

CONVERGENCE IN THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Meno: And how you inquire, Socrates, into that which you know not? What will you put forward as the subject of inquiry? And if you find what you want, how will you ever know that this is what you did not know?

Socrates: I know, Meno, what you mean; but just see what a tiresome dispute you are introducing. You argue that a man cannot inquire either about that which he knows, or about that which he does not know; for he knows, and therefore has no need to inquire about that—nor about that which he does not know, for he does not know that about which he is to inquire.

Meno: Well, Socrates, is not the argument sound?

Socrates: I think not.

Meno: Why not?

Socrates: I will tell you why. I have heard from certain wise men and women who spoke of things divine that . . . the soul of man is immortal . . . and having seen all things that are . . . has knowledge of them all; and it is no wonder that she should be able to call to remembrance all that she ever knew about virtue and about everything; . . . for all inquiry and all learning is but recollection.¹

Meno indeed introduced a tiresome dispute! The subsequent history of philosophy is replete with epistemological theories purporting to account for the experience of questioning. The religious rationale, proffered by Plato's Socrates—that "transhistorical remembrance" which illuminates the human mind in its quest for truth—has never lost its attraction. There have always been philosophers with theological proclivities who have held that we inquire because we already know the answer, that questions are heuristic catalysts.

Theologians—"those who speak of things divine"—in large part still concur with Plato's account of inquiry. For theology is by definition

¹Plato, "Meno," in *Collected Works of Plato*, trans. by B. Jowett (New York: Greystone Press), pp. 304-5.

inquiry into the unknown: the Unknown who although the Incomprehensible and the Ineffable yet somehow becomes the object of our knowing and our speaking. In recognition of this paradox the Christian Greeks were apophatic in their theology even as they greeted Christ as the fulfillment of their philosophical quest. In the more cataphatically inclined West, Augustine rejected any radical self-sufficiency of the human mind and translated the Platonic theme of recollection into his notion of divine illumination. And despite its tendency to highlight the transcendence or hiddenness of God, later Western theology never totally lost the ferment of this form of Augustinian immanentism.²

The purpose of this paper is to show a convergence in Protestant and Catholic anthropology. It seems to me that a fundamental convergence exists precisely on the point of Socrates' reply to Meno. Divergence remains, of course, but perhaps this is a matter more of complementarity than of disagreement. After all, we are dealing with a paradox!

PROTESTANT THEOLOGY: THE QUESTION IS "IGNORANCE"

In his essay, "The Question of God,"³ Wolfhart Pannenberg discusses the more or less negative evaluation of the modern anthropological path to knowledge of God in three major Protestant theologians of our century, Barth, Bultmann, and Tillich. True to the ethos of the Reformation, they suspect any form of natural theology (with either nature or man as the point of departure for knowledge of God) as noetic semi-Pelagianism which constructs idols and obstructs the true knowledge of the divine. These idols of human interiority have furthered the apotheosis of man which in our time has proven itself so destructive of man.

The Neo-Orthodox sobriquet is almost synonymous with the theology of Karl Barth. His iconoclastic reaction to the modern world's (and

²Cf. Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), pp. 103-7. It is interesting to note that TeSelle finds Augustinian illuminationism alive today in the transcendental philosophies of Rahner and Lonergan.

³Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Question of God," in *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 201-33.

modern Protestant theology's) self-confident spanning of the "immense gulf between the human and the divine"⁴ caused him to champion transcendent theocentrism in his theology of God's Word as judgment on man's pride. But, as Pannenberg interestingly points out,⁵ even Barth does not overlook the human "question." In no way a "point of contact" with God, the human question exists only as a consequence of the answer of the divine initiative. Later, in his mellowed days, after he felt assured that his *caveat* against modern anthropocentrism had been heard, Barth sanctioned a nuanced anthropocentrism, a Christian "way from below"—provided that it be understood as "an attempt to formulate a theology of the third article of the Apostles' Creed, the Holy Spirit."⁶ But here again he made his point: "... respectable dogmatics (is) good apologetics."⁷

