

NOTE

THEOLOGY AND THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SACRED

Students of the history of religions have resisted the suggestion from theologians that religious inquiry be subsumed under a theological hermeneutic which provides principles for the interpretation of religious phenomena. The historian of religions is aware that the improper application of theological categories in understanding Eastern religions is confusing and sometimes demonstrably false.¹ It is very clear that there are diverse modalities of the manifestation of the sacred which would be distorted or even lost by transformations into the language of one invariant theological position. However, this resistance to theological interference in the study of the history of religions does obscure a very important question for understanding those religions which have been characterized by theological growth: What is the relationship of theology to the manifestation of the sacred? The question which I am raising is directed toward a phenomenology of theological activity and not a theology of the history of religions. In what sense is theological activity a mode for the manifestation of the sacred in the Christian experience?

TRANSCENDENTAL METHOD AND THE ONTOLOGY OF KNOWING

There is a convergence of ideas in recent theological studies which suggests a direction for this inquiry. The use of a transcendental method by Bernard Lonergan, Karl Rahner, and Emerich Coreth which seeks to determine the structures which make knowing possible on the one hand and the Heideggerian emphasis upon the meaning of language in Protestant thought on the other jointly call into question any understanding of theology which does not recognize the dynamic orientation of theological activity.²

When the theologian crosses the boundary line between theology and philosophy and asks about the possibility of theological activity, there emerges a new and exciting concept of theological inquiry which requires that we revalorize the significance of theology for the history of religions. The use of a transcendental method in our attempt to understand theological activity will (1) emphasize that theology is a dynamic activity and

¹ Cf. Kees W. Bolle, "History of Religions, Hermeneutics, Christian Theology," in *The History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding*, ed. Joseph Kitagawa (Chicago, 1967) p. 96.

² I am particularly interested in the work of Bernard Lonergan, Emerich Coreth, Carlos Cirne-Lima, Karl Rahner, Heinrich Ott, and Hans Georg Gadamer. For an introduction to the growth of transcendental method from Joseph Maréchal to the present, see Otto Muck, *The Transcendental Method* (New York, 1968).

(2) disclose principles regulative of the fundamental structure of theological inquiry.

The Heideggerian insights into the importance of language as a tool for the disclosure of being have been used for the interpretation of biblical literature. The use of these insights has paved the way for a Protestant hermeneutical theology. The importance of the development of hermeneutical theology for an understanding of the relationship between theology and the manifestation of the sacred is its insistence on the creative power of language. The hermeneutical theologians would agree with Martin Heidegger that in language "things come into being and are."³ To understand theological activity and its use of language, we must appraise this speaking of the word as a disclosure of being. In several contexts Heinrich Ott has clearly stated that a hermeneutical theology and ontology are closely related.⁴ The hermeneutical concern has affirmed that understanding belongs to the wholeness of man's situation and that its authentic appearance must be marked by a disclosure of the ontological structures of knowing. This is what is meant when a philosopher such as Hans Georg Gadamer thinks of hermeneutics as a laying bare of the ontological structure of the knowing act rather than as a cataloging of rules for translating or interpreting a text.⁵ The understanding of hermeneutics as a laying bare of the ontological structure of the knowing act presupposes the same type of question that we find in the use of a transcendental method.

A strict phenomenology of theological activity would render clarity concerning patterns only among the concrete manifestations of theology and not disclose the ontological structures which made possible these concrete realizations. We need a method which inquires after the ground and possibility of theological activity. We need to ask questions about the conditions which make possible the act of theological knowing. This is an ontological question as well as an epistemological question, since it asks about the structure of the being of the *act* of knowing and not about the structure of the content of knowing. What will be determined are the structures which make theology a mode for the appearance of being—an event of religious significance.

In the close relationship of recent hermeneutical theology to the work of Heidegger we find a clue which suggests the importance of a transcen-

³ Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (Garden City, N.Y., 1961) p. 11.

⁴ Heinrich Ott, *Theology and Preaching* (Philadelphia, 1965) p. 13, and "Language and Understanding," in *New Theology* 4, ed. Martin Marty and Dean Pearman (New York, 1967) pp. 132-33.

⁵ Heinz Kimmerle, "Hermeneutical Theory or Ontological Hermeneutics," in *History and Hermeneutic*, ed. W. Pannenberg et al. (New York, 1967) p. 113.

dental method (the development of which we will also examine as found in recent Neo-Scholastic theology) for understanding the significance of theological investigation. In particular, I am referring to Heidegger's use of Kant in his understanding of man's being-in-the-world (*Dasein*) and his interpretation of the Kantian "Copernican revolution."⁶ He claims that the importance of Kant's "Copernican revolution" is that it clearly shows that objective knowledge must conform to knowledge of ontological possibilities. The ground for such an interpretation is presented in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* when Heidegger makes a shift from Kant's transcendental analysis of the content of knowing to a transcendental analysis of the act of knowing sanctioned by the primacy of *Dasein*. It is our basic relatedness with the world which makes every manifestation of self-understanding an aspect of a fundamental ontology. The schematism of the pure concepts of the understanding are the primordial conceptualizations shaping our being-in-the-world and not merely an epistemological notion explaining the relationship between pure concepts and the principles for their application. If the Heideggerian notion of *Dasein* is accepted, then it must be accepted that a transcendental method will provide us with ontological categories.

