THE CONFESSIONAL AND APOLOGETIC ASPECTS OF GORDON KAUFMAN'S THOUGHT: AN INTERPRETATION

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ABSTRACT

Several contemporary theologians have maintained that the proper setting for Christian theology is an ecclesiastical one. The formation of character, the internalization of beliefs and values, and the representation of these principles and behavioural patterns in religious and political practices should be the priority of the church.

Others have argued that this circumscribed "confessional" approach is not enough. Biblical stories and religious convictions are not only rooted in faith communities but are also reflected in universal concerns. The reciprocal relationship between text and reader, church and world, requires a broadly-based "apologetic" method.

These two models are used to evaluate Gordon Kaufman's epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, and theologies of revelation, divine agency, and construction. One of the surprising discoveries of this dissertation is that his relative theory of knowledge and employment of a Christian categorial scheme undergird a confessional approach. The thesis nevertheless concludes that his thought is oriented towards a realistic empirical method. The discussion ends with a recommendation that Kaufman link his apologetic concerns to a more identifiable corporeal structure.

RÉSUMÉ

Un nombre de théologiens contemporains prétendent que le milieu qui convient à la théologie chrétienne est un milieu ecclésiastique. Les priorités de l'église doivent être la formation du caractère, l'interiorisation des croyances et des valeurs, et la représentation de ces principes et de ces façons d'agir dans les pratiques religieuses et politiques.

D'autres soutiennent que l'approche "confessionnelle" circonscrite n'est pas suffisante. Les récits bibliques et les convictions religieuses ne proviennent pas uniquement de communautés de croyants mais reflètent également des préoccupations universelles. La relation réciproque entre le texte et le lecteur, l'église et le monde, exige une méthode "apologétique" de base générale.

Par l'entremise de ces deux modèles, nous évaluons l'épistémologie, l'éthique, la métaphysique, et les théologies de révélation, d'agence divine et de construction de Gordon Kaufman. L'un des constats surprenants de cette dissertation est que la théorie relative du savoir et l'emploi d'un schéma catégorial chrétien avancés par Kaufman valident une approche confessionnelle. Néanmoins, l'auteur de la thèse conclut que la pensée de Kaufman est axée sur une méthode réaliste et empirique. Il termine son travail en préconisant que Kaufman établisse un bien entre ses intérêts apologétiques et un corps constitué plus indentifiable.

Reality transcends relativity by transforming the disappointing past and unattainable future into the ever-present "Now" of possibility.

David White

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PREFACE

The choice of Gordon Kaufman as a dissertation topic was first conceived eighteen years ago, when his Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective served as the primary textbook at the author's alma mater, the Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The idea that his (biblical) historicism could make up for the more abstract qualities of Paul Tillich's work, and that his progressive theology could fulfil the requirements of an apologetic, even "liberal" defence of a traditionally sectarian viewpoint, was born here, under the careful tutelage of Professors Harry Huebner, Helmut Harder, David (Doc) Schroeder, and Waldemar Janzen.

The author's views, as well as Kaufman's, have changed since then. No longer is Kaufman as centrally located within the Mennonite faith community as was once perceived (hoped for?). The author's own pilgrimage has also taken him farther afield. Yet when it came to sorting out the diverse directions in which North American theologians have ventured, this writer could not help viewing these trends in terms of his earlier theological training.

There are scholars within my own religious heritage who have called for a return to the Anabaptist roots of faith. Others have maintained that the restitution emphases of the

Radical Reformation are inadequate for coming to terms with modernity. According to the latter, Christians have to go beyond the corrective aspects of the sixteenth century to the older, wiser tradition that preceded it in order to deal with the contemporary challenges facing the church.

This intradenominational discussion parallels the twentieth-century rediscovery of Reformation, Thomistic, Augustinian, and biblical sources by Protestants and Catholics, as well as the more muted acknowledgment that the Enlightenment represents both an asset and liability to these faith traditions. The impetus for this dissertation has therefore come from two sources, one from the lively discussion that has been going on about the future of Anabaptism, and the second from general reflections that have been made about Christianity.

While I have my CMBC professors to thank for the first of these motivating factors, Gordon Harland, of the University of Manitoba, Marlin Miller and Jake Elias, of the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, and Douglas Hall, Gregory Baum, Arthur Boorman, and Tom Wright, of McGill University, have assisted me in placing my tradition within a broader historical context. Dr. Hall, my thesis supervisor, and Dr. Baum have been especially helpful in this regard. Professor Hall has deepened my appreciation of the Augustinian, Lutheran roots of faith, while Professor Baum has added just the right amount of "buoyancy" that is necessary

for the completion of a dissertation. For this, I would like to thank them.

In addition, I would like to thank Gordon Kaufman for his gracious consent to an interview as well as his patient response to the lengthy letter of inquiry that I sent him. My student colleagues have also made the day-to-day struggles that are part of graduate work easier to cope with. Robert MacKenzie, Michael Pettem, Brian Walsh, and Chris Levan are only some of the names that could be mentioned. I am also grateful to my sister-in-law, Rhoda Lehman Stoesz, for her assistance in locating some primary source materials, as well as to Professor Joseph McLelland, John Williams, and Richard Cooper for their helpful suggestions in making revisions to this dissertation.

I would like finally to thank the people closest to me, my wife, Naomi Brubacher, for her emotional, moral, and financial support, and my parents, Ed and Sara Stoesz, for their vision of what was possible. The Low German saying, "Ye yelieda, ye fechieda" (the more learned, the more confused), did not stand in the way of their encouragement of me to go on to higher education, and for that reason, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to them.

Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day,
June 24, 1990

INTRODUCTION

A. Statement of the Problem

Two trends in contemporary theology have emerged. One of them, represented by the "Yale" school of Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, Stanley Hauerwas, and others, has emphasized the intra-systemic aspects of the theological enterprise.[1] According to these thinkers, the most important task of believers is to let the sacred text and church community inform their world and constitute their identity. The liberal, experiential heritage of Schleiermacher is considered in this scheme of things to be a hindrance to the formation of Christian character. Contrary to the universalistic demands of theological modernists, the doctrines, rites, and social practices of the Christian church should be accentuated.

Other theologians have taken exception to what they regard as the circumscribed nature of this intra-textual method.[2] The unavoidable involvement of Christians in the

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[1]Hans Frei, The Identity of Jesus Christ (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); George Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984); Stanley Hauerwas, Character and the Christian Life (San Antonio, Texas: Trinity University Press, 1975).

[2]See in particular David Tracy, "Lindbeck's New Program for Theology," The Thomist 49/3 (1985):460-472. For a more theoretical assessment, see Gary Comstock, "Truth or Meaning: Ricoeur versus Frei on Biblical Narrative," Journal of Reli-

world means that their feelings and beliefs are shaped as much by society as the church. The same holds true for the Bible. This sacred canon is a reflection of different time periods, various genres, and a multitude of audiences (including Jews and Muslims). An inter-systemic approach is better suited to the apprehension of these linguistic and cultural narratives. The reader interacts in a dialectical fashion with the biblical text and his or her religious community, rendering interpretation, translation, experience, and hermeneutics as inextricable aspects of the faith process.

These two approaches, described variously as the methodological differences between Yale and Chicago, postliberal and revisionist theologies (Placher),[3] non-foundationalism and foundationalism (Thiemann),[4] cultural-linguistic and experiential-expressive methods (Lindbeck), pure and impure narratives (Comstock),[5] intra-textual and correlative analyses, as well as a continuation of the neo-orthodox and

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gion 66/2 (1986):117-140.

[3]William Placher, "Revisionist and Postliberal Theologies and the Public Character of Theology," The Thomist 49/3 (1985):392-416.

[4]Ronald Thiemann, Revelation and Theology (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985).

[5]Gary Comstock, "Two Types of Narrative Theology," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 55/4 (1987):687-717.

liberal projects of the last two centuries (Macquarrie)[6] represent the theoretical framework of this dissertation's interpretation of Gordon Kaufman's thought.

The appropriateness of this interpretive scheme is not self-evident, however. Kaufman has distanced himself from the phenomenological method employed at the University of Chicago, saying that there is as much conceptual work to be done after theologians have discovered an empirical reality on which to ground their descriptions of God as before. The idea of God as a mysterium tremendum (Otto)[7] or as a "power that bears down upon as well as sustains us" (Gustafson)[8] has to be linked to a comprehensive categorial scheme in order for it to denote something more than a religious experience.[9]

Kaufman is also sceptical about the possibility of discovering "essences" and ontological realities. Invoking

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[6]John Macquarrie, Twentieth-Century Religious Thought, revised ed. (London: SCM Press, 1963, 1981), p. 380.

[7]Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), pp. 12-40.

[8]James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, 1983), I:129-136.

[9]Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), pp. 105-116; "How is God to be Understood in a Theocentric Ethics?" in James M. Gustafson's Theocentric Ethics: Interpretations and Assessments, ed. Harlan Beckley and Charles Swezey (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1988), pp. 13-37. For a broader discussion of these issues, see Wayne Proudfoot, Religious Experience (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) and Daniel Pals, "Reductionism and Belief: An Appraisal of Recent Attacks on the Doctrine of Irreducible Religion," Journal of Religion 66/1 (1986):18-36.

Kant's distinction between phenomena and noumena, Kaufman says that the most that can be expected of theology is an analysis of concepts on the basis of their pragmatic value. The word "God" represents a regulative principle that orients believers to a specific way of life and spurs them on to action.[10] These epistemological and critical concerns place Kaufman closer to the performative and linguistic emphases of postliberals than the substantive affirmations of revisionist theologians like Paul Ricoeur, David Tracy, and Karl Rahner.[11]

Postliberal theologians have not exactly welcomed Kaufman with open arms, however. His rejection of revelation as an appropriate category for Christian theology, his critical assessment of the monarchial, paternalistic, and personalistic images of the Bible, his call for an imaginative (re)con-

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[10]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 100-115, 257-270; An Essay on Theological Method, revised ed. (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975, 1979), pp. 75-76.

[11]Kaufman has this to say in response to a personal letter of inquiry:". . . you come closer to what I am about when you relate my thinking to social philosophers such as Habermas than when you connect me up with the hermeneutics group. . . . The metaphysical optimism of Ricoeur, his continuing to speak about 'essences' which we can apparently locate, and the like, is pretty far from my own basic metaphysical skepticism," correspondence with author, October 23, 1987. Cf. Gordon Kaufman, A Review of Blessed Rage for Order, by David Tracy, Religious Studies Review 2/4 (1976):7-13; "Conceptualizing Diversity Differently," A Review of The Analogical Imagination, by David Tracy, Journal of Religion 62/4 (1982):392-401; and "Is There Any Way from Athens to Jerusalem?" A Review of Foundations of Christian Faith, by Karl Rahner, Journal of Religion 59/3 (1979):340-346.

structive approach to the conceptualization of God, and his invocation of humanization as a public criterion in the assessment of religions have led various intra-textual thinkers to conclude that Kaufman has more in common with the anti-authoritarian agenda of modernity than with their own non-foundational, ad hoc apologetic method.

George Lindbeck, for instance, has wondered whether Kaufman's attempt to ground his theology in ordinary language philosophy does not amount to a betrayal of his own neo-orthodox training. Although some of Kaufman's work can be interpreted as a "post-Wittgensteinian transcription of an at least quasi-Barthian position," Lindbeck concludes that Kaufman's preoccupation with the philosophical roots of Western society bears more resemblance to a pragmatic metaphysics than the theological distinctiveness with which neo-orthodoxy has come to be identified.[12]

Ronald Thiemann, Garrett Green, and Victor Froese echo Lindbeck's concerns when they defend a theology of revelation against what they consider to be Kaufman's misguided juxtaposing of human creativity and divine prevenience.[13] Kaufman

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[12]George Lindbeck, A Review of An Essay on Theological Method, by Gordon Kaufman, Religious Studies Review 5/4 (1979), pp. 263-264.

[13]Ronald Thiemann, "Revelation and Imaginative Construction," Journal of Religion 61/3 (1981):242-263; Garret Green, A Review of The Theological Imagination, by Gordon Kaufman, Religious Studies Review 9/3 (1983), pp. 220-221; Victor Froese, "Gordon Kaufman's Theology 'Within the Limits of Reason Alone': A Review," Conrad Grebel Review 6/1 (1988):1-26. Cf. Bruce McCormick, "Divine Revelation and Human Imagi-

appears to be so wrapped up in the Enlightenment project of self-knowledge (Sapere aude!) and autonomy that he has given priority to reason over faith, imagination over description, construction over revelation, innovation over receptivity, and the academy over the church. These postliberal thinkers maintain that Kaufman's foundational tendencies can no longer be justified in the face of the emerging consensus concerning the social, religious, and cultural limits of rationality, autonomy, and subjectivity.[14]

The question therefore has to be asked: Where does Gordon Kaufman fit? Is he so attracted by the motifs of system and comprehensiveness that he has not recognized that only "fragments of truth" can be offered in today's age of pluralism and postmodernity?[15] Or should his demand for totality be viewed within the framework of a radical historicism which does not assume that one's theological perspective can be judged on the basis of an ultimate criterion? An affirmative answer to the second question, as Hugh Jones[16] and George

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nation: Must We Choose Between the Two?" Scottish Journal of Theology 37/4 (1984):431-455; David Tracy, The Analogical Imagination (New York: Crossroad, 1986), pp. 64-69 (fn.77).

[14]Cf. Ronald Thiemann, Revelation and Theology; Garrett Green, Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

[15]See George Hendry, "Untimely Systems," A Review of Systematic Theology, by Gordon Kaufman, The Princeton Seminary Bulletin 62/2 (1969), p. 13.

[16]Hugh Jones, "Gordon Kaufman's Perspectival Language," Religious Studies 14/1 (1978), pp. 96-97.

Lindbeck have noted, would place Kaufman on a continuum with the "fideistic" tendencies of neo-orthodoxy rather than in line with the correlative method used by revisionist theologians.

Untangling the implications of these two trajectories represents the task of this dissertation. This thesis will demonstrate the link between Kaufman's thought and the above trends as well as establish the shift that has taken place from the relativistic, presuppositional stance of his earlier thinking to the realistic, empirically-based aspects of his current theology. These two agendas complement each other in the sense that it is only after one has understood the extent to which Kaufman's thought has deep affiliations with both neo-orthodoxy and liberalism that a subtle change within this broad framework can be discerned. A careful reading, in other words, is warranted before judgment can be passed.

B. Explanation of the Terms "Confessional" and "Apologetic"

The second matter that needs to be addressed pertains to the terms that are used to explore Kaufman's relationship to these two theological movements. Why have the words "confessional" and "apologetic" been chosen rather than "postliberal" and "revisionist" or "pure" and "impure" narrative?

The best way of answering this question is to say that these two terms have deeper theological roots, eliciting both negative and positive responses depending on how they are located historically. On the negative side, the word "con-

fession" has come to be associated with a sectarian theology which is not interested in testing its truth claims on the basis of a broader ecclesiological, religious, or cultural basis.[17]

This is the sense in which David Tracy uses it when he accuses Lindbeck of "Barthian confessionalism."[18] What he means by this phrase, Barth notwithstanding, is a theological relativism, fideism, and historicism that uses Wittgenstein's notion of language games to close off the hermeneutical circle of interpretation.[19] This is, as far as I can tell, the worst accusation that a Roman Catholic theologian can make of a Protestant one, for it implies that the latter wants to continue, rather than reconcile or seek a rapprochement with the theological battles that have divided the two camps since the Reformation.[20]

The word "apologetic" has fallen into a similar state of

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[17]See, for example, Wilson D. Miscamble, "Sectarian Passivism?" Theology Today 44/1 (1987):69-77; Michael S. Quirk, "Beyond Sectarianism?" ibid., pp. 78-86; and Stanley Hauerwas, "Will the Real Sectarian Stand Up?" ibid., pp. 87-94.

[18]David Tracy, "Lindbeck's New Program for Theology," p. 465.

[19]Cf. Kai Nielsen, "Wittgensteinian Fideism," Philosophy 42/161 (1967):191-209; John Hick, God Has Many Names (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980, 1982), p. 117.

[20]This accusation is particularly disquieting in light of the fact that Tracy considers Lindbeck to be "the major theological contributor in North America to genuine ecumenical dialogue among the major confessions," "Lindbeck's New Program for Theology," p. 461.

disrepute. Johannes Metz notes that the discipline of justifying or "apologizing for" one's faith arose when the Christian church could no longer be identified with society.[21] Following the Enlightenment, Protestants and Catholics alike felt the need to explain their faith to an increasingly nominal culture.

The term took on a pejorative connotation as the church became more and more defensive in what it perceived to be a losing battle against secularization, scientific positivism, and modernization. Whether associated with the reactionary, politically conservative Catholic forces of France, the privatistic tendencies of Protestantism in Anglophone countries, or the scholasticism of both, apologetics came to be regarded as something to be avoided, or at least toned down.[22]

Against this negative crescendo have arisen some voices in affirmation of these two terms. Although severe in his criticism of Lindbeck, David Tracy opens up a place for confessional theology when he says that its "strong biblical sense of idolatry" grounded in an affirmation of the sovereignty of God, its "dialectical understanding of the revelatory tradition and contemporary experience," as well as its profound sense of historical relativity ensures the public

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[21]Sacramentum Mundi, ed. Karl Rahner, et. al., s. v. "Apologetics," by Johannes-Baptist Metz.

[22]See David Martin, A General Theory of Secularization (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978); William Placher, Unapologetic Theology (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989).

plausibility of a confessional stance, even if the primary focus of its proclamation is the church--rather than the academy or society.[23]

James Gustafson makes a similar, conciliatory move when he acknowledges the cogency of a confessional alternative in the first volume of his magnum opus, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective. While pressing ahead with his own phenomenological method, Gustafson maintains that the Christian distinctiveness of John H. Yoder's thought represents the most radically different approach from his own and the "sharpest challenge" to anyone who claims "backing from the particularities of the Scriptural tradition."[24]

This accommodation of confessional theology on the part of revisionist thinkers has been more than welcomed by intratextual scholars. Gayle Gerber Koontz, in tracing a line of continuity between the confessional thought of H. Richard Niebuhr and John H. Yoder, argues that there are interdisciplinary advantages to emphasizing what she calls the "concreteness" of the Christian faith.[25] Starting with differences in an inter-faith dialogue fosters clarity and candidness in a way that is more difficult when all the

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[23]David Tracy, The Analogical Imagination, pp. 65-69.

[24]James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:75.

[25]See the first chapter of her Ph.D. dissertation, "Confessional Theology in a Pluralistic Context: A Study of the Theological Ethics of H. Richard Niebuhr and John H. Yoder" (Boston University, 1985).

participants' energies are devoted to finding some common ground. The latter endeavour too often ends up as a theoretical exercise in which the proposed solution proves to be less than satisfactory to those concerned.

George Lindbeck further underlines the positive dimensions of a confessional theology when he notes the congruity between its historical specificity and the current interest in thick cultural descriptions on the part of sociologists, anthropologists, and philosophers.[26] The decentred, pluralistic nature of academic studies today bodes well for a theology which places greater priority on distinctiveness, rather than on the assimilative features of a belief system.

A similar rearguard action is being waged on behalf of the idea of apologetics. After listing all of the ways in which it can become counter-productive, Metz retrieves the idea of answering for one's beliefs by saying that it stands at the heart of the gospel message. Giving account of one's faith--what in Catholic circles has come to be known as fundamental theology--represents a way of accepting responsibility for the problems of the world, both in terms of providing practical responses to real dilemmas as well as offering a defence "for the hope that is in you" (I Peter 3:15).[27]

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[26]George Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, pp. 129-130.

[27]Johannes Metz, "Apologetics" ;cf. the first and second chapters of his book, Faith in History and Society, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1980). For a similar type of argument, see Gregory Baum, The Credibility of the Church Today (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968).

This is what David Tracy is doing in a modified sense when he recommends a hermeneutical method which critically correlates received tradition and the contemporary situation.[28] Although Tracy does not explicitly use the term "apologetics," he is as adamant in maintaining that believers are in a continual process of relating, revising, and reformulating their beliefs as they respond to the demands of the world as Metz is.

The terms "confessional" and "apologetic" have therefore been chosen, not only because they encapsulate what I take to be two major features of Kaufman's theology, but also because their equivocal meanings enable the reader to understand why, when reacting to the fideistic tendencies of neo-orthodoxy, Kaufman sounds like an apologist par excellence and why, when emphasizing the historically laden nature of knowledge, he is considered to be too relativistic and agnostic for some tastes. The negative connotations of each term facilitate a strong case to be made for the other, while moderating the extremities of both positions.

The ambivalence of these two terms can therefore be seen as an asset, for it alerts the reader to the fact that there is more to these methods than first meets the eye. Both of these approaches arose in response to specific situations and have been sustained over a period of time by a set of amelio-

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[28]David Tracy, "Lindbeck's New Program for Theology," p. 470; cf. The Analogical Imagination, pp. 59-64.

rating and/or conflictive circumstances. The historical memory that is evoked by the words "confessional" and "apologetic" establishes a longer time frame for this dissertation, fostering the hope that (1) Kaufman's thought can be situated in relation to these historical trends and that (2) the contemporary debate regarding the merits of each stance can joined and extended.[29]

C. Overview of the Dissertation

The time has come for a detailed look at the methodo-

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[29]Two additional comments are in order. First, the use of the terms "confessional" and "apologetic" could be defended on the basis of their historical significance alone. The fact that the Protestant churches during the Reformation used the term "confession" to denote the difference between their affirmations of faith and creedal statements; that the idea of a "confessing church" has gained ascendancy in twentieth-century religious thought; and that "apologetics" becomes potent when the church is seeking a rapprochement with society, as has been the case in the Roman Catholic response to modernity, can be enlisted in support of this dissertation's use of these two terms (some of these issues are raised in the sixth chapter and the conclusion).

It should also be noted that there are yet more ways of naming these two theological trends. One that has been suggested is that of "modernity" and "post-modernity," with the former category being identified with "the belief in linear progress, absolute truths, the rational planning of ideal social orders, and the standardization of knowledge and production" and the latter category being associated with "fragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universal or 'totalizing' discourses," David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 9. This typology fits in the sense that Kaufman's criterion of humanization can be linked to the project of modernity while his pragmatic agnosticism bears a resemblance to postmodernism, cf. Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Options in Post-Modern Theology," Dialog 26/3 (1987):196-200; Theology at the End of Modernity, ed. Sheila G. Davaney (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1991) (forthcoming). These labels have been eschewed for the same reason as the others, i.e. their lack of theological rootedness.

logical procedures used to explicate Kaufman's theology. The first thing that should be said is that his thought has been analysed on a chronological basis, with each chapter corresponding roughly to one of his published works. The first two chapters deal with the epistemological and metaphysical concerns raised in Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith[30]; the third chapter explores the theme of revelation prominent in Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective; the fourth chapter investigates the idea of divine agency outlined in God the Problem; the fifth and longest chapter analyzes the concepts of imagination and theological construction, themes which have become synonymous with Kaufman over the last fifteen years and are explored in An Essay on Theological Method and The Theological Imagination[31]; and the sixth chapter ends with a substantial look at the content of Kaufman's theology, more specifically at the motifs of human freedom and divine sovereignty as they are dealt with in Theology for a Nuclear Age.[32]

Two books not included in the above list are The Context of Decision[33] and Nonresistance and Responsibility,[34] works

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[30](Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

[31](Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981).

[32](Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

[33](Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961). The occasion for this book was the Menno Simons Lecture Series at Bethel College in Newton, Kansas (1959). Gordon Kaufman's father served as president of this college when Gordon was growing up, cf. Kaufman's autobiographical reflections, "Apologia Pro

that Kaufman wrote at the beginning of his career and which deal with the ethical aspects of theology. An abbreviated analysis of these books has been included in an excursus at the end of the dissertation. There, the pragmatic implications of Kaufman's epistemology are linked to the moral issue of pacifism.

Given this diachronic structure, the dissertation proceeds on a more synchronic level within each chapter. It should be noted that the terms "confessional" and "apologetic" do not appear as frequently as could be warranted. The suitability of this frame of reference only became clear once the dissertation was well underway, making it expedient to employ theoretical models which are not as explicitly linked to a confessional or apologetic approach as the reader might wish. I would therefore like to clarify the methodological framework of each chapter and link it to the thesis.

The first chapter shows how Kaufman's relative theory of knowledge can be regarded as a closed hermeneutical stance, in which interpretation is limited to the internal coherence and presuppositional basis of a belief system. This has become known in more sophisticated language as "conceptual relativism," which assumes that truth is relative in "the strong sense of there being mutually incompatible, yet in-

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Vita Sua," in Why I am a Mennonite, ed. Harry Loewen (Kitchener, Ont.: Herald Press, 1988), pp. 126-138.

[34](Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1979). Most of these essays were written between 1955 and 1963.

dividually adequate, sets of conceptual-schema-relative truths."[35] There is much in Kaufman's epistemology that lends itself to this dualistic understanding of knowledge.

The second half of the first chapter asks whether Kaufman's pragmatic criterion of humanization represents a more universal claim to truth. It comes to a tentative negative conclusion when Kaufman's humane vision is demonstrated to be part of the historicist preoccupation of Western religions, making it internally relative to that cultural system. The chapter nevertheless ends on a more transcendent note when it allows for the mutual influence of different frames of reference, bolstering the plausibility of Kaufman's comprehensive scheme.

The second chapter expands the discussion of these two options by considering the metaphysical basis of Kaufman's thought. The idea that an analysis and clarification of concepts is the most that can be expected of philosophy undergirds the "fideistic" side of Kaufman's epistemology and links him in somewhat of a paradoxical manner to the positivists of the early twentieth century.

The similarity between Kaufman and analytical thinkers like A. J. Ayer and Kai Nielsen, not to mention the linguis-

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[35]Joseph Runzo, Reason, Relativism, and God (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), p. 62.

tic philosophers who followed them,[36] has to do with their anti-metaphysical bias. Neither Ayer, Nielsen, Rorty, or Kaufman want to be associated with the "metaphysics of presence" which has dominated Western thought, whether in its existential-ontological form on the continent or its immanent-process counterpart in the United States.[37]

The question of reference is nevertheless reopened at the point at which Western society can be demonstrated to have been influenced by a series of social and philosophical trends. The idea, in other words, that a limited number of world-views has been constitutive of North American life rejuvenates the social-scientific project of inductive discovery and enhances the usefulness of a phenomenological method.[38] Cultural-linguistic perspectives have more to do with ontological reality than some have claimed.

The second chapter delves into this matter to the extent that it uncovers "root metaphors" of American society and links Kaufman's thought to them. Although his theology bears some affinities to secularity and phenomenology, the chapter concludes that Kaufman's accentuation of history, text,

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[36]See Richard Rorty's introduction to The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method, ed. Richard Rorty (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

[37]Cf. the first two chapters of Sallie McFague's book, Models of God (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

[38]For an application of this method, see Edward Farley, Ecclesial Man: A Social Phenomenology of Faith and Reality (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

performance, and denomination--in lieu of nature, world, reality, and church--places him clearly within the cultural-linguistic camp. The confessional aspects of his thought are thereby reinforced, although the possibility of connecting his recent interest in cosmology and biology to apologetics is left open.

The third chapter continues this comparison of historical relativism and empirical phenomenology by making a distinction between Kaufman's theology of revelation and a theology of nature. What is ironic about this situation is that although Kaufman began with the idea that the self-disclosure of God could be established on a secure epistemological basis, he eventually abandoned this strategy for a more empirical theology. Kaufman seems presently to endorse what he originally eschewed, i.e. a type of natural theology.

Even more ironic is the fact that several contemporary thinkers have argued for the cogency of divine revelation on the very grounds that Kaufman rejected it, namely theoretical or philosophical ones. Ronald Thiemann and Garrett Green have maintained that the arbitrary tendencies of a self-disclosure model disappear once it has been linked to divine prevenience[39] and seen as a cohesive part of "positive" religious experience.[40] One cannot help wondering whether these theologians are headed for the same disappointing cul-de-sac

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[39]Ronald Thiemann, Revelation and Theology.

[40]Garrett Green, Imagining God.

that Kaufman encountered twenty years ago as he came to terms with the limits of a revelatory analogy.

The third chapter unravels the paradoxical nature of this situation by tracing Kaufman's growing dissatisfaction with a theology of revelation. References in his Systematic Theology to Rudolf Bultmann's program of demythologization mark the stages of this demise. What Bultmann and Kaufman have in common is a naturalistic world-view which drives a wedge between biblical stories that have been mythologized and those that are deemed plausible on the basis of "facts."

Kaufman uses this twofold definition of history (Geschichte, Historie) to translate biblical themes into remythologized forms. It is here, within sight of his revelatory theology, that Kaufman can be seen at his apologetic best. His development of a personal analogy of transcendence to explain the divine mystery and his use of a teleological model of immanence to explicate God's patient care for the world demonstrates the extent to which he has shifted from a biblical theology to a contemporary anthropology.

Kaufman's explicit correlation of theological themes and phenomenological models is further pursued in God the Problem, only this time with a more astute philosophical analysis. Bultmann's dichotomy between nature and faith, as well as the subjective epistemology implicit in revelatory theologies, are traced back to Rene Descartes' mind/body distinction and dropped. In place of this dualistic theory of

knowledge now stands what Kaufman considers to be a more objective theological foundation: human agency. The observable aspects of human behaviour facilitate a conception of the "external" or economic relation of God to the world. The image of God as a Divine Agent gains its potency from the capability--as well as limitedness--of the human actor.

The significance of this agential theme within Kaufman's theology should be noted. It anticipates his theological use of cosmological images in the sense that once the onus has been placed on the actual--rather than intended--effects of human behaviour, this is but a small step from taking account of the multiple ways in which the natural world impinges upon and establishes a framework for theology. Kaufman's recent description of God as a "series of bio-cultural influences" represents a logical extension of his insight into the objective consequences of human action.