Like Barth, Bultmann restricts the answer to Christian revelation, but he sees even the "natural man" as aware of the questionableness of his existence.⁸ Thus man as such forms the idea of God as an echo to God's primordial initiative in calling man into question. But this idea of God remains only a negative knowledge, an initial inquiry. In reality it is "only a man's knowledge about himself—his limitations, his finitude, his nothingness."⁹ Man, however, contorts this negative knowledge into a positive knowledge—"he hypostatizes in an omnipotence the need he has of omnipotence."¹⁰

For Tillich the universal condition of finitude finds expression in man's question. As Pannenberg observes,¹¹ Tillich's method of correla-

⁴This phrase is derived from Ernst Troeltsch's study of the self-confident modern spirit; cf. his *Protestantism and Progress* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), p. 23.

⁵Pannenberg, "The Question of God," p. 208.

⁶Karl Barth, "Evangelical Theology in the 19th Century," in *The Humanity of God* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1970), p. 25.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁸Cf. Pannenberg, "The Question of God," p. 211.

⁹André Malet, *The Thought of Rudolf Bultmann* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1971), p. 89.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹¹"The Question of God," p. 212.

ting the revelatory answer with the question of human existence includes the questionableness of everything that exists whatsoever. While he, too, maintains that the answer cannot be deduced from the question, Tillich requires that the articulation of the question be independent of the revelatory answer. Indeed, the divine answer proves its efficacy precisely in relation to the creative human interpretations of reality of every age and in every culture wherein the question is posed anew. To the extent, however, that it is the task of the *theologian* to formulate the question, the question is dependent on the revelatory answer.

But Tillich does go beyond Barth and Bultmann in his evaluation of the connection between the human question and its revelatory answer when he avers that God is the presupposition of the question of God. Tillich presents the ontological type of the philosophy of religion as an invitation to man to discover "himself when he discovers God; he discovers something that is identical with himself although it transcends him infinitely . . ." ¹² Herein Tillich is at one with Augustine and the Christian mystical tradition in recognition of the universal divine immanence. ¹³

Despite their differences, however, the Protestant theologians discussed by Pannenberg share a marked tendency to attenuate the connection between the human and the divine. Their Christologies understand the divine as revealed through the human in a negative sense:

The life of Jesus was not an exemplification of any human possibility except that of death, and in dying Jesus made it clear that God had said "No!" to all the possibilities in this world. ¹⁴

God signifies the total abolition of man. ¹⁵

¹²Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 10.

¹³The immanence of God as the Ground of Being is central to Tillich's philosophical theology. His understanding of all religions as "based on revelation" is developed in the third volume of his *Systematic Theology*.

¹⁴Daniel Fuller, *Easter Faith and History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 82 (on Barth).

¹⁵Rudolf Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 55.

Jesus of Nazareth is the medium of the final revelation because he sacrifices himself completely to Jesus as the Christ. He not only sacrifices his life, . . . but everything in him and of him . . .¹⁶

Pannenberg registers dissatisfaction with all of these Protestant variations on the question-answer theme. He holds that these positions are inadequate to explain the intrinsic relationship between man's question and God's answer. He is also concerned about the possibility of connecting the question of human existence concretely with "the God of whom Christian proclamation speaks."¹⁷

Reflecting on the presuppositions of human questioning, Pannenberg refers to man's "openness to the world" or self-transcendence, an "idea about which there is such remarkable agreement among the most diverse trends of modern thought."¹⁸ In accord with the breadth of its "angle of opening" every question projects possible answers. These answers more or less satisfy the "powerful inner urge" which elicited their formulation. As anticipatory projections these answers can be understood partially as creations of the questioner. But the emergence of the question itself can be accounted for only if the question is viewed as "always framed only in association with the reality in question."¹⁹ Thus, Pannenberg avers that the presupposition of the question is an "experience" of the reality in question.

In this essay ("The Question of God") Pannenberg proffers no further development of the nature of this "experience" except to pose the thesis that our experience of ourselves as personal results from our long association with the eminently personal reality of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. While this insight (which he shares with others) on the derivation of our understanding of the personal quality of human existence is both intriguing and enlightening, it seems to me that it is tangential to Pannenberg's immediate concern. While it is most helpful in connecting the human question with the biblical God, it is less helpful in accounting for that universal divine immanence which

¹⁶Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1951), p. 136.

