

# Religion

## Its Reality and its Relevance

*An Inaugural Lecture*

GIVEN IN THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF  
RHODESIA AND NYASALAND

Professor  
Robert Craig

RELIGION  
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RELEVANCE

*An Inaugural Lecture  
given in the University College of  
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on 20 April 1964*

*by*

ROBERT CRAIG

*Professor of Theology*



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## RELIGION: ITS REALITY AND ITS RELEVANCE

AT a very early stage in the history of this College the hope was expressed that a Department of Theology would soon be established. Nevertheless, the teacher of that subject in a modern university is confronted by the perennial question posed long ago by Tertullian: 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What has the Academy to do with the Church?' It is to a consideration of the relation of faith in God to so-called secular thought and action that I ask you to turn with me now.

'Religion: its reality and its relevance' is a subject which at least has the merit of being fundamental. Faith in God, I take it, cannot be justifiably regarded as the sole prerogative of the Jew and the Christian, for there are anticipations of Judaism and of Christianity in all history. Karl Barth, Protestantism's leading contemporary theologian, in his concern to secure the unique nature of the Christian faith, refuses to speak of the Christian religion; 'religion' to him is unbelief.<sup>1</sup> True knowledge of God is apparently a peculiarly Christian privilege. Barth surely confuses erring or imperfect knowledge of God with ignorance of God. Thus I take it that a revered teacher of mine, D. M. Baillie, was justified in entitling one of his two major works *Faith in God and its Christian Consummation*, as was also John Calvin in expounding *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Faith in God has its preamble, as those in the main stream of Christianity have always taught, in the religion of so-called primitive man. Of this fact, I submit, any explication or defence of faith in God must take account. At least initially, the problem on our hands is to answer the four-fold question: What is religion? wherein (if anywhere) lies

<sup>1</sup> See *Church Dogmatics*, vol. i, part 2, pp. 280-361.

its truth? what is the criterion of its higher development? wherein lies its relevance to the problems that beset modern man?

Four contemporary attitudes—religious authoritarianism, agnosticism, scepticism, and atheism—stand apparently opposed to our present investigation. Jews, Roman Catholics, and Protestants have been at different times and in similar degrees guilty of that pride and provincialism which lead men to assert that they possess the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Authoritarianism is one manifestation of that fear of freedom concerning which Erich Fromm has written, and it is a religious as it is also a political characteristic of our day. According to the authoritarian the truth of religion is accepted on the basis of infallible bible, tradition, pope, creed, or church. The authoritarian isolates and insulates himself from rival religions and from so-called secular knowledge, and claims complete possession of final truth. A modicum of reverent agnosticism and scepticism, not to say humour, might temper the dogmatist's presumption to represent God. He would do well to keep Dostoevsky's question in *The Brothers Karamazov* in mind: 'Is not all human exercise of authority tantamount to a usurpation?'

The agnostic denies the possibility of our knowing the truth. That there are elements of 'not knowing' in the mind of every sane person is evident and needs constant emphasis. But a thorough-going agnosticism appears to be self-defeating. It is that mood of intellectual despair in which, because a man has realized the impossibility of full and final knowledge, he proclaims the impossibility of any knowledge at all. But in saying that he is unable to know, he exhibits a knowledge which he claims is unattainable.

Scepticism is the state of doubt regarding the possibility of our knowing the truth. I take it to be more than a mere playing with words to say that dogmatic scepticism is

self-refuting. Is the sceptic prepared to be sceptical about scepticism? Further, the nature of human existence appears to be such that we are constantly involved in actions which are inconsistent with suspension of judgement. The sceptic belies his scepticism every time he asks a question or expresses a doubt; it is only by his implicit denial of scepticism that he can live and think. Unmitigated scepticism, were it conceivable, would be identical with the most rigid dogmatism; and both imply the destruction of man.

In logical positivism as, for example, expounded in the earlier, yet very influential, thinking of A. J. Ayer, in *Language, Truth, and Logic* we have one recent manifestation of scepticism. Briefly, Ayer argues that there are only two classes of genuine propositions. The first are analytical, and they are necessary and certain because they are tautologies. They assert nothing about the empirical world. To this category belong the propositions of logic and mathematics. The second are synthetic propositions which make assertions about the real world, and are capable of empirical verification by sensory perception. The characteristic affirmations of traditional philosophy, ethics, and religion fall into neither of these two classes. They are not tautologies; and they are not verifiable by sensory perception. They are therefore classed as non-sense, as mere emotive utterances which can be neither confirmed nor refuted. Here I make only these comments: if the restriction of knowledge to that which is verifiable by sensory perception is a matter of taste, we need not take it seriously. On the other hand, if, based on an analysis of the limits of human knowledge, it claims to be true, it betrays its own metaphysical assumptions which it ostensibly denies. Logical positivism cannot eliminate metaphysics without destroying itself. The logical positivist, quick to perceive the unproven, and perhaps unprovable, assumptions of others, ought to be aware of his own. His claim that 'the



meaning of a proposition is the method of its verification' is an assumption. It belongs to the class neither of analytic nor of synthetic propositions. So, according to his own principles, it is nonsense. The logical positivist denies his professed scepticism if he claims, as he evidently does, that his position is true.