Kaufman's apologetic agenda is also fortified at the point at which he links his images of God to phenomenological descriptions of reality. This explains as well as justifies, in part, his subsequent theological constructions. The inherent connection between contingent historical events--such as the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki--and theology means that reformulations of divine metaphors are an integral part of the theological project. Conceptual modifications are rooted in the ever changing aspects of reality itself.

This correlative emphasis within Kaufman's theology of divine agency has been underlined because his shift to an imaginative theology can be seen as a return to a confessionally-based method. Kaufman reinvokes Kant's idealistic epistemology in order to demonstrate the indirect relationship between the given aspects of reality and conceptual frameworks. The fact that images are imaginatively conceived facilitates the supervised replacement of one set of metaphors for another.

Kaufman's liberation of theological concepts from their historic moorings is, in turn, balanced by a Wittgensteinian philosophy that defines religion as a 'form of life' and accentuates the performative function of religious ideas. Theological ideas regain their credibility as they are tied to public initiatives and social practices and linked to a comprehensive categorial scheme.

These various parts of Kaufman's constructive theology, taken as a whole, parallel the intra-textual emphases of postliberal thinkers. If one replaces Kaufman's idea of imaginative construction with Lindbeck's exploration of second-order language statements, his social pragmatism with Thiemann's idea of linguistic performance, his categorial scheme of "God," "world," "humanity," and "Christ" with Hans Frei's emphasis on biblical narrative, and Kaufman's concept of God as the ultimate Relativizer and Humanizer with Karl Barth's dialectical affirmation of divine transcendence and

immanence, one has what could simply be called a more rigorous form of neo-orthodoxy. Kaufman has much in common with postliberalism, even as he is rejecting it.

While the beginning of the fifth chapter highlights the similarities between these two positions, the second half demonstrates the ways in which Kaufman has left this intratextual approach behind. The invitation by process thinkers for Kaufman to explore the naturalistic implications of his theological realism represents the best indication of this shift to a new apologetic. The links between David Griffin, David Mason, William Dean, and Gordon Kaufman are noted, with the conclusion being drawn that Kaufman is moving ever closer to an empirical theology, even while his (re)constructive method is being entrenched on a more abstract plane.

The sixth chapter continues the exploration of the thesis question by situating Kaufman between the transcendent emphases of neo-orthodoxy and the immanent themes of process thought. One of the surprising discoveries of this investigation is the extent to which Kaufman retains an affinity for divine mystery. While the threat of an ecological or nuclear catastrophe provides the experiential basis for his affirmation of the otherness of God, this empirical fact would carry less weight were Kaufman not sensitive to the theological import of these new historical circumstances. Kaufman's resonance with neo-orthodoxy, in other words, provides him with the critical resources to reflect and comment

on this situation.

Within this emphasis on transcendence can nevertheless be found a revisionist interpretation of divine sovereignty. If it is true that God intended the universe to become reconciled to the Godself, and that human beings can destroy this world, then we have a situation in which the divine telos is dependent upon human initiative. Kaufman submits that God has become inextricably bound to the fate of the earth.

The best way of coming to terms with this mutable interpretation of divine power is to see it as a result of the tension that was created by neo-orthodoxy's simultaneous affirmation of the otherness and sovereignty of God. Kaufman resolves this dilemma by emphasizing the sustaining aspects of the latter while playing down its arbitrary tendencies. This leads him to an immanentist position which is closer to the relativity, naturalism, and process thinking of Charles Hartshorne, Henry Wieman, and Alfred N. Whitehead than the "orthodox" stance of Karl Barth and H. Richard Niebuhr. Yet Kaufman feels that firmer theological pronouncements of divine sovereignty do not stand up to the test of reality. The sixth chapter investigates the validity of this claim.

The conclusion rounds out the discussion by considering the ways in which Kaufman' theology can be explicitly joined to a confessional and apologetic stance. The first alternative is explored in terms of "confessional" statements that have arisen in response to totalitarianism, apartheid, and

the nuclear arms race. These ecclesial declarations are ecumenical in character and parallel to a surprising degree Kaufman's call for the academic community to show its resistance to United State's policy of nuclear deterrence.

The second option is related to the American Roman Catholic bishops' statements on peace and the economy, as well as to Robert Bellah's discovery of a civil religion in America. These two examples are taken as representative of an apologetic framework which correlates theology and society in a dialectical manner. Similarities between Kaufman's public theology and these two case studies are noted.

The dissertation concludes that while there is much in Kaufman's thought that is reflective of both confessional and apologetic theologies, his presuppositional inclinations have been continually revised in the direction of a realistic or empirically-based method. This is as true of his earlier work, in which he criticized the dualistic tendencies of revelatory theologies, as his later writings, in which he has placed phenomenological checks on his constructive ideas.

The dissertation also comes to the critical judgment that a more objective institutional base is needed to provide a framework for Kaufman's theology. Whether this corporeal structure is represented by the church, as is recommended in the conclusion, or by some other public forum, such as the university or society, Kaufman's imaginative ideas require more social visibility in order to flourish.

Some final comments about the two appendices are also in order. The first appendix was written with the universalization of Kaufman's epistemology in mind. It outlines two theologians' use of the criterion of pragmatism to debate the ethical issue of pacifism, and then goes on to show how Kaufman's standard of humanization is related to their concerns.

The second appendix follows up on Kaufman's paradoxical insight into the constructive task of re-presenting reality. After exploring Paul Ricoeur's understanding of this relationship, Kaufman's imaginative theology is linked to the magic realist tradition of Canadian painters. What emerges from this case study is a limited affirmation of the ontological character of fiction, although this point is once again brought back into the framework of the "real world of action"--as opposed to the "essential" nature of reality.

The entire dissertation can thus be seen as an attempt to provide a definitive interpretation of Gordon Kaufman's thought. While this statement is a little presumptuous, it will help the reader to understand why so much time has been spent "overturning each rock" along the way. The author has tried to interpret Kaufman on his own terms, while building toward a thesis which will be of some use in the future. Hopefully, these two agendas complement each other as well as do justice to Kaufman's theology.

CHAPTER ONE

GORDON KAUFMAN'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

A. Epistemology as a Dialectic Between Experience and Finitude

A consideration of the epistemological foundations of Gordon Kaufman's thought is a good place to begin in understanding his theology. He delineates three aspects of the acquisition of knowledge in his book, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith: (1) the givenness of the human spirit, (2) the experience of limitation, and (3) the rise of consciousness or thought through the encounter of these two realities.[1]

Kaufman proposes that the inherent dynamism of the human personality can be observed in a baby's spontaneous crying in order to obtain some food, in its instinctive urge to touch objects around it, and in its tight hold on a parent when it is afraid. An infant's subconscious desire to comprehend and "take in" the world portrays in a natural way humanity's curiosity and striving after life.

The adult version of this innate vitality can be ex-

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[1]Gordon Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. 29-33.

pressed in terms of a will-to-power, the manifestation of which is evident in a person's manipulation of events. Grown-ups have a more sophisticated way of covering up their true intentions, yet, analysed under the bald light of day, these aspirations can be viewed as the normal make-up of the human species. Human beings are driven by the need to be loved and to accomplish goals in life.[2]

Kaufman maintains that this intrinsically propulsive spirit is modified according to a person's experience of limitation. A toddler discovers that its legs are not used to carrying a great deal of weight; crawling becomes the initial procedure by which the infant moves around. The child also realizes that its mother will not always come when it cries. These restricting experiences compel the infant to reorient its desires according to its capabilities. The child becomes aware that its aspirations are limited by physical, biological, and personal restraints.

Older persons have also learned to gauge their expectations according to their abilities. The likelihood of a job promotion, running a marathon, and marital bliss are dependent on the success individuals have had in the past with work habits, athletic endeavours, and social relationships. They calculate the practicality and reasonability of their desires on the basis of previous obstacles they have faced. Borderline situations mitigate the endless striving of human be-

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[2]Ibid., p. 35.

ings, furnishing a framework through which these yearnings are channelled.

Kaufman maintains that these two aspects of life, vitality and finitude, do not yet constitute knowledge. There are many people who dream about a better life without doing anything about it. And there are others who, faced with seemingly insurmountable impediments, give up hope altogether. These flights of fancy and experiences of despair do not necessarily lead to changes in a person's life. Individuals become engaged with reality when they weigh the possibilities of success against their strengths and weaknesses.

Kaufman goes on to propose that a person's entire worldview is based on this interplay between dynamism and finitude.[3] Erudition is acquired through a complex process of experience in which the givenness or limitedness of reality is interpreted and reconstructed on the basis of an individual's relation to it. People perceive the workings of the universe in light of how they are managing and what they take to be the successes and failures of others. Incidents, feelings, and facts are categorized according to an overall sense of purpose or framework of meaning.[4]

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[3]Ibid., pp. 32-38.

[4]Purpose has to do with the projection of a person's aspirations onto the future, while meaning denotes an overall sense of wellbeing and contentment. The two are used interchangeably by Kaufman to the extent that the human subject plays an active role in their conception, ibid., pp. 97-98.

1. The Subjectivity of Knowledge

A recognition of a person's interpretive frame of reference leads to Kaufman's endorsement of a subjective theory of knowledge. The central premise of this theory is that natural and historical events are comprehensible within a particular world-view. Scientists evaluate phenomena on the basis of cause and effect relationships, i.e. from within a theoretical structure that makes certain assumptions about the interconnection of events. A coherent categorization of the world is a prerequisite for gaining an accurate knowledge of the universe.[5]

Kaufman uses the illustration of a rainbow to substantiate his claim that knowledge is a mediated interpretation of experience. He notes that this phenomenon can be understood on five different levels.[6] A rainbow cannot be dis-

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[5]A recognition of the assumptions that scientists and historians make in their interpretation of facts does not diminish the validity of their work; natural science has been built on a solid foundation of theory. It is nevertheless conceivable that present knowledge will seem trivial or of no consequence to generations living in the thirtieth century. It is not the facts per se that change (although these also can be altered), but the interpretation of details with respect to the overall scheme of things which makes the difference (as has been witnessed by the Copernican, Newtonian and Einsteinian revolutions). Cross-reference Kaufman's remarks, ibid., pp. 102-103.

[6]Ibid., pp. 40-43. The rainbow may represent a too simple example in demonstrating the need for different levels of theory in studying the "same" phenomenon. The problem of reference becomes infinitely more complicated in the case of cultural and historical facts. People in Far Eastern countries assume that filial links include a man's parents, wives, children, and cousins, while two adults, a child, and perhaps a dog or cat (James Thurber) is about all that makes

tinguished from other sensations at the pre-conscious stage. The lack of a frame of reference renders the rainbow as an indiscriminate aspect of the larger whole ("In the beginning . . . the earth was without form and void," Genesis 1:1-2).[7]

The second, conscious level of apprehension enables a person to see the shape of an arch and a variety of colours, but there is as yet no concept of the rainbow itself. Sentience has been reached at this point, but the indefinite features of intuition make it difficult to pinpoint the exact nature of this phenomenon. A more sophisticated framework is required in order for the ambiguous and vague sense of an "object" in the sky to be distinguished from other realities (Adam had to name the animals before they could be identified, Genesis 2:19-20).

The use of language to classify objects constitutes the third level of knowledge, formalizing the second-level observation of a series of colours and lines. The term "rainbow" encompasses everything that is associated with the arch that people sometimes see after a rain. Words confer identity through their objectification of phenomena. This is particularly evident in the use of stereotypes, caricatures, and nicknames; these vivid metaphorical images leave lasting impressions of personalities and events. Human beings have invented language so that they can control, contain, and

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up a family in Western society.

[7]Ibid., pp. 67-68.

critically evaluate the reality which impinges upon them.[8]

A rainbow is described most frequently in terms of this third level of epistemology. All people, at least those in the English-speaking world, understand what is meant when someone points to the sky and utters the word "rainbow." Two other interpretations are, nonetheless, available. A scientific explanation provides an observer with the knowledge that a rainbow is caused by the refraction of light through droplets of water. This means that there is no rainbow as such, at least not in the sense that it can be found or touched. It is an event that occurs as the result of two other realities, the sun and the rain.

There is, finally, the possibility of a fifth, supersensible interpretation of this occurrence. The Hebrew Bible records the story of Noah landing his ark on dry ground after 340 days at sea and seeing a rainbow in the sky. Noah interprets this timely event as a sign from God that the earth will not be flooded again (Genesis 9:8-17). The rainbow in this instance has been connected to not-so-obvious levels of meaning, taking on a broader metaphysical significance.[9]

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[8]Ibid., pp. 59-63. Rudy Wiebe has commented on people's need to "map out" the world in order not to feel so lost within it, The Story-Makers, ed. Rudy Wiebe (Toronto: Macmillan, 1970), pp. ix-xxx. Cross-reference Wolfhart Pannenberg's elaboration of this point, What is Man?, trans. Duane Priebe (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), pp. 14-27.

[9]The theory of evolution represents an example of this fifth stage of knowledge. Its claim that life-forms move from simple to complex operations denotes a metaphysical categorization of history, albeit a naturalistic one. To

2. The Historical Basis of Knowledge

Kaufman maintains that there is an historical as well as subjective component in the acquisition of knowledge.[10] Scholars use their research data to measure human behaviour and predict the future. An inquiry into how a person has coped with emergencies in the past helps to ascertain his or her emotional reactions to critical situations in the future. The outcome of an election, in turn, is predicated on the accomplishments and popularity of a previous government.[11]

A useful comparison can be made between this historical element and the subjective epistemology delineated above. Previous events serve as criteria for the evaluation of present realities in the same manner that language distinguishes a rainbow from other objects. The division of space into three dimensions enables a child to locate objects in relation to other bodies (on the basis of depth-perception and eye-hand coordination). Time, on the other hand, is a fourth dimension that impinges upon an individual's apprehension of the present. It stands in between a person's projection of

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anticipate Kaufman's use of this theory, he proposes that evolution is compatible with a belief in God, God the Problem, p. 139.

[10]Gordon Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. 45-52.

[11]H. Richard Niebuhr has dealt with the problem of historical knowledge in The Meaning of Revelation (New York: Macmillan Press, 1941), pp. 81-96. Kaufman builds upon his teacher's insights by speaking about a "center of history" on the basis of which other events can be evaluated, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. 106-107.

meaning onto the future and his or her recognition that the past has already narrowed his or her opportunities. The past and the future serve as backdrops for a nuanced prognosis of the present.[12]

3. The Personal Aspect of Knowledge

Kaufman claims that his epistemology allows for a reasonably scientific interpretation of the universe. A rainbow appears after almost every rainfall and can be studied in detail for several moments. Testimonies and circumstantial evidence aid in the reconstruction of historical events. The predictable character and ready observability of these phenomena facilitate a credible, if not totally precise description of them.

Human beings, on the other hand, are more enigmatic because their behaviour is dependent on a series of inner attitudes and responses.[13] They infer causes for events and make internal connections about their feelings that are not obvious from another person's point of view. The reasons for their actions, as a result, are more difficult to determine. The human and social sciences have to account for the "inner

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[12]The relevance of an historical method comes into view when one assesses theological positions on the basis of their preference for the past, present, or future. While existentialism was in vogue several years ago, this has given way to recent affirmations of the past (neo-conservatism) and future (liberation theologies).

[13]Gordon Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. 53-59.

workings" of the human spirit in their explanatory analyses.

Kaufman submits that the problem of personal knowledge is overcome when people disclose the reasons for their behaviour. The violent actions of a mentally ill patient make sense to an observer when the sick woman explains the rationale behind her outburst. The psychologist, in turn, is able to help this emotionally disturbed individual when she trusts the counsellor enough to say something about her life. The woman becomes aware of the destructive consequences of her acts of rage when she compares her perception of reality to those of others. An act of self-revelation is nevertheless required in order for the counsellor (as well as the patient) to gain an understanding of the woman's aggressive behaviour.

B. The Problem of Relativity

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from Kaufman's emphasis on the subject-relative, language-dependent, and time-laden aspects of knowledge is that truth is relative. This theory assumes that the validity of a proposition is contingent upon a specific world-view. Each culture, religion, and academic discipline interprets cause and effect relationships in a different way and so insights into reality represent advances in science to the extent that they make sense within a social milieu.[14]

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[14]I am overstating the case when I suggest that there is a gulf between the "object-oriented" natural sciences and the "interpretation-prone" human sciences. This debate is more reminiscent of the positivist-metaphysical discussions within

A. J. Ayer has contended that this relative theory of knowledge leads to a hopelessly emotive, subjectivistic, and incoherent understanding of truth.[15] The perceptions of a mentally ill patient and psychiatrist are equally valid in this subject-dependent perspective because both world-views make (internal) sense to the people involved. Ayer submits that a more realistic approach to the verification of truth claims is needed; scientists require precise analytical and empirical criteria in their evaluation of data.

Kaufman acknowledges that his subjective epistemology fosters uncertainty about reality. Any number of world-views is possible when one realizes that the biological make-up, social upbringing, and cultural environment of a person shape his or her judgments and convictions. There is no escape from the "subjectivist trap,"[16] in which historians and scientists analyse research findings on the basis of inter-

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the first half of the twentieth century; since then, scientists and theologians have reconsidered the legitimacy of each others' viewpoints. Note, for example, Kaufman's current interest in empiricism (discussed in chapter five) and Hilary Putnam's elaboration of the problems of reference, Realism and Reason (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 205-247. Whereas earlier, Putnam thought that "the essence of the relation is that language and thought do asymptotically correspond to reality, to some extent at least," he has now become more "sensitive to the epistemological position of the philosopher," realizing that "our notions of rationality evolve in history," p. vii.

[15]A. J. Ayer, Language, Truth, and Logic (New York: Penguin Books, 1971).

[16]Kaufman uses this phrase in God the Problem, p. 98; cross-reference Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. 84-86.

pretive schemes they have brought to the data. A set of absolute presuppositions (R. G. Collingwood) represents the framework within which facts are assessed.

Kaufman does not conclude that his limited theory of knowledge leads to scepticism or nihilism. Everyone is cognizant of the fact that there are many different ways of looking at the world (Kaufman refers to this position as "external relativism").[17] Scholars nonetheless want to know if their hypotheses are valid in a "universal" sense. They wish to test the authenticity of their claims on the basis of an overarching criterion.[18]

1. Recognition of a Researcher's Presuppositions

Kaufman proposes two ways in which a subjective theory of knowledge can take relativism into account while claiming

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[17]Gordon Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. 14-23. His distinction between external and internal relativism is reminiscent of H. Richard Niebuhr's differentiation between internal and external history, The Meaning of Revelation, pp. 59-67.

[18]There are problems with introducing the word "universal" into this debate, especially in light of today's decentred, postmodern approach to philosophy, science, and theology. The point of the exercise, nonetheless, is to clarify Kaufman's views on the matter. There are at least two directions in which this discussion can go. One is to affirm relativism as a solution to the dilemma of knowledge; the other is to view it as a problem. That Kaufman has placed his deliberations within the context of the latter framework is indicated by the original title of Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith: "The Problem of Relativism and the Possibility of Metaphysics. A Constructive Development of Certain Ideas in R. G. Collingwood, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Paul Tillich" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1955). He suggests early on in the book that theologians do not only want to confess their faith but also establish it, pp. 10-12.

for itself a universal intent. The first method has to do with a scholar's awareness that he or she is analysing data on the basis of a particular frame of reference.

Kaufman maintains that this self-acknowledged involvement or "stake" in the outcome of an investigation allows for an even-handed examination of the phenomenon being studied.[19] Scholars' recognition of the limited applicability of their interpretive schemes fosters openness to the insights of other scientists. A comparison of numerous hypotheses allows for greater comprehension of the reality under examination than if a single method were employed.[20]

The case of an alcoholic who comes to a social agency for help represents a useful illustration of this point. The social worker on hand considers the problem of the drinking man to be that of environment. Given the hard economic times and the fact that the man comes from a socially depressed neighbourhood, the counsellor concludes that the person has turned to alcohol to escape his predicament.

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[19]Kaufman quotes Karl Mannheim in support of the position that "a relativistic perspective actually frees man from subjection to uncritical dogmatisms and enables him to develop broader and more comprehensive knowledge of himself and his world," Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, p. 4. Kaufman uses his theory of "internal relativism," at the heart of which stands the method of Verstehen, to establish the relevance of a subjective theory of knowledge, pp. 5-18.

[20]The substance of my article, "Don Wiebe: A Shift in his Method?" Toronto Journal of Theology 4/1 (1988):71-85, has to do with the impact of pluralism on the study of religion. I argue against Wiebe's endorsement of a single scientific approach, proposing instead that a variety of methods be used to study the phenomenon of religion.

Calling on a team of experts, the staff person discovers that there are other reasons why this person could have a drinking problem. The psychologist deduces that the man's alcoholic father has made him susceptible to this type of behaviour. The son's delinquent life-style is a result of his father's poor role model.

The doctor who comes to examine the person proposes that the problem is of genetic origin. The social sciences have not known how to deal with alcoholism because they have failed to take biological factors into account. Drug dependency, in short, is a disease and should be treated medically. The physician recommends hospitalization and after-treatment care for the sick man.

The point of my little example is that alcoholism cannot be reduced to one scientific explanation. Sociologists have underscored the extenuating circumstances of a person's dependency on "the bottle," but they have tended to absolve the individual of personal responsibility. The alcoholic can point to society or to the way he was brought up as the reason for his dilemma, thereby not facing up to the fact that he is partly to blame.

A clinical approach is useful because it claims that neither society nor the individual bears ultimate responsibility for an overindulgence in alcohol. Guilt cannot be attributed to the party involved nor to his social background because alcoholism, like diabetes and cancer, is a medical

problem. By absolving the alcoholic of his guilt complex, a naturalistic explanation enables him to take a more positive attitude toward himself and others.

A medical procedure is not foolproof, however, because it does not explain why a person has to return--again and again--to a detoxification unit to "sober up." A sense of personal culpability is seldom attributed to diseases such as diabetes or cancer. Alcoholism nevertheless entails the deliberate misuse of a person's body. The man who drinks too much is responsible for his behaviour. Counsellors, together with the man's admission that he has a drinking problem, are required in order for the individual to make medical and social progress.

The sciences have been slow in endorsing this complementary approach because of their predisposition to explain a phenomenon in terms of a single cause. A chemical cure for alcoholism will become accessible if the biologist can demonstrate a strong correlation between hormonal imbalances and the disease. Politicians, in turn, will have a better idea of how to address this debilitating reality if the social scientific community can prove that there is a direct connection between alcoholism and social conditions. The goal of a science is to reduce a phenomenon to a particular cause and effect relationship because this is how solutions to long-

standing dilemmas are procured.[21]

The positive results of a singular method are evident in the area of alcohol abuse. A medical solution has been endorsed because of its relative effectiveness vis-à-vis sociological and psychological explanations. The view that excessive drinking is first and foremost a disease has enabled counsellors to move beyond the stumbling block of guilt (blame) to a successful therapeutic treatment. The competitive and reductionistic tendencies of science have resulted in a better understanding of human beings' susceptibility to drug dependency.

This apology for reductionism notwithstanding, devastating effects can occur if science is considered to be the sole arbiter in the lives of human beings. Prefrontal lobotomies were regarded as the best medical procedure for controlling the violent behaviour of mentally ill patients in the 1930's and 40's. The scientific community's assumption that human behaviour can be reduced to chemical and nervous stimuli helped to legitimate this radical medical practice. People today are more suspicious of a natural scientific approach. They realize that the essential mystery and fundamental rights of a human being are too important to be left in the hands of a single authority.

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[21]Daniel Pals has commented on the imperialistic tendencies of good scientific explanations, "Is Religion a Sui Generis Phenomenon?" Journal of the American Academy of Religion 55/2 (1987), p. 273.

Stated in terms amenable to a pluralist method, it can be said that the declarations of academics are convincing--and scientific--to the extent that they acknowledge the inconclusive nature of their research and relate their findings to work that has been done in other disciplines.

2. Internal Coherence

A second method that facilitates in the verification of truth claims has to do with what Kaufman refers to as the "logical interconnectedness" or internal coherence of a world-view.[22] This criterion assumes that the validity of a theory is determined by its provision of a unified interpretation of a phenomenon. To cite a simple example, the DNA model has allowed scientists to make a number of logically acceptable inferences about cell interaction that have not been able to be verified on an inductive level. The construction of a comprehensive biological theory has enabled doctors to make medical progress, even though it has not been proven to be true on a strictly empirical basis.

The value of internal coherence can also be demonstrated by reconsidering the example of the mentally ill patient and psychiatrist. It was noted above that relativism implies the validity of both perspectives. There is no reason to discriminate against the patient by referring to her analysis of events as an illness because she is able to function in her

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[22]Gordon Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. 75-80.

world in much the same way that the psychiatrist is able to operate in his.

There are now grounds for questioning the accuracy of this assessment. The psychologist leads a relatively normal life, driving a car, paying rent, and cooking meals. The sick person, on the other hand, is not able to cope with reality in the same manner. There are many things that do not make sense to her, including the reasons why the medical staff is "out to get her" and why she is censured for her violent behaviour. The woman comes to realize that her world-view is warped and inadequate for dealing with life. She turns to the counsellor for help in explaining the "gaps" in her perception.

3. The Relevance of These Two Criteria for Kaufman's Theory of Knowledge

Two initial criteria have been suggested for determining the validity of one's work. An admission of one's limited perspective mitigates the imperialistic tendencies of academic disciplines and fosters a pluralistic method. A comprehensive explanation, in turn, allows for a prioritization of the data.

Kaufman says at one point that the ultimate standard for judging the accuracy of a person's perception of the world is an internal one: ". . . the striving for coherence must be the final method of philosophy and theology, for there is

none other available to it."[23] The reason for this limited validation process has to do with a person's inability to step outside of his or her own thought-world. Alternate ways of seeing the world must be evaluated from the scholar's own standpoint because consciousness itself is involved in his or her conception of reality.[24]

This subjective perspective implies that knowledge is something "on which we stake our lives" rather than being verifiable in an objective sense. Kaufman countenances such a view when he says that all metaphysical claims involve "a kind of free decision" in which the ultimate force of a proposition is retained within a recognition of its tentativeness.[25] People have to presume the significance of the world-view they have constructed.

These statements lead to the conclusion that internal coherence and an acknowledgment of one's presuppositions are the only two criteria that Kaufman considers relevant for epistemology. Knowledge is limited to the social and historical experiences of a cultural group. North American

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[23]Ibid., p. 93.

[24]Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit analogy, in which a person sees a duck or a rabbit in the same picture, represents the best argument for this claim. The epistemological implication behind this optical illusion is that a person has to adopt the other person's point of view or stay on familiar territory. Note Hilary Putnam's discussion of this illustration, Reason and Realism, pp. 209-211.

[25]Gordon Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. 115-116, cross-reference p. 94.

scientists are unable to comprehend the meaning of I-Ching, African ideas of rationality, or principles of yoga because these ideas are alien to a Westerner's point of view.[26]

Kaufman recognizes the limited ability of an academic to step into the world of a Buddhist monk or African shaman. A Canadian anthropologist gains an appreciation (Verstehen) of an African villager's way of life when he or she relives (nacherlebt) the social and economic situation of these tribal people.[27] Yet the fact remains that the scientist has to replace his or her world-view with that of another in order to come to terms with this culture. There is no third Archimedean vantage point from which Canadian and African life can be assessed. Each cultural entity is evaluated in terms of its relative position and on the basis of its internal practicality.[28]

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[26]For an analysis of the similarities and differences between Western science and African thought, see Robert Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science," in Rationality, ed. Bryan Wilson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), pp. 131-171.

[27]Gordon Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. 16-18.

[28]Joseph Runzo uses the phrase "pluralist ontology" to endorse the epistemological possibility of having two world-views which are "mutually-incompatible" yet "individually adequate," Reason, Relativism, and God, p. 62. Runzo maintains that this conceptually relative perspective is the only way by which a philosopher can take account of pluralism while defending a theory of truth. For another thinker who is particularly clear about the ramifications of relativism, see Jeffrey Stout, The Flight from Authority (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Ethics After Babel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

C. Pragmatism as a Third Criterion of Knowledge

Kaufman gives several indications that a coherent, presuppositional approach is insufficient for establishing epistemological certainty. An assertion of one's hermeneutical starting point does not prove its validity because there is a degree of arbitrariness in the designation and categorization of phenomena. Indeed, to claim that an acknowledgment of one's assumptions is adequate reinforces the irrational foundations of a science and affords it the opportunity to neglect its philosophical roots.[29] A clarification of principles is necessary, but not to the detriment of the realistic underpinnings of a discipline.