¹⁷Pannenberg, "The Question of God," p. 215.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 221.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 225.

grounds human inquiry. The word, personal, leads us in the direction of transcendence.

In a later article²⁰ Pannenberg again emphasizes the need today for a philosophical anthropology to establish "the assertion that when man's being is fully aware, man is conscious that he is dependent upon a reality which surpasses and sustains everything finite, and in this sense is a divine reality."²¹ He admits that this divine reality grounding all finite being could be an illusion, even a necessary illusion for human existence. No answer can be deduced from the conclusions of a philosophical anthropology, even though such an anthropology is a necessary first step.²²

Beyond Barth's Christomonism, beyond Bultmann's negative natural theology, beyond Tillich's question-answer correlation, Pannenberg has indeed recognized the need for a more positive assessment of man's fundamental "association with Mystery" for confronting today's Feuerbachian-Freudian type of atheism. To date, however, he has not developed a full philosophical account of man's "angle of openness." He has spoken with both appreciation and reserve about the contributions of Catholic theologians (especially Karl Rahner²³) to this critical area of theological anthropology. To a consideration of some Catholic contributions we now turn.

²⁰Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Anthropology and the Question of God," in *The Idea of God and Human Freedom* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), pp. 80-98.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 95.

²²Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Toward a Theology of the History of Religions," in *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 65-118. After a philosophical anthropology has made its case for man's necessary association with a divine reality, "the *reality* of the mystery of being, to which the structure of man's existence points, must be demonstrated in such actual *association* with this mystery. In this sense, the reality of God or of divine power can be proven only by its *happening* (*Widerfahrnis*), namely, in that it proves itself powerful within the horizon of current experience of existence" (p. 104, italics his). Note Pannenberg's extensive footnotes on K. Rahner's philosophy of religion, pp. 102-4.

²³Cf. Pannenberg, "Anthropology and the Question of God," p. 90.

CATHOLIC THEOLOGY: THE QUESTION IS "KNOWLEDGE"

A priori we would expect the Catholic theological tradition on natural theology to provide a more congenial atmosphere for contemporary efforts to explore man's openness to the divine. Human nature debilitated but not destroyed by the heritage of sin has been a characteristically Catholic theme throughout the modern period of polemical theology. This human nature as such constituted man's basic openness to God (the *potentia obedientialis* theme). In its doctrine on the natural knowability of God Vatican I voiced official recognition of this tradition of respect for the relative autonomy of the order of creation.

Certain factors, however (among them, the hamartiological framework of Western nature-grace theology since the Augustinian-Pelagian controversy with its consequent emphasis on the hypothetical necessity and the factual gratuity of grace, together with the Scholastic distinction—and later separation—between the natural and the supernatural), led Catholic theologians to exaggerate the difference between the two orders of creation and redemption. To avoid any indictment for crypto-Pelagianism, because of its fundamentally positive assessment of the natural, and to eschew the new immanentist enthusiasm of Modernism, Catholic theology came more and more to espouse an "extrinsicist" position on the question of the relation between the human and the divine.

Maurice Blondel

Rejecting this extrinsicism as a further form of alienation between Catholicism and the best in the modern spirit, the philosopher, Maurice Blondel, turned to an analysis of the human condition to provide the philosophical prolegomena for Christian revelation. An apologetics of immanence was the explicit intention of his anthropology:

If it is true that the exigencies of Revelation are well founded, then it cannot be said that we are completely at home with ourselves; and of this insufficiency, powerlessness, need, there must be some trace in man, purely as man, and an echo of it even in the most autonomous philosophy.²⁴

²⁴Henri Bouillard, *Blondel and Christianity* (Washington: Corpus Books, 1969), p. 18.

In his attempt to uncover the *a priori* for Christian revelation Blondel set the trend for most of the major Catholic theologians of this century. He constructed a critical analysis of the structure of human existence to reveal man as a "question" and to show that in the experience of life man's questioning "openness" becomes "lack" becomes "need."

