

A SEARCH FOR EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

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DOUGLAS CLYDE MACINTOSH. . . *The Problem of Religious Knowledge*. New York. Harper & Brothers. xvi—390. \$3.50.

Dr. Macintosh is Dwight Professor of Theology and Philosophy of Religion at Yale University. In his latest book he has presented us with a survey of current theories of religious knowledge, his own included. Long study in the general epistemological field, and a wide acquaintance, both personal and literary, with exponents of contemporary religious philosophy, have equipped him well for the task. The fruit of his labors is a work of interest and value for the theologian and philosopher of religion engaged in the study of religious epistemology.

Approximately one fourth of the book (Chapters XI, XII, XX, and XXI) is devoted to an exposition of Professor Macintosh's own constructive position. In an introductory chapter he expounds, clearly and succinctly, the general epistemological presuppositions of his theory of specifically religious knowledge. The definitions there set forth are essential to an understanding not only of the author's own position, but also of his classification and critical consideration of the theories of others. Of particular importance is his use of the terms "monistic" and "dualistic" in the purely *epistemological* sense. These terms refer exclusively to the relationship between the object which exists and the object which is known. Monistic theories of knowledge maintain the essential identity of the object in itself with the object known. Dualistic theories hold that the *terminus* of thought is not the object itself but something existentially distinct. Thus Professor Macintosh classifies himself as a critical monistic realist: a realist inasmuch as his epistemology maintains the existence of the physical world independently of human consciousness of it; a monistic realist in that he holds the object consciously experienced and the object existing independently of consciousness to be existentially one; a critical monistic realist in as far as he maintains that this existential identity is only partial: not all that is immediately experienced is independently real, nor is all that is independently real immediately experienced.

This fundamental viewpoint is further specified in the author's definitions of verification and belief. The test of the truth of ideas, he maintains, is to be found ultimately in direct presentation (immediate experience); only thus do we attain to verified scientific knowledge. All judgments about reality not so verified belong not to the category of knowledge but at best to that of reasonable belief. Accordingly, his scope is primarily "the problem of the possibility of gaining acquaintance with and knowledge

of the religious object commonly called God, in and through religion in its experiential aspects." (p. 10.) Secondly, he is concerned with "the possibility of supplementing whatever religious *knowledge* may turn out to be possible, by adding to it a body of reasonable religious *belief*." (*ibid.*) In attaining this twofold end, Professor Macintosh employs a value-philosophy, presupposing the existence of certain "end-directed processes," e.g. moral development, the value of which (fundamental value) may be reasonably believed universally and permanently valid, implying a similar validity in the value of their positive ends and most effective means (terminal and instrumental values).

Under the heading "Religious Perception" (Chapter XI) the author expounds his religious epistemology. He understands religious knowledge as adequately critical certitude of the validity of values appreciated as divine. These ideals or values, e.g., goodness of personal life, are considered divine *qualitatively*, i.e., inasmuch as they are worthy of universal human devotion. The processes in which these divine values are being realized in the world are divine processes, "and that reality, whatever it may be, which is related to this emergence of divine values in a divine process as its adequately potential and dependable cause is a divine reality." (p. 164.) "This divinely functioning cosmic reality, this qualitatively and functionally divine factor we may call God" and "empirical awareness of this divinely functioning reality we may call religious perception or religio-empirical intuition." (p. 164f.) Understanding God in this minimal sense, Professor Macintosh believes "it may be affirmed as a known [i.e. directly experienced] fact that God exists." (*ibid.*) This statement, however, is not to be interpreted as a reasoned conclusion from effect to cause; for as the author says elsewhere, "from the point of view of a critical monistic realism, instead of having to *argue* from absolute value and the process of its progressive realization to the existence of a divine reality, what we do is to *interpret* absolutely valid value as divine, and the process of its realization as in the last analysis a divine process." (p. 229.) Another datum of religious experience of the "divine-value-producing factor in the universe" is that this factor produces divine values more effectively on condition of the "right religious adjustment." In all this we have knowledge of God: immediate experience of a divinely functioning reality, which exists independently of our experience (realism), but is existentially the same (monism) and yet subjectively modified and objectively transcendent (critical monism). The criterion of this "revelation" of the divine is strictly valuational: experience of the ideally true or beautiful or good; the divine reality itself, inasmuch as it transcends experience, its unity, and its personality, can be believed but not known.

