemological, has always assumed the

form: 'What is meant by such and such a concept?' There is an in-built temptation in this question to present an answer in single, straightforward, unambiguous terms, usually in the form of an all-inclusive definition which will be an expression of the essence of that concept. But reality can be elusive and it is not so easily captured by our definitions. Of course, in some human practices, we could not do without definitions. We would not get very far say, in geometry, if we had different concepts of what is a parallelogram or a hypotenuse, for instance. And indeed, most of the sciences make use of strictly defined concepts which may be expressed rigorously in mathematical terms. Law is another field in which strict definitions are absolutely indispensable if people are to be dealt with equitably. It would be most unjust if the meaning of the concept of murder depended on each judge's private interpretation of it. Yet, in such a context as this, where there is necessary use made of definitions, it is quite remarkable how reality appears to escape our defined categories. 'Was it murder? Or was it manslaughter?' So often in legal cases, there seem to be novel elements in incidents which consistently challenge our definitions and their applications to situations. Reality is so varied. Concepts need to be flexible. And this is true of most ordinary, non-technical concepts. It is true also of the concept of a miracle. There are events that may be typically miraculous, but there are other examples when we are not sure whether the use of the concept is at all appropriate. The essentialist finds an easy way out of the difficulties by ruling out, *a priori*, certain possibilities. The essentialist philosopher or theologian, having determined what the essence of the concept is, and defined it accordingly, will rule out other uses by her definition. The consequence of such a method is to impose artificial restrictions on the use of the concept and rule out what others might, quite legitimately, call a miracle.

The method of the essentialist is clearly prescriptive. It is the philosopher who lays down the criterion or criteria of the meaning of concepts. So there is either an *ought* or a *must* in the definition, and these indicate the prescribed parameters for the correct use of the concept. It is possible to show that the traditional theses on miracles are all of this kind – and all fail to do justice with the range of uses that the concept had and/or does have. Even if the common, secular use of the concept were temporarily discarded, and we were to restrict ourselves to an examination of the uses of the concept within traditional Biblical language, the definitions traditionally offered by essentialists may be shown to be either false or inadequate. It would be easy to cite several examples of this kind of essentialism. But here are just two examples from celebrated theses on miracles. First, this is what Leibniz recommended in his longish correspondence with Samuel Clarke on the concept of a miracle. He insists that a miracle is the operation of Infinite Substance and maintains that:

> In good philosophy and sound theology we ought to distinguish between what is explicable by the natures and powers of creatures and what is

> explicable only by the powers of Infinite Substance. We ought to make an infinite difference between the operation of God . . . and the operations of things that follow the laws which God has given them.[11]

And here is a second example from another famous treatment of the concept by someone who held very different views from those of Leibniz, namely, David Hume:

> A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature . . . There *must* . . . be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation.[12]

In what is, arguably, the most well-known recent treatise on miracles, the short volume *The Concept of a Miracle* by Richard Swinburne, we find the same kind of essentialism exhibited. Here a miracle is roughly defined as 'an event of an extraordinary kind, brought about by a god, and of religious significance'.[13] This means that each one of the three criteria is a necessary, but not in itself a sufficient condition, for the correct use or understanding of the concept of a miracle. But the three criteria together will provide, not only the necessary and sufficient criteria for the correct application of the concept, but also, in this essentialist context, the only relevant criteria. There are no other proper uses of the concept within a religious context – although Swinburne agrees that there are non-religious uses of the concept. It is the essentialist claim that we wish to challenge, and to do so each criterion stipulated by Swinburne has to be scrutinised in turn to establish whether it is essential for every possible religious use of the concept. Such an examination will also reveal the errors of those who have traditionally looked in a completely wrong direction for an understanding of the concept of a miracle.

Swinburne's first criterion is that of extra-ordinariness, and this may be said to be *the* dominant criterion of the miraculous for it is present in every historical treatise on the concept. All miracles, it is claimed, are extraordinary events – although, clearly, not all extraordinary events are miracles. In what sense then, are miracles 'extraordinary' events? Evidently, the meaning of 'extraordinary' depends on the meaning of 'ordinary'. What does 'ordinary' mean? Asking this question ought to indicate how ambiguous this concept is, for 'ordinary' can mean so many different things in different contexts. Indeed, it is a concept which reflects change and diversity more than most concepts. For what is ordinary may depend on all sorts of factors – factors that are subject to change, even to constant change in many instances. What is regarded as ordinary now would have been thought of as extraordinary, if not impossible, say, a century ago. And what is ordinary in one place, in one culture, is not only extraordinary in another culture, but wholly absent – an unthinkable or unthought of practice. Even within the same culture there may be deep divisions that allow different practices to be

ordinary in some lives and wholly absent in others. But nothing indicates better the diverse meanings of 'ordinary' than the fact that there are so many different antitheses to this concept apart from 'extraordinary', and these antitheses are not always synonymous with each other or with 'extraordinary'. Whether or not they do again depends on the nature of the context. 'Ordinary' may variously mean, for instance, 'normal', or 'regular', or 'common', or 'expected', or 'usual', or 'routine', or 'not special' – and all these possible synonyms of 'ordinary' have their respective antitheses such as – 'abnormal', 'irregular', 'uncommon' or 'rare', 'unexpected', 'unusual' and 'special'. 'The parcel came by ordinary post and not by special delivery.' But there is nothing extraordinary about special delivery. 'She visited at irregular times.' But this might not mean 'uncommon' or 'abnormal' or 'unexpected' or 'extraordinary'. Sometimes, one or more of these antitheses may be synonymous with 'extraordinary' but often that is not the case. It does not require much imagination to furnish a whole range of examples which would illustrate this point.

What then, is that meaning of 'extraordinary' which is inextricably connected with the notion of the miraculous, and with what sense of 'ordinary' is it contradistinguished? It is in this kind of context that a crucial error takes place in the historical analyses of the concept of a miracle. For it seems to me that philosophers and theologians immediately forgot that they were asking this question in relation to an ancient Biblical concept that is rooted in Biblical times – and they proceeded to give an account of what 'ordinary' means in terms of philosophical and/or scientific concepts that were either in vogue in their time or culture, or that had become determining influences on the way they, *qua* thinkers, understood the concept of 'ordinary'. And as they adopted a different sense of 'ordinary' from that found in the Biblical literature, their understanding of 'extraordinary' was correspondingly modified – which meant that they presented a distorted account of the concept of a miracle. By adopting either a philosophical or scientific system as a starting point for their analyses of the concept they were led to look in completely the wrong direction. Both the philosophical and the scientific may be described as anthropocentric points of departure and the preoccupation in these contexts, in the first instance, was with physical realities – with the world of objects and things, and with attempts at understanding or explaining the regularity of their behaviour in terms of some cause or causes. Both the concepts of regularity and causality were central in such essays, so that the 'ordinary' in such systems became identified with the 'regular' and with the regularity of causal connections. The 'pattern' of the behaviour of objects was understood exclusively in causal terms. And if the 'regular' is explained in a particular casual way, the 'irregular', the 'extraordinary', must also be explained in some contrasting causal way. So there was a constant preoccupation with providing causal explanations for everything.

But if the talk about miracles is correctly orientated within a religious understanding of the world, then the preoccupation of the religious believer is also very different. There is no attempt at philosophising here – not in Biblical times anyway. And there is no interest either in explaining nature. This is a theocentric world, a world in which God is understood to be at the heart of everything, including the natural world. 'The heavens tell out the glory of God, the vault of heaven reveals his handiwork.'[14] 'Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow and reap and store in barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them... Consider how the lilies grow in the fields...'[15] The language here is not one of explanation, or of understanding objects, and causal connections, but of wonder, praise, adoration and thanksgiving. In its logic this language is much closer to the grammar of aesthetic judgments than it is to anything like the language of causal explanation. The language of worship is closely connected with the recognition that the creation is full of beauty. And part of this beauty is reflected in its order, its regularity. So even the regular is perceived as divine. It is God's world and there is a recognition of its goodness and there is gratitude for it. If there were an instance of something that is perceived as an extraordinary phenomenon or event, something different from how things normally are, the religious question is not, 'How is this thing to be explained?' but rather, 'Is this a sign?' or 'Is God saying something?' In this religious world, the paramount consideration is 'What is the will of God?' There might be some initial natural curiosity with the unusual phenomenon, but that gives way immediately to a religious response as the event is understood to be a sign from God.

Consider, in contrast, the kind of account of the miraculous that we have in Aquinas.[16] Here we have a deeply religious man whose view of the world was God-centred. But unfortunately, his point of departure for his analysis of the concept of a miracle had already shifted from a theocentric understanding of the natural world to an Aristotelian conception. Following Aristotle, Aquinas accepted that every object belongs to a kind, and each kind has its own nature. An object will act or react to another object according to its own nature, according to one or more of its four causes, and this is what 'ordinary' behaviour meant in that system. Not to react according to its own nature was what was meant by 'extraordinary'. If something does not react according to its own nature, this may be explained, according to Aquinas, in terms of the borrowed Aristotelian notion of a First Cause. It all has to do with causality, and Aquinas was not embarrassed to identify 'the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob' of the Hebrew/Christian faith with Aristotle's theoretical construct! But how is it that such an identity can be established? What is the criterion of sameness here? Aristotle created the notion of a First Cause in an attempt to resolve a problem of his own making – the problem of the incompatibility of believing simultaneously that matter is both perishable and eternal. For if matter has always been in existence, and is by nature perishable, how is it that it has not ceased to exist? Aristotle's answer was to

postulate the existence of an imperishable First Cause which was co-eternal with substance and which sustained matter in existence. But if either of Aristotle's premises is false, the belief in a First Cause becomes wholly dispensable. Indeed, the whole concept becomes empty. In the modern world, the belief in 'the indestructibility of matter' was, for well over a century, an axiom of science. So Aristotle's theoretical construct could be said to have been invalidated. The fact that, at present, scientists no longer believe in the indestructibility of matter does not persuade me to bow down in worship to the sun – where matter is converted to the energy that causally sustains our lives – no more than one would have been persuaded to worship Aristotle's intellectual construct. More importantly, even if there was nothing at fault with Aristotle's novel attempt at understanding natural phenomena in terms of various kinds of causes, the mistake was in adopting such a framework to analyse the notion of the miraculous. For the framework was restrictive, blinding the analyst to other and different possibilities, and, at worst, distorting the whole understanding of the theological concept under scrutiny. Aristotle's framework has to do with the natural world, with material objects in particular – their form, their material nature, their interaction with each other, and their various ends or functions. If then a move is made towards an analysis of the religious notion of a miracle within such a framework, it is inevitable that the religious notion will be, in some way, understood side by side with the analysis of material objects – presupposing that we are still in the same world and participating in the same unified discourse. So if we speak of natural changes in terms of efficient causes, then inevitably because to the constraints of the framework, we are led to speak of the miraculous also in terms of causes – even if such causes are special causes with novel names such as a First Cause or a supernatural cause. But we do not come across such notions at all in the Hebrew/Christian scriptures, and when they speak of miracles we do not find there anything remotely similar to either a causal theory or causal explanation. Aristotle's metaphysics and the language of scripture do not belong to the same world.

In only slightly different terminology, a similar kind of account is given by Leibniz. He understood the conception of the ordinary in terms of the novel scientific conception of 'the laws of nature'. For Leibniz, things, objects, ordinarily follow the laws which God has given them. These are natural laws. Hence, if this is what is meant by 'ordinary', then an account of the extraordinary, the miraculous, must be in terms of an event in which, in some sense, those laws are not followed, and that as a result of divine intervention. And this is Leibniz's reason for insisting that we ought to sustain 'an infinite difference' between the ordinary and extraordinary. And in his terminology the God of faith has become another intellectual construct and here named 'Infinite Substance'![17]

Hume's language is inevitably different from that of both Aquinas and Leibniz. The 'ordinary', in this particular context, is expressed by Hume in

terms of 'uniform experience'. For an event to be called a miracle it must then be different from this 'uniform experience'. On the surface, it would appear that my disagreement with Hume would be less than it is with the other two philosophers. For the expression 'uniform experience' does not *prima facie* appear to belong to either a developed philosophical system or to the technical language of science. But this is highly misleading for this expression in Hume's epistemology is of profound philosophical significance. It is an expression that reflects his views, and indeed scepticism, about the strength of the necessity that is implied by the expression 'a law of nature'. For Hume, a law of nature merely reflects our consciousness of the regularity with which one sensation follows another. We cannot even say, according to Hume, that there is a casual connection between A and B, although B regularly follows A. What is surprising is that, in the miracles context, Hume, the alleged sceptic, appears to have so much confidence in the regularity of psychological connections as to make it the basis of an argument for denying the possibility of the miraculous![18] That, at least, is how things should be. However, there are complexities. It appears impossible to reconcile on the one hand, the 'uniform experience' of Hume's epistemological scepticism and subjectivity with, on the other hand, the 'uniform experience' of the whole public domain which he wished to use as evidence against the possibility of miracles. The truth is that Hume has multiple criteria of 'ordinary', which are inconsistent with each other, and which he severally applied as it suited him.

Numerous pseudo-theological problems have ensued as a consequence of the failure of traditional analysts of the concept of a miracle to appreciate the depth-grammar of Biblical language. For instance, it is sometimes claimed that many Biblical events that were once deemed to be miracles, may no longer be regarded as miracles since modern science can provide satisfactory naturalistic explanations of these events. And if there are 'natural' explanations say, in terms of efficient or secondary causes, then as Aquinas maintained, looking for explanations in terms of divine activity would be superfluous. Such a view is often put forward in relation to what allegedly happened to the famous walls of Jericho in Joshua's day.[19] The stamping of the soldier's feet, together with the loud shout, coincided with the walls' natural frequency of oscillation. So the walls fell down. But this kind of 'explanation' does an injustice with the Biblical narrative. For in those scriptures the narrative is presented as a challenge to the faith and obedience of God's people. They are told days in advance of the occurrence that, provided they are obedient, the walls would tumble. Is it contended by the believer in the naturalistic explanation that the prophet also knew the mechanics of oscillating bodies and that he made an exact calculation of the natural frequency of the oscillation of these walls? That can hardly be the case. In the religious context, the question of 'How did it happen?' simply does not arise. The story is about the triumph of faith and of the people's obedience

to God, and to read the story as a scientific curiosity is to misunderstand its meaning.

Other controversies that once raged in theological circles are of the same kind. As a consequence of the singular preoccupation with understanding the regularity of nature in terms of natural laws, the inevitable questions that arose were: 'Does God contradict himself, by transgressing his own laws of nature? Or is the miraculous an event that is, in some mysterious sense, "beyond" God-given natural laws?' (Of course, the issue is partly confused as it is here assumed that the concept of 'law' as it is used in the expression 'natural law', is akin to the meaning of 'law' when we refer to 'criminal law' that we are able to transgress.) From St Augustine onwards, there has hardly been a thesis on the miraculous that has not raised these issues and in these terms. Were it appreciated that the talk about 'natural laws' has to do with our explanatory conceptualising about the uniformity of nature, and that such an explanatory methodology is logically inappropriate in the religious context, the whole issue of whether God does or does not break his laws would disappear. It would become a pseudo-issue that arises only because we insist that an account of the miraculous must be understood and explained in some causal or super-casual terms.

Hume's attempt at discrediting miracles represents the most extreme form of scepticism, and it is his kind of argument that became the most common and forceful of all in modern times. It is the view that no miracle stories can be true for they contravene our scientific understanding of the world. Nothing can happen contrary to the laws of nature. 'A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle from the nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.'[20] However, this kind of argument, echoed so loudly by the Logical Positivists in the last century, has, in more recent decades, lost much of its credibility as it is perceived as an expression of a discredited scientism. There is, nowadays, less faith in the infallibility and immutability of science and, a greater consciousness of the limitations of scientific explanations. Science investigates causal connections; but much of what happens in both the natural world and in the human realm, falls outside the scope of causal explanation. In the natural and human worlds there are chance-occurrences that are not causally governed. Human activities are largely reasoned activities that are not causal in character. There is, of course, a wide range of human actions that is within the realm of causality and which may be investigated scientifically. But when we act rationally, part of the meaning of such a description is that we are able, if challenged, to provide reasons for such actions. Reasoned actions, as opposed to caused behaviour, are inextricably connected with such concepts as motives and intentions. Slipping on a banana skin is not an intended action – unless, say, someone is acting in a play! Indeed, to talk of an intended action is, in most cases, to rule out causal explanations altogether.