Through his analysis of "action" Blondel proffered a phenomenology of the heart. There he located the innate disproportion, the fated imbalance, the ultimate aporia which could make man a "useless passion." Blondel described this ontological inadequacy in terms of a distinction between the *volonté voulante* and the *volonté voulue*. The former is man's insatiable elan, the latter his many choices always insufficient. Thus constituted, man must inquire whether or not he must "will infinitely without willing the infinite . . ." ²⁵ The suggestion of a possible fulfillment of this determined structure of action evokes the desire for "the absolutely necessary but the absolutely impracticable." ²⁶ Thus, exigency and impotency describe the negative conditions for the genesis of the notion of the "supernatural." The quest is ineluctable.

In the second movement of his apologetics of immanence Blondel considers the Christian dogmas as hypothetical answers to the human condition revealed through his analysis of action. He examines "from a philosophical point of view, as hypotheses, the dogmas and practices of Christianity in order to discover their intrinsic relations and their correspondence to the exigencies of the will." ²⁷

The ruling hypothesis is that all men are affected "by a kind of prevent grace" which is "quite independent of all explicit revelation." ²⁸ This "supernatural state" or better, perhaps, this "trans-natural," is God's "original touch *ab intrinseco* which is complemented by Christian revelation *ab extrinseco*." ²⁹

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 64.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 93.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 79.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 87. On p. 89 is found the distinction Blondel makes between the "supernatural state" and its consequent affirmation in the "supernatural life" of grace.

In Christian terms, then, the source of man's infinite willing is "the anonymous presence of an immanent supernatural."³⁰ This immanence of the divine is the prevenient grace which makes all human hearts restless. Christian faith is its explicit acceptance, but even implicit faith can be the endorsement of its anonymous presence. It is indeed remarkable how this Catholic philosopher in his treatment of the Christian "hypotheses" adumbrates and even anticipates the later "intrinsicist" theology of Karl Rahner.

Karl Rahner

What Blondel accomplished through his exploration of action Rahner achieves through his study of intellection. For Rahner the perennial task of theology is to elucidate the intrinsic connection between revelation and its hearer, and consequently, the theologian's point of departure must be a philosophical anthropology adequately expressive of the structure of man's self-understanding.

While Blondel saw the dynamism of the will manifest in choosing, Rahner sees the dynamism of mind evident in questioning. Toward a philosophical account of the phenomenon of questioning as indicative of the nature of man, the potential hearer of God, Rahner constructs his "metaphysics of mind." This metaphysics cannot be "news from nowhere."³¹ It can only be the systematic objectification of what we always already know in the actual performance and experience of knowing anything at all.

The absolutely unknown or unknowable cannot be questioned. Any inquiry signals the presence of some cognitional commerce with its object. Since all questioning adumbrates *the* human question, the question of Being, Being must in some way be already "known" by its questioner. Like Plato's Socrates, Rahner accounts for questioning by claiming that we somehow know the answer.

This knowledge of Being, revealed in its question, is carefully distinguished by Rahner from conceptual, objective, thematic knowledge (the ordinary sense of knowledge). Knowledge of Being is pre-conceptual, non-objective, and a-thematic. It is not given "for itself"

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 91.

³¹Cf. William Shepherd, *Man's Condition: God and the World Process* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), p. 106.

but only as the conditioning factor to ground the possibility of knowing in the ordinary sense. Man is "spirit in-the-world"—his spiritual transcendence is *for* his history of freedom.³²

Ordinary, historical knowledge is not only the natural goal of the transcendent horizon of the mind—but it mediates awareness of its horizon by way of reflective scrutiny of its own presupposition. The spirit's *Vorgriff* of *esse* "performs" only on the occasion of ordinary sense-experience; it brings sensation to intellection.