Both agnosticism and scepticism fail to do justice to the native tendency of the human mind to understand, to explain, and to strive towards coherent explanation of existence. I propose later to argue that this search for coherence, meaning, and unity is one of religion's most significant aspects. Both agnosticism and scepticism run out into a waste land, a vacuum, filled by new, though commonly unconscious, absolutes.

Of professed atheism it is perhaps enough to say here, with Karl Barth, that its *naïveté* lies in its preoccupation with negation and denial. Atheism fails to see that absolute denial can be meaningful only against the background of a relative affirmation. Atheism is parasitical; it lives in and by its negation. 'In the last resort,' says Nicolas Berdyaev, 'even militant atheists revolt in the name of God, although they may be unaware of it';<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche's Anti-Christ is dependent on the Christ whom he would overcome. And here again, as in the case of agnosticism and scepticism, the atheist commonly abases himself with ingenuous credulity before other principalities and powers. 'What does it mean to have a god, or what is God?' asks Luther. 'Trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and idol. . . . Whatever then thy heart clings to . . . and relies upon, that is properly thy God.' In this sense there are as many gods as there are men. Self, family, class, nation, race, scientific method are some of them. Man, it appears, must abase himself before some supposedly absolute power; it is perhaps least humiliating to do so before God.

<sup>1</sup> *Dream and Reality*, p. 55.

But if the interested inquirer asks for a definition of religion he will be answered by a veritable babel of tongues. A. N. Whitehead describes it as 'what the individual does with his own solitariness'. Emile Durkheim sees the idea of God as the personification of the spirit of the human community. For Matthew Arnold the true meaning of religion is 'not simply morality, but morality touched by emotion'; Rudolph Otto finds its essence in the 'numinous', in the 'direct experience of the holy'. According to Tillich religion is the expression of man's 'ultimate concern'; but with Sigmund Freud (in *The Future of an Illusion*) religious ideas 'are illusions, fulfilments of the oldest, strongest, and most insistent wishes of mankind; the secret of their strength is the strength of those wishes'. J. G. Frazer, on the basis of anthropological research, concludes that 'religion is what passed for wisdom when the world was young'. On a less exalted level, an able student of mine once wrote in an essay: 'Religion is but one vast metaphor, a figure of speech.' May it not well be that in face of these and a myriad other definitions, one must conclude as Gibbon did about the various modes of worship in the Roman Empire: 'all [were] considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher as equally false; and by the magistrate as equally useful'? The bewildering conclusion may be that 'religion' is a term of no fixed meaning, covering an indeterminate field of experience.

Yet religion appears to be as universal as it is indeterminate; a constant source of both good and evil in human life. It may be vain to search for an adequate definition, but failure to find one is a predicament which religion shares with other distinctively human activities: poetry and art are examples. H. W. B. Joseph, in his *Introduction to Logic*, reminds us that 'the more complex the subject and the greater the range and variation of the modes in which it manifests itself according to the conditions under which



it exists, the more arbitrary becomes our choice of characters to be included in the definition'.

The ostensible object of religious faith, namely God, cannot in any simple way be empirically or analytically proven. Here, as in morals, no purely objective and decisive evidence is available. To the question of the truth of religion there is an analogy in Aristotle's search for a definition of moral good. After all his attempts to find an objective or quantitative standard for virtue, he had to fall back on the test: ὡς ἂν ὁ φρόνιμος ὀρίσειεν—'virtue is that which the man of moral insight judges it to be'.<sup>1</sup> The so-called proofs of God's existence (though, as I shall later urge, of vital significance as explications of faith in God) are widely, and I believe justifiably, held to be defective as proofs. Our starting-point can lie only in a critical examination of the religious awareness of man. In that awareness, I suggest, there are three basic elements; and I believe that it is in the exploration of these that the reality and relevance of faith in God begin to be clear.

Natural man, so called, has, firstly, a sense of reverence for a power beyond himself and an awareness of being dependent upon an ultimate source of being. Secondly, he has a sense of absolute moral obligation laid upon him by an authority other than himself or society. Natural man thus experiences a sense of unworthiness, of estrangement from true good, and of guilt. At the lowest level he at least knows his own imperfection and the fragmentary nature of his existence. Thirdly, natural man longs for unity, wholeness, perfection, reconciliation to God and to his neighbour. He longs for what more than one religion has called forgiveness. One of the claims of the Hebrew-Christian faith to truth and relevance lies in its answers to these three dimensions of universal human experience. To man's sense of dependence on a power wholly other than

<sup>1</sup> *Eth. Nic.* 1107<sup>a</sup>.

himself it replies with its affirmation of God the Creator. Man's sense of his own failure and imperfection it meets with the fact of God as Judge. To man longing for reconciliation and forgiveness it speaks of God the Redeemer. In God as Creator the meaning of human existence is to be found; in God as Judge man's quest for moral goodness is seen in its ultimate dimension; in God as Redeemer man's longing to be reconciled is met and answered. There are only two possible conclusions regarding the man who claims and exhibits these fundamental elements of religious experience. Either he indeed possesses, or rather is possessed by, the ultimately real; or he is a fit subject, or object, for psychiatric treatment.