It may then be asked: 'If miracles do not belong to the realm of causality, do they belong to the realm of chance?' Some chance-occurrences or coincidences may be described as extraordinary, so could such events be properly classed as miracles? Two problems arise immediately. First, it is recognised that not all coincidences are extraordinary coincidences, and hence a further criterion would be necessary to differentiate between the two kinds of coincidences. A criterion which seems to readily offer itself is that of rarity. Such a concept, however, is a relative notion in the sense that it may be asked 'How rare?' And at what point on a sliding scale of rarity do we arrive at the miraculous? Part of the problem here is that rarity is closely connected with the mathematical notion of probability – which is in turn connected with the notion of predictability. But to be able to say that miracles are in some ways 'predictable' is to make nonsense of the concept of a miracle. Secondly, if, in a given context, there will be a deep sense that some extraordinary coincidence has occurred, this, on its own would never be a sufficient condition to call the occurrence a miracle (except in a secular sense) – unless the event was perceived to be religiously significant. But once the event was seen as religiously significant it would instantly cease to be a coincidence.

Yet, some recent thinkers, including Swinburne[21] and Holland[22], have thought that it is religiously quite legitimate to talk of the extraordinary chance-occurrence as a miracle. But this is as much of a conceptual confusion as to think of a miracle in terms of causality. There is no such thing as a chance-occurrence or a coincidence in the language of faith. There are no accidents in God's world! This does not mean that the religious believer has no notion of chance, but if she sees an event as a chance-occurrence, that means that that event does not have for her any religious significance – say, as a sign from God. Hence the notion of a coincidence and that of a miracle are mutually exclusive. They logically belong to different discourses. It is conceptually confused to read Biblical narratives as coincidences. To do so would be tantamount to denying their spiritual worth and reality, to misconstrue them through religious unbelief. For instance, suppose that one read the story of the salvation of the infant Moses in such a way – as a concatenation of coincidences. What a coincidence it was that Miriam placed the infant in the reeds precisely where Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe! What a coincidence that the Egyptian princess had such a maternal urge that she had to adopt this baby as her own! How remarkable that this infant was given every privilege, social and educational, that would prepare him to be the future leader and champion of his people![23] Such a reading of the events is, in religious terms, nothing short of blasphemy. To understand these stories is to believe that God was in these events.

If we are to give an account of the Biblical notion of miracles, we must look in an entirely different direction for the meaning of 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' from the way philosophers have traditionally interpreted these terms within their own systems. We must look at how these concepts,

or their closest parallels, were used in Biblical literature, and for a more primitive and permanent sense of the distinction between what is ordinary and extraordinary. Not that the concept of a miracle, in Biblical parlance, is at all easily connected with this distinction. For we look in vain for the concepts 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' in the scriptures. (In King James's Authorised Version of the Bible, the word 'ordinary' only appears once, and 'extraordinary does not appear at all.[24]) The closest concept to 'extraordinary' in the New Testament is 'τέρας' (teras) which is normally translated 'a wonder'. However, significantly in this religious context, this concept never appears on its own in the New Testament, but only in conjunction with 'σημεῖον' – 'σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα' – 'signs and wonders'. ('σημεῖον' is variously translated as 'sign' or 'miracle' – 'It is a wicked, godless generation that asks for a sign.' [25]; 'Jews call for miracles',[26] where 'σημεῖον' is used in both of these contexts. 'σημεῖον' is also sometimes translated as 'wonder' or 'portent' as, for instance, in 'Next appeared a great portent from heaven.[27]) The conjunction of the two concepts indicates that the wonder-evoking phenomenon or event was simultaneously perceived as a sign with religious significance. (A sign, of course, was not of necessity a wonder or a miracle. Circumcision was a sign that someone was a descendant of Abraham. A kiss was used as a sign by Judas to identify Jesus in Gethsemane.) And when such events were perceived as such, the reaction was one of holy fear or awe or amazement. 'And a great awe fell upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these events; and many remarkable and wonderful things (σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα πολλὰ) took place among the people at the hands of the apostles.'[28]

Often, this kind of wonder, amazement or astonishment may be a primitive reaction to occurrences that were perceived to be unusual or irregular. There is a primitive, animal awareness of the regularity of the world, and an equally primitive reaction of wonder, awe, and often fear, to the irregular or extraordinary. These are shared reactions common to all humanity. There are some things to which we all react in the same way. Shylock, the Jew, may have overstated the case in his famous justification for seeking revenge, but there is a large measure of truth in his claim. Emphasising his common humanity, Shylock asks, 'Hath not a Jew eyes, hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? . . . if you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? . . .'[29] Of course, there can be a wide variety of reactions too, to the same object or event or experience. If I saw an unusual creature, my natural reaction may be one of terror, whereas a child in another place or culture might even play with such a creature without any fear. Language is often crucial in contexts where there are different reactions to the same, say, object or experience. I saw a creature of terror; the child saw a pet. There is a distinction, not recognised in the above quotation from Shakespeare, between primitive, pre-linguistic reactions on the one hand, and learnt reactions on the other.

Learnt reactions are culturally based. Nevertheless, although it is of cardinal importance in many contexts to recognise differences in reactions, it is equally important to note what is common or shared by humanity. In so many ways the world is the same for all, at all times and in all places. Otherwise, how is it possible for us to read ancient texts which refer to events that allegedly took place thousands of years ago, in very different cultures, and empathise with the people in those narratives? We may share the same wonder, awe, fear or sense of being baffled. What is remarkable is that stories of miracles which are connected with incidents in the life of the early Hebrew people, are still as awe-inspiring, baffling or amazing to us today as they were then to those distant Hebrews. Moses lived over three thousand years ago and he allegedly performed a number of miracles. He turned a rod into a serpent and a serpent into a rod.[30] He turned water from the Nile into blood.[31] A serpent is a serpent and a rod is a rod. Water is water and blood is blood. It does not matter to what time or culture one might belong to, to turn a rod into a serpent or water into blood, can only be perceived as extraordinary. Whatever the religious significance of these signs were, these events were certainly extraordinary. And there is a permanence here in the senses 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' which are connected with both the commonness of the objects referred to – rod, serpent, water and blood in these cases – and a primitive awareness of how objects such as these regularly behave. Such an awareness may also be called 'primitive' in the sense that it does not depend on any intellectual attempt, either philosophical or scientific to *give an account* of that regularity or normality. It is an awareness that goes hand in hand with the phenomenological use of language. The sun rises and sets, and the seasons come in their time. Human beings have always been aware of such regularity, and have spoken in such phenomenological terms, and they have conducted their lives in accordance with these certainties. But it is one thing to be aware of the uniformity or regularity of natural phenomena. It is quite another thing to provide some explanations for such phenomena either in terms of philosophy or science. What we have in Biblical literature is a conception of the miraculous that is dependent solely and wholly on an awareness of a uniformity that is not dependent on any explanatory language. And if the whole notion of understanding the regularity of nature in explanatory terms is absent in Biblical language, then it may be soundly concluded that any attempt at analysing the extraordinary in explanatory terms is confused. Indeed, the whole conception of *explaining* the miraculous phenomenon is self-contradictory.

So far it has been argued that, while the concept of extra-ordinariness is one of the commonest characteristics of some types of miracles, it is a conceptual error to think of that extra-ordinariness in either causal or in terms of coincidences. But we need to go in a different direction if we are to destroy the essentialist case that insists that extra-ordinariness *must* be a criterion of the miraculous. So are there events that are not in any way

extraordinary and yet which are appropriately called 'miracles'? It is certainly the case that, in Biblical times, people believed that God could and did reveal his will in and through ordinary experiences. Think, for instance, of the ordinary human experience of dreaming and the significance of some dreams in Biblical literature. From the earliest patriarchal narratives, dreams play a crucial role. Jacob had a dream at Bethel and was transformed by it.[32] Joseph was named 'the dreamer' and there would be no stories about his successes in Egypt were it not for the fact that he, and his royal contemporaries, 'believed in' dreams![33] His namesake in the New Testament took flight to Egypt, to save the infant Jesus from Herod's sword, as a result of a dream – and, in the same context, the magi were warned in a dream to go home on another way.[34] In a very real sense, we do not understand these occurrences. We speak of dreams, of good or pleasant or bad dreams, but not of religious dreams. Dreams are no longer perceived of as vehicles of divine instruction or revelation. Even if a devout believer today claimed that God had spoken to him in a dream, the reaction would be one of incredulity, and perhaps an accompanying suspicion of an imbalance of mind. But things were very different in Biblical times. And who would venture to maintain that it is inappropriate or meaningless to speak of those most ordinary Biblical events as miraculous?

Swinburne's second and third essential criteria of a miracle is that a miracle has to be the work of a god, and has to have religious significance.[35] It seems odd that these appear as distinct and separate criteria – as if it were possible for an event to satisfy the first criterion but not the second. If that were the case, the inevitable question is: What kind of an action could possibly be brought about by a god that did not have religious significance? What kind of a god did Swinburne have in mind? It is not part of the meaning of the expression, 'God did it', that the event could not be seen as a triviality or an event without religious significance?

However, Swinburne has in mind the Christian God (and the God of the Hebrews and Muslims too – although Swinburne appears to be wholly insensitive to the complexity of the notion of 'the same God'). Miracles can only be wrought by God and by his agents through God's power. This is what Swinburne maintains. But again, even within the parameters of scriptures, the concept of a miracle is much broader than that which Swinburne decrees. And how different this is from Kant's view. Kant certainly was not one who espoused miracles, but he understood quite clearly that even within his own religious tradition there was talk of all sorts of miracles performed by all sorts of agents – so that there is no necessary connection between the concept of a miracle and the concept of a god. Kant wrote,

> And we can think of either *theistic* or *demonic* miracles – the latter being divided into *angelic* miracles (miracles of good spirits) and *satanic* miracles (miracles of evil spirits) . . .[36]

Kant's claim may be supported by a whole range of Biblical references, and it is interesting that a man of his intellectual calibre, and at that time, should adhere so closely to Biblical language. In that early reference in a Hebrew law book to the false prophet's ability to correctly predict the future, there is an indication that non-natural powers are not restricted to the divine. And indeed, in the New Testament there are numerous warnings against deception by 'false' believers. Even in the Sermon on the Mount it is said the on the day of judgement some will claim to have prophesied in God's name and performed miracles in his name, but these 'followers' of Christ were condemned as 'workers of iniquity'.[37] And again, in the Gospels, believers are warned of coming impostors claiming to be messiahs, and that these will perform 'signs and wonders' and deceive the very elect.[38] It seems clear from these references that this second criterion of Swinburne is not met in these instances. In one of her lesser works, *A Letter to a Priest*, Simone Weil briefly discusses the issue of miracles and states that 'miracles themselves prove nothing; they themselves need proving'.[39] In other words, there may be all sorts of signs and wonders, so that signs need to be spiritually authenticated.

In the context of this second criterion of a miracle, Swinburne uses the expression 'brought about by', which is in need of further elucidation. Swinburne could easily have used the expression 'caused by' here. He is in the same tradition as his predecessors who have thought of God as some Super-cause. But to say that God causes his sun to rise on the just and the unjust is not to give an explanation of the rising of the sun, but is rather an expression of the impartial goodness of God. If someone says that the car accident was caused by worn tyres, then this kind of claim can be verified by experimental evidence. But do we look for evidence and verification for the claim that God causes the sun to rise? Science is preoccupied with the question of how things occur, and will justify its explanations by experimental proofs. But once an event is perceived as a miracle, the question of how it happened becomes both irrelevant and irreverent.

But is the claim that God is not a Super-cause a denial of the reality of God? When the religious believer says that something is a miracle, or says that God was in the event, or more specifically, that God *did* something, is this not to think of God as a cause? Part of the problem is that talking about causes is conceptually connected with the talk about effects. So if the believer speaks of a miraculous change, what can be seen in terms of causality is merely the effect. From the effect it is inferred that there must be a cause – and, in this case, it is God. But the epistemological question is not irrelevant in this connection. Suppose a justification is required for making this inference, how is it shown that God is the cause? There is no observable entity here as we have in the normal talk about causes. Why are there ripples in the water? A stone was thrown into it. In the case of calling an event a miracle, all there is, is an event, a change. Only the event, the change, is public. To call it a miracle is a confession of faith. It is to see God in the event, and once the event is

seen as such, the causal issue evaporates. The reality of God is in the perception of the event as a miracle. The reality of God in that act of faith. The person who does not see God in the event is the one who denies the reality of God.

Finally, Swinburne's third criterion of a miracle is that a miracle must be an event that is of 'religious significance'. What Swinburne means by this is that the event in question must not be trivial, but must be in tune with the theology that determines that a certain event is miraculous – which is exactly the point made earlier in criticism of Swinburne when he appears to neglect this issue in conjunction with the idea of the miracles being performed by a god. Indeed, in a religious context, the point is of paramount importance. For if a miracle is a sign, then a sign is significant only in a determinate context. And it is theology that provides that context. Hence, however remarkable an event may be, however inexplicable or incomprehensible, unless that event is in character with the notion of the divine from whom the sign is supposed to have originated, then it does not make sense to claim that it is a sign from God.

In a recently published correspondence on miracles between Rush Rhees and a devout Catholic and former student of Wittgenstein, Dr Drury of Dublin, Rhees underlines this point in relation to the miracles of Jesus. There he states that it is important to see these wonderful deeds as the deeds of Jesus – and they would not be the same if another person had fulfilled them. The miracles of Jesus must be seen as emanating from him – as his virtue. And it is because of this harmony between character and action that his miracles may be said to be religiously significant.

'I can only guess that the early Christians found the miracles of Jesus wrought so entirely congruent with the divinity of his person or his character as they had known it, that mentioning the miracles seemed the most natural way to delineate his character, or show the divinity of his person.' (Something like a 'physiognomy' in the eighteenth-century sense.)[40]

In this kind of context, it has been emphasised that miracles are wonderful events but creative events, in the sense that they brought blessings or benefits to those who are affected by them. And this sense of 'good fortune' is one of the principal elements in the religious conception of a miracle that is clearly present in the secular use of the term. In secular parlance, whatever is regarded as a miracle is always deemed to have a good outcome. No tragedy may be regarded as a miracle. However, in Biblical literature there are instances of what appear to be miracles – acts of God – the outcomes of which are not favourable to those affected. There is, for instance, the Gospel narrative about Jesus cursing the fig tree.[41] The disciples were amazed. And what happened in the case of Ananias and Sapphira?[42] Is that an example of a miracle? If we receive good from the Lord, shall we not receive evil also?[43]

While conceding then that the element of extra-ordinariness is often present in the concept of a miracle, it is also perceived that there are classes of events, including dreams, which do not conform with this essentialist criterion. It is also the case that there are miracles which are not attributed

to God, and there are wonders which have no positive religious significance. Hence, the case against the essentialist is complete, with each allegedly essential criterion shown to be inessential. This is not surprising, for concepts, except in limited contexts, have a much more fluid character than what the formalist is prepared to admit.

In this second part of the chapter, I wish to make some observations on a relatively recent philosophical discussion in which the concept of a miracle has been given some attention. The discussion was initiated by Prof. R.F. Holland, who published a paper in 1965 entitled *The Miraculous*.[44] Initially, there was little reaction to this paper which was, in some respects, pretty novel and radical in its thinking. However, in 1982, the late Prof. Peter Winch gave a lecture entitled, *Ceasing to Exist* to the British Academy.[45] That lecture, according to Winch's own subsequent testimony, had nothing to do with either Holland's earlier paper or with the concept of a miracle. 'I did not regard my argument as a positive contribution to the philosophy of religion in general or to an elucidation of the concept of a miracle in particular.'[46] However, in 1988, Holland published a second paper, entitled *Lusus Naturae*,[47] in which he considered again, in the light of Winch's lecture, certain issues that he had previously raised in his earlier paper. Winch's direct response to Holland was made at this conference, back in 1994, in a paper entitled, *Asking too many questions*.[48] Meanwhile, other philosophers had, or were, contributing to an ongoing discussion on these issues that had been raised, including the late Prof. Norman Malcolm,[49] Prof.'s D.Z. Phillips[50] and Anthony Palmer,[51] H.O. Mounce[52] and others. Obviously, it is beyond the range of this chapter to comment on all these contributions but I would like to take the opportunity to make some comments on the issues involved.