Rahner's philosophical investigation of the *a priori* structure of consciousness terminates with an elaboration of his conclusions in the form of theological prolegomena. As spirit in-the-world, man is that being whose transcendence refers him to history as the place to await either the speech or the silence of God.³³ Throughout his philosophical movement Rahner cautiously refers to the "term" of man's spiritual transcendence as Absolute Being or the "Whither" of spiritual dynamism.³⁴ In his second or theological movement he expresses his faith-valorization of the *de facto* gracious character of human transcendence whereby the Absolute or the "Whither" now become the God of self-communicating grace. Spirit in-the-world becomes hearer of the Word (*de jure* "natural transcendence" cedes to *de facto* "supernatural transcendence") when the immanence of Being becomes the immanence of God.³⁵

The *a priori* activating immanence of God (as both orienting and the orientation of human transcendence) as the conditioning factor of the totality of man's self-performance provides the formal basis for Rahner's understanding of the identity between theology and anthropology. The *a posteriori* material basis for this identification is Jesus Christ, true God, true man. By way of extending his Christological understanding of the immanence of the Transcendent in the finite to all of reality (with man as its conscious apex) Rahner is able to envision all Christian dogmas as different but complementary formulations of the

³²Cf. Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), and *Hearers of the Word* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969).

³³Cf. Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, pp. 111ff.

³⁴Cf. Karl Rahner, "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), pp. 48-60.

³⁵*Ibid.*

one Christian Mystery, grace, or the self-communication of the Un-created to the created.³⁶

According to Christian teaching, this self-transcendence of the cosmos in man towards its own totality and foundation . . . has really reached its final consummation only when the cosmos in the spiritual creature, its goal and its height, is not merely something set apart from its foundation—something created—but something which receives the ultimate self-communication of its ultimate ground itself . . .³⁷

Bernard Lonergan

No Christian thinker of our time has produced a more careful or a more thorough philosophy of human subjectivity as a propaedeutic to theology than Bernard Lonergan. Similar to Rahner in his concern to elucidate the *a priori* structure of consciousness, Lonergan has constructed a more empirically satisfying and more critically nuanced account of human knowing.

Questions for Lonergan are the manifestations of the "transcendental notions" by which he means that radical intentionality or basic outreach which is the dynamism of the human spirit.³⁸ These *a priori*, unrestricted transcendentals are the differentiated dimensions of the notion of being. These notions provide the dynamism for the movement by inquiry from experience to the intelligible, from the intelligible to the true and the real, from the true and the real to the valuable and the good. The transcendental notions bespeak the heuristic power of man's conscious intentionality, evidenced in every question whereby he passes as a pilgrim between ignorance and knowledge toward the fulfillment of his unrestricted eros for being.³⁹

The question of God emerges as the question of questioning, when we advert to the unlimited ambience of questioning as manifestive of the unrestricted character of conscious intentionality. On each level of

³⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 60-73.

³⁷Rahner, "Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), p. 171.

³⁸For an explanation of the "transcendental notions" cf. B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), chap. 1, pp. 3-25.

³⁹Cf. *ibid.*

the unfolding of conscious intentionality the question of God is evoked in the search for the full significance of the insight of understanding, of the achievement of judgment, and of the morality of decision.⁴⁰ This "transcendental tendency of the human spirit" is reflected in every cultural anticipation of its answer, religious or irreligious.

The question of God, then, lies within man's horizon. . . . The reach, not of his attainment, but of his intending is unrestricted. There lies within his horizon a region for the divine, a shrine for ultimate holiness. . . . negations presuppose the spark in our clod, our native orientation to the divine.⁴¹

The transcendental notions describe man's capacity for self-transcendence—intellectual, moral and finally, religious. But religious self-transcendence, precisely because it is the experienced fulfillment of the unrestricted eros of the human spirit in "the dynamic state of being in love with God,"⁴² is beyond man's power. For the ultimate source of the dynamism of conscious intentionality is God's initiative in his "prior word" of love.⁴³ While Lonergan does not clearly distinguish between God's "prior word" and the "state of being in love with God," it seems correct in our context to understand the "prior word" as functionally identical with Rahner's notion of God's initiative in "transcendental revelation." Just as "transcendental revelation" is the experience of God's self-communicating grace for Rahner, so also for Lonergan the "prior word pertains . . . to the unmediated experience of the mystery of love and awe."⁴⁴