Here Freud's critique of religion inevitably arises. If his views constitute a most damaging indictment of the truth of religion, yet both the believer and the unbeliever have much to learn from them, and *The Future of an Illusion* should be required reading for all students of theology. He presents us with the id, the ego, and the superego as the three constituent elements of the personality. The id is the pleasure-principle; through the ego there is interaction with the real world; here is the seat of conscious intelligence. The super-ego is the seat of conscience, it has unconditional authority over the ego. Derived from the Oedipus complex, it works largely in the unconscious. Freud does not see (what I trust is in part the thesis of this lecture) that—to use his terminology—normative religion is the expression of a free ego, dependent on the reality-principle, confronting man with the real world. But he accurately analyses and rejects those types of infantile religion, products of the unconscious, which spring from fantasies, and select and use only such knowledge as is needed to further unconscious wishes. It is Freud's great service to religion that he correctly identified the neurotic, infantile religion of over-dependence and of authoritarianism. For this we

should be grateful. On the other hand, normative religion, as I understand it, can, I believe, withstand his damaging indictment.

The nature of genuine religious experience as an engagement of the whole person should be emphasized. Religion's essential emotive aspects are sufficiently evident, and in moments of intense awareness are so predominant that it is unnecessary to stress them. But as William Temple has well said: 'It is not religious experiences, but religious experience as a whole that is of chief concern—that is to say, the whole experience of religious persons. For the religious man is not only religious when he prays; his work is religiously done, his recreations religiously enjoyed, his food and drink religiously received.'<sup>1</sup> Similarly William James concluded that religion is 'a man's total reaction upon life'. We consider now the place in religious experience firstly, of reason, and secondly, of moral obligation.

Contemporary theology, particularly in some Protestant quarters, appears to be in grave danger of minimizing or dismissing the essential element of rationality. It is important here to be clear about what is meant by reason. Greek thinkers drew a distinction between reason as *διάνοια* and as *νοῦς*. The latter is reason understood as intuitive cognition, and as such must be contrasted with intellect as *ratio* or *διάνοια*, of which syllogistic reasoning is typical. If *νοῦς*, as H. H. Farmer writes, is 'man's whole personality considered as functioning self-consciously in its highest awareness of the world, then it is by reason, and reason alone, that man is able to become aware of God's approach to the soul'.<sup>2</sup> Thus it is, if I may adapt A. N. Whitehead's memorable phrase, that the great ages of faith are the great ages of reason. Personality means rationality, and neither so-called natural nor revealed religion can escape examination at the bar of reason. To place faith in God beyond the

<sup>1</sup> *Nature, Man and God*, p. 334.

<sup>2</sup> *The World and God*, p. 87.

bounds of rational criticism is effectively to place it beyond the pale of belief. The so-called double-truth hypothesis advanced by some contemporary linguistic analysts and Protestant theologians, whereby rational and religious language occupy separate and unconnected universes of discourse, removes religion from all claim to truth and relevance. The two areas of discourse—the rational and the religious—are happily married by the simple expedient of never meeting, and the remedy for domestic discord turns out to be judicial separation. But the reasonable man who looks at religion will want to know whether or not there is the fire of truth behind the smoke of the altar. Even reason in its narrower sense as *διάνοια* has a very real though limited function in religion. It is granted that logic does not supply the material of religious experience; but logic determines its validity or shatters its pretensions. 'I express myself with caution,' wrote Bishop Butler in *The Analogy of Religion*, 'lest I should be mistaken to vilify reason, which is indeed the only faculty we have wherewith to judge concerning anything, even revelation itself.'<sup>1</sup> 'No one', said Hegel, 'ever went forth to slay logic without logic in the long run slaying him', nor, we may add, without himself using logic in the attempt.

Following Kant, it is no doubt fitting to speak of faith taking reason's place when reason, confronted by problems it cannot solve, finds itself at the end of its tether. The demands of practical life only too obviously cannot await solution according to logic's dictates. But, even then, faith must be reasonable, though not necessarily rationalist. We should discern reason's limitations by the use of reason, and, in discerning them, transcend them, finding beyond reason, not the irrational, but a mystery insoluble to our finite powers of reasoning, but soluble by a reason superior to, and essentially continuous with, our own. That there

<sup>1</sup> Part II, ch. iii.



is an irreducible element of mystery in religion is not to be denied: *Ein begriffener Gott ist kein Gott*—‘A God comprehended is no God’, says Tersteegen. But the mystery of religion must not be reduced to the mystification of the believer. Religious belief is irrational only if by irrational is meant that which is not syllogistically deducible from sure premisses. The remark of the Cambridge mathematician who was persuaded to read Keats’s *Ode to Autumn* comes to mind: ‘It doesn’t prove anything.’ Beliefs that are irrational in any other sense—that is, fundamentally at variance with the canons of valid reasoning—cannot be long held by reflective minds. Incompatible conceptions may long coexist, but the mind’s impulse towards integration rebels against confusion and contradiction. Even the most exalted articles of revealed religion must be subjected to rational criteria. The prophet declares: ‘Thus spake the Lord’, but there are criteria, internal and external, of faith whereby we, in the words of the New Testament, must ‘try the spirits whether they are of God’. We may emphasize, with contemporary Protestant orthodoxy, that man cannot sit in judgement upon God; but what man cannot evade is judging statements about God.