The criterion of coherence also fails to provide a sufficient foundation for knowledge because it can only be utilized on an internal basis. The endless revision of hy-

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[29]Gordon Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. viii-xii, 67-71; God the Problem, pp. 3-16. It is tempting to accuse Karl Barth of having paid too little attention to philosophy. One recalls, for instance, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's reference to Barth's theology as a "positivism of revelation," Letters and Papers from Prison, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Reginald Fuller (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p. 168. Kaufman nevertheless notes that Barth viewed theology as a dependent science, which took the latest findings of the historical-critical method seriously, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. x-xi. He refers to this statement from Barth to support his claim: "If theology allows itself to be called . . . a 'science,' in so doing, it declares 1. that like all other so-called sciences it is a human concern with a definite object of knowledge, 2. that like all others it treads a definite and self-consistent path of knowledge, and 3. that like all others it must give an account of this path to itself and to all others," Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, 4 vol. in 13 parts, ed. and trans. G. W. Bromiley, et. al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-1969), I/1:7-8.

potheses in the light of new evidence reveals the limited value of logical consistency. Blueprints may make perfect sense to the architect who has drawn them up but may prove unworkable to the engineer who has to apply them. In this case, the architect has to go back to the drawing board in order to make his designs possible (rather than only conceivable). As for theologians, scientists, and philosophers who speculate about the world, they have to return to the world of experience in order to verify their premises.[30]

Given these difficulties with the first two criteria of knowledge, Kaufman proposes that each hypothesis is also subject to a kind of religious pragmatism, in which faith stances are evaluated in terms of their correspondence to historical realities. The truthfulness of a proposition, in short, has to do with its effectiveness or utility.[31]

1. Kaufman's Reinterpretation of Metaphysics

Several preliminary remarks about this practical criterion of truth are in order. First, Kaufman is contrasting his pragmatic method with that of a traditional metaphysics, in which the essence of existence is regarded as a central

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[30]Kaufman makes this claim in a convincing manner in one of his later books, An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 58, 72n.22. He remains more enamoured with the presuppositional aspects of epistemology in Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith.

[31]Gordon Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. 93-94, 115-117. Cross-reference his elaboration of this point in An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 75-76; The Theological Imagination, pp. 238-262.

concern. Philosophers in the past have attempted to uncover the structures of reality through the development of an ontology or metaphysic. Some theologians still consider it possible to speak of God in this way, describing deity as "being-itself" or as the "ground of reality."[32]

Kaufman submits that such an encompassing description is no longer relevant (or possible). There is no way of getting behind concepts to reality itself and so the most that can be expected of metaphysics today is an analysation and clarification of ideas that are meaningful to a particular tradition.[33] An observer is limited to a critical assessment of national and religious customs.

Kaufman elaborates upon this view when he says that the primary task of philosophy is to make people conscious of the cultural presuppositions "to which they are bound" so that they can be liberated from them.[34] This "conscientization"

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[32]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 240-41. John Macquarrie and Douglas Hall regard such abstract theological language as useful. Macquarrie has amended Paul Tillich's phrase "being-itself" to "letting-be," Principles of Christian Theology, 2nd edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966, 1977), pp. 104-122, while Hall has recommended the theological concept of "being-with," Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship, pp. 113-160.

[33]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 245-249. The views of Richard Rorty are pertinent here, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); The Linguistic Turn, pp. 1-39.

[34]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 254-262.

process (Paulo Freire)[35] is similar to phenomenological investigations in the sense that both elucidate humanity's dependency on the realities of life. The overriding purpose of Kaufman's empirical analysis is, nonetheless, to facilitate greater social and political responsibility with respect to historical existence. He is more interested in the emancipatory role of philosophy than in its efforts at ontological description.[36]

2. Kaufman's Definition of Teleology

Kaufman's pragmatism should also be interpreted within the framework of a broad teleological perspective instead of a short-term consequential approach. Paul Ramsey and James Gustafson have spoken about the "wastelands" of Protestant utilitarianism.[37] Gustafson in particular has criticized Kaufman for his anthropocentrism. He submits that Kaufman's

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[35]Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

[36]Two quotations illustrate Kaufman's concerns. The first comes from Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, in which he says that philosophy has more to do with "the movement to full autonomy of the human spirit" than with an enunciation of the ontologically real, pp. 131-132. The second comes from The Theological Imagination, in which he says: "All knowledge is for action; knowledge of the ultimate presuppositions of our common life is to make possible responsible action with respect to those presuppositions. This is what metaphysics is for," p. 257.

[37]Paul Ramsey, War and the Christian Conscience (Durham: Duke University, 1961), p. 6; James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:68-85. Cross-reference the helpful discussion of consequentialism by Charles Curran, Themes in Fundamental Moral Theology (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), pp. 121-144.

preoccupation with the human species is a result of his focus on the consequences of people's actions (utilitarianism) rather than on the duty that a person has to perform in the face of the realities of life (deontology). Belief for Gustafson is a matter of being faithful to the "powers that bear down upon and sustain the universe." He is critical of Kaufman's interest in the "cash value" of theology.[38]

Kaufman acknowledges that his practical solutions to the fundamental questions of theology have an egocentric tendency. As he states in one of his later books,

> God . . . must be appropriated as relevant to our deepest human needs and as that which in fact provides fulfillment for our existence. We are living beings driven forward by vital powers within us: unless God has some significant relationship to these actual organic drives and needs, he cannot orient our lives.[39]

Religious truths cannot be stated in other than "our terms" because each tradition promises salvation in some form (human or otherwise).

The fact that the future of the world is implicated in the establishment of goals and accomplishment of achievements

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[38]James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:266, see also pp. 264-273; Kaufman uses the term "cash value" in An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 49, 60. Cross-reference the ongoing debate between these two thinkers, Gordon Kaufman, "How is God to be Understood in a Theocentric Ethics?" pp. 13-37; James Gustafson, "Response" and "Panel Discussion," in James M. Gustafson's Theocentric Ethics: Interpretations and Assessments, eds. Harlan Beckley and Charles Swezey (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1988), pp. 210-221, 225-229, 235-238.

[39]Gordon Kaufman, An Essay on Theological Method, p. 54; see also The Theological Imagination, pp. 43-46, 159, 199.

facilitates a diffusion of these anthropocentric inclinations. Adolescents are intuitively drawn to others in their search for identity. International relations become feasible when nations move beyond a narrow patriotism to an understanding of their mutual interdependence. Using religious language, Kaufman states that God is "powerful enough to draw the self out of its own narcissism." Christians are ready to "lose their lives in order to be saved" (Luke 17:33).[40]

These illustrations demonstrate that Kaufman is more interested in the long-term results of a belief than in its immediate consequences. To speak of the telos of existence is to suspend the gratification of immediate success in favour of future rewards; people extend their lives into the future through service, sacrifice, and progeny. This teleological perspective undergirds an affirmation of God as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Divinity extends beyond the latest concerns of humanity to the ends of time.[41]

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[40]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, p. 187; cross-reference God the Problem, pp. 252-254; Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 49-60.

[41]Several comments about the word "teleology" need to be noted. First, Kaufman's emphasis on the ultimate goal of faith takes some of the sting out of the technocratic, consequentialist ways in which pragmatic theologies have come to be viewed on the North American continent. The idea of a final end places utilitarianism and eschatology into a longer time frame.

A divine telos also cannot be equated with a particular human quality such as goodness or happiness. God's intentions for the universe, by definition, extend beyond that of human wishful thinking. Cf. James Gustafson's explanation of this point, Christian Ethics and the Community (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1971), pp. 139-149; "Response," pp. 203-224.

There is thus no intrinsic reason for viewing Kaufman's utilitarianism as anthropocentric. His theology can be criticized for focusing too much on the human species and existential present. The placing of these spatial and temporal vignettes within the perspective of world history nevertheless allows for a favourable comparison between his pragmatism and the current interest in process (David Griffin), character (Stanley Hauerwas), narrative (Hans Frei), and nature (James Gustafson). What works has to do with what is sustainable in an ultimate or final sense.[42]

3. Pragmatism in an Internal Sense

A third issue pertains to the question of whether pragmatism represents a new criterion in the corroboration of Kaufman's subjective theory of knowledge. There is a way in which his functional regard for truth can be construed as being virtually indistinguishable from his insistence on the internal consistency of a world-view. According to this

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[42]Gordon Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. 116-117. The possibility of a rapprochement between teleological and deontological methods can be demonstrated through the use of an example. Thomas Ogletree has maintained that teleology is not included as part of the moral theology of the Scriptures. A perfectionist ethic, sustained by deontological commands, is the overarching motif of God's relation to Israel, The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), pp. 15-22, 47-48, 91. Ogletree nevertheless takes teleological considerations into account when he makes a distinction between the present realities and future possibilities of the "law of Christ," pp. 87-134, 175-205. This theological affirmation of time places ethics into an eschatological framework and facilitates a more nuanced application of the radical sayings of Jesus.

circumscribed interpretation, the concepts that are used by Tibetan Buddhism and Western science are true to the extent that they make practical sense within their respective spheres of reference. There is in this scheme of things no ultimate standard by which ideas can be evaluated. A monk's belief in karma, dharma, and bodhi remains valid as long as these ideas clarify and enlighten his own encounter with the human condition, regardless of whether these beliefs mean anything to anyone else. His convictions are assessed in an internal, albeit pragmatic fashion.

Joseph Runzo has used this utilitarian approach to endorse a pluralistic ontology. Different world-views are meaningful to people around the globe and so it is possible to confine one's analysis to the inherent value of belief systems. Runzo refers to this epistemological factor as the dependency principle.[43]

Gordon Kaufman's thought lends itself to this interpretation to the extent that the relativity of truth remains a priority for him. He returns again and again to the differences between people's perceptions of the world. Hypothesizing what it would be like to carry on a sustained conversation with a Chinese Red Guard, he cites the difficulties of language (English versus Chinese), religion (Christianity versus Maoism), and political views (revolutionary

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[43]"The truth of any statement, P, depends in part, on the conceptual schema from within which P is formulated and/or assessed," Reason, Relativism, and God, p. 59.

versus liberal).[44] Truth is limited to how each person conceives of and works within his or her own frame of reference.

4. Pragmatism in an External Sense

There are, nonetheless, passages that militate against this restrained explanation of Kaufman's epistemology. He claims that no one is ultimately satisfied with the proposition that beliefs are true only for oneself. Religious thinkers want to know if their hypotheses are true in an unrestricted sense. The criterion of pragmatism could conceivably be applied in a general way, judging Tibetan Buddhism, Western science, and Christianity with the same, all-inclusive standard.

Kaufman submits that an encompassing principle of truth is, in fact, necessary. The changes that are occurring in society no longer make it possible to live within the theoretical framework of an unmodified pluralism. The relatively independent cultures of the past are being transformed "into a single interconnected fabric of human civilization, the many constituent parts of which are culturally and socially and spiritually interdependent and interrelated in countless ways."[45] A new standard of truth, culled from the deepest convictions of humanity, is required in responding to this modern transition period. For Kaufman's part, the criterion

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[44]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 155-156.

[45]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 180-181, 196-197.

of humanization is the proper rejoinder to the interrelatedness of the world. It represents the foundation for a new religious dialogue.[46]

What needs to be kept in mind in assessing Kaufman's humanistic proposal is that he is recommending a universal criterion while attempting to avoid a monolithic method. He recognizes that Western religions have been characterized by their accent on history and humanity. These emphases have been used to criticize the mystical traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism.[47]

Kaufman believes that some world religions do, in fact, reinforce dehumanization. He submits that Hindu concepts of karma and reincarnation bolster the caste system of India through their encouragement of a fatalistic response to life.[48] The seemingly passive and esoteric attitudes that are evident in Eastern religions do not resonate with Kaufman's eminently practical view of religion.

He is, however, not only critical of the East but also of the way in which Christianity has been used to promote a particular brand of religious escapism.[49] The church has revelled at times in an other-worldliness that places minimal

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[46]Ibid., pp. 181-184, 191-206.

[47]Ibid., pp. 197-198.

[48]Ibid., p. 193.

[49]Ibid., pp. 42-43, 138-144; Theology for a Nuclear Age, p. 8; God the Problem, pp. 42-52.

priority on the earth (e.g. Gnosticism in the third century, apocalypticism in the sixteenth, millenarian movements in the twentieth). This type of faith is to be avoided, for it, like some of its Eastern counterparts, fails to fathom the integral affinity of God and the world. Christianity's sacralization of the world includes spirituality with a human face.[50]

Kaufman wishes to retain those beliefs in Christianity and other religions that nurture a respect for the resources of the world. Buddhism has much to teach us about the "overcoming of human suffering"; Hinduism, "the importance of spiritual discipline and the dangers of devotion in a too anthropomorphically conceived God"; Judaism and Islam, the "incomparable uniqueness of God"; and secular humanism and Marxism, the "economic and social requirements . . . of justice and equality."[51]

Disclaiming expertise in these religions, Kaufman states that Christianity has something to offer to an ecumenical dialogue. He proposes that the non-coercive spirit of Jesus' authority, as evidenced by his selflessness, humiliation, and suffering, together with Paul's commendation of a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:16-21), should become the foundations of the West's humanistic impulse. The "building of

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[50]Kaufman refers at one point to the world as a "lived in" work of art, An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 33-34.

[51]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, p. 205.

community where there is dissension" and the promotion of "understanding and acceptance where there has been estrangement and rejection" enable communication across the great ditch (Lessing) to take place. For Kaufman's part, every religion should be "brought before the bar of the criterion of humanization and there made to prove itself."[52] The establishment of a humane social order is the gift that Christian theology can donate to the future of life.

Kaufman has thus tendered a universal criterion while attempting to avoid the West's penchant for historical solutions to divine mystery. He is insistent that the common problems of religions override the particular and in some cases petty squabbles within denominations and faiths. The spiritual will of the world should be directed to mutually beneficial ecological, political, and human concerns. A genuine exchange of ideas and beliefs is thereby facilitated.

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[52]Ibid., pp. 203, 206.

CHAPTER TWO

THE METAPHYSICAL BASIS OF KAUFMAN'S THOUGHT

A. Kaufman's Dual Understanding of the Metaphysical Task

The best way of explaining Kaufman's views on metaphysics is to reconsider the different levels of knowledge involved in the perception of a rainbow. The reader will recall that this event can be analysed on a pre-conscious, sentient, common-sensical, scientific, and supersensible level. The implication behind this differentiation of understanding is that an ontology is not necessary in explicating the nuances of lived existence. Psychological, scientific, and rule-oriented theological approaches (Lindbeck) are sufficient for describing reality.

Another way of making the same point is to say that each of these world-views represents a metaphysical interpretation insofar as it utilizes a conceptual framework in its explanation of a phenomenon. Kaufman has this definition of philosophy in mind when he says that a clarification and analysis of reality are the most that can be expected from theories of truth. Metaphysics involves the limited procedure of unifying consciousness into a meaningful whole,

without entailing the further goal of elucidating absolute reality.

This view is of use to academic disciplines because it affords them the chance to ground their research on a solid theory of knowledge without having to demonstrate the universal applicability of their findings. Psychology, sociology, and anthropology have discovered a great deal about the human species without coming to any final conclusions about its condition. Physics, biology, and chemistry, in turn, have proceeded on the assumption that nature can be broken down into its constituent parts. The atomization of reality leads to a better understanding of the universe.

Kaufman gives a philosophical rationale for this pluralistic method when he says that "a new element of 'givenness' appears . . . as each new level of consciousness emerges through the creative act of imagination."[1] What he means by this statement is that new foundations of knowledge are established as the researcher moves through the various stages of the epistemological process. This makes it at least theoretically feasible for psychology, phenomenology, linguistics, the physical sciences, and theology to be grounded on independent bases. The diverse aspects of existence render referential statements true insofar as they fit into specific frames of reference.

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[1]Gordon Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, p. 69.

This delimited approach leads back to the problems of knowledge encountered in the first chapter. "Mutually-incompatible" yet "individually adequate" world-views are conceivable because there is a degree to which each perception stands on its own.[2] The observation that human beings can function within their own spheres of reference without taking others into account lends credence to an internal theory of truth.

Kaufman's difficulties with this relative perspective have been noted. He has maintained that the interdependence of the world necessitates a single standard of assessment; the pragmatic criterion of humanization has been proposed as a way of dealing with this global dilemma. Kaufman makes a stronger case for universality, however, when he locates this norm within the knowing process. He claims that even though an element of "givenness" exists at every level of consciousness, each successive stage is able to take into itself the previous levels of knowledge that are available to it.[3]

These remarks imply that there is a comprehensive level of understanding on the basis of which theories can be judged and that it is necessary to proceed to the highest and most abstract level in order to arrive at a universal view of reality. The ability of believers to move from pre-conscious

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[2]Cross-reference Joseph Runzo's elaboration of this point, Reason, Relativism, and God, p. 62.

[3]Gordon Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. 69-71.

to philosophical levels of knowledge indicates the superiority of an inclusive method.

Kaufman's second definition of metaphysics emerges in front of this backdrop of progressive reality. He maintains that human beings synthesize experience into ever-encompassing theoretical frameworks in order to come to terms with absoluteness.[4] This claim introduces the idea of comprehensiveness as a third bench mark of knowledge that goes beyond internal coherence and pragmatism in its attempt to pinpoint the meaningfulness of existence. People develop and revise their theories endlessly to make sure that their world-views will stand them in good stead in the future.

This discussion makes it appear as though it is possible to speak of an essence of reality. Kaufman countenances such a move when he refers to the "universality of truth" and the "Reality" of existence.[5] He is too much of a sceptical philosopher, however, to believe that he can develop a theory of meaning that will reflect noumenal reality. He is more interested in analysing the impact of cultural paradigms on Western society. The above references are intended to underscore the far-reaching significance of theoretical frameworks, rather than to denote the possibility of arriving at a

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[4]Ibid., pp. 95-103.

[5]Ibid., pp. 71-74, 91, 101-103.

definitive interpretation of life.[6]

These reflections facilitate a refinement of the relationship between plurality and truth. One can summarize Kaufman's extended view of metaphysics by saying that world-views are indicative of the ground of reality insofar as they capture the imagination of a religious, cultural, or ethnic group over an historical period of time. This definition does not prove the absolute validity of truth statements. It serves, nevertheless, as a gauge for researchers who wish to draw conclusions about the world in which they live. Experiences and perceptions are true insofar as they function within frames of reference that are flexible enough to adapt to realities that do not fit easily within their parameters.

B. An Historical Overview of Significant Theoretical Frameworks

The above analysis paves the way for a consideration of the "root metaphors" (Stephen Pepper)[7] that have informed Western experience. The most prevalent of these frameworks has to do with the description of reality in terms of its finite cause and effect relationships, a conceptual scheme that has come to be known as a natural world-view. This mundane analysis of events was made possible by the Enlightenment's re-evaluation of theology. Supernatural interpre-

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[6]Kaufman emphasizes this point in The Theological Imagination, pp. 238-262.

[7]Stephen Pepper, World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942).

tations were viewed with increasing suspicion when people realized that the same phenomenon could be explicated on the basis of rationality alone. This discovery resulted in a loss of confidence in the authority of the church and ensured the longevity of temporal explanations.[8]

This finite description of events was used in the nineteenth century to sanction an overt secularity. An apprehension of the psychological, economic, and social dynamics of religious experiences led some scientists to predict the demise of religion. Freud believed that it would wane once believers had gained a better understanding of their psychological condition; Durkheim thought that there were other components besides belief in God that could hold a society together; and Marx maintained that the "religious reflex" of workers would vanish once they had discovered the true source of their alienation, the bourgeoisie.[9] The disappearance of religion appeared to be a genuine possibility towards the end

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[8]Jeffrey Stout has provided a convincing account of this shift in thinking, The Flight from Authority, pp. 25-92, 149-176.

[9]Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion, revised and ed. James Strachey, trans. W. D. Robson-Scott (London: Hogarth Press, 1978), p. 60, cross-reference Civilization and its Discontents, revised and ed. James Strachey, trans. Joan Riviere (London: Hogarth Press, 1969); Emil Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, trans. Joseph W. Swain (New York: Free Press, 1915), pp. 462-496; Karl Marx, On Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Samuel Moore (New York: Modern Library, 1906), p. 51. August Comte's theory of the evolution of religion is also pertinent, A General View of Positivism (New York: Robert Speller and Sons, 1957).

of the last century.

This prophecy proved to be premature. Indeed, Freud's discovery of the unconscious and Durkheim's recognition of "the society within an individual" led twentieth-century phenomenologists to the conclusion that religious experiences were grounded in the "pre-cognitive," "pre-logical," and "instinctual" aspects of life.[10] Scholars of religion saw this as an opportunity to establish their field of research on an independent basis. An appreciation of the sui generis nature of religious experiences assured the discipline of its scientific credibility as well as served notice to those social scientists who were suggesting that the impetus for religion could be reduced to other causes. This new confidence represented a complete turnabout from the nineteenth century. While Durkheim had maintained that the source of cultic rituals could be found in society, Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade declared that religion was its own cause. It was true in and of itself, regardless of other explanations.[11]

It would be difficult to overestimate the impact that

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[10]E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Theories of Primitive Religion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 116-120; Gregory Baum, Religion and Alienation (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), pp. 115-139.

[11]For an historical overview of this trend, see Daniel Pals, "Reductionism and Belief: An Appraisal of Recent Attacks on the Doctrine of Irreducible Religion"; "Is Religion a Sui Generis Phenomenon?" The books by Otto and Eliade to which Pals refers are Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy; Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religions, trans. Rosemary Sheed (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1963).

this theoretical framework has had on twentieth-century scholarship. One has only to look at the number of theologians who have grounded their concepts of God on the affective side of faith, sociologists who have come to a new appreciation of the durability of the religious encounter, and critics who have defined themselves over against this position to realize the significance of this new consciousness.[12] The expressive aspects of belief have gained a new life in the throes of the twentieth century.

There is, nonetheless, another conceptual scheme that has come to the fore, a frame of reference in which the linguistic side of experience is emphasized. Disenchanted with the grandiose metaphysical systems of their predecessors, philosophers in the early 1920's proposed that the meaning of words was to be found in their most ordinary setting. Promi-

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[12]Theologians who have grounded their concept of God on experience include James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:115-136; Langdon Gilkey, Naming the Whirlwind (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969), pp. 247-470; and David Tracy, Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 91-203.

Two sociologists who have reconsidered the value of a sui generis description are Peter Berger, "Second Thoughts on Substantive versus Functional Definitions of Religion," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 13/2 (1974):125-133, and Robert Bellah, Beyond Belief (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 237-259; cross-reference the comments by Daniel Pals, "Reductionism and Belief," pp. 19-20.

Finally, George Lindbeck, Donald Wiebe, and Robert Segal represent critics who have defined themselves over against what Lindbeck has entitled an "experiential-expressive" approach, George Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, pp. 30-45; Donald Wiebe, "The Failure of Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion," Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses 13/4 (1984):401-422; Robert Segal, Religion and the Social Sciences (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

nent among these scholars was Ludwig Wittgenstein. He maintained that language had to be defined by use, rather than by its ideal possibilities or subconscious innuendoes. Reality was represented by the customary or conventional significance of words.[13]

This movement, known as ordinary language philosophy, has had quite an impact on the study of religion. Some positivists have concluded that the term "God" is meaningless on the basis of this theory of knowledge. Because there is nothing in reality to which deity refers, belief in divinity can be dispensed with.[14] While acknowledging the problems of reference that are associated with this word, other philosophers have upheld the cultural and social significance of deity. They have maintained that the name functions as a regulating principle in the lives of believers. The concept of God fulfils a certain role within history, irrespective of whether a supernatural entity actually exists.[15]

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[13]For a discussion of this philosophy, see V. C. Chappell, ed., Ordinary Language (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964); Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958); A. P. Martinich, ed., Philosophy of Language (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); and Richard Rorty, ed., The Linguistic Turn.

[14]A. J. Ayer, Language, Truth, and Logic; Kai Nielsen, Scepticism (London: Macmillan Press, 1973).

[15]See Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in The Interpretation of Cultures (Basic Books, 1973), pp. 87-125; George Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, pp. 15-29, 63-69, 104-108; Robert Bellah, Beyond Belief, pp. 237-259; Edward Farley, Ecclesial Man; and Ronald Thiemann, Revelation and Theology, pp. 71-91.

This overview helps to clarify the intermediate theory of metaphysics proposed above. It would be simplistic to say that the preceding philosophies compete with one another in a direct manner. Each framework has emerged within an historical context and in response to a particular situation. It would also be incorrect to assume that a clear choice can be made between these perspectives. This would make it appear as though they are equally valid and equally capable of illuminating the same experience.

A better way of delineating the relationship would be to say that each world-view stands as an historical alternative (corrective) to the excesses of the others. This may not sound very profound, but it represents an attempt to come to grips with the intuition that Western society is less pluralistic than it makes itself out to be. The historical dominance of certain paradigms has been demonstrated and so scholars have to be made aware of the metaphysical assumptions (ideological biases) that they are making.[16]

C. The Influence of Secularity

The time has come to situate Kaufman's thinking in relation to these philosophical options. Of the five theories outlined, Kaufman has distanced himself from secular and

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[16]The necessity of developing a unified theory of knowledge from "a definite point of view" is not precluded on this account. It simply means that predominant theoretical frameworks have to be considered when elaborating one's views, see Gordon Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, p. 90; The Theological Imagination, pp. 245-249.

phenomenological approaches while responding more favourably to a cultural-linguistic perspective.[17] A comparison of these three frameworks will set the stage for an investigation of his theology proper.

Kaufman begins his discussion of a secular world-view by saying that it is essentially correct in its recognition of the symbolic nature of theological language. Ludwig Feuerbach, Sigmund Freud, and Emile Durkheim were right when they maintained that the concept of God had as much, if not more to do with the reification of social mores as with a reality beyond history. Believers use human images to speak about their religious experiences and cloak these ideas in ultimacy when they refer to their understanding of the world as theological. The anthropological and ideological features of the theological enterprise are thereby revealed. The reality of God denotes an idealization of existence and an endorsement of a specific way of life.[18]

Secularity's emphasis on the limitedness of human experience is also pertinent for theology. An atheist has rejected the word "God" because he or she is able to explain reality in terms of finite cause and effect relationships. Kaufman concurs with this view insofar as the continuity of

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[17]A succinct summary of his views can be found in God the Problem, pp. 203-225.

[18]Ibid., pp. 25-37, 95-115, 219-225, 257-270; Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. viii-xii, 96-103; An Essay on Theological Method, pp. xi-xiii, 55-58.

the natural process is an indispensable assumption in understanding the world.[19] The fact that the sun "rises" every morning, that chemicals react in the same way, and that organisms live and die according to a set pattern allows people to make intelligent assessments of these phenomena.

A God who acts arbitrarily within the historical process is rejected on the basis of this temporal vantage point. One of the reasons that Kaufman gives for the failure of neo-orthodoxy is that theologians such as Karl Barth did not elaborate sufficiently on the anthropological ramifications of their thought.[20] To say, as Barth did, that God had to come "from beyond the bounds of history to redeem humanity" indicates his preference for a theological interpretation of the universe, but fails to shed any light on the comprehensibility of deity from within a natural world-view.

The death-of-God theologians mark for Kaufman the transition point between neo-orthodoxy and the widening influence of secularity.[21] Thomas Altizer and Paul van Buren sounded the death toll of the neo-reformed movement when they noted the latter's increasingly vacuous accounts of divine tran-

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[19]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 120-125.

[20]Ibid., pp. 3-7, 20-29; Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. viii-xii; An Essay on Theological Method, pp. ix-xiii, 1-4.

[21]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 24, 124, 226.

scendence.[22] Positive statements about God are difficult to make once it has been assumed that there is a wide gap between humanity and divinity. Altizer, van Buren, and others have recommended that this sharp distinction between heaven and earth be resolved in the direction of a this-worldly theology. Emphasis on God can be dropped in favour of an accent on the human endeavour.[23]

Kaufman builds upon the insights of these thinkers when he says that the only way in which "God-talk" can continue after the "death of God"[24] is through an articulation of theology from within a secular or modern point of view. Mystery, providence, grace, and destiny have to be explained in common-sensical terms in order to be meaningful. Kaufman goes so far as to say that theological concepts are significant to the extent that they are of practical value. Their primary role is to orient believers in relation to how they

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[22]Paul van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel (New York: Macmillan, 1963); William Hamilton and Thomas Altizer, Radical Theology and the Death of God (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966).

[23]Besides the works of Altizer and van Buren that have just been cited, see J. A. T. Robinson, Honest to God (London: SCM Press, 1963); The Honest to God Debate, eds. J. A. T. Robinson and David L. Edwards (London: SCM Press, 1963); and Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: Macmillan, 1965).

[24]This phrase has been borrowed from the title of an interview of Gordon Kaufman by Kendig B. Cully, "'God-talk' after 'Death of God'," New Review of Books and Religion 2 (June, 1978), p. 3.

should act.[25]

Differences between Kaufman's theology and an explicit atheism nevertheless remain. The first discontinuity has to do with his assumption of a duality between God and the world. Although he is critical of Barth's contrast of these actualities, Kaufman acknowledges that the minimum requirement of any theological belief is the conviction that ultimate reality is in some ways separate from humanity.[26] Whether that dissimilarity is described in terms of a distinction between heaven and earth, divine and human, Creator and creature, or ideology and reality, the word "God" refers not only to some aspect of life but symbolizes a transcendent entity.

Kaufman uses two examples to demonstrate the meaningfulness of this affirmation. The first illustration has to do with human beings' assessment of their endeavours on the basis of an overarching goal. Kaufman submits that this avowal of a telos of existence renders the Otherness of God intelligible. The concept of divinity places the accomplishments of human beings into an historical perspective in the same way that people use ideals to judge present realities. Believers gain a better understanding of their relative im-

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[25]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 100-115, 257-270. Cross-reference Patrick Sherry, "Is Religion a 'Form of Life'?" American Philosophical Quarterly 9/2 (1972):159-167.

[26]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 237-256; An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 50-58.

portance when they invoke deity as the ultimate reference point of their lives.[27]

The second analogy pertains to human beings' awareness that they are being sustained by forces beyond their control. People cannot determine the exact nature of their destiny because they are dependent on natural and historical factors that either frustrate or enhance their lives. Kaufman proposes that these enigmatic and perhaps even capricious aspects of existence lend themselves to an affirmation of divine transcendence.[28] The realization that they represent a very small part of the world gives people some idea of what it is like to trust in an ultimate reality.