CONCLUSIONS

A brief review of some fundamental features of contemporary theological anthropology has revealed a significant thread of convergence of Protestant and Catholic theologians around the theme of the "point

⁴⁰Cf. *ibid.*

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

of contact" between man and God. Despite the obvious differences in perspective between both traditions a broad consensus can be ascertained from the fact that all modern theologians in some fashion contextualize their "speech about the divine" in terms of their explicit evaluations of the condition of the human listener. The historical route of Western theology has tended to make God more and more transcendent until finally transcendence becomes absence, and our world thus secularized loses resonance with all talk of God. For us it is more than ever the case that "there is no assured way leading from nature to God, and . . . therefore, the whole burden of proof of the truth of faith in God falls upon the understanding of man, upon anthropology."⁴⁵

But what is the appropriate assessment of any so-called "knowledge of God" uncovered by an analysis of man? Protestants and Catholics differ in their answers to this question, but perhaps these differences can be gauged more as complementary than as contradictory.

With varying degrees of emphasis Barth, Bultmann, and Tillich eschew any direct path from man to knowledge of God. Because he is blind to the real truth about himself, man on his own will only fashion idols to suit his sinful proclivities. Thus Barth rejects any philosophy of man as a source for Christian theology, since the truth about man is unveiled only through God's action in Jesus Christ revealed in the Scriptures. He does, however, look with some relish on those existentialist philosophies of man which portray in pessimistic tones the sorry plight inherent in the human situation. Here he finds at least a "negative source" for his Christian denunciation of human pretension. Bultmann, indeed, goes further in embracing the philosophical categories of the early Heidegger to establish a hermeneutic of self-understanding to recast the New Testament message for today. But he replaces the Heideggerian summons for self-affirmation with the self-surrendering stance of Christian faith as the true way to authentic existence. In the case of Tillich, the apologetic intent controlling his entire theology leads him to a deep appreciation of existentialist philosophy as the most apposite ally of contemporary theology: ". . . the existentialist raises the question and analyzes the human situation to which the theologian can then give the answer."⁴⁶ That answer, of course, comes

⁴⁵Pannenberg, "Anthropology and the Question of God," p. 82.

⁴⁶Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, p. 125.

neither from the situation nor from the question, but from "somewhere else."⁴⁷

If Tillich advances beyond both Barth and Bultmann in connecting the question with the answer, Pannenberg goes beyond Tillich in calling for a more thorough philosophical justification for the thesis that man's questionableness is rooted in his *Weltoffenheit*. He refers his readers to the work of Catholic theologians in this area and presents his own preliminary understanding of man's openness to the world as really openness beyond the world experienced as dependence upon some transcendent power for fulfillment. A philosophy of subjectivity is absolutely necessary to provide a reasonable basis for the thesis that man cannot be understood adequately without his having some "association" with the Mystery transcending empirical reality.⁴⁸ "If God remains simply inaccessible to man, then religion becomes a self-contradictory concept."⁴⁹ The acceptance of Jesus and his authority "already assumes a preliminary knowledge of God."⁵⁰ Thus, "an awareness of God must already be assumed by Christian faith and is prior to faith . . ."⁵¹ Over and over again Pannenberg underscores the need for a fully developed anthropological prolegomenon for theology—"the theology of revelation always implicitly assumes an understanding of revelation and religion, that is, a philosophy of religion."⁵²

Now it seems to me that the at least partial fulfillment of this theological exigency is the contribution of Catholic scholars such as Blondel, Rahner, and Lonergan. While Catholic theology has much to learn from the "Protestant principle" and its ally, existentialist philosophy, for a more profound insight into the concrete plight of man

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸Cf. Pannenberg, "Toward a Theology of the History of Religions," p. 102.

⁴⁹Pannenberg, "Anthropology and the Question of God," pp. 94-5.