Although there is much that is commendable in Holland's initial paper on the miraculous, it contains some weaknesses. Holland maintains that there are two (only two?) distinct conceptions of the miraculous which he calls 'the contingency' concept and 'the violation' concept.[53] Both types of miracles are, however, characterised by the element of extra-ordinariness and thus Holland too makes this feature an essential element in the conception of the miraculous. Reservations have already been expressed about talking of coincidences as miracles. But this does not mean that what is, for the religious unbeliever, merely a coincidence, cannot be understood by the religious believer as a miracle. What is logically a confusion is to think of the event simultaneously in terms of religious belief and unbelief. In a profound sense, the religious believer and unbeliever do not see the same event. But in the light of the traditional writings on miracles, it is to Holland's great credit that he does recognise that the extra-ordinariness of the contingency concept of a miracle is not essentially connected with causality at all. Yet while recognising the importance of Holland's contingency concept of a miracle, I have some further reservations about aspects of Holland's account

of it. Holland is correct in his claim that an event – such as the one he describes in his paper of a train coming to rest a few feet from a child playing on the railway crossing – may be seen differently by the religious believer from the way the unbeliever sees the event. The child's 'mother thanks God for the miracle; which she never ceases to think of as such although, as she in due course learns, there was nothing supernatural about the manner in which the brakes of the train came to be applied'.[54] The religious unbeliever may be astonished and grateful at such a fortuitous outcome, but does not see the event as a miracle but as a remarkable series of coincidences. But Holland's account does involve the problem referred to earlier when thinking of chance-occurrences as miracles. How does the religious believer differentiate between a chance-occurrence that is a miracle and one that is not? Holland's attempted reply is woefully inadequate. 'The significance of some coincidences as opposed to others arises from their relation to human needs and hopes and fears, their effects for good or ill upon our lives.'[55] This leads Holland to state 'So we speak of our luck (fortune, fate, etc.). And the kind of thing that, outside religion, we call luck is in religious parlance the grace of God or a miracle of God.' [56] And he proceeds to claim 'that whatever happens by God's grace or by a miracle *is* something for which God is thanked or thankable...'[57] But this will not do. There is a confusion here between two theological concepts which are mistakenly conflated in Holland's account, namely, the idea of what happens by 'the grace of God' and 'a miracle'. The religious believer sees everything as a gift from God, and is thus by grace of God and to be thanked for – but everything is not a miracle. The italicised 'is' in the quotation may only be properly used as the 'is' of predication, but Holland wrongly makes it an 'is' of identity – in which case Holland is clearly wrong. The believer will thank God for ordinary blessings such as her daily bread, and there is nothing miraculous, at least under normal circumstances, about a loaf being on the table. Holland provides no criterion whatsoever to differentiate between what is miraculous and what is not. His attempted answer makes the miraculous so broad as to be meaningless. So we may ask the question: does the mother of the child in Holland's story correctly use the term 'miracle'? Or is it the case that Holland has created a wonderful chance-story and put a secular use of the term 'miracle' in the mother's mouth?

Holland's story is incomplete and, as such, we cannot answer our question. For although the salvation of the child is wonderful and it is religiously proper that the mother should thank God for his goodness, there is an unfortunate gratuitousness that characterises the whole brief narrative. In order to call the event a miracle, more needs to be said, particularly in terms of the consequences of the belief that it was a miracle, in the lives of those concerned – mother, child and those connected with the event. For, theologically, miracles are never fortuitous chance-occurrences. To see an event as miraculous is to see it relative to the *purposes* of God. And the theological problem with Holland's narrative is the gratuitous character of the child's

salvation, with the unfortunate and theologically inadmissible accompanying implication that the grace of God is partial.

However, it was the way in which Holland dealt with his second conception of the miraculous that has been at the centre of the later controversy. Unhappy with the traditional idea of miracles being branded as 'violations of natural laws', Holland introduced the novel expressions, 'a contradiction in our experience' and 'a conflict of certainties' to elucidate this concept of the miraculous. Not that Holland saw either of these descriptions as adequate descriptions of a miracle, but any event that did fit these descriptions might be a candidate for being a miracle. In other words, each of these expressions again represents a necessary condition but not a sufficient condition for a particular use of the concept. What Holland presents in this context is a novel way of defining extra-ordinariness. It is as if it were said: 'This is the way we speak and understand things, this is the way we use these concepts. But this extraordinary event makes nonsense of the way we speak, is offensive to our understanding, and deprives our concepts of their normal meaning.' So here again, there is no necessary connection between Holland's novel definition and scientific language. However primitive our notion of regularity is, and however primitive our reactions are to irregular phenomena, what we are dealing with here is human experience and the ways our concepts are related to such experiences. So even Moses might have asked questions such as 'Am I seeing things? Is that real fire? How is it that the bush is not consumed?' 'Moses noticed that, although the bush was on fire, it was not being burnt up; so he said to himself "I must go across to see this wonderful sight. Why does not the bush burn away?"'[58] Such questions do no presuppose any kind of theory regarding the nature of combustion. They may be based on simple, uncomplicated observations of what normally happens. In this case, that fire burns. Here then, in Holland's language, is a contradiction in Moses' experience. He knows from experience that fire burns. Now he sees a fire and yet it does not burn the bush. In terms of Wittgenstein's concept of 'certainties', it is a certainty that fire burns. That is, if something does not burn, then, by definition, it is not fire. Yet Moses is certain of what he sees, that it is a bush, and that there is a fire in the bush, but the bush is not consumed. It is to this point that Holland developed his 'violation conception' of a miracle in his first paper.

Winch's lecture to the British Academy was, it seems to me, wholly on the technical logical issue of the condition(s) of intelligibility. The way he dealt with this issue in that lecture involved a consideration of an alleged phenomenon that appeared to threaten intelligibility – and that, at least *prima facie*, not in a dissimilar way to that in which Holland had thought that certain phenomena could be offensive to our understanding. Winch considered Isaac Bashevis Singer's story,[59] within a story, which related of the loss of a garden shed, which simply vanished without trace or explanation. The Zelig family's garden shed had been an integral part of their life but,

quite inexplicably one morning, the shed had simply disappeared without any apparent cause and without trace. Winch contends that although we understand this kind of language in a fictional context, we would not be able to understand *what was being said* if someone claimed that she was reporting such an event in real life. Winch's argument is that our concepts belong to 'the stream of life' and so form a kind of unity. The way we speak and think about physical objects logically does not allow us to speak of such objects as sheds, homes, cars, and so on – objects that are not fleeting and have a degree of permanence – simply vanishing into thin air. Of course, as Malcolm pointed out, we do speak of some things vanishing – such as a ship disappearing over the horizon, or a squirrel vanishing in the tree top or a mouse into a hole. But such uses of 'vanishing' or 'disappearing' do 'not imply that the ship, squirrel, or mouse ceased to exist.'[60] However, we do not speak of sheds vanishing in the sense of ceasing to exist – at least not without an explanation, causal or otherwise, such that the shed was destroyed by fire or a tornado, or that it was deliberately dismantled. And who can doubt Winch's central claim? If a valuable object were misplaced it is a natural reaction to search the whole place for the missing object – exactly like the woman in the New Testament parable. 'If a woman has ten silver pieces and loses one of them, does she not light the lamp, sweep out the house, and look in every corner till she has found it?'[61] Such a reaction, shared by all, is based upon the *logical* certainty that such objects do not vanish. 'Logical' in the sense that it is contradictory, and hence unintelligible, against 'the stream of life' as it were, to speak of vanishing objects. There is a regularity in the way we experience physical objects and interact with them, and this regularity is reflected in the way we use concepts in connection with such objects. Indeed, this kind of regularity is a precondition of intelligibility. If this were not the case, then our concepts would lose their stability, and meaning and understanding would be impossible. Winch's case appears to be watertight.

It is obvious how Winch's lecture impinges upon Holland's paper on miracles. Winch, like Holland, makes a great deal of this conception of regularity or uniformity and the way our concepts have meaning because of this uniformity. Both accept the conception of 'the stream of life' in which concepts have a shared meaning. But Holland's seems much more open-minded about the possibility of the 'impossible' occurring. He seems to argue that even though concepts are used in particular ways which reflect the regularity of the world or the way we perceive and speak of the world, this does not, perhaps cannot, preclude occurrences which contravene this regularity. Not that we can have things such as round squares, which involve self-contradiction, but that it is possible to have undeniable public experiences, experiences that are indubitable, that amount to violations of the ways our concepts are used. The 'impossible', as it were, can and does happen. In terms of 'the stream of life', Holland maintains that if the 'impossible' happens, that a single occurrence, that one pebble, does not disrupt the stream. Or, if we confronted

the impossible, we might react to the baffling experience in one of several ways, as Malcolm suggests.[62] We might question our memory – for memory is an integral part of the steam of life. We might simply carry on as usual, and reserve judgement about what had happened. Perhaps one might simply learn to live with the inexplicable experience, but without one's world-view being fundamentally disrupted. But it is also just possible that one might even go crazy!

What then is the root of the difference between Holland and Winch, and where does the concept of a miracle enter into all this? I do not think that there is anything like a huge chasm between their respective standpoints. This may be illustrated by looking at Holland's criticism of Anscombe in his *Lusus Naturae* paper. There, Holland criticises Anscombe for using the concept 'turning' 'in an absolute sense' – as if the concept had a meaning quite independently of any context.[63] Anscombe had spoken of the possibility of a piece of phosphorus turning into a little bird or turning into a piece of bread.[64] Such uses, Holland maintains, are in 'a quasi-speculative mode'. Anscombe, he argued, 'encloses' the concepts 'in a theoretical setting – whereas they logically require the surrounds of a further fiction'.[65] Now, this it seems to me, is almost identical to the criticism that Winch in his *Asking too many questions* makes of Holland. Winch claims that Holland's 'impossible occurrences' are incapable of being understood because the concepts used, in the supposed descriptions of such events, have been emptied of meaning. 'Holland represents the ideas of existence, coming into existence and ceasing to exist as having what I have called an autonomous, independent sense.' Winch argues that if something is 'really conceptually impossible, then we have no idea of what we are talking about and *a fortiori* no idea what it is the occurrence of which we are trying to say is empirically certain'.[66]

The disagreement between Holland and Winch is connected with the problematic conception of the unity of language. I say 'problematic' because it seems to me that this notion is at the root of a great deal of confusion – and that not only in the case of Holland and Winch. It is nowhere more pronounced than in Anthony Palmer's contribution to this discussion. When Palmer reviewed the book *Value and Understanding: Essays for Peter Winch* for the journal *Philosophical Investigations*[67] he made the claim that if there were multiple criteria of intelligibility it would not be possible to speak of the unity of language or the unity of intelligibility at all. He repeated this claim in a paper entitled, 'Violations of Nature and Conditions of Sense', given at this particular conference in 1993 when he warned against advocating multiple criteria of intelligibility on the grounds 'that as soon as we provide more than one criterion of intelligibility or conditions of sense the possibility of a conflict of criteria or conditions arises . . .'[68] In my view, Palmer is wholly mistaken in his interpretation of Wittgenstein. It seems to me that there is no point in taking about 'language games' unless this expression is meant to imply that there are multiple criteria of intelligibility. It would require

another paper to refute Palmer's interpretation of Wittgenstein, but it is clear that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein argued that language is intelligible because it performed one function – that of picturing reality – while in the *Investigations* language is meaningful because of its multiple relation with an indeterminate and changing diversity of practices. And it is the reality of these practices that determines what can and what cannot be said – that is, that provide the conditions of intelligibility.

If then we speak of multiple criteria of intelligibility, what are we to make of the concept of the unity of reality or the unity of understanding? One might be tempted to speak of the unity of one's own individual life. Insofar as the diverse practices belong to my life, they may be said to form a unity. And, going with this is the conviction that it is important to ensure that there are no contradictions in one's life, that one's life is free from internal inconsistencies. But this is an inadequate notion on its own, for there must be considerations outside of one's life to judge whether or not one's life is consistent. We need independent criteria to determine this. Is there a solution to the problem of unity to be found in moving from the unity of one's own life and understanding, to the public realm, and to speak of the unity of shared lives – which is connected with our shared use of concepts and language? But by doing so, we merely confront again the same problem of the diversity and complexity. It may be that, when we speak of the unity of language, perhaps the only thing that is possible to say is that language is about something and not about nothing. But this 'something' – our lives and practices, in all their variety, complexity and mutability – is so indeterminate that it is difficult to know what this unity of understanding amounts to. Indeed, our shared lives, our culture, appears so fragmented that it may be seriously questioned if it makes sense at all to speak of the unity of the whole in this context. And yet we know what it is to speak about this particular activity and that other activity and of how they are related to each other in some ways – sometimes formally, but mostly informally or contingently so. Imagine a simple story of an unmarried mother, who is financially dependent on her weekly State Giro cheque. The cheque has not arrived; she is in desperate financial straits. Her child is ill and needs to be taken to a doctor. Public transport is inadequate and there is no money to pay for a taxi. In desperation, she takes a neighbour's car without consent. She is involved in an accident. She was driving without insurance. The trouble mounts. She is prosecuted. Think of the magistrates deliberating about the case. Think of the discussion that took place between them. Think of the diversity and complexity of the concepts involved in this simple story. There are all sorts of concepts that relate to all sorts of institutions, moral, social, legal and which come together in the story in an *ad hoc* way. There is no essential or formal connection between them. Yet, in this case, so many considerations have a bearing on each other – informally, as it were.

Despite the difficulty in the whole conception of the unity of language it is readily appreciated why it is of such vital importance. For without this unity how can we guarantee that there is no inconsistency, no contradiction in our lives. It is not a coincidence that both Holland and Winch should be preoccupied with experiences and with alleged phenomena – in terms of the miraculous and of vanishing sheds – which appear to threaten this consistency. But, because of the obtuse and nebulous character of this notion of the unity of the whole, it is of little wonder that disagreements arise. But perhaps there is a false presupposition in both Holland and Winch about the unity of understanding. Perhaps we are again succumbing to a temptation to look for some *essence* of understanding, or some criterion or criteria laid down by philosophers to which all understanding must conform? Both writers make considerable use of Wittgenstein's phrase about the 'stream of life', the way we share common reactions and common activities and the way we speak about things. But this expression can be ambiguous for it suggests a uniformity, or patterns of life that are, as it were, laid down. It is as if our practices are set practices, like counting, or playing games with set rules, or as if our lives are conducted like a set method or experimental procedure in science. But Rush Rhees in the recently published work, *Wittgenstein and the possibility of discourse*[69] has taken us in a slightly different direction. Instead of talking in terms of the unity of language in terms of the unity of our culture or world-view, he merely speaks of the unity of discourse. And if we take the unity of discourse to be the measure of the unity of understanding, then discourses are much more varied and unpredictable, and more directly connected with specific practices. If it was Wittgenstein's error, according to Rhees, to speak of the unity of language in terms of a single language game, is it not equally an error to speak of the unity of language in terms of the unity of *everything* – every possible language game or every possible discourse? However, to speak of the unity of discourse is to discover a middle ground – the unity of the specific discussion that is taking place.

A discussion goes on in its own way. It does not have the unity of a formal argument. Nor is a discussion not like repeating lines as actors do. But one says one thing, another says another thing, and there is a further response, and so on. What is said by one is related to what has been said before. New ideas may be introduced. One participant in the discussion learns from the other. There is growth in understanding. But, of course, without a relationship between what is said and what happens in the practices in our lives, no discussion is possible. There cannot be a discussion about what is not.

Let us look, in the light of Rhees's understanding of the unity of language, at one aspect of the disagreement between Holland and Winch. Winch argued in 'Ceasing to exist' that the logical character of the concept 'exists' depends of the nature of the object that is said to exist. What it means to say that something exists is also conceptually related to the meaning of 'it

ceased to exist'. 'The sense of an existential assertion is not independent of what it is for something of the kind that is in question "to cease to exist".'[70] Hence, the existence of a shed is different from the existence of an aspirin. Holland denied this categorically. 'It is in my view a mistake to suggest that the senses of these existential assertions are different because the aspirin is soluble and the shed is not – or as Winch puts it, because "It dissolved in a tumbler of water" is conceptually inapplicable to a shed.'[71] But it seems that both thinkers are equally guilty of committing the same error – that of generalising – so that it is *never* the case that an aspirin and a shed can be spoken of in the same way. But sometimes they can and sometimes they cannot. Whether they can or cannot will depend on the nature of the discussion. In one discussion it will make sense to agree with Holland – and we may say that, in a particular discussion, the sense of 'existence' when talking of the aspirin is the same as the meaning of 'existence' when speaking of a shed. That is, we can ask the same questions about the location of both these objects, their shape, size, colour, hardness, and so on, *qua* physical objects or in what Holland calls 'the *Wirklichkeit* sense; that is to say, the sense in which to exist means to be individually present at some place in the world . . .'.[72] But in a different discussion, someone might say that she is better after taking the soluble aspirin. But such talk would have no sense in relation to a shed, as Winch correctly asserts. Hence, there are similarities of grammar and, equally, differences of grammar. We can say of the aspirin that it vanished in the water, but we cannot speak of the shed vanishing. If Rhees were followed, and we were merely to speak of the unity of a discussion, we may avoid the generalisations and recognise that what can be said, and what cannot be said, is particular to a discussion.