Here surely, if anywhere, lies present, though fragmentary, verification of the truth of religion. The rejection of such verification brings some theologians into curious situations. John Hick, for example, in his *Philosophy of Religion*, posits the idea that the truth of the Christian faith depends upon the possibility of religious assertions being found, after death or at the end of history, to be false. As against such a view, I urge the claim of reason’s function to effect a present, though incomplete, verification of the truth of religion. (And to this I propose later to add morality as a second criterion of truth and progress in religion.) Herein lies the test and at least the partial verification of the special revelations which the great religions have claimed.



'Rational religion', says Whitehead, 'appeals to the direct intuition of special occasions, and to the elucidatory power of its concepts for all occasions.'<sup>1</sup> Thus Judaism finds in the Exodus what Christianity finds in the Resurrection—a principle of rational interpretation, an intelligible event which makes other events intelligible. 'Such an event,' writes Richard Niebuhr, 'rather than being contrary to reason in our life, is the discovery of rational pattern in it.'<sup>2</sup> Revelation finds its verification in the intellectual, moral, social, and aesthetic coherence which it discerns in the apparent chaos and meaninglessness of man's experience of himself and of the world. The unity of the self and the unity of the world apprehended by the self are, in H. H. Farmer's words, 'among the most central springs of religion'.<sup>3</sup> So reason safeguards the objectivity of religion, securing it against the incoherence characteristic of hysteria.

A most significant challenge to reason in our time has come from existentialism, a phenomenon familiar to all students of contemporary European literature. Existentialism may be professedly atheistic, as in J.-P. Sartre, or it may be made the basis of faith in God. The blessings of existentialism are doubtless many. It has shown us the insufficiency of rationalism; it has confirmed our naïve and sound conviction that life is larger than logic. It has protested against the objectification and the dehumanizing of man in abstract thought, in politics, and not least in the industrial and economic order. It has taught us that human nature cannot be identified with any one of its constituent elements; that to discover the nature and destiny of man we must look more deeply than either natural science or logic. Existentialism has revealed man as a distinctive and probably unique creature; standing at the juncture of

<sup>1</sup> *Religion in the Making*, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> *The Meaning of Revelation*, p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> *Revelation and Religion*, p. 104.

nature and of spirit he participates in both, and alone (so far as we can discern) in the created order he transcends himself in the contemplation of his origin, his nature, his destiny, and his death. Existentialism in its religious manifestations has spoken of that homelessness of man in the present world which Reinhold Niebuhr has described as the ground of all religion.

Whether existentialism is a position, a posture, or a pose, I leave it to you to decide. Since Kierkegaard in the mid-nineteenth century it has exemplified all three of these attitudes. Kierkegaard, like many seminal thinkers, desired to found no school, to have no disciples, adherents, or followers. The main results of posterity's disregard of Kierkegaard's injunction have, to put it mildly, been harmful. Kierkegaard chose the paradox, the Christ; Heidegger chose Hitler; J.-P. Sartre committed himself equally to the French Resistance movement and to atheism. Existentialism in its apotheosis of meaninglessness, incoherence, and despair rules out empirical and rational evidence, and in so doing deprives us in advance of all objective guides as we face the proximate and the ultimate issues of human existence. At Heidelberg University in 1950 Karl Jaspers warned his fellow Germans of the danger in the denigration of reason, and we too should ponder well his words: 'By renouncing reason, he [man] has, without noticing the fact, renounced freedom. He is ready for any kind of totalitarianism and follows the ringleader to destruction, crime, and a shameful death along with the rest of the herd.' Kierkegaard saw faith in God as entailing the crucifixion of the intellect; but surely a faith which destroys reason is not divine but demonic.

Further, in its deep and doubtless genuine concern for the person, existentialism easily lapses into individualism and subjectivism. The existentialist tells me: 'Be yourself.' 'But which self,' I ask, 'the self that seeks and finds freedom in

the deep loyalties of our inescapably social existence, or the self that seeks self-service to the exclusion of my neighbour?' "This above all: to thine own self be true" is in fact a piece of high-class ethical futility which Shakespeare appropriately put into the mouth of his own most priceless old dotard.<sup>1</sup> If man does not know himself as more than a self he becomes less than a person. If man is, as Aristotle describes him, a social animal, and, lacking a friend, either a beast or a god, then human existence is basically social and personal. In the light of this, existentialism is insufficiently existential because insufficiently social. Much of man's social existence is indeed, as the existentialist declares, beyond his control; but he would do well to seek to control what is controllable. Man possesses, as the existentialist tells us, indeterminate possibilities in his freedom; but these must be realized progressively as their forms receive coherent structure and order. This is a slow, painful process, depending on man's full use of all his capacities—rational, moral, aesthetic, technological. I cannot see that to this process existentialism is of much evident relevance.