Kaufman acknowledges that these analogies do not prove the existence of God. To believe that there is more to life than the material world, and that this "more" denotes an absolute reality, requires a "leap of faith," a trust that cannot be explained exhaustively in terms of human psychology.[29] He nevertheless claims that these metaphors provide

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[27]Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 299-313; The Theological Imagination, pp. 80-95.

[28]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 1-15; "Mystery, Critical Consciousness, and Faith," in The Rationality of Religious Belief, ed. William Abraham and Steven Holtzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 53-69. These two references indicate that divine transcendence continues to be an important theme in Kaufman's current writings.

[29]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, p. 98. Soren Kierkegaard, a nineteenth-century Christian existentialist, introduced the idea of a "leap of faith" to emphasize the discontinuity between a person's belief in God and experience

anthropological insights into a believer's assumption of a theological duality. People make distinctions between God and the world in the same manner that they differentiate between the mysteriousness and comprehensibility of the universe. Images of divine transcendence are based upon dualities that are an intrinsic part of human experience.[30]

The second difference between Kaufman's theology and secularity has to do with the choice of metaphors that he considers appropriate for a spiritual understanding of the world. Although he agrees with Feuerbach when the latter speaks of religious symbols as reifications of particular

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of the world, Fear And Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death, trans. with an introduction and notes by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941).

[30]Kaufman's entire theology can be viewed as a reaction to neo-orthodoxy's sharp distinction between God and the world. He has problems with invoking a duality of any kind. This dilemma, however, should not be interpreted in a univocal fashion. To believe in God is to assume the reality of some Other, whether that is understood in personal, natural, normative, or historical terms. Hilary Putnam has put it this way: "What philosophers like Donald Davidson and David Wiggens have been telling us is that we should stop worrying about the problem of dualism. We are not committed in any case to a substance dualism, but only a property dualism, and the kind of property dualism we are committed to, the irreducibility of the intentional and the epistemic, is not a dualism that contradicts any of the claims of physics. In a way, it is the kind of dualism Kant acknowledged; we are not able to overcome what Kant called the 'dualities of experience.' We are stuck with having to use intentional language, normative language, mentalistic language, epistemic language as well as 'descriptive language,' scientific language, naturalistic language," Realism and Reason, p. 302.

aspects of existence,[31] this does not mean that atheists can dispense with frameworks of meaning. Believers and unbelievers alike are compelled to adopt a paradigm of orientation when they commit themselves to a course of action or achievement of a goal.

Of the options available--nature, being, power, energy, etc.--Kaufman proposes that the personal and historical features of existence provide the most potent analogies for describing the ultimate concern in a person's life. From a believer's standpoint, God is to be conceived as a personal Being who acts through natural and historical events.[32]

Kaufman defends his choice by citing the use that has been made of personal imagery in the Hebrew Bible and Christian Scriptures. The Israelites refer to Yahweh as their Creator, King, and Judge, and employ emotive expressions to depict the jealous, wrathful, compassionate, and repentant responses of Elohim (Lord) to their neglectful and sinful conduct. Christian believers, in turn, refer to Jesus as the Son of God and consider God to be their "Abba" (Father). According to them, there is at least one point in history when divinity has been fully revealed and that was in the

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[31]Gordon Kaufman, An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 55-58; God the Problem, pp. 100-106; cross-reference Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

[32]Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 117-133; An Essay on Theological Method, p. 47.

birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.[33] Kaufman deduces that human characteristics represent the most metaphysically convincing images of deity.

D. Kaufman's Dissatisfaction with a Phenomenological Method

Kaufman also distinguishes his position from an experiential approach, saying that the difference has to do with the way in which experiences are categorized.[34] An empirical theologian is disposed to the idea of a direct correlation of piety and God because he or she is interested in the manifestation of religious feelings. The divine attributes of holiness, righteousness, aseity, and passion are grounded in believers' expressions of adoration, justice, freedom, and ecstasy (beatific vision).

Kaufman submits that this correlative method does not take sufficient account of the mediated nature of experience. Although feelings of reverence, joy, and respect can be labelled as religious, they have to be set into a larger context in order to qualify as references to God. Affective responses must be related in a comprehensive manner to an object of concern in order to make sense.[35]

Kaufman also argues that the abstract nature of the word "God" renders theology as a synthetic frame of reference

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[33]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, p. 145.

[34]Ibid., pp. 18-20, 214-218.

[35]Wayne Proudfoot has provided a helpful discussion of this point, Religious Experience, pp. 75-118.

instead of a discipline committed to the "straightforward" description of religious experiences. As was noted earlier, metaphysics has to do with the elucidation of the human condition on the basis of an overarching principle. It is therefore a "category mistake" (Kant) to believe that deity can be identified with a specific aspect of reality. The name "God" denotes a conceptual whole in terms of which the phenomenal world can be understood.[36]

Kaufman alludes to the work of two empirical theologians to clarify the distinctiveness of his cultural-linguistic method. Extrapolating from human beings' experiences of mysterium tremendum, Rudolf Otto has described God as a deity whose overwhelming presence creates a sense of awe and reverence among its followers.[37] The tremendous power of God's wrath is made manifest in believers' feelings of guilt and fear as a result of their encounter with a reality that is "wholly Other."

James Gustafson is another theologian who has grounded his concept of God on phenomenological descriptions. He uses the affective experiences of dependency, gratitude, obligation, remorse, possibility, and direction to develop the image of divinity as a "power which bears down upon and sus-

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[36]Gordon Kaufman, An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 21-39.

[37]Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, pp. 12-40.

tains the world."[38] Feelings of helplessness in the face of natural processes engender the idea of an omnipotent God. Viewed from the perspective of the Godself, the telos of the universe is not exhausted by the requirement of human needs. The proper response of believers to this awesome presence is to consent in humility and reverence to the inevitable.

Kaufman acknowledges the powerful effects that these images have had in American history.[39] The natural human desire to be cleansed from the impurities of life not only renders the idea of a vanquishing God intelligible, but enables believers, through their sense of conviction before this restrictive divine presence, to be transformed by mystical experiences of grace.[40]

Kaufman wonders, however, whether Otto and Gustafson

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[38]James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:129-136, 235-279.

[39]Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 105-116; "How is God to be Understood in a Theocentric Ethics?" pp. 13-37.

[40]Gustafson has pointed out his indebtedness to Jonathan Edwards with respect to this emphasis, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:171-178. An eighteenth-century Puritan divine, Edwards preached about "The Justice of God and the Damnation of Sinners" and about "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" in order to induce experiences of regenerating grace. Piety in eighteenth-century New England meant having the proper feelings of fear and reverence toward divinity. For fictional accounts of this, at times debilitating, phenomenon, see Harriet Beecher Stowe, Oldtown Folks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966); Ralph Connor, The Man from Glengarry (Toronto: Westminster Co., 1901). While retaining Edwards' emphasis on the right relationship to God, Gustafson presents a more impersonal view of divinity, op. cit., I:178-193, 270-279.

have paid adequate attention to the redemptive features of this reverent encounter. Otto's accent on the holiness of God can be interpreted as an amoral concept that leaves little room for divine compassion. Although some biblical passages give expression to the stringent requirements of a righteous and holy God (Joshua 10-11; 1 Samuel 15), Kaufman submits that these chapters have to be read in the light of Isaiah 49, which speaks of universal salvation. Specific manifestations of faith take on significance when they are related to the overall intent of deity's purposes.[41]

Kaufman also takes exception to Gustafson's idea that believers are to consent in fidelity to the (natural) "powers that bear down upon and sustain us." He agrees that the pervasive anthropocentrism within contemporary theology needs to be exchanged for a thoroughgoing theocentric vision of the world. A profoundly mysterious image of God is occasioned by humanity's dependence on forces beyond its control.[42]

Kaufman nevertheless has doubts about whether Gustafson has taken sufficient account of the multi-faceted dimensions of experience. The distinctively human qualities of existence are rendered almost invisible by Gustafson's affirma-

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[41]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 218-223; The Theological Imagination, pp. 25-46.

[42]Gordon Kaufman, "How is God to be Understood in a Theocentric Ethics?" p. 20; Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 30-46. Cross-reference Gustafson's statement that Kaufman's latest book has been written with the first volume of his own magnum opus in mind, "Response," p. 211.

tion of God as an entity who is to be trusted "even though he slay me" (Job 13:15). People are not "simply at the disposal of mysterious cosmic powers that impinge upon us unilaterally from beyond."[43] Believers are able, within the limited confines of their finite freedom, to make modifications and adjustments to the human condition.

Kaufman uses this anthropological argument to defend theological images that have been drawn from history, culture, and personal existence. Although Gustafson refers to God as Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer and speaks about the limited possibilities of history, this teleological perspective requires further elaboration if his stark portrayal of deity is going to be seen against the backdrop of divine grace and affection. Kaufman claims that this theological agenda can be accomplished through the conception of God as an imaginative whole. A categorial scheme facilitates the correlation of transcendence and immanence in a manner that Gustafson's phenomenology does not allow.[44]

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[43]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, p. 38. For Gustafson's use of Job 13:15, see Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:226, 278: ". . . fidelity does not lead to what we ordinarily and immediately perceive to be a human good, but that what is of human value must be sacrificed for the sake of the purposes of God," p. 278.

[44]Gordon Kaufman, "How is God to be Understood in a Theocentric Ethics?" pp. 28-32; The Theological Imagination, pp. 99-122. For scholars who have argued that Gustafson's method is less phenomenological than outlined above, see John P. Reeder, "The Dependence of Ethics," in James M. Gustafson's Theocentric Ethics, pp. 120-130; Jeffrey Stout, Ethics after Babel, pp. 167-188. These assessments gain credibility when viewed against the backdrop of Gustafson's book, Protes-

Having distanced himself from the empirical approaches of Otto and Gustafson, Kaufman goes on to compare his thought to that of Paul Tillich.[45] The strength of Tillich's theology lies in its ability to channel non-cognitive aspects of human experience into creative and even redemptive responses to life. Believers gain the "courage to be" when they move from a state of anxiety to full participation in society. They can also take heart in Christ's promise of becoming "new beings" when they are burdened down with feelings of estrangement and loss of self-worth.[46] Tillich responded positively to the Angst (dread) of Christians by presenting God as the Source of all being, in whom they could "find comfort and rest" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Kaufman also commends Tillich for his development of a general system of thought. He enriched the theological tra-

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tant and Roman Catholic Ethics (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978). The influences of relativism and historicism are considered important enough to be included as starting points of discussion in this book, pp. 30-94.

These perspectival elements have led Kaufman to ask whether Gustafson's position is "essentially confessional after all, a basically sentimental attachment to God-talk for which publicly convincing reasons cannot be given?" "How is God to be Understood in a Theocentric Ethics?" p. 23. Although Kaufman gives a negative reply to this question, the ambiguity of Gustafson's theology places it somewhere between a kerygmatic and apologetic approach, a juncture, interestingly enough, at which Kaufman's thought can also be located.

[45]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 214-218; "Can a Man Serve Two Masters?" Theology Today 15/1 (1958):59-77.

[46]Paul Tillich, The Courage To Be (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952); The New Being (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955); Systematic Theology, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63), II:29-137.

dition as a whole when he placed the emotive and existential aspects of life into an overall philosophical framework. His reference to God as the Ground of all being undergirds the universal significance of religion.

Kaufman is nevertheless doubtful about Tillich's attempt to describe the essence of reality by abstracting theology to the point where absoluteness is designated by a single word or phrase. Tillich believed that the term "Being-itself" was not only symbolic of ultimate reality, but that it referred to the very Godself:

> Theologians . . . must begin with the most abstract and completely unsymbolic statement which is possible, namely that God is being-itself or the absolute. . . . if anything beyond this bare assertion is said about God, it no longer is a direct and proper statement, no longer a concept. It is indirect, and it points to something beyond itself. In a word, it is symbolic.[47]

Kaufman submits that this immediate correlation of deity and being goes against the intent of the theological enterprise. Observers of the ideological and anthropological features of religion have made it clear that <u>all</u> divine references remain at a representational level. Although Tillich is right when he says that evocative symbols participate in the larger reality of God, Kaufman does not think that a word like "being-itself" can be used to point to this actuality. Theological terms make the most (common) sense when they are taken out of the ontological realm and placed into a specific

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[47]Paul Tillich, <u>Systematic Theology</u>, I:239.

historical and cultural context.[48]

E. Kaufman's Recommendation of a Cultural-Linguistic Method

Kaufman's remarks about Tillich's method set the stage for his elaboration of a cultural-linguistic model. This approach has come to the fore recently, primarily as a result of George Lindbeck's use of it to distinguish his theology from an "experiential-expressive" theory.[49] Without going into an analysis of these latest developments, an exploration of Kaufman's early writings will disclose the salient features of this cultural orientation.

Kaufman begins his discussion of this method by saying that the historical rather than experiential components of life yield the ultimate sources of meaning.[50] The basis of a person's identity is to be found in the concrete events of communities and societies, rather than in an affective encounter with God or in an abstract principle. A temporal perspective facilitates the development of a philosophy of history in lieu of a natural metaphysics.

Kaufman expands upon these ideas when he says that every religious, cultural, and national group has an historical

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[48]Gordon Kaufman, "Can a Man Serve Two Masters?" pp. 62-63, 72-77. Cross-reference Reinhold Niebuhr, "Biblical Thought and Ontological Speculation in Tillich's Theology," in The Theology of Paul Tillich, eds. Charles Kegley and Robert Brettall (New York: Macmillan, 1952), pp. 216-227.

[49]George Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, pp. 30-45.

[50]Gordon Kaufman, "Can a Man Serve Two Masters?" pp. 69-71.

centre at the origin of its existence.[51] For the people of Israel, it is the acts of God; for Christians, it is the life of Jesus Christ; for citizens of the United States, the Declaration of Independence serves as a rallying point; and for believers raised in a revivalist atmosphere, a sense of direction is provided by their personal experiences of conversion. Kaufman concludes that every religious community has a "Christology" in the sense that it regards certain events or persons as the sine qua non of its faith.

Several ramifications follow from this historicist perspective. First, the task of theology has shifted from the study of absolutes to a critical assessment of religious communities. A delineation of the ontological structures of reality is no longer possible because there is no essence to which the researcher can return (in a psychological sense), discover (using a phenomenological method), or project onto the future (as in idealism). Because depictions of the supreme Being are reflections of a given epoch, theologians are limited in their elaborations to a specific social and religious context.[52]

The second consequence that follows from this cultural

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[51]Ibid., pp. 71-77; Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. 106-109. Kaufman has taken this idea from Paul Tillich, who spoke in his early works about a "center of history" for every religion, Interpretation of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), pp. 242-265; Kingdom of God and History (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938), pp. 106-121.

[52]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 238-262.

approach is that theological beliefs are judged on pragmatic rather than empirical grounds. Taking the statement, "All knowledge is for action" (Marx) as his point of departure, Kaufman considers the usefulness of a paradigm to be its determining factor. North American Christians can be liberated from their economic and racial biases through an investigation of the cultural assumptions that have determined their existence.[53]

This historicist perspective also has some implications for the use of theological language. Instead of ascending to the abstract language of ontology, scholars can remain at the lower level of anthropomorphic description in their portrayals of God. Kaufman considers the image of a personal deity to be particularly evocative because it resonates with everyday experiences. The strong feelings of guilt, hatred, love, and anger that are expressed in human interaction represent a natural avenue for believers' worship of divinity.

These personal descriptions just "happen to be" an integral part of the gospel message. The Hebrews' depiction of Yahweh as a harsh and sympathetic Lord represented their attempt to understand divinity, an accomplishment upon which the fate of their nation rested. Reference to Jesus as the Son of God, in turn, symbolizes a divine kinship which Christians have claimed cannot be replicated. Their use of

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[53]Ibid., pp. 257-262. The similarities and differences between this stance and Lindbeck's performative criterion of truth will be analysed in the fifth chapter.

familial images to describe the relationship between Jesus, God, and themselves establishes the supernatural origins of their genealogical roots.

Kaufman's appeal to the Holy Scriptures solidifies his identity as a Christian theologian. He considers the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to be of particular significance for his understanding of deity. His Anabaptist heritage has also furnished him with a specific perception of this Jewish man. Kaufman includes non-resistance in his list of divine perfections because the historic peace churches have interpreted the self-giving love of Jesus as an avowal of pacifism. From the cultural-linguistic perspective of Mennonitism, God is to be conceived as a Being who submits the Godself

> . . . to the worst indignities and evils to which rebellious men (can) subject him, without turning again in anger upon them . . . The cross, understood as the profoundest symbol of God's being and action, means that God himself suffers for his creation, allowing himself to be 'despised and rejected by men' (Isaiah 53:3). [text inside brackets added][54]

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[54]Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, p. 220, cross-reference pp. 210-222, 402-410. For documentation of this Anabaptist conception of faith, see The Schleitheim Confession, ed. and trans. John H. Yoder (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1973). Although many theologians have developed compassionate and suffering images of God, not all of them have concluded that pacifism follows as a necessary consequence, see Charles Hartshorne, The Divine Relativity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948); Kazoh Kitamori, Theology of the Pain of God (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965); Jurgen Moltmann, The Crucified God (London: SCM Press, 1973); God in Creation, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985); C. S. Song, The Compassionate God (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1982); and Douglas J.

Although this statement indicates Kaufman's indebtedness to the Radical Reformation, he has recently eschewed the privatistic tendencies of his sectarian past in favour of a broader interpretation of theological language. There are people who do not believe in a supernatural being or who employ religious terms in ways that are at variance with established conventions. Kaufman uses this secular phenomenon to emphasize theologians' accountability to the public usage of the symbol "God." Deity is significant beyond the bounds of scriptural and doctrinal histories (à la Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics).[55]

This accent on the collective nature of theology has resulted in two modifications to Kaufman's cultural-linguistic perspective. He believes that he can render an important service to the West's perception of itself by taking account of the monotheistic history of Judaism, the humanistic impulses of Christianity, and the current influences of secularity and natural metaphysics. North American believers can enter into a fruitful dialogue with other faiths once they have understood what they mean when they

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Hall, God and Human Suffering (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986).

[55]Gordon Kaufman, An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 1-17; cross-reference his article, "Theology as a Public Vocation," in The Vocation of a Theologian, ed. Theodore Jennings (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 49-66.

speak about "nature," "God," and "world."[56]

The second qualification pertains to Kaufman's increasing use of impersonal theological images. He still considers the existential significance of divine metaphors to be pertinent. He has nevertheless become convinced that overtly personal symbols foster an individualistic view of God. Deity can no longer be referred to in an immediate sense because of the historical, cultural, and natural processes that are involved. According to Kaufman's most recent reflections on the matter, it would be better to conceive of God "in terms of the complex of physical, biological, and historico-cultural conditions which have made human existence possible, and which may draw it out to a fuller humanity and humaneness."[57] The foundations of Western society take on significance when they are placed within the framework of a larger--cultural, political, religious, and economic--whole.

In summary, Kaufman regards himself as a cultural-linguistic theologian, but has become troubled over the relativistic implications of his method. Global factors have led him to a point where he is willing to forgo personal metaphors in favour of conceptual schemes and to exchange a

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[56]Kaufman pays heed to his own advice when he reflects on the meaning of the concepts "relativity" and "nature," The Theological Imagination, pp. 80-95, 209-237; see also "The Historicity of Religions and the Importance of Religious Dialogue," Buddhist-Christian Studies 4 (1984):5-15.

[57]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, p. 42. For a more general discussion, see pp. 32-44, 51-55.

certain amount of historical rootedness for relevancy. An elaboration of these ideas will have to wait until the fourth and fifth chapters. Of more immediate concern is the way in which Kaufman has used his epistemology to argue for the intelligibility of a theology of revelation. This represents the subject matter of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

GORDON KAUFMAN'S THEOLOGY OF REVELATION

A. A Brief Historical Overview

The second chapter has provided a context for Kaufman's theology by comparing his cultural-linguistic perspective to a secular and religious approach. What a natural world-view has made explicit is the finitude of existence and the symbolic character of theological language. What phenomenology has contributed to the debate has been the pertinence of choosing images of God which resonate with believers' appreciation of deity.

Kaufman has responded to these requirements by accenting the anthropological basis of his thought and by proposing personal analogies as the most appropriate metaphors for God. His portrayal of divinity as a Being who acts in history has anticipated the demand for a thoroughgoing worldly interpretation of theology. His emphasis on the fulfilment of the self through sacrificial love has satisfied the need for direction in a religious person's life.

There are, at the same time, two features that set Kaufman's thought apart from secular and phenomenological

descriptions. He has insisted upon a distinction between divinity and humanity as the minimum requirement of a theological world-view. He has also maintained that a direct correlation between experience and deity cannot be made. God represents a conceptual whole within a synthetic frame of reference. The requisite characteristics of a secular, religious, and theological method have thereby been disclosed.

The time has come for a fuller elucidation of Kaufman's theology. A straightforward analysis is nevertheless difficult because he has responded in different ways to the dilemma of a supernatural interpretation of the universe. Kaufman initially endorsed a theology of revelation on the basis of his subjective theory of knowledge, moved to an account of divine agency when he realized that the idea of self-disclosure was based on a Cartesian model, and ended by assigning a prominent role to the imagination. A brief overview of these three aspects of his theology will serve as an introduction to the next three chapters.

Kaufman's first priority was to provide a philosophical foundation for the theologies of two neo-orthodox thinkers who were less concerned about the metaphysical implications of their thought, Karl Barth and H. Richard Niebuhr. Barth eschewed the contribution that philosophy could make to the "science" of theology by denying a point of contact between humanity and God. H. R. Niebuhr, in turn, did not explore the connection between his theology of revelation and the

advent of historical relativism in the sciences.[1]

Kaufman set out to correct this one-sided approach by establishing the epistemological viability of a theology of revelation. The usefulness of a model of self-disclosure in gaining an understanding (Verstehen) of other cultures and religions had been demonstrated by the human sciences. Kaufman developed his Systematic Theology on the basis of this theoretical insight. God symbolized a hidden reality who revealed the divine purposes in the same fashion that a mentally ill patient disclosed the reasons for her erratic behaviour.

The merits of this cognitive contribution to neo-orthodoxy notwithstanding, Kaufman came under criticism for his dualistic understanding of the human personality. Michael McLain claimed that Kaufman had based his theology of revelation on the faulty premise that there was a distinct difference between the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of human behaviour.[2] People were not disembodied subjects who had to reveal their intentions in order to be understood. Their actions exhibited as much about their character as their words. McLain suggested that Kaufman's theology be

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[1]Karl Barth, "NO! Answer to Emil Brunner," in Natural Theology, ed. Emil Brunner, trans. Peter Fraenkel (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946), pp. 67-128; H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation. Cross-reference Gordon Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. viii-xii, 10-11.

[2]Michael McLain, "On Theological Models," Harvard Theological Review 62/2 (1969):155-187.

revised to take this holistic appreciation of the human species into account.

Kaufman responded to this critique by sketching the contours of a theology of divine agency. The emphasis was now to be placed on the enactment of God's purposes within history rather than upon the mysteriousness of deity. From the standpoint of believers, the progression of historical events gave rise to the idea of a divine agent. God could be said to be working teleologically in the warp and woof of temporal realities.[3]

There was a sound epistemological reason for this shift in thinking. Kaufman had initially grounded his theology on the second stage of the knowing process, maintaining that humanity's experience of finitude required a divine presence from beyond history. Now that the bifurcation of reality into its phenomenal and noumenal aspects had been shown to be unacceptable, Kaufman submitted that a correlation of the first and second levels of knowledge (experience and limit) resulted in a better understanding of God. Divinity was to be conceived in terms of finitude itself, and theologians had to decide which of these "limit" experiences--material,

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[3]The best way of verifying this shift in Kaufman's thinking is to compare two of his essays, "Two Models of Transcendence" and "On the Meaning of 'Act of God,'" God the Problem, pp. 72-81, 119-147. He defends a personal analogy of transcendence against the naturalistic implications of a teleological model in the first essay, while outlining the merits of a purposeful approach in the second one, saying that the entire historical process can be viewed as an enactment of the intentions of divinity.

normative, personal, organic--was the most appropriate for a Christian representation of deity.[4]

The full shape of Kaufman's thought did not emerge, however, until 1975, when he elaborated upon a theology of construction in An Essay on Theological Method. He submitted that a theology of revelation and a theology of divine agency could not be explicated without a recognition of the constructive nature of propositional statements. The word "God" did not refer to an entity beyond history or to particular events within history, but represented an ideal construct of the imagination.

The significance of this new emphasis becomes evident when one realizes how closely it follows upon Kaufman's epistemological insights. What he is claiming is that neither experience (the first level of knowledge) nor finitude (the second level of knowledge) nor a correlation of the two is sufficient for a comprehension of God. Needed instead is an apprehension of the synthetic qualities of knowledge, the recognition of which results in an identification of deity with a conceptual whole. The term "God," in other words, is to be equated with the third stage of the knowing process, a

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[4]"We begin then with a somewhat different duality than that of two-world thinking: the duality of experience and its Limit(s). Such meaning of the term 'God' as derives from an alleged gnosis of some 'other world,' transmitted by mythological traditions, may not be admitted to consideration here, for our interest is in defining the meaning that the awareness of our finitude as such permits and requires" (emphases added), ibid., p. 52.

procedure that entails the use of experience and limit to envisage divinity as a comprehensive theoretical idea.

The importance of this theology of construction could lead to the conclusion that the other two aspects of Kaufman's theology do not require further consideration. There are merits to this suggestion, especially when one realizes that this latest development has enabled him "to come into his own as a Christian thinker," to quote Garrett Green.[5] He has moved beyond his rigorous neo-orthodox training to a new comprehension of the theological task.

Kaufman's theologies of revelation and divine agency have nevertheless been included in this dissertation for two reasons. First, his depiction of God as an historical mystery and immanent presence is anticipated by his earlier use of personal and teleological analogies. An analysis of his Systematic Theology will yield important insights into this revisionary direction.

A recognition of the evolutionary nature of Kaufman's thinking also allows for an exploration of themes which might otherwise be viewed as contradictory. His early rejection of natural theology does not sit well with his current interest in empiricism. His recent eschewal of personal analogies makes little sense unless it is viewed in relation to his initial defence and extensive use of such metaphors. A pro-

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[5]"Reconstructing Christian Theology," p. 219. Cross-reference George Lindbeck's review of An Essay on Theological Method, p. 262.

gressive approach facilitates a more thorough investigation of his theology than a structural method would allow.

There is, however, a more important reason for the dissertation's examination of these two themes. Revelatory and agential theologies constitute a significant part of the contemporary theological landscape, in spite of Kaufman's epistemological doubts about the first motif and conceptual difficulties with the second one. Ronald Thiemann has defended a theology of revelation on the basis of its intrinsic relationship to divine prevenience. Thomas Tracy, in turn, has used a theology of divine agency to develop the idea of the world as God's body.[6] These two scholars are representative of a larger group of theologians who have noted the communitarian benefits of the first approach and the naturalistic implications of the latter.[7]

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[6]Ronald Thiemann, Revelation and Theology; Thomas Tracy, God, Action, and Embodiment (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

[7]Included among the first group of scholars are Paul Ricoeur, Essays on Biblical Interpretation, ed. Lewis Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 73-118; Avery Dulles, Models of Revelation (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1985); Garrett Green, Imagining God; and Bruce L. McCormack, "Divine Revelation and Human Imagination: Must We Choose Between the Two?"

For theologians who have explored the viability of a theology of divine agency, see Sallie McFague, Models of God; Grace Jantzen, God's World, God's Body (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984); David R. Griffin, "Gordon Kaufman's Theology: Some Questions," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 41/4 (1973):554-572; David R. Mason, "Can We Speculate on How God Acts?" Journal of Religion 57/1 (1977):16-32, "Selfhood, Transcendence, and the Experience of God," Modern Theology 3/4 (1987):293-314; Schubert Ogden, The Reality of God and Other Essays (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); and David Burrell, Aquinas: God and Action (Notre Dame: Univer-

These topics have therefore been included in this study, not only to place them within Kaufman's thinking as a whole, but to foster an ongoing dialogue with current proponents of these ideas. An examination of Kaufman's initial endorsement of the concepts of revelation and agency will make these alternatives to a theology of construction comprehensible, if not acceptable.[8]

B. Presuppositions, Finitude, Personality, and History

Kaufman begins his systematic theology by reiterating many of the points that he made in his theory of knowledge. Theology has to do with that which is ultimately real, which is to say that believers arrange their lives according to a hierarchy of value and bring this faith perspective to bear upon their worship patterns, decision-making processes, and attitudes toward life. Faith denotes those "absolute presuppositions" (Collingwood) which remain largely unquestioned in a person's interpretation of existence.[9]

Kaufman also maintains that a point of contact (Anknup-

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sity of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

[8]Kaufman continues to find some value in theologies of revelation and divine agency, in spite of the fact that he considers the imaginative quality of theological statements to be his most important priority. See An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 33, 67-68; The Theological Imagination, pp. 46-57, 275.

[9]Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 18-23. Cross-reference R. G. Collingwood, An Essay on Metaphysics (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984).

fungspunkt) between God and humanity can be found in a believer's awareness of finitude.[10] Adolescents learn about their dependence on realities beyond their control when they are brought up against the limits of knowledge, power, and action. This growing awareness of constraining forces heralds the beginning of their identification with a larger, more meaningful whole, a totality which sustains these individuals through memories of people who have come before.[11]

Kaufman proposes that the personal features of life are important for a Christian's understanding of divinity. Freedom, creativity, fulfilment, and activities are human qualities that describe God's relationship to the world and undergird the relative significance of the human subject vis-à-vis other aspects of creation.[12] The analogy of a person helps to make the affinity of God comprehensible to believers who are anxiety-ridden about the events which shape their lives and dictate their future.