The danger of this approach is that if our epistemological critique fails to illuminate all of the modalities for the realization of insights, then dimensions of meaning belonging to the structure of existence are obscured and our ontology is inadequate. For example, the exclusive examination of classical (Newtonian) heuristic structures in Kant's work seriously limits its use in the development of a fundamental ontology. We will lose the transcendent dimension of experience which we seek to understand if we exclusively accept Heidegger's use of Kant's first critique. Thus, it is necessary for us to go beyond Kant and Heidegger and to construct an ontology of knowing on expanded epistemological principles.

In particular, our emphasis on the complexity of the act of knowing calls into question the universality of time as a formal determinant of unity in the understanding. This reservation has ontological as well as epistemological implications, since the importance of time for the unity of inner sense in the Kantian epistemological critique corresponds to Heidegger's understanding of the goal of fundamental ontology as being the interpretation of *Dasein* as temporality.⁷ In fact, Heidegger claims that the aim of *Being and Time* is the interpretation of time as the possible horizon for the understanding of any manifestation of being.⁸

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Bloomington, Ind., 1962) p. 22.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 247. ⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York, 1962) p. 1.

If we accept Heidegger's analysis in which temporality becomes the horizon definitive of even our primordial conceptualizations, the significance of theological reflection, the articulation of an ultimate concern, remains ambiguous. It would seem that theology at its best could only grasp toward being by revealing the historicity of the human condition in its fundamental revelatory experiences. Theology would be a secondary experience seeking to illuminate manifestations of the sacred in a selected religious community. This appears to be a task more suited for the scientific methods employed in the history of religions.

However, we are not ready to eliminate the theologian's task; for when we examine the Kantian conception of time, which in the shift to a fundamental ontology becomes determinative of basic ontological categories and appears as the horizon under which the unity of experience is determined, we readily note the inadequacy of this notion as an explicative principle giving intelligibility to the diversity of our concrete experiences.

When Heidegger establishes temporality as a formal condition for our being in the world, there is a sense in which he shapes the world so that it would conform to the "analogies of the experience" developed in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁹ This would betray our experience, for each of the analogies lays claim to an ontological limitation which is contradicted by concrete manifestations of meaning in the larger dimensions of our being-in-the-world.

The principle behind the analogies is that experience is possible only when a necessary connection between appearances manifest in that experience is made determinate.¹⁰ The unknown function is always a time determination. This time determination provides the form for the unity of our inner sense. The analogies correspond to three modes in which time could be made determinate: duration, succession, and coexistence.¹¹ Our immediate problem with these analogies is that the world which they illuminate obscures some of our most important personal experiences and is foreign to the world of contemporary physics. Our contemporary world is larger than the horizon under which it should manifest itself as determined by the classical Kantian critique. A close analysis of the analogies bears this conclusion.

The first analogy used for the determination of time as duration is: "in all changes of appearances substance is permanent."¹² Time must be seen against the background of a permanent substratum, and the substances are the substrata of all time determination.¹³ We need this substratum, for if we had only a bare succession, existence would never have any magnitude or duration.¹⁴ Duration can then be understood as

⁹ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (New York, 1965) pp. 208-39.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 205. ¹¹ *Ibid.* ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 212. ¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 213, 217. ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

a magnitude marked off against a substratum. This reduces the concept of duration to a spatial imagery characteristic of Newtonian mechanics. Since in Heidegger's interpretation of the Kantian "Copernican revolution," this notion of time becomes an ontological category, it is not unfair to ask whether it is commensurate with the experience of time in our concrete experience.

This first analogy is called into question by manifestations of a flexibility in our psychic experience of duration and modern scientific models of temporality. They violate the boundaries of Kant's interpretation.

If Kant were correct, time would be experienced as a quantitative multiplicity. But, except on a superficial level in ordinary experience, we seldom perceive durations quantitatively. Very infrequently does pure duration as experienced in the immediacy of consciousness or in the flexibility of the dream experience present itself with a clear quantitative ordering. More often pure duration appears in a succession of qualitative feelings which permeate each other. Henri Bergson has said that when we refer to our deep psychic feelings, the meaning of duration rests with felt experience of a qualitative multiplicity rather than as the markings on a homogeneous substratum.¹⁵ The structures in which these manifestations of meaning are grounded must be larger than the principles used by Kant to define the range of understanding.¹⁶

The second and third analogies are collapsed when we compare them with models of temporality in modern physics. The second and third analogies fix the meaning of before and after (succession) as well as that of simultaneity.