Discussions may have an informal unity. But discussions can come to an end without agreement. In any culture there is not only agreement but also disagreements – all sorts of disagreements in life, which are reflected in discussions. To this extent it may be possible to argue that there is no unity, that the life is not an unity. There is disharmony and tension. What is meaningful in some lives is meaningless in others. Nothing is more real. Not all understanding is shared. And we may have a discussion and reach a point when we say that there is no point in carrying on with the discussion. However, there is a distinction between disagreements on the one hand, and contradiction or inconsistency on the other hand. The concepts of contradiction and inconsistency both presuppose a common understanding. But disagreements may be of a different order and can be so deep that there is no sense in talking of the unity of language.

Finally to the question, is there an audience for miracles? The context will determine what force this question has, and also what we mean by a miracle. If by a miracle we mean, what this concept now commonly means in a secular context, something like 'a fortuitous contingency', then I suppose, there will always be an use made of this concept. If, however, we take the

concept of the miraculous in any one of it many religious senses and answer the question in the affirmative, that there is an audience for miracles, then that may be an expression of a believer's confidence in the permanence of the language that he uses. The believer is saying that talk about God will remain real. But it is also possible to have a religiously negative response to the question based on theological reasoning – that miracles are, for instance, trans-dispensational phenomena, and they are events which belong to specific periods when novel religious truths are introduced and need to be authenticated as divine. This, I suspect, is the one significant meaning of the concept of a miracle as a sign. But as such novel truths are infrequent in an established religion, then signs are equally infrequent. And there are plenty of Biblical references that are critical of those who constantly look for signs. As already cited, Jesus condemns as 'wicked' those who look for signs, and Paul is critical of his fellow countrymen 'who look for signs'. And it could be argued that once the novel truth has been accepted, once faith has reached maturity, believers do not have to look for signs, and that to do so indicates a belief which is closer to a superstition than it is to a genuine religious belief. This argument is parallel with that of Kant's who maintained that rational truth is evident and self-authenticating and does not need to be corroborated by the miraculous. 'If a moral religion . . . must be established . . . we betray a culpable degree of moral unbelief if we do not grant sufficient authority to duty's precepts . . . unless they are in addition authenticated through miracles.'[73] We may disagree with Kant's conception of rationality and the way he related religion (through his ethics) to his idea of rationality, but he is correct in his insistence that if something is already perceived to be the truth, that truth does not stand in need of further external corroboration. But here again one is thinking of miracles in terms of some extraordinary events that occur in the natural world. But there is another class of miracles that are not related to changes in the natural world, but rather with the lives of believers. Most Christian believers understand the whole process of their salvation – their justification and sanctification – in terms of the activity of the Holy Spirit in their lives. These are commonly referred to as 'miracles of grace' – although this is not to imply that other kinds of miracles are not also of grace. It is true that Aquinas denied that these should properly speaking be thought of as miracles. 'Creation, and the justification of the unrighteous, though done by God alone, are not, properly speaking, miracles, because they are not of a nature to proceed from any other cause; so they do not occur outside the order of nature, since they do not belong to the capacity of nature.'[74] We can dismiss this argument as it a consequence of Aquinas's adoption of a restrictive concept of a miracle. But to the extent the Holy Spirit is perceived to be at the heart of a Christian's salvation, it is difficult to see how any such a believer cannot but believe in the permanence of miracles of grace. Faith itself becomes a miracle.

In our society, there are those who believe that God is dead. If that became a common, shared belief, then talk of miracles, in a religious sense, could cease. Of course, a religious remnant might still say that the loss of this religious world-view is only indicative of the fact that people have turned away from God. But who would be so foolish as to pretend to know what the future holds and whether the religious perceptions of the world will persist? Such predictions lie outside the scope of philosophy.

## Notes

All Biblical references, except where otherwise indicated, are from The New English Bible.

1. Deuteronomy ch. 13 vv. 1–3. Although this book of Laws may have been written in the seventh century BC the laws may reflect much earlier beliefs and practices.
2. The sixth century BC prophet is said to be the first thorough-going monotheist who claimed that idols were merely created objects.
3. Ps. 24 v. 1.
4. Matthew ch. 4 vv. 8–10.
5. Ephesians ch. 2 v. 2.
6. Ephesians ch. 6 v. 12.
7. Ps. 145 v. 3.
8. Ps. 34 v. 3.
9. The book of Daniel and some individual Psalms may be exceptions.
10. John ch. 1 vv. 1–18.
11. *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, Manchester University Press, 1956, p. 92.
12. David Hume, *Essays and Treatises, Vol. II, Section X*, Edinburgh, 1809, pp. 120–21. My italics.
13. Richard Swinburne, *The Concept of Miracle*, Macmillan 1970, p. 1.
14. Ps. 19 v.1.
15. Math. ch. 6 vv. 26, 28.
16. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica I*, Question CV, Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Articles; also *Summa contra Gentiles*, iii, chs. 98–103.
17. Leibniz – Clarke, op. cit., p. 92.
18. David Hume, op. cit., p. 120.
19. Joshua ch. 6 v. 20.
20. David Hume, op. cit., p. 120.
21. Swinburne, op. cit., p. 61 '. . . in order to be a miracle an event has to be . . . of an extraordinary kind. But this need not . . . be a violation of a law of nature; it could be an extraordinary coincidence'.
22. R.F. Holland, 'The Miraculous', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 2, No. 1, Jan. 1965, pp. 43–4.
23. Exodus ch. 2 vv. 1–10.
24. Ezekiel ch. 16 v. 27.
25. Math. ch. 12 v. 39.
26. 1 Cor ch. 1 v. 23.
27. Rev. ch. 12 v. 1.
28. Acts ch. 5 v. 12.
29. W. Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act III, Scene 2.
30. Exodus ch. 7 vv. 8–13.

31. Ibid. vv. 17–21.
32. Genesis ch. 28 vv. 10–19.
33. Genesis chs 37–41.
34. Math. ch. 2 vv. 12, 13.
35. Swinburne, op. cit., p. 1.
36. I. Kant, 'Religion within the boundaries of mere reason', *Religion and Rational Theology*, CUP 1996, p. 124.
37. Math. ch. 7 v. 23. Authorised Version expression.
38. Mark ch. 13 v. 22.
39. Simone Weil, *A Letter to a Priest*, tr. A.F. Wills, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953, p. 50.
40. ed. D.Z. Phillips, *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, CUP, 1997, p. 323.
41. Math. ch. 21 vv. 18–21.
42. Acts ch. 5 vv. 5–11.
43. Job ch. 2 v. 10.
44. R.F. Holland, op. cit.
45. Reprinted in Peter Winch, *Trying to Make Sense*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1987.
46. Peter Winch, 'Asking too many questions', eds T. Tessin and M. von der Ruhr, *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, St Martin's Press, 1995, p. 200.
47. R.F. Holland, 'Lusus Naturae', eds D.Z. Phillips and Peter Winch, *Wittgenstein: Attention to Particulars*, Macmillan, 1989, pp. 45–60.
48. Peter Winch, ibid.
49. Norman Malcolm, 'On Ceasing to Exist', ed. Raimond Gaita, *Values and Understanding: Essays for Peter Winch*, Routledge, 1990.
50. D.Z. Phillips, 'Waiting for the Vanishing Shed', *Wittgenstein and Religion*, St Martin's Press, 1993, pp. 171–92.
51. Anthony Palmer, 'Violations of nature and conditions of Sense', in *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, pp. 186–99.
52. H.O. Mounce, Critical Notice of *Trying to Make Sense*, in *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. D.Z. Phillips, vol. 11, 1988, pp. 236–44.
53. R.F. Holland, 'The Miraculous', op. cit., p. 44.
54. Ibid., p. 43.
55. Ibid., p. 44.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Exodus ch. 3 vv. 3–4.
59. Issac Bashevis Singer, 'Stories from Behind the Stove', in *A Friend of Kafka*, Penguin, 1970.
60. N. Malcolm, op. cit.
61. Luke ch. 15 v. 8.
62. N. Malcolm, op. cit.
63. R.F. Holland, 'Lusus Naturae', op. cit., p. 50.
64. G.E.M. Anscombe, 'Times, Beginnings and Causes', in her *Collected Papers*, vol. II, Blackwell, Oxford 1981, p. 151.
65. R.F. Holland, ibid.
66. Peter Winch, 'Asking Too Many Questions', op. cit., p. 203.
67. Anthony Palmer, Critical Notice of *Value and Understanding*, in *Philosophical Investigations*, vol. 15, No. 3, July 1992, pp. 276–84.
68. Anthony Palmer, 'Violation of Nature and Conditions of Sense', op. cit., p. 189.
69. Rush Rhees, *Wittgenstein and the possibility of discourse*, ed. D.Z. Phillips, CUP, 1998.

70. Peter Winch, *Trying to Make Sense*, p. 337.
71. R.F. Holland, 'Lusus Naturae', op. cit., p. 53.
72. Ibid.
73. I. Kant, op. cit., p. 122.
74. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Question CV, Seventh Article, Reply to Obj. 1.

# 12
# Miracles as Signs of the Times

*D.Z. Phillips*

By the time I had become a very late emergency replacement to reply to Walford Gealy's rich chapter, "Is there an audience for miracles?",[1] I had also read the contributions by Gareth Moore and James Robinson to the topic.[2] I had also been part of the discussion of miracles which Gealy refers to in the second part of his chapter.[3] There is one aspect of the problem, however, which requires a greater, and perhaps different, emphasis from that given to it by Gealy, Moore, and Robinson. Why I say this will not become evident until the last section of my chapter, but, at the outset, my question can be expressed as follows: if miracles are signs of biblical times, are they also signs of ours? Unlikely though it may seem, this question leads to central philosophical problems.

## I

### Miracles and reality

Early in his chapter, Gealy says, "Our understanding of the concept of a miracle cannot be divorced from religious thought and practices."[4] At the end of his paper, "Asking Too Many Questions," Winch says, "I can imagine a philosopher retorting: 'That's all very well, but philosophy's concern is not human practice but the world and what it contains (its "furniture").'" Such a reaction is common in contemporary philosophy of religion. Winch responds:

> To this I would reply that even quite common or garden concepts of items of the furniture of the world – objects like buckets, tables, houses, trees, rivers – enter into our discourse in ways rather different from that which philosophers are inclined to allege. I think Wittgenstein somewhere says that the word 'bucket' is most characteristically used not in saying such things as "This is a bucket" or "The bucket is gray" (the kinds of example you are most likely to find philosophers offering), but in saying

> things like "Would you mind passing me/fetching the bucket," "Do you know where the bucket is?", "I'm just going to fill the bucket," and so on. Of course it's not that we *never* speak in the first of these modes, but it is, as it were, less expressive of our concept of a bucket than is the second mode. I do not want to conclude from this that the furniture of the world *is* that which enters into our practices, because that would really be to miss the point. After all, the way in which the concept of a miracle enters our lives, in so far as it does, is quite different from the ways in which concepts of buckets, trees, rivers, etc. enter our lives (and of course they too differ very much among themselves.) But what we fundamentally need to get away from is the whole idea that we need to, or even can, give a "description of the world and what it's like and what is in it." To put it more provocatively, we need to do away with the pseudo-concept of "ontology." The main thing that is wrong with this is its use of such an expression as "things that there are in the world." This irons out precisely the conceptual differences we need to attend to.[5]

To appreciate Winch's response is to see that it does not take us very far to ask whether miracles are part of the furniture of the world, or to say that a belief in miracles is true if and only if there are miracles. Such talk gives the impression of providing a conceptual analysis without actually doing any work. It makes it look as though the belief in miracles is answerable to a homogeneous ontology.

The philosophical investigation of reality *does* involve a generality, but of what kind? Certainly *not* the kind of generality which is said to be the difference between philosophy and the sciences. The sciences are said to investigate aspects of reality, whereas philosophy is said to investigate reality as such. But what is meant by "reality as such"? In discussing the question I am simply reiterating Rush Rhees' arguments in his *In Dialogue with the Greeks Vol. I: The Presocratics and Reality* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), which influenced the early chapters of my *Philosophy's Cool Place*.[6]

Most of the Presocratics seemed to be seeking what Aristotle called a science of being *qua* being. They sought the essence of reality, the nature of "all things." All that can be said of this nature or essence, apparently, is that "it is." One cannot say that "it is not." How can reality be negated or denied? But, Rhees argues, if one cannot deny the existence of reality, one cannot assert it either. If we say that something exists, it makes sense to speak of the conditions of its existence, conditions which are independent of the "something" in question. But what can be independent of reality? One cannot speak of a thing without implying many things. Whatever unity reality can be said to have, it cannot have the unity of a thing.

Most of the Presocratics seemed to discuss the reality of all things in terms of *substance*. Such attempts inherit insuperable difficulties. Whatever substance is posited, further questions can be asked about *its* reality. Thales said, "All

things are Water," but what about the reality of the water? Obviously, nothing is solved by choosing an alternative substance, since the same questions will be asked about *its* reality.

According to this view, the *sine qua non* of reality is meant to be something all things have in common. But no common element can be found. As Rhees says, we can say that water is what all crystals have in common, but what do all crystals and water have in common? The answer cannot be "water."

The nature of reality is also supposed to account, in some sense or other, for the various modes of thought and action we engage in. But how is this possible? If the nature of reality enters into this variety, how can it be unchanging? If it does not, how can it account for the undeniable heterogeneity of our world?

As a result of these three futile searches – the search for an all-inclusive substance as the essence of reality – the search for a common element which is the mark of "the real" – the search for an account of how an unchanging reality accounts for our diverse modes of thought and action – it is often concluded that the whole attempt to investigate *the* nature of reality is confused.

It makes no difference if "God" is said to occupy the space accorded to this metaphysical conception of reality, whether the "God" be, as Gealy shows, Aristotle's Finite Cause, or Leibniz's infinite substance, since it turns out to be no space at all. Not even God himself could tell us anything about it.[7] This is not to place any kind of restriction on God, but to insist as Gealy does, on the difference between the reality philosophy investigates, and that divine reality in which believers say they live and move and have their being – a difference not discussed sufficiently in contemporary philosophy of religion.[8]

## II

### The unity of discourse

As a result of the confusions involved in the attempt to determine *the* nature of reality, it has been said that philosophy has to settle for a more modest task, namely, to clarify the confusions we may fall into concerning our diverse forms of thought and action. The philosopher becomes an underlabourer, clearing up confusions on other people's sites by giving perspicuous representations of the grammatical differences between them.

In *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*,[9] Rhees shows how one might ascribe the underlabourer conception of philosophy to Wittgenstein. The aim of philosophical analysis, it is said, is essentially therapeutic. Why should we think that our lives with concepts are any less various than the

games we play? There is nothing that all games have in common, so why should the distinction between "the real" and "the unreal" come to the same thing in all contexts?

This reading of Wittgenstein appeals to Gealy. He emphasizes that there are multiple conditions of intelligibility, and that any attempt to reduce them to a unity is futile. Various activities may hang together in a person's life in such a way as to bring a unity to it. But, as Gealy says, this does not mean that we have arrived at what is constitutive of the unity of a human life. Things hang together for people in different ways, and different things at that. Religion is crucial in some people's lives, and completely absent from others. Neither people's lives nor the activities they engage in can be reduced to a unity.

Rhees says that there is a great deal in Part One of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* to encourage the reading Gealy finds attractive. Using the analogy between language and games, Wittgenstein says that language has the unity of a collection of games. He wanted to insist that language games are not related to each other in systematic ways akin to parts of a calculus. But he sometimes went to the other extreme of holding that each language game is complete in itself, and could be the whole of a language. Rhees argues that these suppositions are unintelligible. If language *were* a collection of language games, it would not be what we call language at all.

In arguing for these conclusions, Rhees is not combating confusions between different forms of language, but confusions about language itself. The former can be helped by giving perspicuous representations of the differences between them, but what would be a perspicuous representation of the whole of a language?[10]

Rhees is asking what it means *to say* something. He says, over and over again, that speaking makes sense if living makes sense. We speak in the course of lives we lead with others. What we say in one context has bearings on what is said in other contexts in the stream of life. Without these bearings, we would not be saying anything at all.