In light of this priority on personal analogies, Kaufman submits that the "obsessively" goal-oriented nature of the human species can be used to vouch for the divine sustenance of the universe. Natural and historical events can be placed

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[10]Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 105-116.

[11]Note H. Richard Niebuhr's discussion of the role of memory and history in the formation of character, The Meaning of Revelation, pp. 32-66.

[12]Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 85-93, 117-133, 329-351.

within a larger teleological framework in the same way that people adjust their activities to conform to their expectations. A model of intentionality renders the divine destiny of the world as an intelligible belief. God is providentially caring for the world in the same manner that people are striving to achieve their ambitions.[13]

Kaufman also states that the historical facets of existence are the ones with which the Christian church should be most concerned. To focus on the liberation of a people (the Hebrews), the foundation of a nation (Israel), or the renewal of a tradition (the people of God) is to deem the accidents of this world as more than incidental to the meaning of life. Social and economic activities foster individual achievements which, in turn, nurture cultural and religious movements through their charismatic effects and accent on personal initiative. It is, in other words, the historical journeys of families, societies, nations, and congregations that represent the most significant elements of the faith process. The value that Christianity has placed on communal relationships makes believers accountable to the way in which life is lived in <u>this</u> world.[14]

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[13]Ibid., pp. 255-326.

[14]Ibid., pp. xii-xvi, 25-32, 266-287. Placing a high value on history can result in the ideological legitimation of a particular epoch, people, or geographical location. The idea that the Christian church will continue despite all odds represents a simple example of this sanctification of a social arrangement. This emphasis on the church has had varied results. On the one hand, it has helped to limit totalitar-

Stated in terms of obligations that people have to each other, Jesus' exhortation to "lose one's life for my sake" (Mark 8:35) and Paul's command to "do the good" (Romans 13:3) set the standards for community life.[15] The exchange of minority principles for majority rule, the sacrifice of ecclesiastical isolation for cultural dialogue, and the substitution of material benefits for spiritual contentedness signal a modern interpretation of the sayings of Jesus and indicate a possible direction for the Christian church. The self-satisfying individuality of Western society is demonstrated to be an illusion by the existence of social institutions that encourage and sustain the participation of peoples who have been marginalized.[16]

Human beings' dependence on natural resources for their wellbeing also belies the freedom that they have from environmental conditions. Conveniences are purchased at a high ecological cost, an expense which is passed on in the form of diminished autonomy. Christians are predisposed to the

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ian regimes; on other hand, it has led to religious wars. For a general discussion of this point, see Waldemar Janzen, Still in the Image: Essays in Biblical Theology and Anthropology (Winnipeg, Man.: CMBC Publications, 1982), pp. 137-157.

[15]Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 87-93, 378-388, 479-499.

[16]Cross-reference Gregory Baum's discussion of the church's "preferential option for the poor," Theology and Society (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 66-87, 157-178: Compassion and Solidarity: The Church for Others, CBC Massey Lectures (Montréal: CBC Enterprises, 1987), pp. 11-30.

multiplicity of problems that arise from this historical and natural matrix and can offer signs of hope and justice to this eminently social world.

C. A Distinction Between Natural and Revealed Theology

This skeletal theoretical framework affords Kaufman the opportunity of presenting a theology of revelation as a solution to the problem of God. He begins by highlighting the fact that aims and goals are thought-processes that take place internally.[17] Using the example of a woodcutter who goes into a forest, Kaufman states that an observer can only conjecture about the possible reasons for the man's actions. The presence of an axe would suggest that he wants to cut down a tree, but the person might simply be taking a hatchet along in order to ward off wild animals. The eyewitness would still not know the purpose for which the trees are going to be used, even if the individual's intentions were to cut down some spruce. A fine piece of furniture could be made from the logs, but the woodsman may only need the pines for firewood. The best procedure for finding out about the man's objectives is to ask the person himself. The inquirer gains a better insight into the man's motives, intentions, and purposes through an act of self-disclosure.

Kaufman uses this illustration to show that there is

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[17]Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 32-40, 255-265; cross-reference Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. 53-59.

nothing as such that "points toward" God. All phenomenological descriptions presume frames of reference that have been brought to the events in question. The orderliness of some natural processes lends credence to the idea of an immanent and gracious divine presence. Other forces, however, lead to the conclusion that if there is such an overarching reality, it is an arbitrary, ruthless, and indiscriminate power. The destructive effects of a tornado and brutal reality of "the survival of the fittest" conjure up images of a dispassionate God. A supernatural interpretation has to be presupposed in order for divinity to be included in a believer's perception of the universe.

Another way of conveying the idea that one's convictions enable one to "see" a divine presence is to say that God has revealed the divine purposes to humanity.[18] Abraham ordered his life according to God's promise that he would have many descendants and that they would one day constitute a great nation (Genesis 11:1-3). Israel believed that as long as it obeyed the will of Yahweh its time in Canaan would be established forever (Deuteronomy 7, 11). Early Christians centred their existence in the idea that the reconciliation of the world had begun in the selfless sacrifice, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5). Judaism and

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[18]Cross-reference John Hick's discussion of this point, "Religious Faith as Experiencing-As," in Talk of God, Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures, Vol. 2 (London: Macmillan Co., 1969), pp. 20-35.

Christianity were founded on the belief that these miraculous encounters represented the work of a divine reality, experiences which could be referred to as revelations of God.

These historical events presented believers with the opportunity of "picturing" the universe in a whole new way, a world-view that was expanded to include a theory of the origins of the earth, a division of time into seven-day periods, a preference for certain political arrangements, and a hierarchial ordering of the flora, fauna, and human species. Referring to Yahweh as their Creator placed the Israelites in closer proximity to their fellow creatures and at a greater distance from deity (Genesis 1-3). To believe in Elohim as the one and only God also meant that all nations were accountable to this supreme Being (Deuteronomy 5-6). The Hebrew prophets condemned the actions of other countries on the basis of their belief that God was the sole ruler of the universe (Amos 1-3).

The people of Israel, in turn, considered the division of time into a seven-day cycle to be part of the divine plan (Exodus 20:8-11), argued about God's partiality for tribalism or kingship (1 Samuel 8), and considered work and the pain of bearing children to be the result of humanity's disobedience (Genesis 3).[19] A comprehensive interpretation of reality was

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[19]These themes are still with us today. Jews and Seventh-Day Adventists regard Saturday as the proper day of rest (Sabbath) while traditional Christianity celebrates Sunday as the beginning (resurrection) of the new week.

The issue of kingship and tribalism has also manifested

constructed on the basis of these few, relatively insignificant events. These "acts of God" came to serve as the sacred canon of Judaism and Christianity.

D. The Development of Mythologies and Traditions

Kaufman's point in discussing these scriptural references is to show that a theology of revelation has more to do with a synthetic frame of reference than with an unequivocal endorsement of God's miraculous intervention in history.[20] Biblical authors highlighted the unusual and inexplicable character of certain events to corroborate the existence of a divine presence. Moses' encounter with the burning bush, the defeat of the Egyptians at the Red Sea, and the resurrection of Jesus represented epiphanies that were cloaked in an aura

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itself in the growing debate between nationalism and internationalism. Although one could argue that the dispute between a "federation of states" and an "empire of loyalists" was decided in 1776, the theological differences between these two ideas have been the subject of several recent articles and books, Millard Lind, "Biblical Economics: A 'Bottom Up' Social Order," The Window (Bulletin of the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries) 8/3 (February, 1981):1-3; Religion and the American Revolution, ed. Jerald C. Brauer (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976); Norman Gottwald, The Tribes of Yahweh (New York: Orbis Books, 1979).

Scholars also remain divided about the significance of work. While its backbreaking aspects reinforce the idea that work is a punishment for humanity's sinfulness, the creative fulfilment which some people experience while labouring implies a more wholesome understanding of the routine of our lives, see Dorothee Soelle, To Work and to Love: A Theology of Creation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); Gregory Baum, ed., Work and Religion, Concilium No. 131 (New York: Seabury Press, 1980).

[20]Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 57-80.

of mystery in order to illustrate the awesome power of divinity.

These stories were not only retold in order to substantiate the reality of God. They also represented the beginnings of mythologies, chronological accounts of "history-like" events that were expanded and incorporated into a comprehensive world-view.[21] The tiny Hebrew tribe in Israel took on significance when its God was linked to the origins of the universe. The divinity of Jesus, in turn, was bolstered by the idea that there were eyewitness reports of his timely birth, resurrected presence, and ascension into heaven. A whole theological narrative was constructed to underline the universal significance of these historic occasions.

These realistic biblical accounts found a parallel in the second and third centuries with the evolution of church doctrine. The words "trinity" and homoousios were added to the Christian vocabulary in order to define the precise relationship between Jesus and God. The experiences that believers had of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit resulted in the

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[21]The term "mythology" is being replaced today by such words as "narrative," "world-view," "history," and "language games," see Schubert Ogden, The Reality of God and Other Essays, pp. 99-119. The expression retains its value in the sense that a myth lifts out the chronological or story-like qualities of theological assertions. To take an example, the phrase, "God raised Jesus from the dead" (Acts 2:32), makes sense if the temporal succession of Jesus' death and God's initiative in "raising him" are taken as requisites in understanding the (synchronic) similarities and differences between Jesus and God in their divine consubstantiality. Note Hans Frei's explanation of this point, The Identity of Jesus Christ, pp. 120-125.

church's proclamation of a triune divinity. God was affirmed to be of one substance (ousia), yet manifested in three ways (hypostases).[22]

Athanasius, in turn, employed the term homoousios to underline the equality of Jesus and God. He attacked the Arians for emphasizing the humanity of Jesus to the detriment of his divinity, arguing that Christ had existed with God before the creation of the world (Proverbs 8:22-31).[23] Confession of the essential identity of Christ and God became a tenet of orthodoxy, distinguishing true believers from "worshippers of the creature Jesus," as the Arians were called.

Theological discussions focused increasingly on the proper use of analogies because fourth-century believers were asking questions that had not been thought of in the first. Concerns about the continuity of the church's stance meant that traditional statements had to be reinterpreted to meet the difficulties of language and culture. A whole new worldview, in short, had to be fashioned so that Scriptural accounts could continue to be meaningful. Novel images and metaphors had to be conceived so that the exact relation of God and humanity could be specified.

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[22]Jaroslav Pelikan, The Christian Tradition, 5 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971-1989), I:172-225.

[23]Athanasius, "Four Discourses Against the Arians," in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Archibald Robertson, trans. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 357-393.

E. A Contemporary Demythologization of the Bible

Kaufman uses this historical precedent of transposing expressions of faith into new idiomatic forms to endorse a program of demythologization and remythologization.[24] The problem with the biblical records is that their symbols and images do not fit easily into the theological framework of contemporary believers. The modern reader cannot make immediate sense of a six-day creation (Genesis 1-2) or of Paul's affirmation of Jesus' defeat of the principalities and powers (Colossians 2:15). The first myth does not give sufficient consideration to the slow and agonizing drama of the world's natural development. A mere assertion (Barth) of Jesus' triumph over evil also disguises the continuing reality of sin and devolution of the world's resources.[25]

Kaufman maintains that these mythical images have to be exchanged for meaningful metaphors in order for communication to take place. Believers have to be brave enough to use the vernacular in their reconstruction of first-century testimonies, just as Christians in the third to sixth centuries borrowed Greek terms to clarify the meaning of the incarnation.

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[24]Kaufman takes up Bultmann's proposal on pp. 132n.20, 273n.9, and 270-287 of his Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, suggesting, however, that the word "myth" be replaced by "history" (Geschichte). Cross-reference the key article by Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," Kerygma and Myth, 2 vols., ed. Hans-Werner Bartsch, trans. Reginald Fuller (London: S.P.C.K., 1953), I:1-44.

[25]Cross-reference Karl Barth's discussion of "nothingness," Church Dogmatics, III/3:289-368.

1. A Personal Analogy of Transcendence

Kaufman presents two illustrations of the way in which a program of remythologization can be carried out. The first example pertains to his employment of a personal analogy to describe divine transcendence.[26] God is free in the same manner that individuals retain their identities throughout their long association with others. The socialization process of adolescents consists of their growing independence from the emotional and economic supports of their parents. This drive toward freedom results in feelings of isolation and loneliness; teenagers realize that there is no single set of relationships upon which they can rely. Their efforts in replacing the companionship of their biological family with more deliberate commitments represents a second stage in the maturation process. This quest marks the beginning of adulthood and culminates in a series of long-term associations (e.g. marriage).

There is, nonetheless, a loss of innocence during this transition period. Alongside the celebration of new friendships now stand experiences of mis-communication, alienation, dissatisfaction, and estrangement, feelings which will continue for the rest of the teenagers' lives. There persists, in other words, an indescribable limit to their relationships, a transcendence that cannot be reduced to one ex-

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[26]Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 32-40, 105-133, 148-160, 329-351.

planation. The common word for such an abiding reality is individuality, a characteristic that has been affirmed in the Christian doctrine of the immortality of the soul and the (promised) "resurrection of the body."[27]

Kaufman maintains that the irreducibility of the human subject reflects the incomprehensibility of the divine object, a noumenon that eludes the domination of language and authority. God remains beyond the grasp of human control because it is the delectability of the surprising itself that renews and refurbishes life. The aseity of God, in other words, enhances a Christian understanding of salvation. Divinity's openness to the enigmatic features of the human endeavour makes it possible to experience hope and grace.[28]

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[27]Ibid., pp. 329-351; cross-reference The Context of Decision, pp. 71-116.

[28]The philosophical "turn to the subject" has resulted in many theological difficulties, not the least of which are introspection and dualism. Note the scathing critique by Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," in Paul Among Jews and Gentiles (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 78-96, as well as James Gustafson's criticism of the theological use that has been made of the transcendental ego, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, II:65-84.

The notion of self-identity, however, will not languish easily. The human subject is of such importance to Christianity that there are religious commemorations of a person's birth (baptism or dedication), vigilant attitudes about the dignity of life (human rights), and memorial services at the time of death (funerals). Individuality continues to stand as an important foundation for Western thinking. Cross-reference the varied discussion of this point, James Gustafson, Christian Ethics and the Community, pp. 139-149; Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/4:324-564; Gerard J. P. O'Daly, Plotinus' Philosophy of the Self (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1973).

2. A Teleological Model of Immanence

The second manner in which Kaufman utilizes an anthropological model is through his comparison of divine sovereignty and the teleological orientation of humanity. He proposes that God's initiative in winning humanity to the divine purposes can be likened to a student setting out to become a medical doctor.[29] The young person first has to count the cost of going to university, spending several years in medical school, and apprenticing as an overworked intern. The financial, emotional, and social commitments of this goal have to be assessed before embarking on such an venture.

One could say analogically that God had to be aware of the risks that were involved in bringing humanity to life. Creating human beings in the "image of God" meant that they had a freedom similar to that of deity; they could reject the destiny for which they had been born if they so desired.[30]

This model also facilitates a clarification of God's response after humanity's wilful nature had become a reality. The medical student may have to spend an extra year in the

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[29]Gordon Kaufman, The Context of Decision, pp. 72-88; Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 256-265, 299-313, 329-351.

[30]To say that God anticipated the fall of the world is to hold to a supralapsarian position, a belief which safeguards the omniscience and omnipotence of God, note Karl Barth's affirmation of this doctrine, Church Dogmatics, II/2: 127-145. Kaufman's theology reflects the infralapsarian notion that the divine plan of salvation was a response to humanity's sinfulness, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 378-388.

work force to save up enough money to go to school. The difficulties associated with becoming a health-care worker may also cause the woman to concentrate her energies elsewhere. These decisions can only be made during the tenure of her undertaking. An illness or the failure of a key chemistry examination represent unforeseen circumstances in the student's quest, crises that compel her to modify her previous aspirations. These obstacles "bind" the woman's options because she has already proceeded along a certain path. She can neither return to the beginning nor accomplish her goal as originally intended.

A third alternative is necessitated, a direction that stands somewhere between uninhibited free choice and determination by external factors. Although the woman's predicament has transformed her perception of the past, the present offers her new possibilities. Control of her destiny can be regained by holding these two aspects of reality in a dialectical balance. Viewing new opportunities in the light of present circumstances enables the medical student to adjust her goal to fit the situation.

The point of this illustration is to underscore the role of time in the perception of reality. There is no way of knowing in advance whether the woman will pass her chemistry exam or stay healthy. History does not allow her to see beyond the snippets of time that have been allotted to her. A goal-oriented person lives on the assumption that there is

a relatively straight line from intentionality to actualization. The emergence of new dilemmas upsets this arrangement. Incidental occurrences obviate the past and create new anchor points for interpreting the future.[31]

What this analogy signifies for an understanding of deity is that historical events effect a change in the divine relation to the world. Biblical accounts speak of God repenting for having created human beings; the Lord wanted to "blot them from the face of the earth" on account of their sinfulness (Genesis 6:5-8). This way of describing God is highly metaphorical. Yet a dramatization of God's reaction to human behaviour underlines the dynamic interconnection between the spiritual and the mundane. The Scriptures portray God as a compassionate Being who participates wholeheartedly in the whimsical life and unpredictable character of the human species.

This affective affirmation of God leads to the conclusion that divinity is mutable in the sense that the "divine plan" is not carried out in a straightforward manner. Technocratic, managerial, and mechanistic models are tempting

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[31]Two implications follow as a result of this radical historicism. First, systematic theologies represent an interpretation of reality from a particular point of view, note Kaufman's remarks, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. xii-xv, 57-80. The development of a natural theology is also hindered by this time-perspective. Cross-reference the discussion by Reinhold Niebuhr, Love and Justice, ed. D. B. Robertson (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1976), pp. 46-56; Charles Curran, Themes in Fundamental Moral Theology, pp. 27-80.

precisely because they are so clean when compared to the messy reality and hesitant stops and starts that typify human relations. Teleology applied to history ends up with less than the Ultimate had hoped for but with more in terms of the dynamic interplay of power politics.

Kaufman's point is that God cannot manipulate events because of deity's dependence on the very objectives that the Godself embarked upon in the first place. Divinity is subject to the contingencies of history in the same fashion that the medical student is caught between the idealized possibilities of the past and the circumscribed potential of the future. God's creation of humanity "like unto the Godself" implicates divinity in the consequences of human destiny.[32]

Kaufman cites the biblical record in his justification of this admittedly limited view of divine omnipotence.[33] God's exaltation of Jesus only occurs at the very end of the

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[32]Kaufman regards his position as a modification of the nineteenth-century belief in progressive salvation. What liberal Protestantism did not account for was the "great suffering and struggle and even terrible reversals" of the redemptive process, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 402-403, see also pp. 268-287, 378-388.

It should be noted that an intrinsic teleology is subverted at the point at which the enactment of God's intentions is no longer evident. One is then "reduced" to explaining events in terms of their finite causes and effects, thereby limiting the attribution of a divine end, or purpose, to these historical circumstances. Cf. Michel Despland's discussion of Kant's weak understanding of--and therefore underdeveloped teleological response to--the reality of evil, Kant on History and Religion (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1973), pp. 185-214.

[33]Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 265-287, 378-388.

Christian Scriptures and then in the form of a "narrated promise" (Thiemann) of the future glory of humanity (Philippians 2:9; Ephesians 1:20; Acts 1:11). The real story commences two thousand years earlier, with the journey of Abram from Ur to Canaan. This tale wends its way from the untimely birth of Isaac through the lives of unlikely heros (Joseph, Gideon, David, Isaiah, Mary) to its culmination in the capital city of a small vassal state of Rome. Halfway through this narrative, the great land that God has promised Israel is overrun by Babylon and the Hebrews are left to rebuild the temple in the ruins of the divided country of Samaria and Judea. The Maccabean revolt and Mary's conception of Jesus do not represent much better new beginnings; Jesus dies prematurely and the temple is destroyed for the second time.

Kaufman submits that this convoluted history, taken as a whole, typifies deity's patient care for the world. God's steadfast love emerges out of the disjointed and disreputable history of Israel itself, a narrative in which the lowliest are chosen to represent the kingdom of the divine.[34] These Scriptural accounts lend credence to the idea that deity responds to each crisis by reformulating the divine vision according to historical exigencies. The telos of redemption is envisaged and made possible by the actuality of exist-

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[34]See Waldemar Janzen, Still in the Image, pp. 63-66; Ronald Thiemann, "Radiance and Obscurity in Biblical Narrative," in Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation, ed. Garrett Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 30-38.

ence.[35]

The final examples that Kaufman uses to undergird his relational concept of God have to do with the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness and garden of Gethsemane.[36] These two incidents indicate that a subjective appropriation of God's grace is an integral aspect of the salvation process. Jesus' opportunity to have the "cup removed from him" means that the fulfilment of divine purposes is dependent, in part, on believers' acceptance of them.

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[35]R. G. Collingwood has maintained that the shift from a static to dynamic view of reality has more to do with contemporary ideas of relativity than Hebraic or Grecian concepts of time, The Idea of Nature (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), pp. 13-28. This critical analysis fosters a rehabilitation of the relationship between Christianity and Greek thought. E. P. Meijering, for example, has made a favourable comparison between the Hebrew idea of steadfast love and the Greek concept of eternity, Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius: Synthesis or Antithesis? (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), p. 139. Bernard Lonergan, in turn, has said that the "importation of a Greek ontology" is not required in understanding the Nicene confession of the consubstantial nature of Jesus and God. Natural reason, illumined by faith, is how fourth-century Christians arrived at the homoousios formula, The Way to Nicea trans. Conn O'Donovan (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 130, 133. These points of view imply that the contingencies and continuities of history are not as far apart as Kaufman has intimated. That is to say, his radical historicism is undermined at the point at which the thread of Christianity can be traced through culturally diverse traditions.

This does not mean that Kaufman's emphasis on temporality is nullified. There is a sense in which the threat of nuclear war can be compared to the terror of the bubonic plague. Yet the split-second consequences of an atomic attack reveals the differences between these two realities. World-wide devastation has been made immanently possible by society's atomization of time, cross-reference Collingwood's discussion, op. cit.

[36]Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 383-388.

This view renders freedom as the linchpin of Kaufman's theology and represents the principal obstacle to any strong notion of divine omnipotence. The non-compulsive identification of Jesus with God discloses the fact that a manifestation of divine power does not require the destruction of the human personality. The persuasive nature of God is revealed in Jesus' patient, selfless, and loving care.[37]

Self-identity, in other words, is moulded and shaped by the sacrificial stance that people take toward others. Jesus' character was consolidated through his offer to suffer and die for humanity. The virtues of believers are similarly revealed when they indicate their willingness to forfeit their lives for the sake of the greater good. Social solidarity and divine continuity are assured through the sacrificial stance of individuals.[38]

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[37]Ibid., pp. 211-213, 219-222.

[38]Kaufman's view of the matter can be highlighted by contrasting it with that of Hans Frei. According to the latter, Jesus' identity was vindicated and established by his resurrection: "In his passion and death the initiative of Jesus disappears more and more into that of God; but in the resurrection, where the initiative of God is finally and decisively climaxed and he alone is and can be active, the sole identity to mark the presence of that activity is Jesus. God remains hidden and even reference to him is almost altogether lacking. Jesus of Nazareth, he and none other, marks the presence of the action of God," The Identity of Jesus Christ, p. 121. Kaufman approaches the problem very differently. For him, the intention of God has already been revealed in Jesus' obedience unto death. The resurrection merely signifies the divine approval of this selfless stance and demonstrates its historical effectiveness, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 404-410, 426-434.

CHAPTER FOUR

GORDON KAUFMAN'S THEOLOGY OF DIVINE AGENCY

A. Disadvantages of a Personal Model of Transcendence

Michael McLain wrote a critique of Gordon Kaufman's theology of revelation in 1969, stating that there were epistemological problems with utilizing a personal analogy in portraying God's transcendence.[1] His most serious charge was that Kaufman had assumed a "residual Cartesian" concept of the human personality, in which the internal and external aspects of a human being had been bifurcated in order to establish the necessity of divine revelation.

McLain maintains that Kaufman's postulation of a mind/body dualism leads to an inaccurate description of human subjects. Character traits and mannerisms are shaped as much by people's actions as by their disclosure of hidden objectives. Customers take note of a salesman's actions instead of his promises if he comes consistently late for his appointments. Similarly, a professor gains confidence in a bookstore's promised delivery date if the books he or she has

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[1]Michael McLain, "On Theological Models," Harvard Theological Review 62/2 (1969):155-187.

ordered always arrive on time. These examples demonstrate that people's intentions, far from standing apart from their conduct, are measured against the effects of their behaviour. The psychosomatic unity of body and soul defines the self, not the disembodied or disengaged ego that Kaufman has been employing to characterize divine transcendence.[2]

Several theological implications follow from McLain's criticisms. First, Kaufman's sharp distinction between the methods of observation and self-disclosure is no longer viable because it places the human species in a privileged status that it does not deserve. Consciousness, volition, and intention can still be ascribed to the human animal. Indeed, this is what sets it apart from other species. The human condition is not so different from natural processes, however, that a totally new procedure is needed to interpret the enigmatic mortal. Observation is as important as an empathetic (verstehen) approach in deducing the dispositional nature of human beings.

This means that theologians of revelation can no longer

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[2]The authors that McLain cites in defence of the essential unity of a person's thoughts and actions include Gilbert Ryle, The Concept of Mind (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1949); P. F. Strawson, Individuals: An Essay on Descriptive Metaphysics (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1963); and Stuart Hampshire, Thought and Action (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965). Other scholars who have dealt with this problem include Charles Taylor, The Explanation of Behaviour (New York: Humanities Press, 1964); Human Agency and Language, Philosophical Papers No. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and Robert H. King, The Meaning of God (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973).

claim the self-transcendent posture of the human subject as a legitimate basis for their accounts of God's presence. A liberation from natural theology was ensured as long as the binding connection between a person's intentions and actions was not recognized. Now that the inextricable link between the two has been demonstrated, the epistemological foundations of theology have to be re-evaluated. In fact, McLain's critique implies that an analysis of the knowing process is insufficient for a depiction of deity. Ontological questions have to be addressed, queries that require theological elucidations of the reality of God.[3]

One way of highlighting this dilemma would be to say that Kaufman can no longer take advantage of a natural worldview to bolster his conviction that God has to "come from beyond the bounds of human history" to reveal the divine purposes. The second chapter indicated the necessity of a mundane frame of reference for deriving scientific conclusions from phenomenal observations. Kaufman has used this secular point of view to show that the divine noumenon has more to do with an underlying telos than with historical exigencies. Humanity alone is responsible for its actions while God is existent in the sense that believers bring a

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[3]Paul Ricoeur has described the journey from Dilthey to Heidegger as a transition from epistemology to ontology, with a current possibility of returning to epistemology via "a critique of ideology," Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, ed. and trans. John Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 43-100.

supernatural frame of reference to bear upon their interpretations of reality. An act of faith renders the divine reality, not evidence from the natural world.[4]

McLain's criticisms expose the fallaciousness of this argument. Either the mind of God is related to divine agency in the same sense that a person's achievement of goals consolidates his or her individuality or else one can cease talking about deity altogether. People are not incorporeal beings floating beyond the help of fellow compatriots;[5] nor is deity a "ghost in a machine" operating willy-nilly in the universe, unbeknown to humanity. Theologians have to speak about the acts of God if they wish to affirm the prevenient and correcting influence of deity. Otherwise, their accentuation of the internal divine presence will appear like the emperor's new clothes, i.e. nonexistent.[6]

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[4]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 226-256. Thomas F. Tracy has indicated the extent to which Kaufman considers a natural world-view to be a problem for theology, "Enacting History: Ogden and Kaufman on God's Mighty Acts," Journal of Religion 64/1 (1984), pp. 25-33.

[5]Franz Kafka's short story, "Der Jäger Gracchus," comes to mind: "Ich bin hier, mehr weiss ich nicht, mehr kann ich nicht tun. Mein Kahn ist ohne Steuer, er fährt mit dem Wind, der in den untersten Regionen des Todes bläst," Heiteres und Ernstes, eds. James Hepworth and Heinz Rahde (New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 188.

[6]The internal presence of God continues to be a major theme within contemporary thought, largely because it solves the knotty problem of empirical verification. Note the comments by David Mason, "Selfhood, Transcendence, and the Experience of God," pp. 297-299, 308-311; "Can We Speculate on How God Acts?" p. 31; Schubert Ogden, The Reality of God and Other Essays, pp. 56-70, 174-182.

B. Rudolf Bultmann's Distinction Between Kerygma and Myth

A review of Bultmann's distinction between kerygma and myth will help to clarify the issues surrounding the debate about God's immanence. Bultmann has claimed that a demythologization of the New Testament is necessary because of Christians' assumption of a secular world-view. Believers are compelled to reinterpret the biblical accounts because they have been trained to look at the world through the eyes of natural scientists, i.e. from a viewpoint that is closed to extraterrestrial realities.[7]

Bultmann maintains that the kerygmatic truth of God's omnipotence can be discovered by moving beyond the fanciful descriptions of angels and miracles to a recognition of the fact that the purpose of these stories is to help believers gain a better understanding of themselves and their relation to God. A demythologization of the Bible results in an existential interpretation of the history of Israel and the life of Jesus.[8]

Bultmann acknowledges the dangers of translating the gospel into a contemporary form. The elimination of miracle stories by nineteenth-century liberals produced a one-dimensional portrait of Jesus as the great ethical example.

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[7]Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," p. 7; see also "Bultmann Replies to His Critics," ibid., pp. 196-199.

[8]Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," pp. 10-11.