The second analogy claims that all changes take place in conformity with the law of cause and effect.¹⁷ The notion of causation implies that cause is prior to the effect and thereby determines a time series fixing the meaning of before and after. This analogy is required so that our inner sense can have synthetic unity.¹⁸ The third analogy, the principle of community, determines the meaning of coexistence or simultaneity. Kant says that if two occasions can be intelligibly presented to consciousness so that they can follow one another reciprocally, they are simultaneous with one another.¹⁹ All three of the analogies are the formal conditions for experience in the Kantian conception of understanding. In modern physics, however, our understanding conforms to larger patterns of intelligibility than are sanctioned by these analogies.

The scientific community has learned to live with the creative tensions of a scientific revolution which came after the work of Kant. If we were

¹⁵ See Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will* (New York, 1960) chap. 2.

¹⁶ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Collection* (New York, 1967) p. 265.

¹⁷ Kant, *Critique*, p. 218. ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 210. ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

limited to classical heuristic structures, then the affirmations of modern physics would make the world seem out of joint.²⁰ With the emergence of the special theory of relativity, words such as "before," and "after," and "simultaneous" no longer have an absolute meaning independent of any particular co-ordinate systems. Einstein claimed that we have to understand the meaning of the sentence: "Two events which are simultaneous in one coordinate system may not be simultaneous in another coordinate system."²¹ Obviously this demand requires that we abandon the second and third analogies of Kant's principles as regulative of appearances and constitutive of intelligibility.

With just these few examples we can see that our experience would be distorted by the suggestion that temporality is the horizon under which we interpret *Dasein*. Even if temporality were conceived exclusively as an epistemological horizon, much of our experience would be placed in an unintelligible residue and the transcendental method would lead to obscurantism. The transcendental method must be more inclusive if we are to determine adequately the significance of theological activity and its relationship to the manifestation of the sacred.

We must appeal to the fulness of self-understanding. Instead of transforming only those categories which are regulative of the content of understanding into ontological structures, we must also develop principles which are regulative of the *act* of understanding and assess their ontological significance. This emphasis on the primacy of the act of understanding is developed by contemporary Neo-Scholastic thought in the tradition of Joseph Maréchal. These theologians assert that there is a natural finality implicit in the basic assertion of our primordial noetic striving which transcends any conditioned horizon. We can only have a radical phenomenism when we ignore the dialectical relationship between the content and act of knowing.

Bernard Lonergan, a formative figure in this movement, considers the failure to recognize this transcendent element resident in our desire to know as obscurantism. To assess properly the meaning of theological activity and to determine the horizon under which understanding completes itself, we need to focus a transcendental critique on the dynamic act of knowing. It is only through this type of inquiry that we can meaningfully sense the relationship between theology and the manifestation of the sacred.

Instead of beginning with an analysis of the content of the known, we can turn to the existential reality of the desire to know resident in the

²⁰ See T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 1962) pp. 77-92, for further development of this suggestion.

²¹ Albert Einstein and Leopold Infeld, *Evolution of Physics* (New York, 1961) p. 179.

knower. The presence to the self of this primordial noetic striving defines the level and meaning of intelligibility which can alone satisfy the act of questioning.

Since theological inquiry is not simply an act of perception or memory, we must include in the scope of our inquiry this antecedent desire to know as part of the knowing act. The desire to know, our primordial noetic striving, is not identical with objective knowledge and therefore the range of the desire to know is not the same as the range of objective knowledge.²² The immediate implication of this affirmation is that the horizon under which the act of knowing is realized may also be different from the horizon of objective understanding. Lonergan's conception of being, the objective of this pure desire to know, is the complete set of answers to the complete set of questions. This is an unrestricted notion which locates within the act of knowing an element of transcendence.²³ As Lonergan notes, transcendence is experienced in the self as the simple matter of asking questions.²⁴ This is certainly not an inclusive description of the experience of transcendence. What it does affirm, however, is that even in the elementary step of asking a question we have transcended the range of the content of the known. By acknowledging that we can question, we require of a transcendental critique that it define its horizon in terms of the questionability of things. The notion of reality which belongs to the experience of the self as a questioning questioner includes in its scope all that can be called into question.

It follows that the referent of this experience of transcendence is itself absolutely transcendent, since every conditional horizon associated with the content of the known can be called into question and thereby transcended. Lonergan claims that the idea of being commensurate with the possibility for transcendence could only be illuminated by an unrestricted act of understanding.²⁵ The conception of such an act transcends human experience and establishes a horizon under which the process of transcendence is contained. This means that a transcendental analysis of the act of knowing must include a reference to a transcendent horizon. This parallels Maréchal's emphasis on the notion of natural finality.