Gealy appreciates that the *kind* of unity in discourse Rhees is talking of is more akin to the unity of a discussion or conversation. Gealy says, "A discussion goes its own way. It does not have the unity of a formal argument. Nor is discussion like repeating lines as actors do. But one says one thing, another says another thing, and there is a further response, and so on. What is said by one is in relation to what has been said before. New ideas can be introduced. One participant in the discussion learns from the other. There is a growth in understanding. But of course, without a relationship between what is said and what happens in the practice of our lives, no discussion is possible. There cannot be a discussion of what is not."[11]

Nevertheless, Gealy is still troubled by the notion of the unity of discourse: "Discussions may have an informal unity. But discussions can come to an end without agreement. In any culture there is not only agreement but also

disagreements – all sorts of disagreements in life which are reflected in discussions. To this extent it may be possible to argue that there is no unity, that the life is not a unity. There is disharmony and tension. What is meaningful in some lives is meaningless in others. Nothing is more real. Not all understanding is shared. And we may have a discussion and reach a point when we say that there is no point in carrying on with the discussion."[12] What is the sense, then Gealy asks, in talking of the unity of language?

Rhees would not deny the phenomena to which Gealy calls our attention, but it does not affect the point he is making about the unity of language. He is not talking about agreement in *opinions*, but of how our lives with concepts give a point to our agreements and disagreements – make them the kind of agreements and disagreements that they are. For example, how that life shows itself to be different from the Sophists' depiction of it as a mastery of discrete skills. It is because the proximities and distances between us are not like that, that trying to understand makes sense, and growth in understanding is, at least, possible.

To appreciate Rhees' argument is to see why any understanding achieved in life is an understanding *in time*. It is to see also why philosophy cannot prescribe the content of such understanding. This is not a matter of an ascetic limitation on the part of philosophy, as Robinson thinks, nor a turning aside from the positive guidance in life it could give.[13] Rather, it is an achievement of understanding, within philosophy itself, of its contemplative task of doing conceptual justice to the world in all its variety. The claim to be able to give an advice for living, which is underwritten by philosophy, is itself a form of intellectual corruption.

The philosophical discussion of miracles in contemporary philosophy of religion is often governed by religious, or secular apologetics. Philosophy's contemplative task, however, is to do conceptual justice to belief in miracles, whether one appreciates that belief personally or not. What does that task involve?

If we appreciate Rhees' remarks on the unity of language, we can see that we have to ask what it means to believe in miracles, and how that belief is related to other aspects of our lives and culture.

## III

### Two cultures?

If the significance of what we say is found in the stream of life in which it is said, we have to ask, with respect to the witnessing of miracles, *which* stream of life we are talking about. Gealy, Moore, and Robinson emphasize that the biblical world, in which miracles are prominent, is a very different world from our own. We find there a polytheistic world involving witchcraft, magic, demons, and divination. Even in the monotheistic world of the New

Testament, there are cosmic spirits, the spiritual powers of the air, and the powers of darkness. Do we, in our scientific and technological culture, believe in that world? If not, how can we believe in miracles?

To many philosophers of religion, this question is not problematic. The two cultures are bridged by their view that miracles are made possible by an omnipotent God who violates or suspends the laws of nature. But not even God can do this, since this notion of violation or suspension is meaningless. In a previous discussion, I put the matter thus: "A law of nature does not *prevent* anything from happening, since it is simply a description and systematisation of what *does* happen. Clusters of phenomena, in the context of certain modes of explanation, prove to be amenable to a systematisation which makes regular correlation and prediction possible. This is what enables us to formulate laws which say, 'If such-and-such happens, then such-and-such *must* happen.'"[14] The laws may be modified in light of persistent data which deviate from them, but miracles do not constitute such data, and no method can be made of them. As I said, "They are not even on the agenda of unsolved problems as far as science is concerned. At best, they are irrelevant curiosities."[15] Miracles cannot be brought into a working relationship with science, as though they were alternative explanations co-existing within a wider category of causal instrumentality.

Winch illustrates the impossibility of such a working relationship in a discussion of a short story by Isaac Singer[16] about the reaction of villagers to a familiar shed which simply vanishes. To bring this event into a working relationship with naturalistic explanations, "it's vanished" would have to function either as a description or an explanation of what has happened to the shed, and it does neither. "It's vanished" is simply a cry of bewilderment in face of what has happened.[17]

Gealy thinks that R.F. Holland, in response to Winch, is more open-minded about the possibility of the occurrence of inexplicable events and, hence, about the possibility of miracles. For example, in response to the example of the vanishing shed, Holland says, "Something might have happened to the stream of the world, but only in that field, while everything else remained normal. The flow of a stream is not impeded by a stone dropping into it."[18]

I suspect that Gealy, like Holland, believes that Winch is committed to what Holland calls a naturalistic principle, one formulation of which, he says, could read as follows: "If something of a material nature M, existed formerly, or was formerly in such-and-such a state, but is not in existence now, or is now in a different state, there must be an explanation, and the explanation must be one that fits in with our understanding of the kind of thing M is."[19]

Winch certainly acknowledges this principle, but he points out that he does so, as do we all, relative to a world-view in which we participate. But, crucially, he adds: "I did *not* of course say that there is no possibility of our being confronted with a situation quite transcending our powers of comprehension."[20] For Holland, certain miracles are such situations. They are an

affront to our understanding. When Jesus is said to have turned the water into wine, Holland wants to say that we are confronted with something which is empirically certain, but conceptually impossible. Such miracles present us with a contradiction in our experience. Winch thinks that this way of putting the matter is confused. He insists that "if something really is conceptually impossible, then we would have no idea of what we are talking about and *a fortriori* no idea what it is the occurrence of which we are trying to say is empirically certain."[21] Further, he argues, if we admit that what confronts us defies our comprehension, "that would not be to encounter anything we could recognize as a miracle, since that requires that we can attach a certain sort of significance to what confronts us."[22]

Moore outlines the horns of a dilemma a modern reader of the Bible may face in trying to make this significance explicit. Such a reader may feel that if what is said to have happened in miracles is scientifically impossible, the miracles did not happen. The reports which claim they did are false and lies. Or such a reader may accept that the reported events did happen, but in ways which exclude any miraculous element. Thus the feeding of the five thousand becomes a matter of Jesus creating a spirit of generosity among those who had brought food for themselves, so that they shared with those without any. And so on for the other miracles.

Robinson castigates what he calls this "horrible choice." He says that it belongs to a discredited liberal theology which divorces biblical scholarship from religious concerns, and fuels a condescending attitude towards a culture other than our own. Robinson thinks that Moore is advocating this horrible choice.[23] As we shall see later, there are times when Moore seems to be in the grip of the dilemma he describes. On the other hand, his overall view seems to be that the dilemma is based on a misunderstanding. He says that it stems not from "a difficulty in reading the Bible, but (from) a failure to read the Bible."[24] Along with Gealy and Robinson, Moore insists that religious reactions to miracles are not expressions of curiosity about *how* they are done, but, rather, wonder at what they show. But this simply brings us back to our central question: how, if at all, are miracles related to the naturalistic explanations which feature so prominently in our culture?

It is highly ironic that philosophers of religion who want to show that science is not the whole story, make God the violator or suspender of its laws. Far from showing freedom from science, the abiding influence of science is shown in this attempt to turn God into a super-scientist.

## IV

### Naturalistic and religious responses

It seems to me to be that Winch is right in locating the anomaly between belief in miracles and naturalistic responses to the world, not in miracles as

violations of scientific laws, but in the contrast between *what is asked of us* in naturalistic inquiry, and the acknowledging of a miracle, respectively. Winch illustrates the contrast by reference to the story of Moses and the burning bush.

Moses confronts a bush which is burning but which, nevertheless, is not consumed. Moses reacts to it with a primitive, natural response, "I must go across to see this wonderful sight. Why does not the bush burn away?"[25] One does not need a knowledge of, or even in interest in, science to ask this question. In the account of the miracle, however, it is precisely this primitive interest in explanation which is *forbidden*. The voice of Jehovah commands from the bush, "'Do not come any closer. Take off your shoes for you are on holy ground. I am the God of your Father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' Moses covered his face because he feared to look on God."

Winch, Gealy, and Moore emphasize that the story is mediated through the authority of scripture. It is not offered as a report for our consideration. The context of the whole story is the reality of the divine and, as Robinson says, we are invited to hear the voice of God in it. Moses does not reason to the conclusion that God is speaking from the bush; that is not an opinion he holds. His reaction is a religious one.

Winch continues, "Similarly, that Moses was being called by God from the burning bush is not something that can be teased out of the details of the physical occurrences that took place on the mountainside by Horeb. More than that, an interest in these physical details and their explanation, runs counter to acceptance of what is happening as a miracle. Such as acceptance involves a completely different attitude, or *Einstellung*.[26] These questions are *forbidden*; it is a condition of Moses' properly understanding what is happening that he should *not* ask them."[27]

The problem is, given the dominance of science and technology in our culture, that it is almost impossible not to ask the forbidden questions. In a world such as ours, with its dominant interests, who can doubt that hearing God speak from a burning bush which is not consumed is more problematic? So dominant are these interests that, as we have seen, an attempt is made to find a place for God in the logic of scientific space.

Is Winch saying, then, that it is impossible for anyone to witness a miracle in our culture? No, only that such a witness faces difficulties, and that these difficulties are not accidental. This is shown in his discussion of an example which I shall quote in full:

> A year or so ago the news media in the United States had a field day about a statue of the Virgin Mary in a church in a small southern town: the statue was reported to be from time to time shedding tears. There were many interviews on the radio with people, who, in the main, either maintained that this was a genuine occurrence of a miraculous nature – by

> which they meant that there was no "natural" explanation of it; or they maintained that it was indeed explicable, for example, by fraud and clever mechanical tricks. I must confess that in the main I found the speakers on both sides of the issue equally disgusting, or at least mediocre, in their response to what was happening. What had all this to do with worship of God and veneration of the Virgin Mary? There was one interview, however, that to my mind stood out from the rest: with a woman who simply asked: why would the Holy Mother *not* shed tears at the terrible spectacle of human life in our time? What was striking about the woman was that she evinced no interest in the questions about how what was happening might have been caused; and equally she had no interest in trying to show that it had *no* natural causes. These questions lay, as it were, outside the spectrum of her interests. Her posture was quite at variance *both* with that of those who insisted on some sort of natural causation (probably trickery) and with that of those who, having investigated the case, concluded that the explanation must be a supernatural one.[28]

No doubt the woman Winch speaks of will miss a great deal. She may be duped by tricksters. But the debits are not all on one side. Some who have a sharper eye for condensation and con men, may never see the Virgin weep for the sins of the world. As Gealy insists, it is confusing to speak as though events are *first* seen as coincidences, or as causally inexplicable and are *then* responded to religiously. To see them as falling under those descriptions is to exclude seeing them, *at the same time*, as a miracle from God. The happenings we have referred to in the Bible are either seen, *ab intio*, as miracles, or prior naturalistic reactions are rebuked, as in the case of Moses, and a religious response commanded instead of them. The difficulties I want to discuss in the last section of the chapter have to do with the extent to which we, now, can understand the religious responses to miracles that we find in the Bible.

## V

### Wanted: a proof of the spirit and of power

At the outset of this chapter, I said that there is an aspect of the philosophical discussion of miracles about which I want to press Gealy, Moore, and Robinson a little further. I gave a preliminary expression of it as follows: if miracles are signs of biblical times, are they also signs of ours? To be a successful sign, it must be such in the stream of life in which it occurs. Wittgenstein says that a miracle is a gesture made by God. That image seems exactly right to me, but a gesture needs an audience to appreciate it. Do we still have an audience for miracles?

My difficulty can be expounded with reference to Winch's discussion of the miracle surrounding the statue of the Virgin Mary. I want to say that

I have within me the possibility of acknowledging it as a miracle. I cannot say this of the story of Moses and the burning bush, the story of Jesus walking on the water, or the story of the raising of Lazarus. My difficulty is not with believing that these inexplicable things happened. In *that* respect, I say with Rhees: if they happened, they happened. But, like him, I am responding to them, and wondering at them, as *natural* events. I am not responding to them as miracles? What was involved in doing that?

In the case of the statue of the Virgin, there are surroundings which have the possibility of speaking to me: the statue is in a church, I know whom it is a statue of. I know who she is taken to be. I am vaguely acquainted with stories and doctrines connected with her, and know of practices involving veneration of her. But in the case of the other miracles, comparable surroundings are not forthcoming. Lessing would say that the presence of such surroundings affords the opportunity and context for a certain kind of proof, a proof of the spirit and of power.[29] In the case of the biblical miracles, that proof is not available to me. Lessing says, "The problem is that this proof of the spirit and of power no longer has any spirit or power, but has sunk to the level of human testimonies of spirit and power."[30] This is not to endorse entirely Lessing's use of the distinction between witness and testimony, since there is no *a priori* reason to deny that later reflection on events can see more in them than the immediate witnessing of them. After all, Christology depends on that possibility. The problem is that biblical testimony is not heard today in the way it was by early recipients of scripture. This is not an accidental matter. So I am not blaming Winch, Gealy, Moore, or Robinson for not providing a proof of the spirit of miracles. My whole point is that, for the most part, none of us are in any better a situation.

Gealy, Moore, and Robinson emphasize the changes between our world-view and the world-views prevalent in the Bible. The latter involve a world of good and evil spirits. That world is not ours. As Moore says, we have not proved that demons do not exist. We simply do not think in that way any longer. But, then, what was it to think in that way?

Judgments in the Bible are made in a world in which miracles are commonplace. One had to decide which miracles were of God. Gealy and Robinson remind us of the dire warnings which were given against false wonder-workers, while Moore reminds us of the authority which miracles from God are meant to have. They would all agree with Simone Weil's remark: "miracles themselves prove nothing; they themselves need proving."[31] The proof is in terms of the spirituality of the miracles. Gealy, Moore, and Robinson emphasize that they are signs. They recognize that the question asked of miracles was not, who caused them, but, rather, do they show anything about God? God was seen *in* the miracles. But *how* was he seen? What is lost to us, to a great extent, is the thought-form in which that question was answered.

The question of the relation between the divinity of Jesus and his miracles is a special instance of this mere general problem. For me, Gealy, Moore, and Robinson are not puzzled enough by this question.

Rhees recognizes that the order in which the miracles are related in the Gospels may show something important about the development in the character of Jesus' ministry, but this in itself "does not answer (the) difficulty... about the importance which they evidently had in the tradition that gave birth to the Gospels."[32] Rhees asks: "what was there so special about performing *miracles*? Would there not have been the same necessity to believe if you saw and heard him, *whatever* he was doing or saying?"[33]

It seems to me to be a mistake to regard the performing of miracles as a skill which Jesus possessed. There is good reason to see him as undergoing an experience himself in what he does. Sometimes, it seems as though something has gone out of him, leaving him dejected thereafter. Certainly, he is often depressed at the way his miracles are taken, and he criticizes the generation that seeks signs. If, on the other hand, one attributes a skill to Jesus, one wonders why he did not use it more liberally, why he chose the people he did and not others. If we go down that road in search of answers, then vulgarities of contemporary theodicies await us, and I do not propose to do so.

It seems to me also that we should not assume that those involved in the miracles always went on their way rejoicing, as though they were the recipients of favors. Rhees wonders whether they might not be intolerably puzzled and weighed down by the experience: "(Lazarus brought out of the tomb. I do not know what the rest of his life was like. But it cannot have been just as though the whole thing had never happened. I always think of him as mostly silent, unable to understand what it meant, why it had happened to *him*, and what he was supposed to conclude from it. Something like that would be too much for a human being.)"[34]

This is speculation on Rhees' part, and he does not present it as more. His general position is as follows: "In any case, the lists of miracles form a fairly closed chapter for us *now*: They *cannot*, as written records, have the force which the actual working of the miracles had for those (or rather, *some* of those) who saw them."[35] This is part of Lessing's point, and it counts against Kierkegaard's general claim that believers, in any age, are, in all respects, contemporaneous with Christ.[36]

But Rhees is making a more general point. He is emphasizing not only that being with Jesus, as he performed the miracles, would make an important difference, but also that one would have understood how what is shown about him is mediated in *that* way. It is at this point what the difference between biblical and our world-view becomes important. I shall quote Rhees' conclusion in full.