⁵⁰Pannenberg, "Speaking about God in the Face of Atheist Criticism," in *The Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p. 103.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁵²Pannenberg, "Christian Theology and Philosophical Criticism," in *The Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p. 121.

experiencing his "infinite qualitative distance" from God, the Catholic tradition can complement this understanding by retrieving its characteristic optimism regarding human "nature." Both perspectives are necessary to preserve the paradox of God's "No!" in Christ to man's self-made condition of ambiguity manifested in the totality of its cultural pretensions, and God's "Yes!" in Christ to the fulfillment of the human potential which is the realization of the divine intention of the *imago Dei*. The Protestant principle must be supplemented by Catholic substance. And, in terms of our theme, the existentialist portrayal of the concrete questionableness of the human condition must be completed by a philosophical anthropology to uncover the conditions for the possibility of the emergence and performance of man, the question.

For Blondel the "idea" of God is necessarily evoked by the movement of life. This "knowledge of God," generated by the experienced disproportion between finite achievement and infinite elan, is implicit in all men. The being of God, however, transcends this "idea" of him necessarily evoked by experience. Only through the religious option (faith) will true knowledge of the divine be attained. For the mind is not equal to the task of moving beyond the ineluctable affirmation that God is. Knowledge of what God is demands from man the self-surrendering option for a totally dedicated love by which he comes to understand that to grasp the Infinite, to possess God, is really to be grasped and to be possessed by him.

For Rahner the pre-conceptual awareness of God as the conditioning horizon for man's knowing and willing is the most primordial knowledge of God. It is primordial because it is that necessary commerce with the divine which is constitutive for the historical unfolding in freedom of the human spirit. This knowledge, again, is not knowledge in the ordinary (categorical) sense. Moreover, this knowledge of itself is insufficient to account for or to sustain the *actual history* of man in his quest for God—it cannot ground the possibility of faith. For Rahner this merely "natural" knowledge of God must cede in the actual, historical situation to the presence of the Mystery of love so that no man experiences merely the "Absolute" but all men really experience the self-giving God. *De facto*, the most primordial knowledge of God is "transcendental revelation."

Expressed in Catholic terms, this doctrine of the transcendental necessity of the priority of the experience of God and its necessary expression in explicit speaking about God (with all the dangers of conceptual idolatry) refers to a knowledge which is both transcendental and unavoidable and is always sustained by the offer of God's self-communication in grace. Consequently, the doctrine of the *natural* knowability and knowledge of God is not a knowledge which appears in isolation, but one element, only subsequently isolated, in a single knowledge of God, authorized by him in its direct relation to him, which, when it is accepted, is already faith.⁵³

By his notion of transcendental revelation Rahner is able to provide the needed focus on the immanence of God as the graceful basis for (because ultimate answer to) the question of man. Man's question is a "point of contact" because it is derived from the always already present self-giving Mystery who is its answer. The question is the echo of the call.

Like Rahner, Lonergan has cleared the space or found the room for the divine immanence through his transcendental philosophy. Conscious intentionality finds its ultimate fulfillment in being in love with God, that dynamic state initiated by God's "prior word."

Different from Rahner, Lonergan denies that the immanent Mystery is "known." The dynamic state is conscious and thus experienced but not known—for knowledge is a "compound of experience, understanding, and judging."⁵⁴ God's flooding of our hearts with his love effects that dynamic state which "of itself is operative grace . . ."⁵⁵ This dynamic state is experienced in the fulfillment of our capacity for moral self-transcendence as "deep joy and profound peace."⁵⁶ It is the task of the Christian apologist to assist us to "know what is going on within us" so that we might "integrate it with the rest of our living."⁵⁷ It seems apposite, in terms of our theme, to note that

⁵³Rahner, "Observations on the Doctrine of God in Catholic Dogmatics," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 9 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972), pp. 135-6.

⁵⁴Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 106.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

Loneragan considers his approach to have greatly reduced the problem of the salvation of non-Christians.

We began with Plato's paradoxical account of the experience of inquiry—questioning is both not knowing and knowing. Hopefully, we have established a case for the complementarity of the different positions of Protestant and Catholic theologians on the connection between the question of God and the knowledge of God. Protestants rightfully insist on the priority of the divine answer, which they find in categorical clarity in Christian revelation. Catholics share this insistence on the priority of the answer, but they find it in the transcendental presence of the divine immanence.

The divergence of the two basic tendencies preserves the Platonic paradox. We question God; therefore, we do not know him but we do know him!

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