The possibility and method of empirically verifying religious judgments is considered by Professor Macintosh under the heading "Empirical Theology" (Chapter XII). He maintains that it is possible to formulate empirical laws about the divinely functioning reality on the basis of experimental religious experience—thus erecting a theology on his epistemology. Such laws indicate the various tendencies (not infallible results) for which the divinely functioning reality can be depended upon, in experimentally varied conditions of religious adjustment. The author formulates thirteen such laws, e.g.: "1. The elemental law of empirical theology (law of the answer to prayer). A divinely functioning reality, on condition of the right religious adjustment for a specific volitional effect (the promotion of the good will) tends to produce a desirable change in that direction in the will and character of the individual concerned, and this may be regarded as the basic, dependable 'answer to prayer'."

This law is presented symbolically, "in order the better to emphasize the scientific character of the formulation," thus: $DFR \cdot RRA (ve) \longrightarrow ap$ (p. 203.) Other elements are introduced as variants of the religious adjustment, e.g., comprehensiveness, persistence, intensity, Christian repentance and love, an intellectually satisfactory theology, and finally the social factor. On the basis of these laws it is claimed that we have scientific (i.e., empirically verified) knowledge of God as a reality which can be depended upon to function according to these laws and hence in a way worthy of human devotion.

In order to supplement this religious knowledge of the divine reality as directly experienced, with a body of reasonable beliefs about the same reality as transcendent, Professor Macintosh devotes the last two chapters of his book (XX, XXI) to "Normative Theology" and "Metaphysical Theology." The basic "norm" on which such a "reasonably tenable faith" can be constructed he considers to be the value-norm, expressed in the fundamental principle that "whatever value or values serve as a valid criterion or criteria of the divine as perceived and known may be reasonably taken as applicable also to the divine as transcendent and only believed in." (p. 358) More concretely, "in the divine value of the spiritual processes dependably promoted in human experience by the divinely functioning reality on condition of the right religious adjustment we are in possession of a norm by which to measure all that is claimed to be divine." (p. 359)

Imaginal intuition asserts that this divine functioning is purposive and hence that the divine reality is personal; consequently we have a reasonable basis for faith that God is a person. Similarly since the divine processes promote worthy moral qualities in man, the transcendent God of faith may be believed to have these same ethical qualities. In fact we may even

believe that He possesses them in a perfect degree and is great enough in power and wisdom to merit our absolute trust. This is not verified knowledge, of course, but it is at least a not yet discredited intuition. In turn this imaginal intuition itself is reasonably believed to be illumination ("revelation") from the God of faith. Whether the tendency to this imaginal intuition that the God man needs actually exists, follows from favorable religious experience only psychologically or also logically, is a problem for metaphysical theology.

In his consideration of the possibility and value of a metaphysical development of normative theology, Professor Macintosh presumes that "what we can know about concrete reality by deductive reasoning alone is, in so far as it is stated in universal terms, hypothetical only. It can be transformed into categorical knowledge only by empirical verification." (p. 372) He feels that both rationalist and empiricist metaphysics are inept and inclines to a valuational metaphysics of the nature of faith rather than knowledge—or better still, a combination of this with metaphysics of the empiricist type. To such a metaphysical theology he leaves the solution of the final problems of reality in the religious realm: substance and process, mind and matter, causality and freedom, natural and supernatural, immanence and transcendence, the absolute, the infinite, the eternal. On these and other points the author is content merely to suggest the solutions which he thinks may be reasonably believed, though never known. In regard to the supernatural in particular, he believes that "unordered, science-baffling, religion-embarrassing, miraculous interventions seem ruled out as improbable, as well as being scientifically unrecognizable even if they did happen."

Professor Macintosh's position in this book does not differ materially from that presented in his earlier works (*The Problem of Knowledge*, Macmillan, 1915, and *Theology as an Empirical Science*, Macmillan, 1919). Fundamentally his solution is unsatisfactory not because it is realistic nor because it attempts to be critically monistic (in the epistemological sense) but because he has interpreted critical monism in the narrow sense of empirical intuition, i.e., as exclusively experiential and experimental. A theory of knowledge may maintain that we know an object by a process of rationalization from the complex of sensed elements of immediate experience, that the object thus known is existentially the same as the independently existing object, and that the object as known is subjectively modified and as existing independently is transcendent—and such a theory of knowledge will still be critical monistic realism. It will, however, be *rational* monism, maintaining that the object as *known* is one with independent reality, as distinct from the author's *empirical* monism, in which only the object as *directly experienced* is one with the independently real.