Christians at other times have allegorized, spiritualized, and used typology to make the Canon relevant. Bultmann believes that the central meaning of Christianity can be preserved through an existential interpretation of the New Testament. Liberal theologians in particular have failed to recognize the saving efficacy of Jesus' death on the cross. This latter concern can be safeguarded by viewing the crucifixion as a "decisive act of God in Christ."[9]

Bultmann is suggesting that it is intelligible to speak of the salvific activities of divinity, but that this enactment has to be defined in such a fashion that the "closed weft of history," as he terms the modern view of nature, is left intact.[10] The separation of historically valid narratives from those that assume the interference of supernatural powers facilitates such a procedure. Claims about the preexistence, virgin birth, and resurrection of Christ exemplify the types of biblical myths that have to be reconstructed. The death of Jesus, on the other hand, denotes an historical fact that reaches beyond itself and becomes "an ever-present reality" for Christians. It can be referred to as an act of God, although its significance remains hidden within natural history and is revealed only to the eyes of faith. The continuum of finite cause and effect relationships, in other

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[9]Ibid., pp. 12-15, 27-42.

[10]Rudolf Bultmann, "Bultmann Replies to His Critics," p. 197, cross-reference pp. 196-202, 209-211.

words, is transcended for those people who encounter the reality of God in the crucifixion of Christ. For others, the life and death of Jesus epitomize the tragic history of a radical Jewish teacher.

C. Other Ways of Speaking about the Acts of God

Theologians who have reflected on Bultmann's program of demythologization have agreed that a theology of divine agency denotes an advance over the liberal reduction of Jesus to a moral paradigm. Bultmann's avowal of the divine apprehension of humanity, a Reformation leitmotif that was developed in reaction to the Medieval Catholic conviction that "humanity could reach up and touch God," is particularly apt in countering the narcissism and autonomous pretensions of present-day society. Bultmann is similar to other neo-orthodox thinkers in the sense that he has declared that true self-understanding comes from God's saving grace, not from a humanistic philosophy of self-actualization.[11]

What has concerned Bultmann's contemporaries, however, is his subjective internalization of the acts of God. There seems, in the end, to be little difference between his portrayal of the Christ event as an ever-present divine encounter and the emphasis on immediacy and decision-making by secular existentialists. George E. Wright believes that Bultmann has individualized biblical faith to such an extent

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[11]Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," pp. 22-33.

that the historical meaning of the gospel has been obscured. What needs to be emphasized, contra Bultmann, is the "objective work of God in history which points toward history's fulfillment."[12]

Karl Barth, in turn, has proclaimed that the cross and resurrection can not be subsumed under "a single, indivisible cosmic event" which opens up possibilities of authentic existence. The resurrection is not merely a "horizon which embraces all occurrence yesterday, to-day and to-morrow, here, there and everywhere." It represents an act of God in its own right, "a concrete, specific, once and for all, contingent fact of history."[13]

Wright and Barth acknowledge that some of the events that are recorded in the Scriptures cannot be labelled as historical in the strict sense of the word. Wright states that the factual value of all parts cannot be maintained equally because "the further the Bible leads backward to creation and forward to the eschaton," the more the biblical writers have to create symbols and pictures in order to describe what they know to be true.[14]

Meanwhile, Barth has used the terms "saga," "legend,"

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[12]G. E. Wright, God Who Acts (London: SCM Press, 1952), p. 121.

[13]Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, IV/1:298; cross-reference Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," p. 39.

[14]G. E. Wright, God Who Acts, pp. 127-128.

and "pre-history" to define the genre of the resurrection stories, while maintaining that these accounts represent an "objective event which underlies the development" of faith in the disciples.[15] Both of these scholars are in sympathy with Bultmann's historical-critical method and concur that a modern world-view presents theologians with the problem of making divine immanence intelligible.

They nonetheless have insisted that the definition of divine agency be broadened to include stories that stand on the edge of historicity. Following Bultmann's lead, Gerhard von Rad has referred to the Exodus experience as Israel's interpretation of her own history, thereby relativizing its significance for the Christian church.[16] In opposition to this view, Wright has vouched for the universal meaning of these accounts. The liberation of Jews from Egypt (Exodus 14-15) does not only signify salvation for them but for all people, a redemption that continues <u>through</u> Hebrew history to the events of the first century.[17] Bultmann's emphasis on the single "act of God in Christ" has to be set within a longer process of salvation, a narrative that extends back to

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[15]Karl Barth, <u>Church Dogmatics</u>, IV/1:336.

[16]Von Rad speaks of the Exodus event as a typological "prefiguration of Christ," <u>Old Testament Theology</u>, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962, 1965), II:357-387; I:105-128. For a critique of his method, see Walther Eichrodt, <u>Theology of the Old Testament</u>, trans. J. A. Baker, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961, 1967), I:512-520.

[17]G. E. Wright, <u>God Who Acts</u>, pp. 50-58.

God's covenant with Israel.

Karl Barth also contends that Bultmann's accent on the existential present diminishes the eschatological reality of the Christian faith.[18] Bultmann is correct in speaking about the possibilities of new life in Christ. To believe, however, in the resurrection of Jesus as a distinct event is to be less doubtful about the fact of God's gracious verdict and the assurance of the resurrection of the body. The three days between the cross and resurrection symbolize for Barth the difference between the internal efficacy of grace and God's victory over death. These events do not only have to do with changes in attitude but undergird the whole Christian tradition. God's triumph over the principalities and powers ensures the embodiment of divinity in the social fabric of the church's historical existence.[19]

At the same time, the Christian conviction that life will be consummated at the end of history relativizes the completion of God's purposes by placing an historical distance between present realities and the anticipated future.[20] Belief in the Parousia extends the salvation process to the final destiny of the universe, reinforcing an eschatological

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[18]Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/2:437-511, 587-640; IV/1:283-357 (he refers specifically to Bultmann in III/2: 443-451, IV/1:285-287). For Bultmann's view of eschatology, see "New Testament and Mythology," pp. 19-22.

[19]Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, IV/1:303-333.

[20]Ibid., III/2:485-511.

understanding of Christianity. Bultmann's single "act of God in Christ" has in this way been stretched by Wright and Barth to include the Israelite tradition, the three days between the crucifixion and the resurrection, the forty days of Jesus' appearances, and the three thousand years "and counting" of the world's history.

D. The Continuing Dilemma of a Natural-World View

The task of this dissertation is not to judge the success of Barth, Bultmann, and Wright in situating divine immanence. Several thinkers have already undertaken that assignment.[21] These Protestant theologians have nevertheless placed their fingers on a question that has come to dominate twentieth-century theology: How is God's agency to be conceived? Some process thinkers have insisted on the virtual immanence of God, going so far as to compare, if not equate the world with God's body.[22] Other theologians, more accustomed to the Reformed school of theologia krisis or the Lutheran discipline of theologia crucis, have continued to

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[21]To note only one example, Schubert M. Ogden has proposed that Hartshorne's dipolar theism be used to complement the one-sided nature of Bultmann's existentialism, The Reality of God and Other Essays, pp. 170-172.

[22]See Charles Hartshorne, The Divine Relativity; John B. Cobb, Jr., A Christian Natural Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965); God and the World (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969); Grace Jantzen, God's World, God's Body; and Thomas Tracy, God, Action, and Embodiment.

distinguish more sharply between God and the natural world.[23] According to the latter, finitude and the reality of sin disclose a God who stands at some distance from humanity. The deity is immanent in a modified manner.

Irrespective of which theology is most compatible with one's personal conception of deity, what all these thinkers have been attempting to do is to make the relation of God to the world intelligible. Langdon Gilkey has summed up the matter in a seminal 1961 article on the subject: "What we desperately need is a theological ontology which will put intelligible and credible meanings into our analogical categories of divine deeds," a theology, moreover, that will avoid the liberal trap of reducing God to a subjective feeling while forgoing neo-orthodoxy's penchant for a literal recital of the acts of God.[24] Bultmann's existentialism falls into the first category while Wright's endeavour to remain true to the biblical narratives leads back to the problem of making the accounts comprehensible.

The solution Gilkey has proposed is that theologians take more care in their use of univocal, equivocal, and ana-

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[23]James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:61; Langdon Gilkey, A Review of A Christian Natural Theology by John B. Cobb, Jr., Theology Today 22/4 (1966): 530-545; Douglas Hall, Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1989), p. 106n.51.

[24]Langdon Gilkey, "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language," Journal of Religion 41/3 (1961), p. 203.

logical language.[25] Neo-orthodoxy's implicit equation of the acts of God and historical events has resulted in univocity. These scholars have failed to situate their descriptions within the framework of natural cause and effect relationships. Restricting God to a sense of piety has nevertheless led to the opposite problem of equivocation. The identification of deity with a particular aspect of human consciousness makes it hard to differentiate between these two realities.

Gilkey maintains that an analogical conception of God is required, a description which keeps the comparison of God to human experiences and natural processes as a similarity-in-difference. To cite the definition of analogy that classical theists have used, the likeness of God can be expressed after the dissimilarities have been explored. The order of the relationship proceeds from a negative to a positive articulation of the divine modes of activity.[26]

Relating this discussion to the contemporary scene, the theological agenda for the next century has to do with steering a course between the liberal follies of the nineteenth century and neo-orthodoxy's overreaction in the twentieth, a journey to which the second generation of "reformation liber-

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[25]Ibid., pp. 196, 203.

[26]Note the discussion by David Tracy, The Analogical Imagination, pp. 405-445; James F. Anderson, The Bond of Being (Missouri: B. Herder Book Co., 1949), p. 19; and David Burrell, Analogy and Philosophical Language (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 9-33, 215-267.

als"[27] has been committed. The question that still needs to be asked is whether Kaufman had negotiated this road successfully.

E. McLain's Recommendation of an Agent-Act Model of Transcendence

A helpful way of introducing Kaufman's thoughts on the subject is to consider Michael McLain's proposal of an agent-act model of transcendence. While concurring with Kaufman that the human being is a suitable candidate for "imaging" (Hall) God, McLain submits that its agential features represent a more appropriate model for understanding divinity than its subjective attributes.[28] Character is defined by the

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[27]The word "reformation liberal" refers to twentieth-century Protestant theologians who have been influenced by Reformation sources, a group that for the purpose of this discussion includes Paul Tillich, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Rudolf Bultmann, H. Richard and Reinhold Niebuhr, as well as the "second generation" believers who have followed in their footsteps (Sallie McFague, James Gustafson, Douglas Hall, Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, Langdon Gilkey, Gordon Kaufman, J. Philip Wogaman, Paul Ramsey, John Yoder, etc.).

A way of broadening this category would be to refer to scholars who have emphasized the transcendent and immanent attributes of God as "dialectical theologians," a group that would include such eminent Catholic thinkers as Karl Rahner, David Tracy, Rosemary Ruether, Hans Küng, Gregory Baum, David Burrell, Bernard Lonergan, and Charles Davis. These writers have been more heavily influenced by Thomism (cross-reference Tracy's description of the sources of Christian theology as the Holy Scriptures and common human experience, Blessed Rage for Order, pp. 32-63).

[28]Michael McLain, "On Theological Models," pp. 167-173, 184-186. For a more complete discussion, see his Ph.D. dissertation, "The Meaning of Transcendence: A Theological Inquiry in the Context of Philosophical Analysis" (Vanderbilt University, 1968), pp. 17-26, 171-210. Robert King has used a similar model but come to slightly different conclusions, "The Concept of Personal Agency as a Theological Model"

unity of a person's intentions and actions, and so deity can be conceived in analogous fashion to a person who sets goals for herself and works toward the realization of these objectives. God has created the world for a reason and is working to achieve deity's purposes in history.

Two images of transcendence can be deduced from this model of personal agency. The first is that of a deity who stands far beyond the grasp of humanity, not, however, as a veiled reality (Exodus 33:17-23), but as a self-moved Mover who is infinitely more free to act than human beings. The aseity of God is derived in this instance from an individual's freedom to initiate activity. The fact that people determine the direction of their own lives means that, by extension, God is to be conceived as an unconditionally free Agent.[29]

This analogy of proportion avoids the theological dualism into which Kaufman's personal model tends to lapse. A scale of relation permits a description of the difference between finitude and unrestricted autonomy in terms of degree rather than ontological break. God can be referred to as the Ground of existence or, in the language of classical theism,

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(Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1965), published in revised form as The Meaning of God.

[29]Michael McLain, "The Meaning of Transcendence," pp. 173-185. He has gleaned this analogy of proportion from Austin Farrer, Finite and Infinite, 2nd ed. (London: A. & C. Black, 1943); Faith and Speculation (London: A. & C. Black, 1967).

as pure Actuality whose substantiality enables people to realize their potential. Awareness of one's absolute dependence effects a beatific vision.

The second image of transcendence that emerges from this agent-act model calls attention to the discrepancy between a person's pursuit and achievement of goals. Transcendence in this case has to do with the objectives that an agent posits rather than with his or her ability to act. There is a sense in which ideals remain in the future, luring people to continue their quest while representing an almost unattainable standard on the basis of which past exploits are judged. The acceptance of failure gives way to new possibilities.[30]

Belief in a consummation of history facilitates a correlation of this teleological way of looking at the world and the elusive presence of God. The very idea that goodness is not exhausted by the number of gracious deeds enacted indicates the transcendent nature of the divine imperative and reveals the spiritual source of humanity's concern for the universe. Purged of its opiate effects, the utopian vision of a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1) spurs Christians into action.

Of the two paradigms that have been outlined, McLain finds the first one more convincing, partly because of the second model's tendency toward subjectivity once it has been

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[30]Robert King favours this intentional model because of its ability to "give direction and meaning to our action," The Meaning of God, p. 157, cross-reference pp. 151-161.

removed from a discussion of enactment and partly because of Kaufman's strictures against an idealistic approach. The first problem with a goal-oriented analogy has to do with its focus upon the ability of human beings to postulate an endless variety of objectives. This means that the dilemma of interiority has not been overcome. The onus is still on the individual to disclose the goals that he or she has chosen.

McLain claims that the placement of this intentional analogy within the context of an agent's actions alleviates this difficulty. The emphasis has now shifted from the subjective predication of ideals to the enactment of goals that have been determined by the context in which a person lives. People have the freedom to choose a particular course of action, but they have no choice in "deciding to decide," as McLain has phrased the matter.[31]

This behavioural feature of the human personality represents a non-subjective anthropological image that can be used to describe divinity. The fact that action is a necessity allows theologians to move from speculations about the divine will to investigations of God's "external" relationship to the world, a shift that in more traditional terms has been

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[31]Michael McLain, "On Theological Models," pp. 170-172; cross-reference "The Meaning of Transcendence," p. 192. The current emphasis on the necessity of action denotes a shift from epistemology ("I think, therefore I am") to pragmatism ("I do, therefore I am") and phenomenology ("I exist, therefore I am").

referred to as a theology of becoming.[32]

The second disadvantage of an intentional model has to do with the temporality of its transcendence, an insight that McLain has gleaned from Kaufman.[33] Ideals denote conceptual abstractions that have been formulated on the basis of what is feasible, despite the fact that they are, by definition, unattainable. It is precisely the conviction that perfection is possible that produces results.[34]

The pragmatic role that ideals play in society represents a legitimate use of normative paradigms. Some thinkers consider this to be their primary function.[35] The association of God with standards of excellence is nevertheless susceptible to an equation of deity and ethical principles. If, for example, federalism were considered a goal toward

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[32]See, for example, Douglas J. Hall, Imaging God, pp. 88-112; Gregory Baum, Man Becoming: God in Secular Language (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970); Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics II/1:257-321; Robert King, The Meaning of God, pp. 41-42. A distinction between the monarchial and economic relations of the Godhead is another way of speaking about the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of divinity, Jaroslav Pelikan, The Christian Tradition, I:176-177.

[33]Michael McLain, "On Theological Models," pp. 168-169; see Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 72-81.

[34]Wallace Stevens has noted the aesthetic implications of this link between imagination and reality: "The imagination loses vitality as it ceases to adhere to what is real. When it adheres to the unreal, while its first effect may be extraordinary, that effect is the maximum effect that it will ever have," The Necessary Angel (New York: Vintage Books, 1951), p. 6.

[35]See Nicholas Rescher, Conceptual Idealism (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973); The Primacy of Practice (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973).

which all citizens should strive, claiming divine sanction for such a state of political unity might produce the desired conformity. Yet this religious conviction would represent an ideological legitimation of a political strategy. Divine transcendence would have been exchanged in this instance for a domesticated deity that had been placed into the service of a "higher ideal."

McLain acknowledges that this same argument can be used to refute his conception of deity as a free Agent.[36] To imagine God as unconditional autonomy, unhindered in movement and direction, falls short of a transcendental approach because it represents a (mere) idealization of human freedom. A model that does not utilize a scale of relation would seem to be required.

McLain nevertheless insists that his agent-act analogy remains valid as long as God is envisioned as "a reality with whom we have to do" rather than as an unadorned abstraction of humanity.[37] People do not simply project their ideas of freedom, teleology, and agency onto the world but experience life as a limited reality. Existence is bounded on all sides by the tangibility of nature, the corporeality of human

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[36]Michael McLain, "The Meaning of Transcendence," pp. 186-210.

[37]Michael McLain, "On Theological Models," pp. 178-180. David Burrell has argued for the continued use of an analogy of proportion, but has suggested that this model gains potency through its link to metaphorical images and "normal human exchange," Analogy and Philosophical Language, pp. 260-263.

beings, the conflict of wills that is a concomitant part of this co-existence, and the finitude of vitality itself. God is to be conceived analogously as the ultimate Limit beyond which people cannot go, a boundary that in addition to goading them into action effects a profound awareness of their diminutive significance and circumscribed range of possibilities.[38]

McLain concludes his discussion with the suggestion that Kaufman's description of human beings as elusive subjects be revised to take account of their experiences of others as external limits.[39] Reference can still be made to people's internal desires, hidden motives, veiled intentions, and capacity for self-transcendence. These expressions portray human beings in reflective repose. Allusions to their essen-

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[38]Iris Murdoch is especially helpful in clarifying this point. She draws a parallel between realism and transcendence because she wants to get away from the empty freedom that existentialists have granted the isolated self. Using a work of art to make her point, she says that its enduring qualities indicate its "inaccessibility" from possession and destruction, The Sovereignty of Good (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1970), p. 59.

Having made this correlation, Murdoch echoes McLain's paradoxical insight into "the necessity of freedom" when she says that "by the time the moment of choice has arrived the quality of attention has probably determined the nature of the act," p. 67. Freedom has more to do with acting in accordance with the conceptual and moral framework that has shaped one's identity than with choosing, as existentialists would have us believe, from an endless variety of "goods" at one's disposal, note her discussion, p. 8. Both McLain and Murdoch are interested in a realistic notion of freedom and transcendence.

[39]Michael McLain, "The Meaning of Transcendence," pp. 208-210.

tial mysteriousness nevertheless fail to underscore the full impact of people on each other, the effects of which are anything but nebulous when experienced as coercive force. When it comes to the physical confinement, material restrictions, and compelling control that humans exercise in relation to their own species, these encounters have to be described in the strongest substantive language. The phrase "external limit" expresses in a palpable manner the fundamental otherness of human beings, an actuality that can be transposed into an understanding of deity as dynamic power.

At the same time, McLain's modified affirmation of a personal analogy means that God connotes vitality with a human face. A blank check cannot be written to a superhuman agent (Nietzsche's Uebermensch) because arbitrary and terrifying forces have their frontiers, limits that admittedly are reached at great expense and with tremendous losses of life but limits nonetheless. Inherent political restrictions apply to one's conception of divinity, constraints that are intended to clarify the manner in which the divine presence transforms, as well as is transformed by, the human spirit and natural processes.

F. A Revision of Kaufman's Epistemological Presuppositions

Kaufman takes account of McLain's criticisms by refining his theology of revelation in God the Problem. He begins his reappraisal with the statement that Bultmann's program of demythologization has failed to come to grips with the cos-

mological dualism underlying biblical mythology.[40] To speak, as Bultmann has done, about the divine incarnation of Christ is to view the world in a bifurcated manner and to regard God as a Reality from beyond history. The question that has to be asked--one which death-of-God theologians and secular existentialists have asked--is why this dualism cannot be given up without remainder. Why cannot perceptions of God be collapsed into assertions about humanity, society, and nature, as various nineteenth-century sociologists and psychologists (Durkheim, Feuerbach, Marx, Freud) have proposed?

Notwithstanding the possibility of a positive answer to this rhetorical question, Kaufman's remarks are intended as a qualification of his own thought. He had referred to divine revelation in his Systematic Theology as "a movement from outside the bounds of human history into man's world,"[41] indicating his own susceptibility to a cosmological duality. This aspect of his theology had to be reformulated to take account of the problem that God represented to so many people in the modern age.

Kaufman claims that a shift from finitude to the dialectic of experience and limit represents a solution to this dilemma.[42] He had initially regarded human beings' experi-

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[40]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 42-44.

[41]Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, p. 37.

[42]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, p. 52.

ence of life as a boundary situation as the most adequate symbol for the transcendence of deity. Nothing except finitude and the krisis of sin itself could be identified with God because all positive correlations, with their penchant for equating divinity and a sense of piety, verged on idolatry.[43] Belief in God could be upheld as long as the distinction between faith and religious experience was retained, a stance that Barth and Bonhoeffer had recommended with their remarks about "the revelation of God as the abolition of religion" and "religionless Christianity."[44]

Two problems nevertheless surface as a result of this accentuation of God as Ultimate Limit. First, the metaphor of a divine X, divorced from all affirmative expressions, tends to be rather vacuous and void of content. Via negativa routes to God are formulated at the expense of feelings of security and comfort, leaving parishioners with the urge to redecorate the white sterile walls that have been left bare

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[43]Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 105-116.

[44]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, p. 215; Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, I/2:280-361; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 121. Kaufman goes so far as to say that the "view that man has direct access in his own experience and knowledge to ultimate reality or God" represents a greater threat to faith than the modern "positivistic skepticism about metaphysics," op. cit., p. 152. This statement reveals the essential agnosticism of his position, cross-reference pp. 107, 222, 246-249. There are similarities between this view and Lindbeck's "performative-propositional" theory of truth, The Nature of Doctrine, pp. 64-67, 106, as well as David Burrell's interpretation of Aquinas' theology as "agnostic," Analogy and Philosophical Language, p. 197.

by iconoclastic movements. Positive metaphysical assertions cannot be avoided because Christians are inclined to indulge the emptiness and starkness of their lives.[45]

The remedy offered by neo-orthodox theologians has been to speak about the disclosure of the Godself in the incarnation of Christ. Kaufman claims that the use of such mythological language is no longer acceptable. Believers cannot escape the dilemma of reference by pointing to the other side of finitude and justifying their perception of the noumenal God that they find there on the minimal grounds that the "Bible tells me so." Scriptural images have themselves been formulated on the basis of religious experiences. It is thus feasible to downplay a theology of revelation by transposing statements about the miraculous presence of God into phenomenological language that people in the twentieth century can understand. Concepts of deity can be constructed that lessen the tension between faith and doubt, as well as make sense to people who do not have any specifically theological beliefs.[46]

Kaufman proposes that the experiential component of knowledge be given more weight than has been granted in his systematic theology, but that these "encounters" with God, as he prefers to characterize religious experiences, serve as

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[45]In response to this need, Garrett Green has affirmed the "positivity" of theology, Imagining God, pp. 78-80.

[46]Note Kaufman's remarks, God the Problem, pp. 257-270. This point will be clarified in the next chapter.

qualifiers instead of substantive definitions of divine reality.[47] If nature is experienced as an incontestable force, God may be described as a power that restricts life in a material sense. The organic nature of existence, in turn, leads to an understanding of divinity as a vital entity. Circumstantial evidence gathered from this side of the essence/existence dichotomy is as important as an analogy's place within the biblical record. Believers are to use their experiences to imagine what God is like.

G. The Use of Analogies, Models, and Concepts in Theology

One of the dilemmas that inevitably arises when phenomenology is taken as more and scripture and tradition are taken as less definitive pertains to the standards that are employed in designating an analogy as appropriate. If the Bible and church "fathers" no longer suffice, how are believers supposed to choose their concepts of divinity? In specific terms, are there any criteria that can be invoked to assess the idea of God as a normative, personal, organic, and material Limit?

The first two chapters have noted Kaufman's use of internal coherence and pragmatism in his evaluation of conceptual schemes. The standard of coherence demands that an image of God be related to other doctrines as well as to scientific conclusions about humanity. The criterion of

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[47]Ibid., p. 64, see also pp. 50-52.

pragmatism inveighs against all beliefs that take humanity for granted. Although divinity can be conceived as a natural force, this image is fraught with amoral, impersonal, and dehumanizing allusions. The idea of nature has to be analysed carefully if it is going to be used to symbolize God.

Kaufman expands upon these two criteria of truth in God the Problem. He begins by reiterating what he has said in his Systematic Theology, namely that mythological statements have to be translated into analogical ones.[48] The collapse of a dualistic cosmology necessitates the employment of new images that resonate with people's experiences of life.

What Kaufman did not fully realize, however, was that the value of an analogy increases as it is taken out of its biblical setting. Metaphors and myths that were suitable in the historical context of ancient Palestine become suspect when applied in a philosophical sense to God and weighed down with a universal significance. A straightforward exchange of myths and analogies is not possible. A whole new discourse has to be constructed, one that can match the "staying power" (McFague) that myths have enjoyed in the history of Christianity while avoiding their susceptibility to univocity.[49]

Without proposing a complete answer to this dilemma,

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[48]Ibid., p. 70; cross-reference Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 117-133, 266-287, 389-410, 455-474.

[49]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 82-88. Note Sallie McFague's discussion, Metaphorical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp. 1-29, 103-144.

Kaufman makes the preliminary observation that analogies and models offer some respite from the problem of theological reference. Personal images of divinity enjoy a wide appeal because they can be transferred from the heart of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures to a philosophical analysis of personality, identity, and behaviour. The usefulness of these analogies lies in their ability to establish a link between specific metaphors ("God stretched out his hand") and abstract references (God as Being). They carry the freight of meaning from symbols to conceptual frameworks.

Models, in turn, function as qualifiers of ambiguous analogies. Even though Gordon Kaufman, Robert King, and Michael McLain have used the same analogy, they have come to different theological conclusions about its status. This diversity is due to the numerous ways in which a personal analogy can be employed. Kaufman has used the elusive aspect of the human subject to define transcendence. King and McLain, on the other hand, have emphasized the teleological and agential features of the human being. Models can be defined as extended analogies that control symbols by pointing them in a certain direction and setting limits to their applicability. They determine the metaphorical and conceptual uses of an analogy by situating it within a systematic pattern or structure.[50]

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[50]Cross-reference the discussion of these terms by Robert Scharlemann, "Theological Models and Their Construction," Journal of Religion 53/1 (1973):65-82; David Burrell,

Kaufman expands his discussion of these categories by speaking about divinity as an "imaginative construct," "ordering principle," and "map."[51] Theological attribution is particularly difficult because the word "God" does not function in the same manner as ordinary concepts. Divinity serves as an overall framework for understanding life rather than as an ostensive reference to a part of the world.[52] There is, by implication, no end in sight to the different meanings that can be assigned to deity. The term "God" is an imaginative construct that has been fashioned from people's experiences.

The slippery slide toward relativism is nevertheless averted once scholars have realized that theological language moves in a certain direction, namely from the specific to the general and back again. For Kaufman, the linguistic journey begins with myth, moves into the domain of analogy and model, and ends with concepts. He likens theological ideas to a map, maintaining that they provide an overview of the situation in a way that analogies are unable to do. The abstract quality of concepts makes it possible to position a believer

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Analogy and Philosophical Language, pp. 252-263; and Garrett Green, Imagining God, pp. 70-80.

[51]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 86-88, 95-100.

[52]George Lindbeck has outlined the conceptual nature of theological language by distinguishing between first and second-order propositions, The Nature of Doctrine, pp. 63-69. Kaufman achieves the same result with his Kantian distinction between a real and an available God, God the Problem, pp. 82-86.

along a path, orient the person in relation to his or her surroundings, and equip the individual with just enough supplies to carry on with his or her life.[53]

Stated in terms amenable to the previous discussion, ideas of God regulate the flow of metaphors, analogies, and models. Concepts have the advantage of encompassing a wide area, providing the reader with a clear view of the road ahead. For Kaufman, the believer is best able to familiarize himself with the hilly land known as theology through an analysis of the concept of deity. The term "God" sets the parameters for theology through its prioritization of that which is of ultimate concern.[54]

H. The Performative Value of Theological Concepts

Having pointed out the imaginative nature of theology, Kaufman goes on to outline the role that creative ideas have played in the history of Christianity.[55] The development of doctrine is an initial use to which concepts have been put.

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[53]"When making a journey through difficult and uncharted territories, one ought to travel light, taking along only essentials which will be needed for the journey," Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, p. 180. He goes on to suggest that the criterion of humanization, seen from the perspective of a Christian categorial scheme, represents the essence of faith, pp. 182-183, 184-191, 99-122. Cross-reference his discussion in God the Problem, pp. 96-100.

[54]Kaufman takes his cue from Ian Ramsey when he says that theology is "presided over" by the concept of God, An Essay on Theological Method, p. 8; cross-reference Ramsey's remarks, Religious Language (London: SCM Press, 1957), p. 59.

[55]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 95-106; see also An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 1-17.

The terms perichoresis and homoousios were coined near the beginning of the Christian era in order to describe in as exact a manner as possible the internal relations of the Godhead as well as the Son's identity with the Father.

Subsequent ecumenical councils improved upon these expressions so that controversies could be decided and heresies overcome. To confess that Jesus was "true God and true man, . . . acknowledged in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation"[56] was to steer a faithful course between the Arian reference to Jesus as a creature and the undue emphasis on the divinity of Christ by the Monophysites. Creeds served as "regulative principles" for the Christian church, attempting to remain true to the spirit of the Word of God while strengthening an ecclesiological unity that seemed forever on the brink of division.[57]

Kaufman followed this classical line of reasoning in his Systematic Theology, outlining the Christian faith according to the traditional themes of epistemology, theology, anthro-

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[56]Jaroslav Pelikan, The Christian Tradition, I:263-264 (part of the Chalcedon creed [451 CE]).