The use of the term 'subject' in relation to man reminds me that existentialists have consistently, as, for example, Martin Buber, spoken of God as subject. In recent and contemporary writers such as Berdyaev, Tillich, and Bonhoeffer and—more familiar perhaps—Bishop Robinson in his *Honest to God*, it is reiterated that God is not an object, but subject, and that we must not on any account commit the error of saying that God exists. If this means that God is not, in Robinson's words, an observable object 'up there', there can hardly be room for disagreement. But a unilateral emphasis on God as subject appears to me to run the risk of seeing God as subjective, that is, as the function of a human being who happens to see himself and the world in a particular light. Divinity

<sup>1</sup> W. Temple, *Nature, Man and God*, p. 26.

becomes an aspect of humanity. Here what has been called the \$64,000 question of religion arises: Is religion concerned with some objective reality, are its statements about God of a cognitive or of a non-cognitive nature? The exponents of theism and those of the Christian faith both have on their hands the question whether God exists not only in our minds but objectively; whether He is the initiator of processes, our creator, sustainer, and ruler. Christian biblical theologians, among whom Bishop Robinson is one of the most distinguished, have spoken frequently of 'God who acts'. Is this, to quote again from the essay of my student, no more than a metaphor or figure of speech? Is God man's creator or his creature? The Bishop has been accused, on high authority, of atheism; he appears to me to be at least vulnerable to the charge of a humanistic idealism in which human values preoccupy the imagination and in which religion, deprived of God, its proper object, is removed from the realm of the objectively true.

I submit that religion, and in particular Christianity, has an essential interest in seeing God as object though not as an object. Its theory and its practice, its theology and its worship, cannot be, and never have been, sustained by less. It is with the objectivity of God that the traditional 'proofs' of God's existence have been concerned. I turn to a brief consideration of their nature and purpose.

'There are two things', says Plato, 'which lead men to faith in the gods. . . . One is the argument about the soul—that it is the oldest and most divine of all things. . . . The other is the argument from the orderliness of the courses of the stars and of everything that is controlled by the mind which orders the universe.'<sup>1</sup> Subsequent statements of the cosmological and teleological arguments have not added significantly to Plato's exposition. Here we have the earliest hypothesis ever put forward by human thought as the

<sup>1</sup> *Laws*, Book xii, § 966.



explanation of natural phenomena. It should be noted that here we have no eccentricity of Plato's thought but rather the very essence of his idealism: the first cause of all things must be of the nature of mind, not matter. All movements with the ultimate origin of which we are acquainted—movements, for example, of our own bodies—are due to the activity of mind or soul. It is reasonable, Plato argues, to hold that movements in external nature are due to the same cause. Here Platonic idealism is, as N. Söderblom has observed, in *Das Werden des Gottesglaubens*, identical with what students of the history of religion call animism. The ultimate source of evolutionary process (ἀρχή τῆς κινήσεως) must be a supreme soul. Platonic idealism and animism both point to what I regard as a reasonably explanatory hypothesis: that natural process, which has produced mind, has its first and sustaining cause in mind. Both witness to the persistent human tendency to look for, and to find, more than a material explanation of natural events.

Objections to the argument readily occur. 'Whence', asks Hume, 'can any cause be known but from its known effects?' It is impossible from such finite and imperfect data as our premisses to reach the infinite and perfect in our conclusion. H. D. Lewis observes that the usual form of the so-called proofs overlooks the fact that the movement of thought which they involve 'is unique and has no strict analogy elsewhere'. The arguments, I hold, manifestly fail as arguments; but, in Lewis's words: 'The cosmological and the ontological arguments in particular converge on the requirement that the conditioned and incomplete realities we directly encounter should have some source that is not limited in that way.'<sup>1</sup> To this significant extent, though they cannot be properly viewed as the foundation of faith in God, they embody rational reflection and constitute its reasonable grounds.

<sup>1</sup> *Our Experience of God*, p. 42.



A distinguished contemporary empiricist, D. J. O'Connor, has remarked that 'any first-year undergraduate can point out the logical flaws in the scholastic "proofs" for the existence of God'. An equally distinguished contemporary Protestant philosophical theologian, John Hick, writes, *tout court*, that his 'own conclusion concerning the theistic proofs is negative'. One should doubtless resist the tendency to believe that arguments which, in different forms, have been found persuasive by, for example, Plato, Aristotle, Anselm, Aquinas, Maimonides, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hegel, must be of some worth. But the arguments cannot today escape close and critical scrutiny. It is now, except in Roman Catholic circles, fairly widely held that the proofs manifestly fail to prove. I suggest, with particular regard to the ontological and cosmological arguments, that they are valuable not as proofs but as explications of antecedently held faith. Roman Catholic thought ever since St. Thomas has consistently rejected the ontological argument which runs as follows: 'God as I know him in my mind is the greatest possible object of thought. An idea that exists only in the mind is not so great as one which exists in actuality as well as in the mind. Therefore, God must be thought of as necessarily existing.' As all the textbooks in philosophy inform us, this argument was demolished by Kant on the ground that being is evidently not a real predicate. But Kant, though here rejecting the ontological argument, implicitly utilizes it in seeing God as an implicate of the moral or practical reason. The moral argument in fact is ontological analysis in disguise. The ontological argument stands for something of fundamental significance; it expresses reason's self-confidence that rational thought is true, which is the presupposition of all rational thinking; without it there are no grounds for engaging in that enterprise.

Perhaps one reason why we and our contemporaries,

as compared with our predecessors, find the cosmological and the teleological 'proofs' so unpersuasive is that, under modern conditions, we have little opportunity or capacity to consider the natural order except in a functional and instrumental manner. The poet sees that 'the world is charged with the grandeur of God'. This sense of wonder is largely absent from our awareness of nature; but it is in wonder that religion, like philosophy, begins and is sustained.