Actually such a rationally critical theory of knowledge is more strictly monistic and realistic than the empirically critical theory of Professor Macintosh; for he admits that in his system the existential oneness of the transcendent and the immediately experienced divine reality is merely believed, not known; (p. 359) that religious idealism remains theoretically possible, (p. 174) and that his whole epistemology is merely belief, not knowledge. (p. 176) This is meager fruit to garner from a monistic realist's solution of the problem of religious *knowledge*.

The exclusion of rationalization by insistence on empirical (experiential) verification as the sole test of knowledge is not remedied by the author's use of the philosophy of value in his treatment of religious perception. Ethical values are not necessarily superhuman because they are universally recognized as valid, they may still be merely human ideals, produced by human factors, and the experimentally right religious adjustment may be only a psychological condition for strictly human processes. Moreover, if the valuation criterion does not suffice to establish the existence of a divinely functioning reality, neither can it serve as a satisfactory norm for an empirical theology. Indeed a theology both empirical and valuational would seem to be impossible. The subjective, pragmatic element implied in determining what values are divine and what not, must precede and condition verification so that it is not empirical in any objective sense.

Thus, the laws the author has formulated in accordance with such a theology give us little religious information because of their empirical restrictions and no certainty because of their valuational subjectivity. Inevitably, in constructing a normative theology on the criterion of value and even extending the valuational norm to metaphysics, Professor Macintosh has introduced more and more subjective, human elements into his concept of the divine reality, until he has created a God in the image—albeit the transcendent image—of man. This is noticeable in his consideration of predestination, of the problem of moral and physical evil, and particularly in his rejection of what he terms "arbitrary, order-upsetting, science-thwarting, miraculous intervention of God in the natural or social world." (p. 83)

Though Professor Macintosh's positive construction of a religious epistemology is unsatisfactory, the critical review of other theories of religious knowledge, to which he devotes the major part of his book, is a valuable survey of non-Catholic thought in this field. Under the general headings "Extreme Monistic Realism," "Monistic Idealism," and "Dualistic Realism," he succinctly expounds, with numerous quotations, the views of many writers and appends his own incisive comments.

By "Monistic Idealism" the author understands any religious epistemology which holds that there is no religious object existing beyond the content

of religious experience—God is merely the God-idea. In psychological idealism (Chapters IV-IX) the divine reality is identified with the subjective concrete idea of God in consciousness. In logical and logical-psychological idealism (Chapter X) it is identified respectively either with the abstract universal idea of God or with that idea as present in consciousness. Under psychological idealism, the author discusses the psychologism of Feuerbach, Vaihinger, Durkheim and McTaggart, the psychiatric interpretations of Freud, Adler and Jung, the humanistic pragmatism of Dewey, G. B. Foster, Ames, Haydon and Bishop Brown—and the views of many other writers from Leroy to George Jean Nathan. The opinions of Santayana, McGiffert, B. Russell, Inge and K. Lake are examined in connection with logical idealism; and logical-psychological idealism is represented by those of Croce and Gentile. Throughout, the exposition is clear and informative, the criticisms are dispassionate and often effective, especially with regard to humanism. The author's fundamental realism has sharpened his lance against the champions of idealistic atheism.

Less satisfactory are Professor Macintosh's exposition and evaluation of what he calls "Extreme Monistic Realism" (Chapters II and III). By this he means the theory that all the characteristics of the object of immediate religious experience are true of the independently existing divine reality, and he identifies this opinion with mysticism. Both in his description and his criticism of mysticism, the author makes many sound observations, particularly in regard to "the good and bad essence" of mysticism in its historical results—though even here his test for distinguishing healthy from pathological mystic experience, *viz.* the functional test, seems too literally pragmatic in its insistence on good *works*. More fundamental, however, from the philosophical point of view, is the question as to whether it is possible to speak of "the prevailing religious epistemology of the mystics" at all. The mystics themselves regard their experience as extraordinary, Catholic mystics in particular, as supernatural, and not to be confused with our ordinary knowledge of God. Moreover, the mystic state must be distinguished from subsequent recollection of it, which is necessarily interpretative, and this in turn from any attempted description, which can only be symbolic. It does not seem that in such circumstances any theory of religious knowledge can be constructed. From the theological point of view, the presumption that all visions are hallucinations and that mysticism is essentially the same in Lao-Tze and St. Paul, in Plotinus and St. Teresa and Ramakrishna, further impairs the value of the author's treatment of intuitive knowledge of God.