[57]George Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, pp. 73-90. It is somewhat misleading to refer to creeds as "regulative principles" because they were originally intended to represent substantive definitions of God, Christ, etc. What is at stake, however, is not only the reality to which these creeds refer (both Lindbeck and Kaufman are agnostic in regard to this point, ibid., pp. 62-69, 105-106; Kaufman, God the Problem, p. 98), but their relevance. Lindbeck continues to engage the traditional doctrines, while Kaufman is committed to replacing these creedal statements with a categorial scheme, see chapter five.

pology, soteriology, and ecclesiology. Other theologians have also insisted on the relevance of creeds and confessions. Jaroslav Pelikan and George Lindbeck have maintained that the authenticity of faith is determined by the evolution of church doctrine, taken as a whole. New theological statements have to be evaluated in terms of their logical development of dogmas that have been accepted by the church since its founding.[58]

There is a breadth of vision and ecumenical spirit that informs the work of these scholars. Their serious consideration of the "whole" of the Christian tradition enables them to place seemingly innovative religious movements into their proper theological context. To consider the case of Lindbeck alone, he shows how the doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary can be viewed as a logical extension of the Western church's accent on original sin.[59] Given the historical link between cultural mores and theological beliefs, Lindbeck allows for the possibility of this doctrine being reversed. Just as "the immortality of the soul" made more sense to people living in the Middle Ages, so too, can the sinlessness of Mary be seen in a different light once the West's tendency to equate sin and finitude has been re-evaluated.

Lindbeck recognizes the importance of assessing theo-

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[58]Jaroslav Pelikan, The Christian Tradition, I:8-10; George Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, pp. 91-108.

[59]George Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, pp. 96-98.

logical themes on the basis of their consistency or internal logic. He defines "intratextuality" as an analysis of a text on its own terms, rather than from the perspective of an externally imposed authority or framework. This method can be favourably compared to Kaufman's criterion of internal coherence. Both of these theologians are interested in the theoretical connections between an array of Christian beliefs.[60]

Kaufman nevertheless has serious reservations about a doctrinal approach to the study of Christianity.[61] The preoccupation of Lindbeck and Pelikan with the contribution that theological movements can make to the development of doctrine makes it difficult for them to recognize the critical aspects of countervailing forces. Groups that have been branded as heretical in the first three-quarters of the church's history, as sectarian in the last four hundred years, and as subversive in the twentieth century do not represent mere signposts beyond which believers are not to venture. These movements have been founded on the premise that there is a fundamental problem with the mainstream interpretation of the

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[60]Ibid., pp. 113-124; Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 99-122.

[61]The following analysis is based on statements Kaufman has made in his reviews of The Nature of Doctrine, by George Lindbeck, Theology Today 42/2 (1985):240-241; "Is There Any Way from Athens to Jerusalem?" A Review of Foundations of Christian Faith, by Karl Rahner, Journal of Religion 59/3 (1979):340-346; and "Conceptualizing Diversity Theologically," A Review of The Analogical Imagination, by David Tracy, Journal of Religion 62/4 (1982):392-401.

gospel itself.[62]

Given this revisionist understanding of the history of Christianity, it can be said that the infallibility of the Pope and the immaculate conception of Mary do not constitute the most important theological agenda for Christians in the dying moments of the twentieth century. Greater hope rests with the radical movements within the church, for it is here that revitalization is occurring in a manner that is less obvious in the latest doctrinal developments.[63]

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[62]It should be said in fairness to Pelikan that he has dealt sympathetically with movements that represent a challenge to the idea of theological and/or ecclesiological continuity, The Christian Tradition, IV:304-385.

The case of Lindbeck is more complicated. On the one hand, he has made some deprecating remarks about the Radical Reformation, "Barth and Textuality," Theology Today 43/3 (1986), p. 364. On the other hand, he has referred to the church as a "diaspora" community, which presently finds itself in a similar situation to that of early Christian believers, The Nature of Doctrine, p. 78; see also "The Sectarian Future of the Church," in The God Experience, ed. Joseph Whelan (New York: Newman Press, 1971), pp. 226-243. One can only surmise that there is an unresolved tension between Lindbeck's experiential recognition of the waning influence of Christianity and his theological commitment to doctrinal ecumenism.

[63]It should be said at the outset that Kaufman is more interested in establishing a theoretical connection between critique and revitalization than in providing a sociological structure that can reflect this dialectical movement. Other scholars have developed a "disestablished" ecclesiology on the basis of this principle of discontinuity. See John H. Yoder, The Priestly Kingdom (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); Stanley Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); Douglas J. Hall, Has the Church a Future? (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980); and Gregory Baum, "The New Ecclesiology" Commonweal 91/5 (October 31, 1969):123-128; Theology and Society. The relation between Kaufman and these thinkers will be considered in the next chapter.

Without developing a full-blown ecclesiology by which these minority movements can be taken into account (see footnote 63), Kaufman states that the second difficulty with a doctrinal approach has to do with its concentration on the intramural aspects of faith. Theologians are tempted to regard their subject matter as a logical arrangement of esoteric ideas, for this gives them the opportunity to take up the never-ending task of refining and revising doctrines in the light of newly discovered principles and patterns.

This advantage, however, is gained at the expense of the integral link between belief-systems, ritualistic practices, and social structures.[64] A change in official theological polity signals the implicit legitimation of a particular cultural or political arrangement. It is therefore necessary to go beyond an intratextual evaluation of doctrines. Theological beliefs have to be assessed in terms of their social, cultural, and political impact.[65]

Given this inextricable connection between ideas and reality, Kaufman proposes pragmatism as a solution to the

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[64]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, p. 97.

[65]Scholars have described the difference between these two approaches in various ways. Patrick Sherry has distinguished between the methods of "relativism/conventionalism" and "pragmatism/empiricism," "Is Religion a 'Form of Life'?" p. 159. Gregory Baum has differentiated between a "logic of maintenance" and a "logic of mission," Compassion and Solidarity, pp. 41-49. And Paul Ricoeur has elaborated upon the differences between a "hermeneutics of understanding" and a "hermeneutics of suspicion," Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, pp. 63-100.

problem of theological reference. Marx has shown how material conditions give rise to imaginative projections; McLain has demonstrated the need to act upon these constructive ideals. Kaufman submits that the adoption of life-policies that enhance the quality of existence represents the heart of the Christian message. God's interest in the banality, triviality, and plain ordinariness of everyday life provides people with the necessary resources to transform the world into a home and nature into a reality that can be "lived in."[66]

Christianity, in short, has to do with the assumption of moral, social, and political stances in relation to the circumstances of life. Believers indicate the superiority of practice over theory and action over speculation when they commit themselves to organizations such as the church, service groups, cooperatives, businesses, unions, and the political process. The very reality of God, according to Kaufman, is revealed by such endeavours. Deity is to be identified with those activities that lead to a liberation of creation, making it possible to conceive of divinity "as living and active at every point in reality." This phrase is meant to be interpreted in terms of the active engagement of people themselves, rather than as an immediate reference to

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[66]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 100-115, 242-256; An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 33-34. Cross-reference Gregory Baum's discussion of idealism and materialism, Religion and Alienation, pp. 21-39.

divinity. God is to be found at the place where noble thoughts intersect with gracious deeds.[67]

Having made utilitarianism a priority in his theology, Kaufman qualifies the voluntaristic implications of his position by speaking about the determining factors of prevenient grace.[68] Given a situation in which Christianity gives its overwhelming support to a political regime, citizens alienated by the government's policies are liable to reject the meaningfulness of religion. Secular sociologists, on the other hand, continue to wrestle with the cultural effects of transcendent ideals, even though they live in a predominantly nominalist culture and have largely rejected the meaning of religion for themselves. It appears to them (e.g. Weber, Durkheim) that utopias and ideologies are necessary for the continuation of civilizations. These examples lend credence to the idea that belief and unbelief are related to the milieu in which people are raised.

Turning explicitly to the issue of religious conversion itself, Kaufman states that a person's journey to faith has more to do with the impingement of one world-view on another than with conscious decision-making processes. It was only as Islam threatened to sweep over Europe more than one

[67]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, p. 113; see pp. 129, 158-159 for his reasons for rejecting God's direct impingement on the world. For a very different view of the matter, see Schubert Ogden, The Reality of God and Other Essays, pp. 176-182.

[68]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 242-250.

thousand years ago that its significance was acknowledged. Christianity's tendency to view the denigration of Judaism as necessary for its own survival also reveals the profound insecurity and shallowness of its faith. These illustrations show that changes in world religions have more to do with internal and external factors than with the direct proselytizing efforts of religious groups. A shrinking world and shifting populations result in the reassessment of religions.[69]

Finally, although there are many pragmatic criteria that can be used to make the world a liveable place, Kaufman submits that Jesus embodies the necessary characteristics for transforming humanity's propensity for evil into good.[70] What was different about the Jew who lived in Galilee during the time of the Roman occupation was his defence of justice and human rights on the basis of acts of self-sacrifice. A kingdom or democracy or dignified communities can be gained if people are willing to forgo the consummate desires of the self in favour of the needs of the many. Jesus' willingness to die for the very people who killed him reveals a graciousness that breaks the type of egocentrism that places family and country ahead of others. His inclusion of the enemy inside the boundaries of acceptance has caused nations to

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[69]For a somewhat different analysis of this point, see Elmer Thiessen, "Proselytizing Without Intolerance," Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses 14/3 (1985):333-345.

[70]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 180-200, 252-256.

take another look at their nationalism. His love for people at the periphery of notoriety effects a re-evaluation by the rich of their stature.

Kaufman modifies this position when he says that love-of-self and hope-for-reward represent integral aspects of the gospel message.[71] Demonstrations against oppression are based on the premise that fundamental rights and privileges have been violated. An "enlightened form of self-interest" stands as the cornerstone of these protests.[72] At the same time, civil disobedience can only be effective if the welfare of those most vehemently opposed to such actions are taken into consideration. The bankruptcy of a company following a strike benefits neither the owners nor the workers. A violent conflict without the highest of justifiable reasons is merely the showcase for a glaring exhibition of evil.

The journey to peace and contentment is therefore not as simple as choosing between the needs of the self and the needs of others. Required are dreams that spur people on to action, yet give no guarantee of the outcome. According to biblical accounts, the first two thousand years of "salvation history" entailed the loss of land, the destruction of the temple, and the death of Jesus. The Christian tradition of

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[71]Ibid.; cross-reference Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 329-351.

[72]See chapter one of Reinhold Niebuhr's book, The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944).

theologia crucis, in turn, can be traced through the deaths of martyrs, self-effacing contributions of monks and nuns, and contemporary church communities that have a realistic understanding of their transformative role. These acts of oblation are not endured for the sake of suffering itself, but for the enhancement of life. Acceptance of forgiveness and commitment to self-sacrifice are the proper routes to hope and self-fulfilment.[73]

I. God as Embodied Humanity

Three features of Kaufman's theology of divine agency have been considered up to this point: (1) his shift from finitude to the dialectic of experience and limit, (2) his use of analogies, models, and concepts to speak about God, and (3) his accentuation of the practical import of theology. The issue that Michael McLain has raised has remained untouched, namely Kaufman's ability to reconcile a personal

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[73]There has been no clear cut resolution to the debate between eros and agape because both are required for a healthy disposition. The highest of aspirations cannot be reached without a great deal of sacrifice, yet people strive toward these goals because of the satisfaction that is a concomitant part of this process. The problem becomes infinitely more complex when human life is at stake. This is the principal reason for the enigmatic victory of Jesus' death. Fixation on his crucifixion allows people, paradoxically, to disengage themselves from the prison of their revengeful desires and impossible ideals. Note the varied discussion of this topic, Anders Nygren, Agape and Eros, trans. Philip S. Watson (London: S.P.C.K., 1957); Gene Outka, Agape: An Ethical Analysis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972); Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941, 1943); Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 47-63.

concept of God with ideas of human agency. McLain has wondered whether a reinterpretation of the human personality does not nullify the appropriateness of personal metaphors--or require the utilization of a bodily image to identify the reality of God.

This question has been partly answered by the above analysis. Kaufman's willingness to replace revelatory with phenomenological criteria opens the door to an infinite number of immanent analogies, including material, organic, and normative qualifiers. His insight into the regulating function of concepts also allows him to focus upon a few key paradigms. He has proposed that the correlation of deity and human activities avoids the problem of God's bodily presence. Natural and historical processes that lead to greater humanization are of God.

The time has come for a more direct approach to the matter of God's agency. While Kaufman has continued to defend a personal conception of God, he has modified this stance by using a teleological model to specify God's indirect involvement in the world. An analysis of these two arguments will round out the chapter, as well as prepare the reader for Kaufman's subsequent shift to a theology of construction.

1. The Continuing Relevance of a Personal Model

Kaufman begins his discussion of a personal analogy by saying that the idea of a human agent does not exclude the

subjective reality of a person.[74] Unlike animals, whose instinctual drives make behaviour predictable, humans can suspend and redirect their natural desires in order to achieve difficult ideals. Human acts continue to be subject to internal decision-making processes. It is necessary to take the elusive character of human beings seriously.

Given the philosophical soundness of this analysis,[75] Kaufman shows how a personal model safeguards the transcendence of God in a manner that a teleological analogy is unable to do.[76] The virtue of an intentional model rests in its account of the affinity of God. Its analogous use of people's projection of goals enables theologians to speak of the intrinsic bond between divinity and humanity. God is providentially caring for the earth in the same manner that believers are striving to attain their ideals (ambitions).

The pastoral mileage that can be gained from this purposeful analogy makes it difficult to pinpoint the otherness of divinity. In addition to speaking of the God of salvation, the biblical record refers to deity as a Reality from whom people should run and hide (Isaiah 2:10). Kaufman maintains that the ability of a personal model to take account of this mysterious and austere aspect of divinity denotes its

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[74]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. xiii-xviii.

[75]See Charles Taylor, The Explanation of Behaviour; Human Agency and Language.

[76]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 75-80.

significance. Believers experience other people as irreducible entities who infringe upon their private spaces and public aspirations. These encounters have to be described in the strongest terms as the clash of personal wills and the arbitrariness of powerful authorities. A dialectical divine image emerges from this confrontational view of reality. Deity can be depicted as a compelling presence that reorients humanity's obsession with itself.

Kaufman uses the illustration of a prison to undergird a personal image of this absolute Limit.[77] The example of a penitentiary is especially instructive because of its embodiment of various constraints that have been used to describe deity. A jail represents, first of all, one of the more rigorous forms of physical confinement. A prisoner is restricted in terms of his movements, interactions with others, and times when he can work, eat, exercise, and sleep.

An inmate also undergoes physiological changes while in jail. The lack of fresh air, heat, and in some cases proper food causes a person's health to deteriorate. Combined with the denial of conjugal rights and time spent in cramped quarters, prison life slowly effects biological changes in the prisoner's behavioural patterns.

In addition to these physical and natural limitations, normative constraints represent the most immediate reason for the person's incarceration. Internalization of cultural

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[77]Ibid., pp. 53-61.

mores is the minimum requirement for the functioning of a society. The prison system stands as the border guard of this community, ensuring adherence to the values that have been established. Anyone who does not abide by the written and unwritten rules of society has a chance to reconsider the significance of these taboos from the inside. By its very Latin definition, a penitentiary is to provide opportunities for the criminal to rethink his interpretation of moral norms.

Finally, a sense of personal limitation permeates every aspect of the correctional system. A group of politicians and lawyers has formulated the laws which the convict has violated; the police and justice system are in charge of enforcing these rules; the prison guards are responsible for ensuring that no detainee escapes; and the person who ends up in jail has to find a niche for himself within the tight social hierarchy of the inmate population. The feeling of being hemmed in by all of these groups represents a fourth type of limit experience. Personal and political interests compete with each other as an individual is arrested, accused, convicted, and sent to prison for his criminal activities.

Kaufman proposes that it is this last, personal consciousness of dread, failure, and alienation that best describes a prisoner's reaction to the walls around him. The most cogent argument for this metaphor can be summed up in

the truism: "One can break a person's body, but not his or her spirit." Even though society keeps criminals in jail for a long time, including life-long stays for habitual killers, the common sentiment among citizens, police, politicians, and guards is that physical and mental restraints (including death) do not represent long-term solutions to the problem of crime.[78] What often remains unaffected, even in the face of a show of force and deprivation of privileges, is the prisoner's refusal to internalize ethical mores that have been deemed acceptable.

There are, in other words, many "repeat offenders" because the heart of the problem is so difficult to reach, namely individuals' deprecating attitudes toward themselves and the society in which they live. Although most people gain respect through means other than brute strength, youths at the periphery of society find this difficult to do. Incidents of repeated betrayal leave delinquents with the distinct impression that society will never give them a fair break. This attitude is reinforced when, having resorted to

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[78]Reinhold Niebuhr had this to say in a prophetic passage about the limited use of force: "Military action must frequently be the ultimate ratio in a struggle with a foe. . . . But the contemporary situation in Vietnam should certainly instruct us on the limits of military power in the long cold war. For what we are witnessing is the revelation of the poverty of our cause in moral and political terms in a nation that we sought to save from communist aggression by military defense. . . . Military power is, in short, ineffective when it lacks a moral and political base. It is the fist of a hand; but the hand must be attached to an arm, and the arm to a body; and the body must be before the fist can be effective," Love and Justice, p. 192.

illegal means to satisfy their desires, the power of the state is brought further to bear on these individuals.

This situation requires a sense of empowerment that can lead disenfranchised members away from the maze of denial, anger, and blame that is their life. A new understanding of humanness is required, one that includes the capacity to stand up for oneself while graciously accepting the loss of face, rejection, and struggle that are concomitant parts of this process of self-affirmation. It is, in short, the combination of strength with strength, ego with ego, and will with will that makes peaceful and social relations possible. The acceptance of people who are not always heading in the same direction as oneself, together with the persuasive assertion of one's rights when wronged, enable one to cope with the fact of finitude.

Transferring this insight to an understanding of God, Kaufman states that the intentional, purposive, deliberate, and interactive power of a human agent best symbolizes divinity's association with the world.[79] Deity can be conceived as a powerful force that impedes the movements of humanity. Harsh winter storms and the devastating effects of an earthquake give ample support for such an amoral and impersonal conception of God. Yet Christians have confessed that this material analogy does not do justice to the human reaction following a natural disaster. Although unforeseen tragedies

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[79]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, p. 180.

cannot be attributed to moral causes,[80] people's need to place these calamities within a larger framework of meaning makes a personal concept of God an appropriate one. The image of a divine Creator relativizes the devastation of a catastrophe through its provision of a sense of purpose.

Kaufman also argues that a personal analogy sets vitalistic views into perspective. Analysing human beings on the basis of organic dependency alone is difficult because ideas of time and purpose are inevitably brought to bear on the data. Throbbing muscle tissue and a fading heartbeat are assessed in terms of their temporal life span. Kaufman uses this phenomenological observation of temporality to defend a personal analogy of deity. The uniquely human characteristics of intentionality and resolve undergird the image of God as a compassionate and sustaining reality.[81]

Finally, Kaufman proposes that a normative approach to

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[80]See Luke 13:1-5, as well as the discussion by James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:242-251, 272.

[81]Cross-reference Kaufman's use of Collingwood in regard to this point, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. 16-23, 127-129; The Theological Imagination, pp. 213-237. For a theologian who has argued against the use of human intentionality to speak about God, see James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:270-279; "A Response to Critics," Journal of Religious Ethics 13/2 (1985), p. 199; "Response," pp. 213-216: "I speak of God's purposes without claiming that God has intentions like we have. . . . By using the term purpose I pointed (somewhere) to the functional interdependence of things and attempted to be agnostic about one big telos. My temptation toward a big telos comes from both Thomas Aquinas and Jonathan Edwards; perhaps God's purpose in creation is ultimately to glorify Himself. . . . but about that I surely cannot be certain," ibid., p. 215.

God is mitigated by the fact that it is to fallible human beings that ideals apply. Rules without exceptions and a justice system without mercy entrap ethicists in a legalistic web of their own making. The reason for this problem is that not enough room has been left for the dissimilarities between divinity and humanity. An equation of God and morality makes it difficult to give criminals a second chance. Forgiveness, on the other hand, allows people to deal with the desperation of their circumstances in a new way. The "fact" that divinity repented for having created the world (Genesis 6:6-8) and that Jesus asked for the cup of death to be removed from him (Mark 14:36) enable human beings to live with themselves and the wrong they have done to others.[82]

2. A Teleological Model of Divine Action

The value of a personal model lies in its ability to

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[82]"If we try to overcome and control the mystery within which we live . . . we sin against God, for we are trying to make ourselves the ultimate disposers of our lives and destiny. We must, then, repent: we must turn around from this posture, which we all too easily take up, and move toward a recognition that our destiny is ultimately in God's hands, not ours--that is, that it remains a mystery to us," Gordon Kaufman, "Mystery, Critical Consciousness, and Faith," p. 67; see also God the Problem, pp. 191-200.

Robert King has made a similar modification to his teleological approach: "The predicament of the agent is that he acts so often without the full knowledge of what he is doing, yet with the realization that he is responsible for what he does. Moreover, once he has initiated an action he cannot recall it. . . . The only remedy, therefore, is to begin again, to accept responsibility for what one had done and start over. But that is possible only if others permit it. . . . He must be released from the consequences of his action and accepted on a new footing; then he can think of starting over," The Meaning of God, p. 142.

depict the divine transcendence in a convincing manner. The mysterious presence of deity becomes real when the compelling corporeality of other people is expressed in institutional form. The penitentiary represents but one of many organized extensions of human finitude.

Kaufman realizes that the image of a prison does not speak directly to the issue of God's immanence. It does a better job of symbolizing the negative or absent side of deity than of specifying the manner in which God is active. The question that needs to be addressed is whether institutions such as prisons represent stark border crossings (Grenzfalle) along the way, or whether avenues of divine retrieval can be discovered within their ambiguous walls.

Kaufman's pragmatic solution to the problem of theological reference indicates the direction in which he is heading with respect to this dilemma. He maintains that the reality of God has more to do with the humanitarian stance that believers take in relation to the needs around them than with attempts to locate the metaphysical essence of deity.[83] The unknowability of the actuality of God makes it necessary to choose from among the experiences at hand. For Kaufman, the life of Jesus illustrates the type of moral posture that Christians are to adopt as their own. Divine agency has to do with the redemptive actions of humanity, of which Jesus is

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[83]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 82-86, 95-100.

the archetypical example.[84]

The difficulty with this assertion is that it does not provide for an adequate conceptualization of the relationship between divinity and the world. It is not clear from Kaufman's identification of God with the gracious deeds of humanity whether these actions are the direct or indirect result of deity's intentions. To what extent can the activities of God be correlated with human endeavours?

Kaufman attempts to meet this dilemma by defining the act of an agent in two different ways.[85] Using the construction of a house as an example, he says that the entire building process can be defined as a master-act while the individual tasks required to finish the job can be referred to as sub-acts. The owner and architect erect the edifice in the sense that they provide the necessary funds and oversee the project. The labourers, on the other hand, represent sub-acts within this larger framework, for they are involved in the actual building and completion of the structure.

Kaufman maintains that this distinction clarifies the relationship between deity and the world. Creation is to be viewed as God's master-act while the sustaining processes of nature and history correspond to the specific acts within this comprehensive plan. Divinity represents the underlying

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[84]Ibid., p. 145.

[85]Ibid., pp. 125-140; cross-reference his discussion of teleology in Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 255-287.

intentionality that ties the disjointed events of life together. Humanity's transformation of the world gives rise to a providential interpretation of events.

The benefit of this teleological analogy is that it disentangles the problem of a natural world-view by placing the intentionality and actuality of deity at two different levels. In regard to the first matter, God has more to do with the theological point of view that is brought to bear on people's perceptions of the world than with an extrinsic reality. At the same time, deity is existent in the sense that Christians act upon the conviction that God has intended the world to be a better place. The redeeming activities that result from this spiritual view of history can be referred to as acts of God.[86]

Kaufman's assumption that the existence of God is dependent on a person's interpretation of the universe nevertheless reopens the question of divine reality. By reverting to an inherently conceptual approach, he seems to be saying along with Bultmann that the actions of God are real only in a subjective sense. Revealed to the eyes of faith, they

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[86]"Indeed, the theological interpretation I am proposing does not differ materially from a naturalistic view (as far as the latter goes), but rather maintains that precisely this 'natural' cultural development must--or at least may--be understood to have a deeper dimension of meaning than appears on the surface," Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, p. 162. The belief that God has created the world for a reason represents this "deeper dimension," an assumption that has more to do with "the presuppositions with which experience is apprehended and interpreted than with the particularities or details of experience itself," p. 239.

remain hidden within worldly events. The logical implication of this position is a kind of secular humanism, in which the philanthropic efforts of believers are devoid of divine prevenience.[87]

Kaufman insists that his concepts of God as a "regulative principle" and "presuppositional frame of reference" do not lead back to a relativistic perspective. Imaginative theological ideas indicate their objective independence through subsequent influence.[88] To take a simple example, the Jews' belief in monotheism arose as a result of their experience of God as distinctly different from themselves and other deities (Deuteronomy 6). Athanasius modified this separation of divinity from humanity when he argued that

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[87]This is the conclusion to which Ronald Thiemann has come: "For Kaufman theology is not properly conceived as a response to God's prior act of grace. Kaufman . . . appears to reject completely the notion of the prevenience of God," Revelation and Theology, p. 159.

Clark Pinnock has made a similar comment: "Kaufman has indicated from his side a very definite great divide in theology, a massive line that separates those who believe in the gospel as a special revelation from God from those like himself who simply do not. Evangelical theology seeks to rest its claims upon the Word of God, while liberal theology advocates a religious autonomy in which man gives the word to himself," "God Made in the Image of Man," A Review of The Theological Imagination, by Gordon Kaufman, Christianity Today 26 (September 3, 1982), p. 35.

For a more theoretical discussion of this problem, see Thomas Tracy, "Enacting History: Ogden and Kaufman on God's Mighty Acts," pp. 29-35; David Griffin, "Gordon Kaufman's Theology: Some Questions," pp. 555-558; and David Mason, "Can We Speculate on How God Acts?" pp. 17-26.

[88]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, pp. 252-254. H. Richard Niebuhr's discussion of the past in the present is pertinent here, The Meaning of Revelation, pp. 32-66.

Jesus Christ had been with the Father since the beginning of the world (Proverbs 8:23).[89] Athanasius used the divine act of creation to establish the essential identity of Christ and God, rather than to accent the independent nature of God alone.

This illustration shows how theological ideas have a curious habit of becoming autonomous once they have been formulated. Although Kaufman concurs with Feuerbach when the latter refers to religious images as reified constructions of reality,[90] this does not mean that theological metaphors are mere projections, to be abandoned at will. Belief in God has anchored itself firmly in the human tradition. It would be foolish to underestimate the ramifications of this historical force.

This insight has relevance for the present discussion. The anthropomorphic roots of a teleological model can be found in people's innate sense of purpose; their projection of ideals helps in the conceptualization of divinity. There is also an anthropocentric side to this goal-oriented analogy; human beings rarely strive for ends without some anticipated reward. Their aspirations to gain things for themselves reveals the self-centred nature of this inten-

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[89]Athanasius, "Four Discourses Against the Arians," pp. 357-393; cross-reference Kaufman's discussion, God the Problem, pp. 230-233.

[90]Gordon Kaufman, An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 23-27; see Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity.

tional model.

A transformation takes place when this analogy is transferred into the theological realm. Instead of reinforcing a parochial vision of reality, a belief in the divine destination of the world relativizes the significance of humanity's achievements. A divine teleology mitigates the success-oriented tendency of this human metaphor by setting it within a larger perspective. The self-seeking marketers of an intentional analogy end up with less than they had bargained for--but with more in terms of a theocentric vision.[91]

Kaufman submits that this dialectical aspect of a teleological model allows it to walk a fine line between fideism and deism. An intentional analogy averts a collapse of God into the arena of "actual occasions" (Whitehead) through its retention of an idealistic gap between divinity and the world. "God" represents a conceptual framework that believers bring to reality.

At the same time, divine subjectivity is avoided once it

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[91]Cross-reference Gustafson's argument for the sacrifice of human values on behalf of the purposes of God, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:278; "Response," p. 214. The biblical roots for this idea can be found in Job 13:15 ("Yea though he slay me, yet will I trust him") and Romans 14:8 ("If we live, we live unto the Lord, and if we die, we die unto the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's"). Kaufman's rejoinder to this theocentric vision is to say that human good cannot be separated from the purposes of deity. Just as a teleological model remains implicitly anthropocentric, so too, must a God-oriented ethic retain humanistic elements, "How is God to be Understood in a Theocentric Ethics," pp. 27-32; The Theological Imagination, pp. 34-46, 159-171.

has been understood that human beings and the sustaining aspects of nature represent the chief agents through which divine activity becomes manifest. Theology is an eminently practical and humanistic enterprise that is interested in the relation of categorial schemes to moral predicaments.

It can be said, in fact, that the very idea of thought and action discloses the twofold reference points of theology. Theology represents a reflective discipline that devotes itself to the creation of new concepts and evaluates these ideas in terms of their coherence within the larger world that is life and conviction. By the same token, the idling reality of so many dogmas in so many dusty libraries and abandoned churches means that theological renewal occurs when the spectacle of human need and natural devolution reengages believers' contemplative lives. Language has to do with use (Wittgenstein).