I suggest that the attempts to prove the existence of God are valuable as analyses, explications, and explanations of faith. We might well call them the product of rationalization had that term not acquired a pejorative, and undeserved, connotation in the language of our time.

If what has been said of the rational element in religion has been successfully maintained, we may now pass to consider briefly the place of morality in religious awareness. My argument is that morality is essential to religion, that it is a criterion of its progress and higher development, that in morality the reality and relevance of faith in God are made manifest. Here religion's social and political implications begin to be clear.

Empirically speaking, it is fairly obvious that religion and morality have always existed in substantial unity. Nearly eighty years ago, W. Robertson Smith wrote that 'the indissoluble bond uniting men to their God is the same bond of blood-fellowship which in early society is the one binding link between man and man, and the one sacred principle of moral obligation. Even in its rudest form religion was a moral force . . . all morality—as morality was then understood—was consecrated and enforced by religious motives and sanctions.'<sup>1</sup> The subsequent work of Durkheim, Marett, and Malinowski appears to substantiate this position. All religion, says Marett, 'is ethical; inasmuch as it is of its essence to make the worshipper feel a

<sup>1</sup> *The Religion of the Semites*, pp. 53, 267.

stronger and better man'.<sup>1</sup> If this is so, then we are delivered from the notion that religion in its elementary forms is non-ethical, that so-called higher religion has developed from the so-called lower by a process of moralization. R. G. Collingwood points out that in this connexion 'the word "moralization" is the real difficulty. If a thing has at the outset nothing to do with morality, no juggling or alchemy will bring it into relation with the moral consciousness. You cannot arbitrarily impose a category on a thing which is unfitted to receive it.'<sup>2</sup> Religion, in other words, cannot have become what it never was; morality is an essential constituent of the reality of religion, giving it radical relevance to all human activities, providing it with one of the main means of self-criticism and progress. Seen in this light, religion is an aspect of human appreciation of values, gathering up into its conception of God the highest known values. Values, of course, are not only intellectual or moral; Whitehead indeed gives priority to the aesthetic. My argument is that in the trinity of values—intellectual, aesthetic, and ethical—the last possesses an absoluteness absent from the others. So far as truth is concerned, certain moralists maintain—justifiably, I believe—that it may on occasion be a duty to tell a lie; and in the realm of beauty, it is arguable that a great work of art may have a demoralizing effect on the immature or the uninstructed. 'These doubts', says Archbishop Temple, 'do not arise concerning goodness of character. It would never be better that a man should be worse than he is.'<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, an examination of actual origin and development, such as we see in Old Testament religion, appears to substantiate the essential ethical element in religion's nature and progress. The question of the reality of the revelation

<sup>1</sup> *The Threshold of Religion*, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Religion and Philosophy*, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Nature, Man and God*, p. 138.

of God in the Old Testament need not concern us here, nor the question whether the Mosaic religion was monotheist or monolatrous. What is clear there is the moral relationship established by God between Himself and man. Any adequate theology of the Old Testament is a 'covenant' theology according to which, on God's initiative, a bond is established between Him and the people who thereby accept obligations towards Him and towards each other. And if R. G. Collingwood is right when he says, 'You cannot arbitrarily impose a category on a thing which is unfitted to receive it', then the ethical element in post-covenantal Hebrew religion had its preparation in religion before the covenant, wherein the element of morality was already present and essential. Thus revelation, though it brings new awareness of God, is also corroboration and strengthening of what has, however obscurely, been known before. And the true word of prophecy can be distinguished from the false. 'There is', writes H. Wheeler Robinson, 'a certain self-consistency in genuine revelation [and] also the presence of a common moral judgement in the prophets as a whole, prior to Jeremiah.'<sup>1</sup> Here, incidentally, the rational as well as the moral quality of genuine revelation is made clear.

The prophetic criterion of progress in religion throughout the Old Testament is in prophecy's apprehension and application of the ethical element in the covenant relationship. The day is long past when Old Testament scholars could speak with confidence of Israel's religion as progressively evolutionary in a simple sense. The seven centuries which separate Moses from Second Isaiah see retrogression as well as progression. But always it is to the ethical and spiritual essence of the early Mosaic covenant-faith that appeal is made in later times by the prophet when he seeks to speak the Word of the Lord and to purge contemporary religion of errors and abuses. Much of early Hebrew

<sup>1</sup> *The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament*, p. 121.



prophecy is no doubt undistinguishable from madness. (The madness of Saul is described by the same word as that used for prophesying, 1 Samuel xviii. 10.) But the difference between the earlier and the later stages of prophecy in Israel is that the psychopathic and the hysterical are driven from the centre to the circumference and are progressively subordinated to that moral and spiritual message which is the heart of prophecy. Monotheism was reached in the Old Testament not by abstract speculation, in which the Israelites showed little interest, but in the apprehension of the implications of an ethic which, if it is to be of real significance, must be universal. They learned that God required ethical obedience and not magical rites, and advanced to the belief that the kingdom of this God is not bounded by geographical or tribal limitations. They attained the knowledge that God is one, not by speculative necessity or a conscious monistic impulse, but because their faith in God included moral conviction, and moral values know no limitations of range or territory. Old Testament prophetic teaching is monotheistic because it is ethical. True religion teaches that while outward goods like political supremacy, racial superiority, and possession of property are competitive in character, inward goods like justice and mercy can be possessed by all at once; in Pascal's words, 'without diminution and without envy'. With the teaching of the eighth-century prophets, implicit monotheism becomes increasingly explicit. To what extent the Mosaic faith was monotheistic we can hardly tell. H. H. Rowley convincingly argues that 'the seeds of monotheism are here from the beginning, even though the full flower did not bloom for many years'.<sup>1</sup> In Second Isaiah (mid-sixth century B.C.), full and explicit monotheism is attained: 'Beside me there is no God' (Isaiah xlv. 6). My conclusion is that in the progress towards monotheism, as we observe it in Israel's