> I can only guess that the early Christians found the miracles Jesus wrought so entirely congruent with the divinity of his person or his character as

they had known it, that mentioning the miracles seemed the most natural way to delineate his character, or show the divinity of his person. (Something like a 'physiognomy' in the eighteenth century sense.) Whereas it might have seemed more natural to us to give, if we could, some portrayal of the way he moved, of his voice, or his features. I do not mean that their recounting of the miracles could *only* be this. But they recounted them because they thought the miracles revealed something divine about him. But not just by being *miracles*. (Jesus said that the Apostles would perform greater miracles than he had performed, and that the Anti-Christ would perform miracles as well.)

In another picture, these lines or strokes would not have anything revealing or breath-taking about them. But in this picture they do.

I repeat, I can only *guess* it must have been something like this.[37]

I have discussed Rhees at some length as a background for the questions I want to leave with Gealy, Moore, and Robinson. While all three recognize that miracles were signs in biblical times, what they say of these signs in relation to our own times seems to me to be problematic.

Gealy says that if we take "miracle" in any of its religious senses, to say that there is an audience for such miracles today, would be "an expression of believer's confidence in the permanence of the language he uses."[38] But that simply ducks the issue of what *kind* of language the language of miracles is, and the question of whether, or to what extent, that language is a closed book to us.

Gealy also points out that it is possible to argue, theologically, that some miracles are relative to certain cultural epochs, in which they are seen as corroborations of novel truths, or even of spiritual truths which are, nevertheless, independent of them. This argument, however, contradicts Gealy's earlier insistence that miracles were read, not as corroborations of the spirit, but as expressions of it, whether that spirit is divine or demonic. So Gealy is still faced with the philosophical question: what did the expressiveness of miracles amount to, and to what extent can we appreciate that mode of expression now?

Moore, too, has to face the issue of whether miracles can be signs for our times, since, for him, the Bible, as an authoritative text, contains, not simply truths from a bygone age, or an ancient literature, but truths about himself. How, then, is he to read the miracles? His answer is that he has to make a religious judgment about them, a judgment he hopes to reach through prayer and meditation.

Moore tells us that he is helped in his judgment by distinguishing between the public meaning of a miracle, and its spiritual meaning. By its public meaning, he means its alleged occurrence as an inexplicable event. He asks whether the miracles in the Bible are true, or whether those who

relate them had motives for doing so, even though they know that, with respect to their public meanings, they were false. Nevertheless, he holds that the spiritual meaning of the miracle is mediated through its public meaning. As a result, in his own meditations, Moore finds that the spiritual meaning of a miracle could be true, even when its public meaning is false.

Moore's position seems to inherit a number of difficulties. His distinction between the public and spiritual meaning of a miracle, seems to contradict his earlier emphasis, in which he claimed that religious reactions to miracles did not take the form of wondering whether they could be explained or not, but of wondering at, and acknowledging, what they show. Moore's distinction also falls foul of Gealy's criticism that one cannot regard events under two descriptions at the same time, as the result of supernatural causation on the one hand, and as spiritually significant on the other. Perhaps Moore is simply endeavouring to record, faithfully, a dilemma which people, including himself, find themselves to be in. Finally, it is not clear whether Moore believes that certain inexplicable events associated with miracles actually occurred. Perhaps his answer would differ from case to case.

No matter how those questions are resolved, whether Moore believes that certain inexplicable events occurred or not, or whether he believes that, though false, they are related for religious or apologetic purposes, our central question remains unanswered. Why should the spiritual meaning be mediated in *that* way? Further, is the spiritual meaning mediated through Moore's personal meditation, the *same* meditation of spiritual meaning through miracles that we find in the Bible?

I doubt whether Robinson, any more than Gealy, would allow Moore's distinction between the public and the spiritual meaning of a miracle. For him, this would be an instance of biblical scholarship divorced from religious concerns. What we should be concerned in showing, he argues, is not whether the miracles are factually false, but the sense in which they are theologically true.

How is this theological truth to be arrived at? Robinson is alarmed at Moore's suggestion that this can be achieved through personal meditation and piety. He cites unfortunate views which have claimed such a source. Robinson also thinks that this view shows insufficient respect of the text of the bible, as though its authors were ignorant of spiritual meaning which can only be arrived at through personal piety.

Whatever impressions are given, sometimes, in his present chapter, I am sure Moore does not want to make religious or theological significance a purely individualistic matter. Even in this chapter, he emphasizes the authoritative status of the Bible, such that he is prepared to say that a miracle has a spiritual significance even when he, personally, is unable to discern it. Moreover, in a previous discussion of miracles, Moore emphasized the importance of an authoritative background against which the believer has to decide what is or is not a contemporary miracle. As a Roman Catholic, he

cited the Church as constituting that background.[39] That would not satisfy Robinson theologically, because, on his view, unfortunate practices have emanated from the authority of the church. My point, however, is a conceptual one, namely, that for Moore, not anything can count as a miracle.

Robinson's own hopes lie in the right kind of biblical scholarship aided, apparently, by sociology. For him, this has involved moving "from the Barthian theology of the word of God and Bultmann's kerygmatic theology to the reconstruction of the Sayings Gospel Q, a collection of sayings of Jesus used in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, but as such not included in the canon of the New Testament."[40] Its exclusion, Robinson argues, was due to the creedal developments which emphasized the virgin birth, the crucifixion, and the resurrection; creedal developments which played a large part in determining the content of the canon.

I am conscious that I am in danger at this point of drowning in deep theological waters, stirred by controversies surrounding how one understands the determination of the canon, the place accorded to the Passion, the authority of the Church, and the issue of continuing and developing revelation. Even if I could, I do not intend to get immersed in those matters. Instead, I want to concentrate on some important philosophical issues raised by Robinson's remarks.

Can miracles be a sign for our times? Robinson's answer seems to be that they can if we search for the theological truth in them. This truth will only be found if we realize that the miracles are not to be understood literally. They were part of a mythological mode of expression. To arrive at theological truth for today, however, we have to realize also that that mythological mode of expression is no longer ours, and we must not be diverted from theological truth by concentrating on it. So the literal meaning of the miracles never had an application, while their mythological mode of expression had an application in the Bible, but one which is no longer effective in our culture.

My first difficulty concerns Robinson's distinction between the literal and theological meanings of miracles. Robinson criticizes Moore's distinction between the public and the spiritual meanings of miracles, and accuses it of denigrating the Bible as a text. But how different is Robinson's distinction between the literal and the theological? It is unclear to me whether Robinson would regard the belief that the inexplicable events associated with miracles actually occurred, as a denigration of the biblical text.

The wider philosophical issues involve the implications of Robinson's views for our understanding of the meaning of words. What, on Robinson's view, is the relation between the miracle and the theological truths he thinks can be found in them? Clearly, he would not want the relation to be an external one, such as we find in the view of R.B. Braithwaite. Braithwaite argued that religious stories need not be accepted as true, because their function is merely to act as a psychological aid to a moral endeavor which makes

sense independently of them.[41] Given his strictures against the Jeffersonian Bible, Robinson would certainly not want to go down that road.

If, on the other hand, we say that there is an internal relation between the miracle stories and the theological truths they convey, that relation cannot be one between a kernel and a husk. Yet, that is Robinson's suggestion. If the biblical audience for miracles saw a truth and meaning in them which is independent of the mode of expression, where did that truth and meaning come from? Meaning is not something which accompanies words, or something which is contained in them like the contents within a shell. The meaning is found *in* the way the words are *used*. But it is that very use, according to Robinson, that diverts us from the theological truths in miracle stories.

Even if one allowed Robinson's distinction between theological truths and their mythological mode of expression in miracle stories, my initial puzzle remains unanswered: why were the truths conveyed in *that* way? Robinson criticizes Moore for speculating on whether the story of Jesus walking on the water is true. He says that the significance of the story would have been transparent to the audience that heard it. What, then was its transparent significance? We are not told. I am asking whether we know anymore.

Again, suppose I accept the view that Matthew reorganizes, or even creates, miracle stories, for kerygmatic purposes, so that his audience might hear the voice of God in them. The original puzzle remains: why miracle stories? What was it about them which made them, for some people, so effective and important a revelation of the divine?

Robinson gives an impressive account of what he takes to be the essence of Christianity in Sayings Gospel Q. At one point it is expressed as follows: "God is here, acting for our good in our lives, taking care of us, and sending us out to care for others, thereby giving our lives ultimate meaning."[42] Apart from the miracle of faith, this is a message without miracles. But this leaves us none the wiser about the contribution miracles in the Bible made to that message.

Looking back at these contributions to the discussion of miracles, their conclusions do not help me with my puzzle. Gealy suggests that the real miracle is the miracle of faith created in the lives of believers, a miracle which does not need the support of miracles of other kinds. Moore seeks for spiritual meanings in miracle stories even when their public meanings are false. Robinson finds the real Gospel message in the Sayings Gospel Q, which is free of miracles.

So my question remains: What was the significance of miracles in the biblical contexts in which they clearly have importance? I doubt whether sociology will help us to discover it, anymore than anthropology helped Frazer to appreciate primitive rain dances. Lessing's reason has application there too, the proof of the spirit and of power was missing. Frazer missed the spirits in

the dances, because he missed the spirit in the rain. Do we miss the theology in miracles because we miss their spirit too? I have suggested that we do. That answer may seem disappointingly negative, but the considerations which led me to it certainly are not.

## Notes

1. Walford Gealy, "Is there an audience for miracles?" in this book.
2. Gareth Moore, "Hearing The Voice of God" and James M. Robinson, "The Hermeneutics of the Voice of God", in the present book.
3. See R.F. Holland, "The Miraculous" in *Against Empiricism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980); Peter Winch, "Ceasing to Exist" in *Trying to Make Sense* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); H.O. Mounce, Critical Notice of *Trying to Make Sense* in *Philosophical Investigations* vol. 11, 1988; R.F. Holland, "Lusus Naturae" in *Wittgenstein: Attention to Particulars: Essays in Honour of Rush Rhees*, eds D.Z. Phillips and Peter Winch (London, Macmillan, 1989); R.F. Holland, "Naturalism and Preternatural Change" in *Values and Understanding*: *Essays for Peter Winch*, ed. Raimond Gaita (London: Routledge, 1990); Norman Malcolm, "On Ceasing to Exist" in ibid.; D.Z. Phillips, "Waiting for the Vanishing Shed" in *Wittgenstein and Religion* (London, Macmillan and New York: St Martin's Press, 1993); D.Z. Phillips, "Miracles and Open-Door Epistemology" in *Recovering Religious Concepts* (London: Macmillan, 2000); Anthony Palmer, "Violations of Nature and Conditions of Sense" in *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, eds Timothy Tessin and Mario von der Ruhr (London, Macmillan and New York: St Martin's Press, 1995); Peter Winch, "Asking Too Many Questions" in ibid., R.W. Beardsmore, "Hume and the Miraculous" in *Religion and Hume's Legacy*, eds D.Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin (Basingstoke, Macmillan and New York: St Martin's Press, 1999).
4. Op. cit., p. 215.
5. Winch, "Asking Too Many Questions", p. 212.
6. D.Z. Phillips, *Philosophy's Cool Place* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).
7. See my "What God Himself Cannot Tell Us: RealismVersus Metaphysical Realism", *Faith and Philosophy*, Oct. 2001.
8. See my "Wittgensteinianism: Logic, Reality, and God" in *Handbook in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William Wainwright. Oxford University Press (forthcoming).
9. Rush Rhees, *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, ed. D.Z. Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
10. See ibid., It is a theme which runs through the whole book.
11. Gealy, op. cit., p. 240.
12. Ibid., p. 240.
13. Robinson, op. cit., p. 240.
14. D.Z. Phillips, "Miracles and Open-Door Epistemology", p. 131.
15. Ibid.
16. Isaac Bashevis Singer, "Stones from Behind the Stove" in *A Friend of Kafka* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970).
17. See "Ceasing to Exist", p. 85.
18. R.F. Holland, "Naturalism and Preternatural Change", p. 59.
19. Ibid., p. 32.

20. Winch, "Asking Too Many Questions", p. 203.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Robinson, op. cit., p. 32.
24. Moore, op. cit., p. 7
25. Exodus, Chapter 3 vv. 3–4.
26. Winch, "Asking Too Many Questions?" p. 206. He adds a footnote on p. 213: Hence I definitely echo a phrase of Wittgenstein from a different context. See "Eine Einstellung zur Seele" in *Trying to Make Sense*.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., p. 210.
29. See G.E. Lessing, "On the Proof of the Spirits and of Power" in *Theological Writings*, trans. Henry Chadwick (London: Adams and Charles Block, 1956).
30. Ibid., p. 52.
31. Simone Weil, *Letter to a Priest* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 50.
32. Rush Rhees, "Miracles" in Rush Rhees, *On Religion and Philosophy*, ed. D.Z. Phillips assisted by Mario von der Ruhr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 321.
33. Ibid., p. 332.
34. Ibid., p. 326.
35. Ibid., p. 322.
36. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946) Chapter IV: "The Case of the Contemporary Disciple."
37. Rush Rhees, "Miracles", p. 323.
38. Gealy, op. cit., p. 242.
39. See Moore's comments (identified as E) in discussion with Winch (identified as J) on pp. 378–79 of "Voices in Discussion" and Moore's paper "Tradition, Authority, and the Hiddenness of God" in *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, eds Timothy Tessin and Mario von der Ruhr.
40. Robinson, op. cit., p. 45.
41. R.B. Braithwaite, "An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief" in *The Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Basil Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
42. Robinson, op. cit., p. 46.

# Voices in Discussion

*D.Z. Phillips*

*E*: May I first thank my good friend Prof. Phillips for responding to my paper, and that at the eleventh hour. Interestingly, it was not the only written response that was received. Prof. Plantinga also forwarded some constructive comments for which I am deeply grateful. But, due to the constraints of time, I doubt if I shall be able to say anything at all, let alone anything of value, in response to Prof. Plantinga's brief but critical reply.

Phillips's reply does not only address some of the issues that were raised in my own paper, but it also comments on those of Professors Moore and Robinson, both of whom had something to say about miracles in their respective contributions to this conference. I was also tempted to offer some criticisms of these, but after reading what Phillips had written about them, I recognised that I could not have said anything half so well as he did. Hence, it would be wholly superfluous to simply repeat his criticisms. (However, on one central issue, I wish to make it clear that I concur wholly with Phillips's criticism of the notion of miracles as violations or suspensions of the laws of nature. As Phillips states, 'A law of nature does not *prevent* anything from happening, since it is simply a description of what *does* happen.') Consequently, in my response, I will concentrate on what Phillips had to say about my paper and comment only occasionally on some of the remarks of the other contributors.

Phillips's response to my effort was mainly constructive. He was not particularly critical of the essay as a whole, and, in the end, what he does is to attempt to push the debate further by issuing a challenge to all three of us – Moore, Robinson and myself – to provide more in terms of elucidatory material on the concept of miracles, and that, partly, because Phillips is puzzled by one aspect of the concept of which all three of us, according to him, gave an inadequate account.

However, although Phillips largely concurs with what I had written, he still alleges that there are some weakness and inconsistencies in my paper and these need to be addressed. The main area of criticism

revolves around a relatively recent debate about the kind of sense we essay to make of occurrences which appear to baffle or frustrate our understanding – experiences that are contrary to the flow of 'the stream of life', that is, the way we ordinarily speak about things and how we ordinarily act. At the heart of this discussion is the concept of the unity of language. This is a concept which is of paramount importance. Yet it is a concept of which it is most difficult to give an account, and I confess to be unclear as to what is precisely to be said about it. Now Phillips correctly says that I 'emphasise that there are multiple conditions of intelligibility, and that any attempt to reduce them to a unity is futile.' Phillips is justified in saying this – although he may have created a false impression by expressing himself too forcibly. It is true that in my paper I did express some reservations about the talk of the unity of intelligibility. But I also made it clear that I believed in the importance of the notion – for without it, there appears to be no bulwark against all sorts of inconsistencies invading one's personal life or indeed, life generally within a culture. We may take part in all sorts of practices (language-games) which will have internal criteria of what it makes sense to do and say within such activities. But, as Phillips rightly points out, the unity of an activity is not the unity of language. And one may address the question whether there is any guarantee that participation in one activity is not totally at odds with participation in another practice – and whether there are any criteria, external to the individual practices, which may determine whether the practices are at all compatible with each other. Hence one may ask, 'What does the expression "unity of discourse" amount to?' This is an issue which has commanded the attention and perplexed a number of contemporary philosophers who have been influenced by the writings of the later Wittgenstein. When one reads, for instance, the late Prof. Peter Winch's contribution to the discussion of this issue, one gets the impression that he was not altogether clear as to what the answer is to this issue of the nature of the unity of language – although it is quite clear that he thought that this unity is not a theoretical unity but 'a unity of practice'. It is interesting to note the variety of expressions which Winch uses in a single context in his attempt to say something about the nature of this unity. In one particular essay entitled, "Asking Too Many Questions" (*Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, ed. by Timothy Tessin and Mario von der Ruhr, pp. 200–14) he refers to this unity in terms of 'belonging to a common world' and that 'to speak of a "language game", or "a form of life", is already to introduce a certain concept of *generality* into the discussion . . . Wittgenstein's constant discussions of such notions as "following a rule", "going on in the same way", "doing something in the same way", are designed to bring out the sense in which our language-games involve generality' ("Asking Too Many Questions", pp. 208–209). But it is not

this kind of unity or generality – that all practices are rule-governed, even though the rules are different for each practice – that particularly bothered me, but the unity of the wider 'stream of life' which is made up of these different practices. That is, my specific problem concerns the inter-relation of these activities, their unity in language – the fact that they are all part of language. Certainly, in this paper, Winch was struggling, and perhaps failing, to give a perspicuous account of the nature of the unity of language – a concept crucial to his account of what it is to say anything, of what it is to understand anything, and hence what it is about certain events that baffle the intelligence – that is, how it is that we fail to make sense of them.