The horizon to which we refer is an ontological and not an epistemological notion, since our analysis took as its object the act of knowing instead of the content of the known. We are concerned about the horizon of an act which contributes to the definition of a situation.

We have already affirmed that if we accept the Heideggerian metaphors belonging to our basic connectedness with the world, then a trans-

²² Bernard Lonergan, *Insight* (New York, 1957) p. 349.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 350. ²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 635-36. ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 643.

scendental analysis of the knowing act provides us with ontological categories. This means that our consideration of a transcendent horizon is an ontological consideration. Heidegger used the Kantian model of understanding as a route to a fundamental ontology and claimed that this possibility is implied in Kant's "Copernican revolution." All that was needed was an emphasis on the organic nature of things.

We are also making this movement, but the principles of our epistemology are different, because we have included in our data for understanding the antecedent desire to know. We did not prescind from the dynamic element of knowing which we find in ourselves. In fact, it was in this primordial noetic striving that we found a transcendent element which ultimately refers to an absolute transcendence.

Heidegger claims that the use of language, an element in the act of knowing, shapes our being-in-the-world. This is why the centrality of time as the determinate of inner sense in Kant's understanding of knowing becomes in Heidegger the basic conception for the interpretation of being. Temporality becomes the ontological horizon for the appearance of the ontic world.

In our inquiry there can be no such conditional horizon. This was implied in our transcendental analysis. The act of knowing, which is also an act of being, refers to an absolute transcendence. The reality of an absolute transcendence becomes the horizon under which we interpret our connectedness with the world. The knowing act establishes a modality for being-in-the-world which is a structure for the concrete realization of our participation in this unconditional horizon.

THEOLOGY AND THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

We can again raise our question, what is the significance of theology for the historian of religions? Or, what is the relationship between theology and the manifestation of the sacred? Theology must now be understood as the concrete realization of ontological possibilities which have a reference to an unconditional horizon.

This conception of theology is importantly related to study in the history of religions. Mircea Eliade, in his *Patterns in Comparative Religions*, develops the conception of a hierophany which is directly applicable to our understanding of theology as an act of knowing.²⁶ He claims that anything can become sacred when it embodies something other than itself. Anything man contacts can become a hierophany—even theology.²⁷

A hierophany reveals the paradoxical coming together of the condi-

²⁶ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Cleveland, 1963) pp. 2, 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 13.

tional and unconditional. This concretization of opposites is the ontological significance of the act of knowing. Theology is a modality for the manifestation of the sacred on two different levels. On the surface, it is obvious that the theologian takes as his subject matter an ultimate concern; but as an event, the theologian's work brings into being an occasion which unites our conditioned being-in-the-world with its unconditional horizon. Theology is not only *about* the manifestation of the sacred; it is a hierophany.

For the historian of religions, the importance of this assertion is that he will have to include theology in his investigations as a modality for the manifestation of the sacred. To understand theologically-oriented religions, he will have to develop a methodology which will let him see the structure of theological activity, if he is in agreement with Eliade's suggestion that the religious historian must first of all explain the modality of the sacred revealed in a hierophany.²⁸ Since there is a close relationship between the manifestations of the sacred and manifestation of being, the historian of religions uses ontological categories, and he must now develop an ontology of knowing before seeking to understand the manifestation of the sacred through theological activity. The historian of religions must be willing to accept the transcendental analysis of theological activity to initiate his own investigation. He must cross the boundary line into philosophy to understand the dialectical relationship between the content of theological assertions, which are not his basic interest, and theological activity, which represents a fundamental modality for the manifestation of the sacred.

The importance of a transcendental analysis of theology for the theologian is more far-reaching than for the historian of religion. Its importance is not that it requires the theologian to understand his subject matter from a different perspective, but that he understand his acts of inquiry as existential events. The theologian must accept the responsibility for bringing into existence a complex of ideas and events which can constitute a hierophany. No longer can he afford the luxury of understanding his work as a secondary reference to man's sacred history of ideas. Because of the structure of the knowing act, the theologian's work can be interpreted only under the unconditional horizon to which it refers. In this sense theological conceptualization is a sacred event and the concept of theology is a representative modality for the realization of the sacred.

The theologian is immediately involved in the disclosure of sacral forces in this conception of theological activity. Through constructions of the imagination he brings to the culture a complex of ideas unified under

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

a transcendent horizon or a series of events which concretizes the transcendent dimension of our experience.

The traditional intellectual criteria for the evaluation of a theological position are no longer adequate if we seek to understand it in all of its dimensions. The importance of theology must be assessed in terms of the fulness of the event which it brings into being. We must ask in what sense a particular theology is a manifestation of the sacred.

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