<sup>1</sup> *The Rediscovery of the Old Testament*, p. 88.



history, morality has played an essential role; that in morality we have a significant clue to the nature of true religion and a partial verification of its reality. Further, I hold that morality, if taken seriously, implies religion. 'A system of ethics, if thorough, is explicitly or implicitly a system of theology', writes T. S. Eliot in his *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*. Thus it appears that, both in practice and in theory, morality lies at the very heart of religion, is a criterion of its progress and a significant verification of its truth.

I trust that, in what I have ventured to say, something of the contemporary relevance of religion to the perplexing problems of our time, and not least to those of our own country, may be evident. The ordinary man is justified in his conviction, however inarticulate, that the reality of religion is tested in its application to the affairs of the world. A concern, for example, that our academic and wider social communities should be ordered according to our best and highest values can justifiably be cited as religious faith at its proper work. Here Academy and Church have much in common. And A. N. Whitehead has ventured to 'hazard the prophecy that that religion will conquer which can render clear to popular understanding some eternal greatness in the passage of temporal fact'. The extent to which a religious system satisfies this criterion appears to me as evidence of its reality and its relevance. Its value in the light of this criterion will be found, if found at all, in the seriousness with which it views history and human activity in this world; in its appreciation and augmentation of human values, ethical, rational, aesthetic, and social; in its awareness of the high status of human personality and individuality. All these mean that, in time, man participates in the eternal; that, in the here and now, in his so-called profane and secular preoccupations, he encounters the sacred and the eternal. This directly implies the rejection

of religions which have repudiated, or never known, what I take to be one of the primary criteria of religion.

There are two areas of contemporary social life which are of immediate and urgent concern to us all today, epitomized for us here by our membership, first, of the academic corporation of the University, and secondly, by our membership of a political and social order as citizens of a multi-racial community in Central Africa in the second half of the twentieth century. In regard to the latter, I submit to you the concept of Natural Law as consistent with the radical, rational, and ethical monotheism in which, as I have tried to argue, religious progress culminates. Natural Law is a criterion indispensable in the concrete and proximate issues of political life, and a concept in which adherents of various religious systems, and adherents of none, may find a common basis of thought and action. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines Natural Law as 'the body of commandments which express the will of God with regard to the conduct of His intelligent creatures; as implanted by nature in the human mind, or as capable of being demonstrated by reason'. 'It is called *Natural Law*', writes Father Joseph Rickaby, 'because it is found, more or less perfectly expressed, in all rational beings: now whatever is found in all the individuals of a kind, is taken to belong to the *specific* nature, or type of that kind. Again it is called the *Natural Law* because it is a thing which any rational creature must necessarily compass and contain within itself in order to arrive at its own proper perfection and maturity. Thus the inner law is natural, in the sense in which walking, speech, and civilization are natural to man. A man who has it not is below the standard of his species.'<sup>1</sup>

In Catholic moral casuistry, on the one hand, and in orthodox Protestantism on the other, there are two opposed attitudes to Natural Law both of which, I believe, must be

<sup>1</sup> *Ethics and Natural Law*, pp. 134-5.

avoided. Catholic moral casuistry tends to infer absolute moral judgements too directly from the premiss of Natural Law. The status of universality is given to Natural Law which, after all, is in part conditioned by particular historical circumstances. Thus the social ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas include some of the provincial, contingent, and relativist elements of the thirteenth-century agrarian social order.

Orthodox Protestantism, because of its view of human reason as fallen, has granted Natural Law at most only a very subordinate significance, and in its zeal to establish the undifferentiated sinfulness of all men obscures the very important difference between the more and the less rational, the more and the less just and good. Hence the difficulty, observes Reinhold Niebuhr, of political and social orders dominated by an Augustinian-Lutheran inheritance 'in achieving a measure of political sanity and justice'.<sup>1</sup> Much of significant contemporary thought evinces a marked, and I believe disastrously uncritical, rejection of Natural Law. I have referred earlier to modern existentialism. J.-P. Sartre, for example, in his book *Existentialism*, argues that man has no essential nature such as Natural Law assumes: 'Man is nothing else but what he makes himself.' I choose, therefore I am. Existence precedes essence; man creates himself in his limitless self-understanding. There is no pre-existent value, or essence, or structure of reality, which can support choice, commitment, action. But Sartre makes the significant statement that 'when in all honesty I've recognized that man is a being in whom existence precedes essence, that he is a free being who, in various circumstances, can only want his freedom, I have at the same time recognized that I can want only the freedom of others'. Sartre surely errs in imagining that he has rejected all concepts that limit freedom; for he has stated

<sup>1</sup> *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. i, p. 234.

that my freedom must be limited by the freedom of others. In other words, to think about the nature of man at all, Sartre must deal with the concept of essential human nature which he ostensibly rejects. Thus, even in Sartre's atheistic existentialism, there is the element of Natural Law, a hidden ontology of essential human nature.