Phillips implies that part of my scepticism about the unity of discourse is based on the wrong idea that the unity is a unity in opinions – agreement and disagreement in opinion – while Phillips himself states that the unity of language has to do with 'how our lives with concepts give a point to our agreements and disagreements – make them the kind of agreements and disagreements that they are'. Yet it is fairly obvious that there all sorts of differences – other than differences of opinion – within a culture, and there is nothing that appears to guarantee anything like the unity of thought or of language in general – certainly not along the lines implied by the use of such an expression as the 'stream of life'. It seems to me that this expression represents something akin to a homogeneous cultural whole – for instance, the kind of 'ramified world picture' that Winch refers to in the above context, 'a naturalistic world picture, of the kind that goes with our thinking of events in terms of natural laws and with the dominance of technological considerations in our culture . . . the picture of the world characteristic of the industrialised West.'

We may have already grasped the fact that there is a difference between what Winch and Phillips say about this issue of unity. Winch, for one thing, refers to the 'unity of practice' but Phillips correctly says that the unity of language is not the unity of an activity. I suspect that, in this context, Rush Rhees's recently published volume, *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse* has had a deep influence on Phillips. When Rhees spoke of the unity of language, he spoke of the unity of discussion. However, Rhees's account appears to accentuate rather than resolve the problem of a possible fundamental disunity within a culture – by which I mean the kind of disagreements that do arise when nothing more can be said, or when further discussion would be futile and empty. These disagreements are not merely ones of opinion. Indeed, Rhees, by limiting the concept of the unity of language to that of a discussion, seems to leave room for a more heterogeneous view of society – for it allows for the possibility for discussions to break down. But then, what becomes of the concept 'the stream of life'? Does this conception of

unity allow for some concepts, like that of miracles to be intelligible to some and wholly unintelligible to others? This kind of difference is not a difference in opinion but in totally different ways of looking at things or of picturing the world. Let's consider two brief, different kinds of conversations, one which reflects differences of opinion and the other where there is a total breakdown in the conversation.

First, here is an imaginary conversation between two friends, meeting say, at some cafe on a Saturday afternoon:

*A*: Did you see the late film on the television last night?
*B*: No, I had a hard day and I was too tired.
*A*: It was an excellent film.
*B*: I know, I've seen it once. But as I said I was tired and went to bed. Besides I had to work this morning.
*A*: Work this morning? Man, you work too hard – you're too conscientious.
*B*: No, I'm not. I'm just doing what I'm asked.

This is a simple, casual conversation. Two people *say* something to each other. There is nothing formal, deductive or inductive about what they say, but there is a kind of natural movement from one statement to another. There is also agreement amid disagreement here. They agree about the excellence of the film, but they disagree about the degree of commitment to work. Nevertheless there is a unity to their conversation. That unity lies in the fact that they share in common practices – like work, obligation to work, tiredness, relaxing by watching films, and making judgements about good and bad films, and so on. The naturalness of the movement from one remark to another in their conversation reflects how these various factors 'hang together' (Rhees's expression) in their lives. Their conversation makes sense because of the sense that there is in the way they carry on their lives. And the kind of unity of which Rhees wrote is not the unity of the whole conversation, but is in the very connection that is perceived in each and every step of the conversation – so that wherever the conversation starts or finishes, as long as each participant says something to the other, he is reflecting how things hang together in their shared lives.

In contrast, take the following real conversation between an elderly lady (L) who had come to live recently in the vicinity of W's home. W was walking homewards one morning, during the first week of the year. W saw this elderly lady turning into her bungalow. He had not set eye on her before – but he assumed that she was the new resident of the property.

> W, being jolly, Welsh and happy, greeted her, 'Good Morning – and a happy new year to you.' She looked up and retorted, 'Happy new year indeed, what's happy about it?'

'Come now, what's bothering you? Life is wonderful!' said W.

'It's not wonderful at all. It's a cold frosty morning and I've locked myself out of the house. The dogs are inside, and I can see that I've left the key on the kitchen table!'

'Well, perhaps I can help. Come over to my place. I'm sure my wife would have spoken to you before. You can have a cup of coffee to warm you up – and I have a handful of old keys with which we can try to open your door.'

'All right.' L was grateful for the warmth of the house and the coffee, but the attempts to open the door with other keys, were unsuccessful.

'If we want a fast solution we can break a small window pane – or, if you have patience, we can try to prise the pane out', said W.

'Well, I have the patience – if you have the time.'

Sometime later, as W was chipping away at the putty, the lady asks 'Why did you stop to help me? I don't know you and you did not know me.'

'Well', said W, 'I happened to be returning home from a morning prayer meeting – which is part of chapel activity at the beginning of the year. And coming from chapel I could not, metaphorically, cross over to the other side.'

L sharply retorted, 'Don't say any more! I don't want to hear anything about religion and all that nonsense!'

There was an icy silence. The conversation has come to an abrupt end. W quietly kept on chipping off the putty.

Obviously, there are the features of the earlier dialogue in this one. But suddenly there is no conversation – at least at this point. And when the conversation resumes it is about putty and glass.

There is a life in which the elderly lady does not participate. Consequently, there was no sharing of a common understanding. The unity ceases, the conversation ceases too. Saying something belongs to a common understanding and it is to that common understanding that unity – at least, one kind of unity – belongs. My problem is this: how can we speak of the unity of language of understanding, of 'the stream of life', when there is such disunity among language-users?

This larger demand for unity, not for the limited unity of discourse but the unity of all discourse may be in demand for an ideal – which is absent in our individual lives and, indeed, within our culture. It may very well be that my life is, after all, full of unresolved tensions that are papered over, or even suppressed, for the sake of a peaceful life. Perhaps only painful self-examination, together with it love for truth,

may show what is really the case – and even that there are no resolutions possible – and that is the nature of things indeed, the tension or tensions, as in a Heraclitian or Hegelian thesis may even be a necessary condition of growth in understanding, both in the life of an individual and in a broader cultural context.

The two other points of specific criticism of my paper made by Phillips are found in the context of the wider challenge in his response. This challenge is made to all three of the contributors – Moore, Robinson and myself – who said something about miracles in their submissions to this conference. For, although all three of us 'recognise that miracles were signs in biblical times, what they say of these signs in relation to our own times seems to me to be problematic' according to Phillips. But while I accept the validity of Phillips's criticism of Moore's distinction between 'the public meaning of a miracle, and its spiritual meaning' and of Robinson's distinction between 'the literal and theological meanings of miracles', I am rather reluctant to give much ground to either of the criticisms directed against myself.

The first of these criticisms is made in conjunction with a point in my paper, that it is theologically possible to argue that miracles belong to certain religious epochs in which particular novel religious truths are introduced – and in such instances, miracles may sometimes be seen as independent corroboration of some new perception of the will of God. Phillips goes on to say that this argument of mine 'contradicts Gealy's earlier insistence that miracles were read not as corroborations of the spirit, but as expressions of it . . . ' I do not see this dichotomy of 'corroborative' or 'expressive' as necessarily a contradiction, partly because of the diversity of circumstances of alleged miracles, and partly because of the plain historical fact that different kinds of miracles have been read differently by different observers or witnesses of miracles. Let's take one or two Biblical examples.

In Judges Ch. 6 we are told that the Israelites were in desperate straits. For seven years they had been enslaved by, and suffering, at the hands of the Midianites. Many believed that God had abandoned them. Talk of miracles and divine intervention, such as the deliverance from Egypt, belonged to stories that spoke of what happened in a fast disappearing past. But things were about to change. Gideon was called to be a Judge, leader of his People, in Israel. We are told that an angel of the Lord spoke to him and commanded Gideon to deliver Israel from its bondage. Gideon is wholly sceptical. He feels totally inadequate. He doubts if it is God who is speaking to him – and he says to the angel 'If I stand so well with you' (that is, if it is really God who is really calling me to this great office), 'give me a sign that it is you who speak to me'. Gideon is asking for a sign – some wonder – which will confirm, substantiate, corroborate and authenticate, that it is God's message

that he is hearing. He prepares a meal of meat, cakes (unleavened bread) and broth. He is commanded to place the meal on a rock and pour the broth over the rock. 'Then the angel of the Lord reached out a staff in his hand and touched the meat and the cakes with the tip of it. Fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the cakes; and the angel of the Lord was no more to be seen. Then Gideon knew that it was the angel of the Lord.'

Here, so it seems to me, the wonder itself is not essentially expressive of divinity. It is difficult for us to see the flames coming from the rock as expressive of divinity. Only in this particular context, of Gideon and his request for a sign, is the wonder understood as a sign or confirmation that it was God's will that Gideon should become leader of his people. The will of God, that Gideon should be leader, is a revealed truth which is independent of any miracle The miracle is thus not all expression of God's will, but rather has a corroborative role.

The above example, it appears, is quite different from so many of the miracle stories in the New Testament – which are more immediately expressive of divinity. In the Gospel narratives, for instance, time and time again, it is reiterated that Jesus was moved by compassion. So that healing people are wonderful events, not only because they were themselves extraordinary occurrences, but because that which is paramount in our conception of the divine is so transparent in these works. When it is stated in the Prologue of John's Gospel, that the Son revealed himself as the only begotten of the Father, John seems to expand what he meant by this expression by the use of the phrase 'full of grace and truth'. His divinity was revealed in acts of love and words of truth. An aspect of grace is compassion. And not only was this compassion shown to individuals in particular stories of healing, time and time again it is said that he saw the crowd and was moved with compassion. They were seen 'like sheep without a shepherd'. Again we are told that Jesus 'went round all towns and villages . . . curing every kind of ailment and disease . . . The sight of the people moved him to pity'. In these contexts, I suggest, miracles are expressive of the divine.

Finally, we turn to Phillips's final criticism and his own central concern: can miracles be signs today? I gave a qualified, but positive, answer to this question – that, at least, the concept of a miracle is still meaningful to some. And I suggested that 'the believer who still believes in miracles is expressing a confidence in the permanence of the language that she uses'. For Phillips it is not good enough – for 'that simply ducks the issue of what kind of language the language of miracles is, and the question of *whether, or to what* extent that language is a closed book to us'. So what does Phillips contend? Interestingly, he is prepared to say that some kinds of miracles are capable of saying something to him – but not all miracles. He alludes to Winch's example of a statue of a weeping

Virgin Mary – and particularly to the response of one lady observer who reacted by asking: why would the Holy Mother not shed tears at the terrible spectacle of human life in our time? Unlike Biblical miracles – such as Moses and the burning bush, Jesus walking on the water, and the raising of Lazarus from the dead – which Phillips cannot find it within him to acknowledge as miracles, he can understand the reaction of the woman to the weeping statue of the Virgin Mary. Not that Phillips doubts the historicity of the Biblical miracle narratives at all. If they happened, he says, they happened – and then he proceeds to say something that appears to me to be quite unfathomable. 'I am responding to them, and wondering at them, as natural events.' 'Natural events' – natural? That, it appears to me, is the very last possible description of a reaction to such occurrences. 'Natural' as opposed to what? If these were to be described as 'natural', I know of nothing at all with which 'natural' could be contrasted – which means that the concept 'natural' is vacuous! At least one has to say something like – these events are awesome, frightening, baffling – even wholly incomprehensible – but not 'natural', not ordinary, not commonplace, not predictable, not even capable of being integrated into our systematisation of natural phenomena. Far from being 'natural', they are unique and *other than* natural!

However, that is not my main point. The reason Phillips gives for finding it within him to acknowledge the possibility of a miracle in the case of the weeping statue is because the surroundings of the alleged miracle are familiar to him – statues, churches, stories about the Virgin Mary, doctrines connected with her, veneration of the Virgin and so on. 'But', states Phillips, 'in the case of the other miracles comparable surroundings are not forthcoming'. There are three points that I wish to make quite briefly.

First, the generality of the comment 'comparable surroundings are not forthcoming' is significant. Logically, the implication is that there are no comparable surroundings. This leads inevitably to the question: Is there absolutely nothing at all to which Phillips is able to relate in the context of the New Testament stories? If that were the case, the whole text would be closed to him. Of course, we all recognise the massive cultural gap that exists between ourselves and the peoples of Biblical times. But to say that there are 'no comparable surroundings' is an unjustified hyperbole – and as much of an exaggeration as the directly opposite view held by Kierkegaard 'that believers, in any age, are in all respects, contemporaneous with Christ'.

Secondly, it has been maintained that miracles say something about God's character and will. In one sense, they are not that different from 'the fruits of the Spirit'. And Phillips's correct emphasis in the whole of his interpretation of the meaning of religious faith is on how faith works

in the life of the believer – in terms of her responses to the world, to God's creatures, and to God himself. The mature believer does not particularly 'look for signs' but for 'the fruit of the Spirit'. 'By their fruits you shall know them!' As in so many religious contexts, particularly in the New Testament, a sign, a wonder, is equally an act of compassion or grace. (Indeed, it is this truth that has enabled many 'modern' theologians to, unfortunately, interpret miracle stories as mere parables about compassion.) Hence, the apparent dichotomy between divine miracles and acts of grace is not sustainable at all times – if at all. A Christian believer would be reluctant to call a particular act of wonder 'a miracle' if she were unable to see compassion in the event. (This is why, I think, the story of Jesus cursing the fig tree has been seen as presenting some difficulty – although, seen as a symbolic act of Jesus' desire to disassociate himself, and wanting to free others, from contemporary, barren, legalistic Judaism, the event is still profoundly compassionate.)

Thirdly, Phillips, uncharacteristically, argues against the Kierkegaardian view that no contemporary disciple of Christ is at a disadvantage in comparison with the original disciples who witnessed the deeds of Jesus. Rather, he adopts a view that is closer to that of Lessing who maintained that the 'proof of the spirit and power no longer has any spirit of power, but this sunk to the level of human testimonies of spirit and power'. It appears to me that the truth lies somewhere between Kierkegaard and Lessing. Kierkegaard was emphasising the need for the believer to be taught by Christ himself, thus making the historical Jesus of less significance, while Lessing thinks that the narratives about the historical Jesus belong to a distant past and believers are dependent on secondary evidence. But history within the Hebrew/Christian communities is different from secular history, for religious history is spiritually relived from generation to generation. A believing contemporary Jew will still confess that he has been redeemed from Egypt, 'from the land of bondage'. And similarly, the Christian believer, through knowing Christ, claims to know him both in 'spirit and power'. And it is because of the believer's experience of spirituality within the living church, within the community living the faith, that the language of faith still has its sense, still says something to her. Hence, when it was suggested above that 'the believer is expressing confidence in the permanence of the language she was using', I was not 'ducking the issue' as Phillips claims, but, as a good Wittgensteinian, I had in mind the whole package that comes with language – that is, the practice of faith in worship, prayer and obedience to the will of God. However dead miracles may seem to Phillips because of the absence of surroundings, within the surroundings of the community of believers, it may be said (in theological terms) that

it is still the same Holy Spirit and Power that is at work, realising the will of God through his people.

*H*: There is a great deal of agreement between E and myself. He says on p. 215, 'Our understanding of the concept of a miracle cannot be divorced from religious thought and practice.' I agree. I think he agrees with me when I say (p. 247), 'that it does not take us very far to ask whether miracles are part of the furniture of the world, or to say that a belief in miracles is true if and only if there are miracles... It makes it look as though the belief in miracles is answerable to a homogeneous ontology.' Instead of saying that propositions can be true or false, Wittgenstein argues that we should say that we only call propositions that which can be true or false. This does not prejudge what a determination of truth would amount to in each case. That would depend on what kind of propositions we are talking about. It weans us away from the idea that an already determined distinction between truth and falsity determines the nature of propositions. The contexts are diverse.