By "Dualistic Realism" in religion (Chapters XIII-XIX) Professor Macintosh understands any religious epistemology, which, while admitting the existence of the divine reality "independently of all religious experience

or thinking," yet maintains that the object religiously experienced is existentially distinct from the object thus independently existing. In an introductory chapter entitled "Argumentative Theism" he posits the question as to how, in such systems, God can be known to exist if He can never be directly experienced—in other words, how dualism can be realistic. Logically, he maintains, it cannot be, and agnosticism must follow. Historically, however, he believes that "for the less intellectual and critical, the testimony of external authority to the alleged fact of direct revelation of God in the past has seemed satisfactory," while "among those who have wanted to do their own experiencing and thinking, the argumentative, so-called 'proofs' of the existence of God have throughout the generations been greatly in favor." (p. 219) After a brief, negative appraisal of St. Thomas's "five proofs," he examines the ontological, cosmological, anthropological, teleological and axiological arguments as proposed by modern (Kantian) dualists—and finds them inconclusive.

The fallacy of the author's position throughout this chapter is obvious. By his division of all epistemological Gaul into idealism, dualism and *empirical* monism (in which knowledge of reality is exclusively experiential), he has omitted the entire region of *rational* monism (in which knowledge of reality comes also from rationalization of experience)—and only in this latter land can arguments for the existence of God take solid root. To deny that our knowledge of God's existence is intuitive experience, is not necessarily to embrace phenomenalism (in which the divine reality is deemed unknowable). An epistemology which maintains that knowledge of God is possible through rationalization of intuitive sense knowledge—that thinking about experience gives knowledge—has a place for valid argumentative theism.

In the review of dualistic theories of religious knowledge, which follows this introductory chapter, the author is again at his best. He expounds and evaluates the religious agnosticism of Mansel, Spencer and Schleiermacher, the religious value-judgments proposed by Albrecht and Otto Ritschl, and the development of these by Herrmann, Kaftan, Scheibe and Wobbermin. A chapter on critical rationalism is devoted to the views of Troeltsch and Rudolf Otto. Religious pragmatism is examined as advocated by W. James, Balfour and Lyman, and the author's own modified use of it explained. Finally, under reactionary irrationalism, are considered the theories of Kierkegaard, Unamuno, Barth and Berdyaev. Throughout his study of these and many other writers the author's expositions abound in apt quotations and concise summaries. His criticisms are interesting, particularly as he traces the influence of Kant, and frequently valid, due to their basic, if inadequate, monistic presuppositions. Undoubt-

edly the value of the book lies in these two long sections which the author gives to critical reviews of idealistic and dualistic religious epistemology.

It is a matter worthy of comment, however, that in all this extensive survey of theories of religious knowledge, Professor Macintosh sedulously avoids any representatives of the *philosophia perennis*, save for his brief reference to St. Thomas Aquinas. Does he really believe that Newman, Maritain, Przywara, Marechal or Garrigou-Lagrange have exerted no influence on "theories of religious knowledge, current in contemporary thought"? Nor Sertillanges, Geysler, Picard, Steffes, Gilson, Lennerz, Rousselot, Faulhaber, Gutberlet or Mercier? These and other authors are internationally known and have written in the vernacular—if works in Latin by such writers as Descoqs, Romeyer, Gretdt, Van der Woestyne, Loinaz and Pohl are inaccessible. The author's startling failure to consider even one of these scholars does not detract from the usefulness of his book for the Catholic theologian and philosopher of religion, but objectively it is a serious defect in an otherwise rather successful attempt to review the field of contemporary religious thought. Moreover, it strongly emphasizes the false impression already referred to, that between the Scylla of monistic idealism and the Charybdis of dualistic realism there lies only the author's own route of *empirically* critical monistic realism. There have been others—not only Catholics—who have found a safer passage in that (epistemologically) monistic realism which is critical in the *rational* sense.