We seem now to be poised between the Scylla of uncritical acceptance of Natural Law and the Charybdis of a relativism which repudiates, or pretends to repudiate, all absolute values. Is there a third way? I believe there is.

With reason and morality as our criteria we should attempt a positive, dialectical, and critical analysis of the inferences made from Natural Law, distinguishing in them a subtle mixture of the absolute and the relative. Start with the proposition that 'right is to be done' as a self-evident, necessary truth, and consider what is the specific content of right and how it is to be related to the perplexing and ambiguous issues with which we are confronted in our attempts to act as responsible citizens. Of course, neither the Christian nor the adherent of any other religious system, nor any man, possesses infallible judgement of any political issue. But what may—indeed must—be claimed is that reason and morality be consulted; that justice, which is rendering to each man that which is his due, be pursued. Thrasymachus, in Plato's *Republic*, argues that justice can be defined as the interest of the stronger, but his opinion, fortunately for human history, was a minority one in Greek thought. Plato himself stresses the ontological significance of human values, and the need to train men in them, thereby anticipating biblical ethical theory. 'If the gods do not prefer the just to the unjust man, then it is better to die than to live.' And in the *Gorgias*, in words with a curiously modern ring, he condemns the leaders of his country who diminished its greatness by 'filling the city full of harbours and docks and walls and revenues and such trifles to the



exclusion of temperance and justice'.<sup>1</sup> The Old Testament, more briefly, in the Book of Proverbs, declares that 'righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people'. Here, at least, Plato and prophet agree; and the Hebrew psalmist sees the issue in terms of God's moral nature and His law for men and for nations: 'Clouds and darkness are round about Him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne.' Justice is the foundation of law and order.

We may now be in substantial agreement with the general proposition that, in its higher developments, religion, by virtue of its rational and moral nature, calls upon those who profess it to see their political duties in its light. But you and I are inescapably called upon as responsible citizens to make decisions not only about high-sounding principles, but in specific, ambiguous, and highly controversial issues. Allow me to give an illustration of this from the contemporary situation in Southern Rhodesia. There has recently been in this country some controversy concerning the Land Apportionment Act of 1930. As all here know, the report of the Southern Rhodesia Constitutional Council has condemned that Act as 'the embodiment of racial discrimination, as inconsistent with the Declaration of Rights contained in the 1961 Constitution, and as enshrining the ideology of a "master race"'. Now what assistance, if any, is religious faith, such as I have described it, in this issue?

Firstly, I believe that we should be thankful that we live in a country where it is possible for such a report to appear at all, and where opposition to the policies of a government in power can still be expressed. Secondly, we should note that the report is the work of twelve no doubt just, but nevertheless fallible, men. Thirdly, we should reflect that, whatever its defects, the report is an attempt to apply the



canons of reason and justice to an Act which affects the lives of every man, woman, and child in this country. As such, it merits earnest consideration by all citizens of religious faith and of none, who are concerned for the good future of our land. By reason of human finitude, and that undue self-interest which certain religions see as sin, we are seldom the best judge of our own case. The report of the Constitutional Council is not infallible, it may not even be wholly impartial; but, inasmuch as it seeks a rational and just solution to a problem of critical significance, it cannot, to say the very least, be ignored with impunity.

For precisely the same reasons, it appears that developments in certain other parts of Africa seriously jeopardize some of the values for which religion, as I have interpreted it, must stand firm. The interests of justice necessitate a Judiciary independent of the Legislature and the Executive. The International Commission of Jurists has examined and reported on the situation in Ghana, and, in terms unmistakably clear, has shown that personal despotism has stifled the rule of law. No man, it has been said, is good or wise enough to have absolute power over another without that man's consent; nor, I would add, even with that man's consent. Paternalism, be it benevolent or despotic, like patriotism, is not enough.

It is surely not too late to urge that the voices of reason and of conscience, and even of enlightened self-interest, be heard, so that the leaders of the peoples and the ostensible bearers of civilized human values may escape the terrible judgement of the tragic fragment: *Quem Iuppiter vult perdere dementat prius*—'Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad'.

I have tried to say what I understand by religion and to relate it to some of the issues with which men and women of religious faith are properly concerned. Religion, one

may reflect, is no unambiguous blessing to mankind. In human history it has produced something like equal portions of good and evil. Lucretius's observation—*tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*, 'Such evil deeds could religion prompt'—is ever worth keeping in mind. But in its varied manifestations, and even in the days of its greatest decline, normative religion, such as I understand it, contains resources of progress and reformation. It has, in its high estimate of human nature and destiny, and its awareness that the spirit of man was made for something beyond the flux of things, sought those human values—intellectual, moral, aesthetic, social—without which man is less than human. In this search the reality and the relevance of religion are manifest.

The subscription of the arms of our University College reads: *Domum vitae aedificat sapientia*—'Wisdom builds the house of life.' If what I have said be substantially or even partly true, religion is no alien in 'the house of intellect', nor removed from our common endeavours to make sound learning the foundation of human life. For, says the Book of Proverbs: 'Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established.'

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