This has led people to say that philosophy is not interested in reality, but only clears up confusions between different uses of language. Some have seen Wittgenstein's analogy between language and games in this way. There is no more reason to say that all uses of language have a common form than there is to say this of the different games we play. Wittgenstein, according to Rush Rhees, in his *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, let that analogy run away with him in the first part of his *Philosophical Investigations*. Reacting to his earlier view that language had a unity akin to the unity of a calculus, he went, at times, to the other extreme of saying that each language game could be a whole language. Rhees argues against this, arguing that Wittgenstein is nearer the mark when he insists that to imagine a language is to imagine a way of living. Language does not have the unity of a substance or of a form. It is more like the unity of a conversation where what is said in one context bears on what is said in another. We speak in the course of lives that we lead. Rhees says over and over again, language makes sense if living makes sense.

E, while appreciating Rhees' point has difficulties with this notion of the unity of language. He can see how it applies to disagreements which take opposing poses within a shared context, but thinks it does not apply to the situation where communication breaks down, where people look at each other in blank astonishment, or pass each other by like ships in the night. How can we speak of the unity of discourse here? In Rhees' sense one can, because the breakdown is one between language users and gets its sense from that. The inadequacy of the games analogy brings this out. Though it is inexplicable why Americans prefer baseball to cricket, that's all there is to say about it. You play your game and I'll play mine. But the distances between language-users is not

like that. The failure may show a pointlessness in certain respects in the respective lives. A pop song I heard expressed it thus: 'It's not funny, we don't talk any more!' If we simply played our different games, that couldn't be said. To be robbed of discourse in one's response needs discourse to account for it. A breakdown in a relationship still needs a reference to a relationship to show what kind of breakdown it is.

Against this background my question becomes: what is the conceptual space occupied by miracles in the stream of life? To imagine miracles is to imagine a way of living – but the problem is, with respect to many of the Biblical miracles, that I do not see what we are asked to imagine. Their surroundings have eroded. My difficulty is found on p. 253 of my paper, 'The problem is, given the dominance of science and technology in our culture, that it is almost impossible not to ask the forbidden questions. In a world such as ours, with its dominant interests, who can doubt that hearing God speak from a burning bush which is not consumed is more problematic? So dominant are these interests that, as we have seen, an attempt is made to find a place for God in the logic of scientific space.'

Some philosophers want to say that the matter is straightforward: God violates or suspends the laws of nature. Since I think those notions are meaningless, that way out is not open to me. I also find it ironic that in an attempt to show that science doesn't know it all, its very influence on us is shown in turning God into a super-scientist.

What is more, what is characteristic of pre-scientific natural curiosity is precisely what is forbidden in the story of Moses and the burning bush. Moses asks, as we would, 'What's going on here?' The question is forbidden: 'Take off your shoes, you are on holy ground.' I agree with Winch – the anomaly is not between laws of nature and miracles as violations of those laws, but between what naturalistic explanatory investigations ask of us, and what the acknowledgment of a miracle asks of us. It is very hard for us, in our age, not to ask the very question Moses is forbidden to ask. Even if I can't answer it, but say, nevertheless with Rhees, that if Lazarus walked out of the tomb, that's that, I find myself wondering at it, even with awe, as a natural event, but not as a miracle. I am not saying that I see them at the same time as miracle and natural event – I'm referring to the only reaction I can make, because the religious surroundings are missing for me.

What is it to see it as a miracle? E, A and B all share a conception of the miracles as a sign, as a novelty which reveals the divine.

I am saying that the mode of that revelation, or the mediation of it has become problematic. The response made by A and B do not make it less problematic for me. A tells us that the language survives if believers have confidence in it. That is a tautology. But what is the significance of that language? If we simply say that a miracle is a demonstration of

power, that cannot be enough, since wonders were performed which were not said to reveal the divine. So how do miracles reveal the divine? That is my question. I am not doubting that they did, but saying, with Lessing, that with us, the proof of the spirit and of power is missing.

On p. 242, E refers to certain miracles which, in certain cultural epochs, have the role as 'authentications' of novel religious truths. I don't see any difference between this term and my use of 'corroborations'. A says that these signs are as infrequent as the novel truths. Apparently, once the novel truths are accepted, one no longer needs the signs to authenticate them, and to continue to look for them is condemned as superstition. For this very reason, *this* use of miracle doesn't throw much light on my problem.

I have difficulties with A's distinction between the public and spiritual meaning of the miracles. Can it avoid E's point that one cannot think of them in both ways *at the same time*. A doesn't tell us whether the spiritual meaning arrived at through meditation is the same meaning as the miracles had for those who heard them. B raises this concern, and I share it.

Now B does try to tell me in his reply to me, what the significance of some of the miracles was. Thus he tells me that the significance of Jesus walking on the water 'signified that Jesus had superhuman power over a storm which was itself an evil wind, that is to say an evil spirit'. Am I any wiser? When Wittgenstein said of the killing of the priest-king at Nemi that if we put the phrase 'the majesty of death' alongside it we see that they come to the same thing. I find that wonderfully illuminating. But after B's clarification I have two problems instead of the one I set out with: I began being puzzled about how 'walking on water' has religious significance, and end by being equally puzzled by what is meant by 'power over an evil wind which is an evil spirit'. Finally, I am puzzled as to why B wishes to disavow the kernel/husk distinction which he draws. Does he accept that if this were a distinction he uses it would lead to the confused views about the meanings of words I outline. It's hard to say for the following reasons. I find it hard to find consistency between the following six points.

1. On p. 60 B quotes me: 'Can miracles be signs for our times?' B's answer seems to be that they can if we search for the theological truth in them. This truth will only be found if we realise that the miracles are not to be understood literally. They were part of a mythological mode of expression. To arrive at theological truth for today, however, we have to realize also that the mythological mode of expression is no longer ours, and we must not be diverted from the theological truth by concentrating on it. He comments, 'So far, so good!' Don't concentrate on the mode of expression, concentrate on the

meaning. If 'the meaning' is to survive that mode of expression, it must be independent of it. I asked, 'Where does the meaning come from?'

2. On p. 62, B says that 'the biblical audience may well have not been diverted from the meaning, since they lived in the same mythopoeic world as did the biblical text' – But I'm not talking about then, but about us. The question is can there be a meaning which diverts from this mode of expression?
3. I ask: What was that mode of expression for them? Robinson's answer on p. 63 is: 'The truths were conveyed in mythopeic language, because they lived in a mythopeic culture.' Here we seem back to the idea of the independent truth conveyed by a mode of expression.
4. When I ask what that mode *did* mean, B tells me, 'That is simply the way they thought and talked' – this simply takes me back to the question of what that way amount to. It reiterates the problem and does not advance it.
5. B says on p. 62, referring to Biblical culture and our own that 'myth is never really replaced and discarded' – but earlier he had said that if we concentrate on the myth we'll be diverted from the theological truth. He says that we must 'seek as best we can to move back and forth from one to the other', that is, between the mythopeic culture and our own. I'm simply saying that we can't simply assume that this is possible. Years ago in *Belief, Change and Forms of Life* I said that one cannot hang on to the comforting picture of religious accommodation which holds that no matter what cultural changes occur, there can always be an accommodation for religious meanings.
6. B's final comment in his reply is that we do have a problem with miracles which antiquity doesn't have. If they break laws of nature we say they didn't happen. I have questioned this assumption. I do not deny that the wonders happened. I am asking – what was it to see them as miracles?

And so my concluding question remains: 'What was the significance of miracles in the biblical contexts in which they clearly have importance? I doubt whether sociology will help us to discover it, anymore than anthropology helped Frazer to appreciate primitive rain dances. Lessing's reason has application there too, the proof of the spirit and of power was missing. Frazer missed the spirits in the dances because he missed the spirit in the rain. Do we miss the theology in miracles because we miss their spirit too? I have suggested that we do.' I am not saying that this *had* to happen, but that it has. Even if I'm wrong about this, why the reluctance to admit this possibility?

*E*: The main point of disagreement between us concerns H's endorsement of Rhees' use of 'the unity of language'.

*K*: I share E's concern. What does talk of unity mean here?

*H*: The philosophical context of the dispute is Rhees' attempt to extend Wittgenstein's work in certain directions. In his early work, the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein argued that if a proposition is to have sense it must be related to other propositions in the language in the way parts of a calculus are related to each other. It has a formal unity. By the time of his *Investigations* he had rejected that view, and wanted to emphasise the variety there is in our forms of discourse, hence the analogy between games and language games. Rhees thought he had let the analogy run away with him in the first part of that work, even to the extent of saying that each language game is complete in itself, and that the order 'Slab' given by one builder to another could be the whole of a language. Rhees thought that in getting rid of the formal unity of language, Wittgenstein had thrown away the notion of the interlocking intelligibility of language. If what we say was like a game, it needn't have much to do with another game – what we say elsewhere. But we say what we do in the stream of life. What we say are not signals, but expressions which get their sense in the lives we lead. Rhees is emphasising that. He is not referring to an agreement in opinion, but in what makes sense to us and its bearing on other things that make sense.

*E*: But that last point captures my difficulty. When there is a break down of communication, such as the ones I illustrated in my paper, isn't it confusing to speak of 'unity'? What we have seems to be disunity rather than unity.

*H*: I acknowledge the term 'unity' may cause difficulties, but let's try to see what Rhees is getting at. Obviously, he can't mean a difference in opinions in the cases E mentions. The breakdown is more radical than that. What one says passes by the other. But, now, don't we need discourse to understand *the kind* of breakdown it is, the significance it has, and so on? If the analogy with games were to hold we could simply say, 'You play your game and you play mine!' I think E would agree that that won't do. So what do you need to bring back in to do justice to the nature of the breakdown? The fact that two language-users are faced with a breakdown in communication, or, better: that two people with lives to lead find they cannot speak to each other. That is what Rhees is trying to get at.

*Q*: I agree with H. That is the only way we can talk about the unity of discourse and breakdowns in communication. This raises an interesting question: what happens when there has been a breakdown, but it is not recognised? This is directly relevant to the question of whether we understand miracles. Further, an honest reading of the Bible shows that we already have disagreements about miracles there. So our problems are not so surprising if there is already a debate going

on in Biblical times, a debate which concerns different perceptions of authority.

*H*: Agreed, and it is no part of my view to think that we will get around all breakdowns. My view is that in philosophy of religion the breakdown is often not recognised.

*B*: In response to his references to me, I think we ought to realise that we never dispense with the myth of scripture. The reference to demythologizing concerns decoding a text. I don't think the decoding ever has a distinction between a clear kernel and a coded husk. I could speak of 'transcendence' but that is mythological too. We are kidding ourselves if we think our language is purely literal and free from myth. But I do think we can talk of miracles in the context of Jesus' public ministry. In the case of some miracles, such as Jesus walking on the water, we don't believe they happened. In others, such as the healing miracles, we do. But we approach them as modern thinkers seeking their theological significance for us.

*F*: I have a question for H. You and E say that the response of people to a miracle is no tone of curiosity, but you are not sure what it is. You say that nowadays people don't believe in powers of the air and so on. Well, maybe they do or maybe they don't but what is the difficulty? H has a view of laws of nature as descriptions of what happens, a systematisation of data, and so says that the laws do not prescribe. But, then, he goes to use 'must' with respect to them. There the 'must' seems to have modal force. And, as you know, that is one way of thinking about them. You can think of laws as descriptions of how God ordinarily behaves, but in miracles, it can be believed that he works in some other way.

*H*: For me the 'must' which has modal force is a function of the systematisation I referred to. The 'must' is parasitic on the experimental data and so on.

*F*: But there are presuppositions is scripture too and many of us have no problem in understanding it.

*H*: What the scriptures say is that 'God did it'. Our disagreement is about what that means.

*F*: My point is that there is not an *ab initio* difficulty in 'God doing it'. It isn't already a problem. It just needs some work.

*H*: One miracle is that we don't get down to it!

*D*: E says quite generally that thinkers in Western thought have analysed miracles in alien terms. But miracles have been discussed in different ways. For example, Rosensweig in his *Star of Redemption* sees miracles as fulfillments of prophecy. Without the prophetic background you wouldn't be able to recognise it as a miracle, or to know whether it was one or not. A miracle is an event in a particular context against a particular background. The question whether we can understand a miracle, then,

can be put by asking whether we have preserved that context. So the attempt to formulate a general concept of miracles is misguided.

*E*: I don't want to contest what you say about prophecy, although maybe it cannot be extended to Christianity. I, of course, was emphasising that there is no 'essence' of miracles. On the other hand, I tried to show how certain 'natural' phenomena can be understood as having religious significance, for example, dreams. As in the case of the flight from Herod, they can be regarded as miracles. Here one might say that divine intervention occurs through natural behavior. I have no problem in calling these miracles. Perhaps I was too harsh on Swinburne's claim that miracles have to be extraordinary. What does extraordinary mean? Here, one may be involved in wider contexts, such as the 'miracles of grace' I mentioned in concluding. That I am a Christian is a miracle. It is a confession of faith to see the hand of God at work.

*U*: I wonder whether H thinks that a comment by Wittgenstein about the way trees bowed after a saint had spoken throws any light in the way E is speaking about miracles. Wittgenstein is saying that he does not believe that the saint's words caused the trees to bow, but although he is not impressed himself, he could see how the connection could be seen as miraculous. In the same way how could it not be seen that the Son of God healed a blind man?

*H*: Of course, this connection between the saint's words and the bowing of the trees is not seen as causal by Wittgenstein. Similarly, elsewhere he says with approval that the opening of a flower is a miracle. That is a point E and I should pursue. That the natural/miraculous distinction is not an all-or-nothing affair. That is part of E's point. Yes, your point is helpful.

*J*: I don't understand why H says that the notion of objects 'simply vanishing' is logically contradictory. Isn't it easy to imagine?

*H*: In a story yes, but not in reality. Of course there are ordinary uses of 'vanishes': the squirrel vanishes up the tree, water vanishes from a saucer when evaporated, and so on. But not 'simply vanishing'. This is because the persistence of physical objects over time is part of our understanding of them over time. As Winch showed in 'Asking Too Many Questions' in the Claremont volume *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, 'It's Vanished!' is neither an explanation, nor a description of what has happened; if you say something has 'simply vanished!', it is a cry of bewilderment.

*J*: Why shouldn't the end of the world be thought of as 'simply vanishing'?

*H*: That would involve me in discussing wider issues, such as whether the end of time is a time.

*J*: Since Augustine it has been thought of in this way.

*N*: Isn't it possible to have criteria as to whether a miracle has happened? Can't we go through certain steps to determine this?

*E*: I was emphasising that you can't say 'That's a miracle' *in vacuo*. A religious context is presupposed. This is why the significance of the language is absolutely central in the perception of a miracle.

*H*: But what has that language become for us? I watch American television with a morbid curiosity. I see a woman in an evening dress against the background of a waterfall saying, 'I believe in miracles' and the waterfall stops. I see people falling like logs when Benny Hinn touches them in the name of Jesus. I find him eerie and certainly don't laugh at him. What is going on there? What is at stake in calling or in not calling that a miracle?

*C*: I think one can and should respond to the request for criteria. These are broadly scientific and broadly religious. First, we must be unable, given our best knowledge of how things work, to explain what has happened. That comes pretty close to being a necessary condition. But, then, on the religious side, the event must be one that you think God is likely to do.

*H*: There's one more point I want to make in relation to E's comments on Jesus' healing miracles. I wasn't pouring scorn on the fact that he healed some and not others. What I did say is that miracle-working isn't a skill and that if it were, his selectivity would be puzzling.

*A*: Of course a miracle can't be a skill. If it were, it would not be miraculous anyway. But more needs to be said about criteria. I think it important sometimes to distinguish between the first person and a third person approach.

Suppose that you are on your deathbed dying of cancer. The doctors have said there is no hope. You pray, and the next day the tumour has gone. I don't see how the person could see that as anything but a miraculous answer to prayer. You don't search for evidence here. But that applies to a first person relationship to what has happened.

But suppose you pray to Cardinal Newman to be healed, and you are. Then you present this as evidence for a miracle to the Bishop. He will have to ask whether it was really a miracle. This is what happens in considering reported miracles at Lourdes. A medical panel checks, not whether it is a miracle, but on whether there is no medical explanation.

So you can't ask in abstraction whether or not there are criteria for miracles. You must ask what relationship you bear to the miracle.

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