Stated in terms germane to the dissertation, the concept of revelation can be dispensed with once it has been recognized that theological terms are more closely related to the imaginative aspects of the human mind than to ostensive reference. The retention of every biblical and traditional statement about God is unnecessary, for each generation is faced with a new set of circumstances and conceptual schemes.

A strictly immanent view of divinity is precluded on the same principle. The deity that process theologians have associated with the world says more about the conceptual

framework that they have brought to experience than the divine noumenon. God denotes an ordering principle for human beings' interaction with life.

To anticipate, Kaufman can be characterized as a constructive theologian who wishes to avoid the philosophical problems connected with a theology of revelation as well as the speculative pursuits of process thought. He considers the second-order nature of theological statements to be at the crux of the dilemma. Theologians of revelation have tended towards a univocal identification of God and the Bible because they have not comprehended the extent to which sacred texts are the work of the imagination.

On the other hand, process thinkers have failed to realize that their correlation of God and the world ends up within a stone's throw of the literalistic cul-de-sac that neo-orthodoxy has been attempting to exit. To believe that God has a material corporeality, similar to but larger than our own, and that deity lives in this worldly "body" in the same sense that consciousness inhabits our frames, is to use an intention-action model in a too unambiguous, not to mention dualistic and mythical fashion. The situating of Kaufman's theology in relation to these two positions will have to wait, however, until the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

GORDON KAUFMAN'S THEOLOGY OF CONSTRUCTION

Introduction

The last chapter documented Kaufman's shift from the image of God as divine subject to that of embodied agent. His identification of the acts of God with the redemptive activities of humanity, of which Jesus is the archetypical example, has led to a qualification of the otherness of divinity. God is to be conceived "as living and active at every point in reality."[1]

Kaufman nevertheless has had lingering doubts about the direct impingement of deity upon the affairs of the universe. The principal obstacle to an unequivocal identification of God with piety (Gustafson), liberation (Gutierrez), the world (Griffin, Mason), or character formation (Hauerwas) has to do with the mediated experience of reality. An observer's participation in the perception of an object (à la Kant and Hume) denotes the significance of conceptuality. Deeds and actions do not make (internal) sense unless they have been

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[1]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, p. 113; cross-reference p. 145.

placed within a larger frame of reference. Kaufman has referred to this perspective as a world-view.[2]

Given this dialectical link between thought and action, Kaufman has stated that the reality of God has more to do with the "presuppositions with which experience is apprehended and interpreted than with the particularities or details of experience itself."[3] What this means for Kaufman's understanding of divinity is that the relationship between transcendence and immanence has not been clarified. His differentiation of God and humanity in terms of a final and efficient causality has simply transferred the problem of divine actuality to another level. The question that still has to be answered is whether God represents a transcendent ideal or metaphysical reality.

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate this connection between theoretical frameworks and authentic existence. Kaufman's emphasis on the synthetic nature of theological language shows that he has not left the subjective features of his thought far behind. Indeed, one could conclude that he has simply found a new way of expressing what he has always believed to be the purpose of theological reflection, namely epistemological analysis for the sake of

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[2]Ibid., pp. 203-209. Scholars who have underlined the theory-laden aspect of religious experience include Wayne Proudfoot, Religious Experience; Donald Wiebe, "Theory in the Study of Religion," Religion 13/4 (1983):283-309.

[3]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, p. 239.

greater humanization. Because the reality of God is indiscernible, the most that can be accomplished is an examination of theological concepts on the basis of their visionary power and pragmatic usefulness.

Kaufman's agnostic attitude towards ontology is nevertheless mitigated by his correlation of divine images and experiences of life. As he has said in response to process thinkers' use of the self to designate the world as God's body, some images are more appropriate than others in clarifying the ultimate Mystery.[4] This concern has led him to employ another criterion besides relativization and humanization in his assessment of theological metaphors: "presence" or realism. An analysis of what human beings consider to be of absolute value results in a symbol of God as the foundation of existence.[5]

To the extent that he has shown an appreciation for the empirical constraints of theological language, Kaufman can be said to be exploring the viability of a natural metaphysic as

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[4]Ibid., pp. 129, 158-159.

[5]Note Kaufman's explication of the empirically real on pp. 58 and 72n.22 of An Essay on Theological Method. This theme is continued in The Theological Imagination, in which God is said to be present "to every segment and every dimension of our experience and world," p. 275, see also pp. 46-57. William Dean has noted Kaufman's increasing attention to empirical criteria and naturalistic images, History Making History: The New Historicism in American Religious Thought (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 140-141.

well as a utilitarian heuristic.[6] His recent description of God as a "complex of physical, biological and historico-cultural conditions"[7] can be regarded as an explicit response to the immanent analogies put forward by process thinkers. He has seemingly taken up the challenge of formulating a substantive as well as useful image of divinity.

Kaufman's theology of construction will thus be considered with this question in mind: What is the relation of his conceptual idealism, as exemplified by his criterion of humanization and Christian categorial scheme, to his description of divinity as a hidden creativity that "establishes and sustains us, creating in us the new modality of existence which is faith?"[8]

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[6]For a discussion of what a heuristic theology entails, see Sallie McFague, Models of God, p. 36.

[7]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, p. 42.

[8]Gordon Kaufman, "Mystery, Critical Consciousness, and Faith," p. 67. It should be said at the outset that Kaufman regards the pragmatic interpretation as the more accurate description of his thought. As he says in response to the author's suggestion that his theology be placed along a hermeneutical arc that stretches from Hans Frei and George Lindbeck to Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, ". . . in trying to interpret me in relationship to the hermeneutical arc which you earlier posited . . . you come much closer to what I am about when you relate my thinking to social philosophers such as Habermas than when you connect me up with the hermeneutics group. . . . The metaphysical optimism of Ricoeur, his continuing to speak of 'essences' which we can apparently locate, and the like, is pretty far from my own basic metaphysical skepticism," correspondence with author, October 23, 1987. For the differences between conceptual idealism and an experiential approach, see Nicholas Rescher, Conceptual Idealism; William Dean, American Religious Empiricism (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1986).

A. A Clarification of Kaufman's Position vis-à-vis His Critics

One of two items that needs to be clarified before proceeding to Kaufman's theology of construction pertains to the negative responses he has received in regard to his latest emphasis. In the judgment of this author, many of the criticisms have missed the point of Kaufman's argument. A careful consideration of his critics' concerns will make room for what this writer believes to be one of the more important issues in contemporary theology: the role of imagination in envisioning the reality of God.

The other matter that requires attention is the impetus for Kaufman's shift to a theology of construction. Although an historical overview of this development has already been provided (chapter three), sufficient reasons have not been given for his recent enchantment with deconstructive and reconstructive analogies. A discussion of the epistemological foundations of this newest innovation will demonstrate the centrality of imagination in Kaufman's thinking, as well as clear the way for an interpretation of the idealistic and realistic aspects of his theology.

1. The Relation of Faith and Reason

The first issue that needs to be broached in regard to Kaufman's theology of construction pertains to the relation of faith and reason. In a recent article on the subject, Victor Froese has suggested that Kaufman's work can be under-

stood as a "theology within the limits of reason alone." While Kaufman considered Scripture and tradition to be an integral part of his earlier thought, he has now endorsed a "criterion of truth . . . that lies outside of Christian faith itself and on the supposedly neutral 'higher ground' of philosophical analysis."[9]

Froese elaborates briefly on what this "higher ground" might look like, citing Kaufman's interest in ordinary language philosophy. The most important issue that the article raises, however, concerns Kaufman's stance vis-à-vis the Christian tradition. Can his theology of construction be understood from within an Anselmian perspective, which takes the motto, "faith seeking understanding," as its methodological starting point? Or is he seeking a universal reason that can decide between alternate world-views?

On the surface, this question is a difficult one to answer. Kaufman has spoken of theological points of view proving themselves before "the bar of ordinary human reason," "the bar of the gradually emerging common discipline of theology," and "the bar of the criterion of humanization."[10] These statements imply that there is a non-partisan institu-

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[9]H. Victor Froese, "Gordon Kaufman's Theology 'Within the Limits of Reason Alone': A Review." The following remarks have been published as a response to Froese's article, Conrad Grebel Review 6/2 (1988):164-167.

[10]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, p. 24; An Essay of Theological Method, p. 67; The Theological Imagination, p. 206.

tion (the university) and faculty of mind (practical reason) that can adjudicate these matters, lending credence to Froese's remarks.[11]

Kaufman also falls into the trap of what Ricoeur has referred to as "opposing the pretentious claims of theology with the equally unacceptable claims of philosophy" when he juxtaposes the authoritarian manner in which theologians of revelation have spoken about God's own truth, and the creative, novel, and imaginative possibilities of a theology of construction.[12] The apparent sacrifice of intelligence that is entailed in laying claim to an ultimate manifestation of God leads to Kaufman's endorsement of the "total autonomy of the thinking subject." Given a choice between these two--which Ricoeur considers to be false--alternatives, it seems only natural that one would choose the freedom of the latter over the tyranny of the former.[13]

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[11]Robert Neville has taken this position in his book, Creativity and God (New York: Seabury Press, 1980): "A practical result of this recognition of the world-cultural context for theology is that the best institutions for theology are universities in which world religions are presented with as much philosophical and hermeneutical objectivity as possible. . . . This is a revolutionary consequence, both for universities and for church institutions," p. 145.

[12]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 17-20; cross-reference Paul Ricoeur, Essays on Biblical Interpretation, p. 95.

[13]Garrett Green makes this observation in his review of The Theological Imagination: "The cry of 'Sapere aude!' still reverberates through these pages, challenging theologians to admit that the old authoritarianism is dead, to abandon dogmatism in favor of criticism," "Reconstructing Christian Theology," p. 220.

A final example of Kaufman's deference to rationality instead of faith is to be found in his use of ordinary language philosophy. In response to neo-orthodoxy's claim that believers can only reflect upon God from within a particular vantage point, Kaufman says:

> . . . there is no problem of how one can get into a charmed 'circle of faith' or 'theological circle' in order to do theology. . . . We are already there simply by virtue of speaking and understanding English.[14]

The traditional distinction between belief and unbelief has been minimized by Kaufman's claim that speaking a language is all that is required in reflecting upon "God." Value-free linguistic analysis has seemingly replaced his earlier emphasis upon the presuppositional starting point of metaphysics.

It should be frankly acknowledged that Kaufman's understanding of faith differs from Froese's. Kaufman has defined belief from within a broad philosophical context, referring to people's innate sense of trust as the "religious manifestation of the unification of consciousness."[15] Froese, on the other hand, regards the propagation of Christianity as the primary function of faith. These two views have diverging consequences. While the similarities between secular, theistic, and scientific world-views are highlighted in Kaufman's theology, Froese ends up contrasting this philosophical

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[14]Gordon Kaufman, An Essay on Theological Method, p. 8.

[15]Victor Froese's summation of Kaufman's definition of faith, "Gordon Kaufman's Theology 'Within the Limits of Reason Alone': A Review," p. 8.

historicism with what he regards as the central issues of Christianity: sin, salvation, and life in eternity.[16]

The question must be raised whether Kaufman's position is as radically different from "orthodox Christianity" as Froese makes it out to be. The first two chapters have demonstrated that Kaufman's preoccupation with philosophical reflection has less to do with a search for a universal reason than with a recognition that every person orients his or her life according to some overarching frame of reference. What this epistemological insight means for theology is that the Anselmian principle of "faith seeking understanding" is presupposed at every level of the knowing process. The act of interpreting experience on the basis of a unified whole enables people to explain the universe in a particular way, indicating rationality's dependence upon a world-view. Reason, instead of opposing faith, presupposes it.

This relative theory of knowledge sheds light on Kaufman's use of ordinary language philosophy. His definition of deity as "that which is of ultimate concern" is based on the observation that ultimacy is what the term "God" has come to denote within the cultural context of North America. While non-theistic cultures have bestowed absolute values on other words, such as karma or buddha, the monotheistic traditions of Judaism and Christianity have influenced the West to such an extent that whenever one wishes to speak of absoluteness,

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[16]Ibid., pp. 8-10.

"God" is the term most often used. Cultural-linguistic analysis helps to determine the primary values of North Americans, whether these standards are defined in materialistic, scientific, secular, or theistic terms.[17]

The role of faith within Kaufman's theology of construction can now be better understood. His recognition of the synthetic nature of theological concepts enables believers to see that the contextual adaptation of Christianity represents an integral part of the gospel message. Canonical authors have always known that their concepts of God have had to be revised (YHWH, Elohim, Messiah, Jesus) in order for "the songs of Zion to be sung in a strange land" (Psalm 137). A deconstruction of images that have become exploitative and a reconstruction of them into symbols that foster redemption is facilitated by a recognition of the human qualities of sacred words. The impotence of one metaphor allows another to take its place within the confines of what is known as faith.

This revisionist interpretation of Christianity demonstrates that the proclivity of a theology of revelation to an

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[17]Kaufman considers the possibility of the word "God" disappearing from the English language altogether, An Essay on Theological Method, p. 17. This is a real option, since materialism, socialism, science, and politics have replaced much of what theism has stood for in the past. Kaufman suggests, however, that people would not be able to live very long without an ultimate reference point to orient their lives: "Every culture of which we know has found it necessary to articulate the meaning of human existence in some mythical or metaphysical form," ibid. The implication behind this statement is that "theological" reflection will always be needed, even if faith in an absolute is defined in terms other than belief in God.

authoritarian definition of obedience represents only one of the reasons for Kaufman's shift to a theology of construction. More germane is the sharp duality between God and the world that has been assumed by a model of self-disclosure. Kaufman initially viewed this duality as an asset because it made the ideas of divine aseity and human freedom comprehensible. Lacking from such an account, however, was a description of deity's involvement in the affairs of the world. Thus began Kaufman's search for realistic and agential concepts, indicating in the process that a reassessment of his faith was possible without succumbing to an oppressive heteronomy or belligerent autonomy. The fact that life entails change allows believers to reorient their thinking without feeling that they have compromised their beliefs.[18]

2. The Relation of Church and Culture

The preceding section has established the fact that Kaufman's theology of construction represents a response to faith and that his use of ordinary language philosophy has been conducted within these parameters.[19] A subsequent

[18]The continuity between Kaufman's earlier and later work has been demonstrated most clearly by Douglas Ottati, "Reconstructing Christian Theology," A Review of The Theological Imagination, by Gordon Kaufman, Religious Studies Review 9/3 (1983):222-227.

[19]Kaufman refers to his method as Anselmian in several places: ". . . (a theology of construction) is a deliberate human activity directed toward criticizing and reconstructing the symbols by which faith lives and to which faith responds" (text inside brackets added), An Essay on Theological Method, p. xi. "In this respect, then, awareness of God, faith in

question that needs to be raised pertains to Kaufman's cultural-linguistic analysis of Western society. Are Christian scholars not accountable first to the church and only secondarily to the culture in which religious experiences and historical events find their expression? To state the matter on Kaufman's own terms, can one really speak of ordinary language philosophy without indicating the particular traditions out of which theological concepts have developed, and within which they are still considered to be of first-order significance, i.e., in those contexts where "prayer, preaching, and practice" take precedence over analytical reflection?[20]

There are merits to these criticisms. Kaufman's assessment of the church in terms of the contribution that it can make to society leads to a minimization of the critical stance that Christian communities are called, at times, to take in relation to the world.[21] The congregational the-

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God, knowledge of God, is the beginning point of properly theological work; and theology may be described as 'faith seeking understanding' (Anselm)," p. 51. Cross-reference his response to Victor Froese's article, Conrad Grebel Review 6/1 (1988):26-28.

[20]George Lindbeck has criticized Kaufman's ecclesiology along these lines, A Review of An Essay on Theological Method, by Gordon Kaufman, p. 264. See also Ronald Thiemann, "Revelation and Imaginative Construction," pp. 247-248; John Yoder, A Review of The Context of Decision, by Gordon Kaufman, Mennonite Quarterly Review 37 (April, 1963):133-138; and Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

[21]This tendency is especially prevalent in Nonresistance and Responsibility, pp. 46-62, 101-115.

ologies that have been developed by Karl Barth, Stanley Hauerwas, and John Yoder represent important correctives to Kaufman's tendency to conflate church and world. They have provided an institutional means by which believers can stand in solidarity against evil.[22]

A second problem has to do with the predominance of empirical and pragmatic criteria in Kaufman's evaluation of the church. He has intimated that the church's existence is contingent upon its effectiveness within history. The repercussions of such a consequential view are devastating. Should the church outlive its usefulness as a humane institution, or other organizations become more redemptive in their actions, it is conceivable that the church would one day be replaced by these sociological entities.[23]

It should be said that Kaufman has thought through the ramifications of his ecclesiology. Given a choice between the inviolability of the church and a Christian theology that is defined in terms of the redemptive activities of (cosmic) history, Kaufman appears to be willing to give up the former in favour of the latter. The reasons for his eschewal of the church as the primary locus of theology require elucidation

[22]Karl Barth, Community, State, and Church, introduction by Will Herberg (New York: Anchor Books, 1960); John Yoder, The Priestly Kingdom; Stanley Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom.

[23]The impetus for these remarks comes from Kaufman's discussion of the church in Nonresistance and Responsibility, pp. 51-59, 97; An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 1-17, 37-39, 65-68.

before these criticisms can be dealt with properly.

One of two reasons that Kaufman gives for his emphasis on a theology of culture is that Protestants have too often used a theology of the church to advocate withdrawal from the world. Taking his own pacifist denomination as an example, Kaufman grants that sixteenth-century Anabaptists were justified in making a sharp distinction between church and world. Their vividly dualistic soteriology was in large measure due to the severe persecution that they faced.[24]

Kaufman nevertheless has doubts about the legitimacy of a Stille im Lande attitude when it is used by twentieth-century Christians to avoid getting involved in the messy realities of life. Does "loving one's enemies" not mean that the church is called to be exactly where there is the greatest need rather than, as traditional Mennonitism has insisted, at a place where difficult decisions and less-than-perfect actions are relegated to the state?[25] If this is

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[24]Gordon Kaufman, Nonresistance and Responsibility, pp. 13-19. For an example of the duality of Anabaptist theology, see the twenty treatises of Michael Sattler, The Legacy of Michael Sattler, ed. and trans. John H. Yoder (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1973), pp. 22-23.

[25]Gordon Kaufman, Nonresistance and Responsibility, pp. 64-65, 75-80, 101-115. Kaufman's statement that love "is precisely that which goes into the very heart of an evil situation and attempts to rectify it" is reminiscent of Martin Luther's claim that "If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point at which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing him," quoted in Douglas J. Hall, Thinking the Faith, p. 108.

true, as Kaufman suggests it is, the church/world duality will have to be revised so that the inextricable link between societies and communities of faith can be taken into account. Kaufman suggests that this problem can be resolved by speaking of the church as "the world being transformed."[26]

The second reason for Kaufman's weak ecclesiology is that he is so convinced of the historical influence of monotheism that he believes that God is the only concept that can act as the ultimate relativizer of human values.[27] He acknowledges that there are other standards of judgment that have been used to analyse culture critically. Rationality has helped to curb the heteronomous actions of parochial establishments. The institutional clout of the church has been instrumental in curtailing the imperialistic tendencies of nations. Kaufman nevertheless claims that these courts of appeals are of penultimate significance because of their implicit assumption of a theistic frame of reference. The fact that secularity and ecclesiology can be interpreted in terms of the more comprehensive history of theism makes "God"

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[26]Gordon Kaufman, Nonresistance and Responsibility, p. 52. For his thoughts on Mennonite theology within the modern context, see his review of The Priestly Kingdom, by John Yoder, Conrad Grebel Review 4/1 (1986):77-80; and his "Response to Discussion on Mennonite Theology," Conrad Grebel Review 3/1 (1985):99-101.

[27]Gordon Kaufman, An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 11-15, 43-58.

the ultimate relativizer of the world.[28]

This thoroughgoing theocentrism means that ecclesia can no longer be viewed as the exclusive harbinger and supporter of the theological enterprise. Kaufman, in fact, maintains that Christians "put an idol in the place where only God can rightly be" when they define theology primarily in terms of its service to the church.[29] The church's dependence on God should be recognized. A comprehensive theological world-view relativizes the significance of the church and furnishes it with a sense of direction in relation to the larger frame of reference that deity denotes.

This analysis demonstrates that the church's role of faithful witness and liberating presence is fulfilled for Kaufman by the concept of God. The fact that people are drawn by a theistic centre of orientation to a sense of obligation toward others shows that the idea of divinity can be used to break the bonds of ethnocentrism.[30]

Theism also helps believers to set their values into a broader context. The humanizing tendencies of Judaism and

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[28]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 80-95. For scholars who have reservations about the mutual relationship between secularity and theism, see Don Wiebe, "The Failure of Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion"; Robert Segal, "In Defence of Reductionism," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 51/1 (1983):97-124.

[29]Gordon Kaufman, "Theology as a Public Vocation," p. 60, see also pp. 49-51.

[30]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 35-41, 283-284.

Christianity, for example, can be used to call into question the largely negative guarantees of economic and political opportunism that have been enshrined in the American constitution. These belief-systems make it possible to develop a theory of justice that reflects a broader sense of social accountability than the minimalist rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."[31]

Kaufman's willingness to allow the church to disappear can also be explained in terms of his reference to communities of faith as the "world being transformed." This phrase implies that the gospel message of self-giving love is of such importance to Kaufman that he is ready to give up a prize possession of Christianity (the church) in order for a just and humane social order to be established.[32] The radical implications of Christianity undergird his preference for humanization over a defence of traditional ecclesiastical structures. Paul's injunction to be "ministers of reconciliation" (II Cor. 5:17-20) represents the basis of a theology that addresses the problems that humanity is facing today.[33]

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[31]Ibid., pp. 255-260; Nonresistance and Responsibility, pp. 82-115. Cross-reference David Hollenbach, Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

[32]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 172-206.

[33]There is precedence for this radical view of Christianity. Dietrich Bonhoeffer has endorsed a worldly interpretation that is willing to live without God as a working

The precise nature of the debate between Kaufman and those Protestant theologians who consider the church to be of primary importance can now be clarified. The issue revolves around the response of these scholars to historical relativism. Does the fact of pluralism in the United States require a "highly generalized outlook" to cope with the dilemmas that arise from this situation? Or does the impossibility of a "universal" stance require a renewal of Christianity from the inside?[34]

Kaufman has emphasized the former, maintaining that a global theology of responsibility is needed so that nuclear war and world hunger can be avoided. The realities of a shrinking world, in which people are becoming increasingly dependent on each other for survival, necessitate the construction of highly conceptual frameworks to pinpoint the

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hypothesis," Letters and Papers from Prison, pp. 219-220, 226-227, 239-240. Gregory Baum has written about the church as a social movement, dedicated to the redemptive transformation of society, "The New Ecclesiology." Karl Rahner has said that "the Church represents a visible sign of the fact that the world, even in its secular aspect, is sanctified by God's grace," "The Church in the World," in Theological Investigations, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longmans, & Todd, 1971), VII:94. And Douglas Hall has spoken about the creative possibilities of a church in the diaspora, Has the Church a Future?, pp. 49-69.

[34]George Lindbeck has outlined the problem in these terms, The Nature of Doctrine, p. 127, see also pp. 52-55, 124-128. The significance of post-modernity hinges on how one answers these two questions. See Ted Peters, "David Bohm, Postmodernism, and the Divine," Zygon 20/2 (1985), p. 193; Harry Bruce, "All About Words," The Montreal Gazette, November 21, 1987, J12.

differences between ideologies and theological world-views.[35]

George Lindbeck has serious doubts about Kaufman's comprehensive approach. Along with other, so-called "post-liberal" or "narrative" theologians,[36] he has maintained that an assessment of different points of view on the basis of a common ground is no longer possible. The world is too fragmented, relativistic, and chaotic to permit an inclusive solution. Christians should pay more attention to the theological sources that set them apart from society, for this is how their identity is solidified. The significance of Christianity becomes "present" (Frei) to believers when they allow the biblical text to "absorb the world" in which they are living and view the church as the proper context for their theological reflections.

The merits of each method should be recognized. The interdisciplinary advantage of an intratextual approach has to do with the fact that differences between world-views are

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[35]Note Gordon Kaufman's recent comments on the subject, "Nuclear Eschatology and the Study of Religion," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 51/1 (1982):3-14; "Religious Diversity, Historical Consciousness, and Christian Theology," in The Myth of Christian Uniqueness, eds. John Hick and Paul Knitter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), pp. 3-15.

[36]For a discussion of these positions, see Stanley Hauerwas, Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), pp. 1-22; Ronald Thiemann, Revelation and Theology, pp. 71-91; Hans Frei, The Identity of Jesus Christ, pp. vii-xviii; Gary Comstock, "Two Types of Narrative Theology"; and George Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, pp. 112-138. For a person who has responded directly to Kaufman on this matter, see George Hendry, "Untimely Systems."

taken seriously. Confessional and narrative theologians are correct when they say that an ecumenical dialogue can only take place after the particularities of each perspective have been highlighted. Ownership of the embarrassing facts of miracles and resurrections, along with an acknowledgment of the scandalous nature of worshipping a criminal on a cross, enable Christians to decipher the genuine aspects of their faith and communicate that authenticity to others.[37]

There is, nonetheless, a point at which the "uniqueness" of Christianity can turn into a disguised form of discrimination and escapism. Having grown up within the sectarian tradition of Anabaptism, Kaufman is keenly aware how quickly a non-conformist position can degenerate into a separateness that does not take the other person's point of view seriously. This discontinuity has resulted in Kaufman's promotion of a holistic theology that meets the demands of those people who say that relativism makes it impossible for them to communicate with others. The unification of world history requires the cognizance of world-views vastly different from, perhaps even incommensurable with one's own.[38]

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[37]Note Lindbeck's remarks, The Nature of Doctrine, p. 130. Gayle Gerber Koontz has demonstrated the dialogical advantages of an intratextual approach, "Confessional Theology in a Pluralistic Context: A Study of the Theological Ethics of H. Richard Niebuhr and John H. Yoder."

[38]Kaufman's strictures against an overly situational approach are directed, in part, to black, feminist, and liberation theologians, "Whatever Happened to Theology?" Christianity and Crisis 35/8 (May 12, 1975):110-111; An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 37-39, 61-62.

It would appear from this discussion that liberal theology, for all its "pathos,"[39] has some lasting value. Its longstanding efforts at overcoming the epistemological, sociological, and ideological obstacles that people have put in each other's paths make it a suitable candidate in intervening in conflicts that arise from a lack of understanding of, as well as reaction against other religious, ethnic, and cultural groups.

It should be said in conclusion that the substance of Kaufman's ecclesiological remarks has more to do with the attitudes of believers toward the world than with the structure of the church as such. He has written very little about the nature of the church, other than to acknowledge its empirical necessity and to say that it will probably be here for some time to come.[40] His overriding concern has to do with the importance that Christian theologians attach to nature and history. If the universe is viewed as a place in which to live and feel at home, it would not seem to matter whether the "restitution of the church" (Yoder), "the church in the diaspora" (Hall, Rahner), or the church "as the world

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[39]Van A. Harvey, "The Pathos of Liberal Theology," A Review of Blessed Rage for Order, by David Tracy, Journal of Religion 56/4 (1976):382-391.

[40]Gordon Kaufman, Nonresistance and Responsibility, pp. 53-59; "Theology as a Public Vocation," pp. 49-51.

transformed" (Kaufman, Baum, H. R. Niebuhr)[41] can assist in such a venture. The enhancement of life on this earth is the important thing, for this is what Paul meant when he said that God, in reconciling the world to the Godself, made believers ambassadors of reconciliation. Kaufman, at least, is convinced of the far-reaching implications of this stance, going so far as to say that "wherever a spirit of creativity and liberation and healing and reconciliation and reconstruction is at work in the world, there is to be seen saving activity."[42]

3. The Relation of Description and Imagination

The last issue to be dealt with pertains to the relation of description and imagination in Kaufman's thought. This discussion belongs more properly in the next section, because his theology of construction rests upon a distinction between these two methods of reflection. The criticisms, however, that Kaufman has received in regard to this matter do not adequately reflect the reasons for his accentuation of the synthetic nature of theological language. A careful consideration of these negative evaluations will set the stage for the lengthier analysis that is to follow.

The first criticism bears upon Kaufman's differentiation

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[41]H. R. Niebuhr, The Church Against the World (Chicago: Willett, Clark & Co., 1935); Christ and Culture (New York: Harper and Row, 1951).

[42]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, p. 57.

of theology from the sciences. He states that the difference between the two has to do with the types of objects that are being depicted.[43] The scientific disciplines are involved in describing items that can be found in the world, while theology concerns itself with abstract ideas that regulate the manner in which one thinks of life as a whole. Diverging methods are in evidence, a descriptive approach in the sciences and an imaginative one in theology. The fact that "God" and "universe" do not refer ostensively to anything in the world means that a highly constructive analysis is needed to understand the manner in which these concepts operate in our thinking.

Ronald Thiemann wonders whether such a sharp distinction between description and construction is necessary.[44] Could it not be said that the sciences are as involved in the theoretical aspects of their academic disciplines as in the perception and description of natural phenomena? Psychology has made use of the idea of the self in its interpretation of human behaviour. Biology has employed a DNA model to make sense of its experimental data. Theology does not stand alone in its use of conceptual frameworks. The sciences are also in the business of deconstructing and reconstructing

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[43]Gordon Kaufman, An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 21-34.

[44]Ronald Thiemann, "Revelation and Imaginative Construction," pp. 248-257.

"facts" to dovetail with experiences of reality.[45]

Thiemann's remarks are valid to the extent that Kaufman has overstated his case. Reacting to theologians' use of the "objective" model of the sciences to speak about God as a real referent, Kaufman has said that imaginative construction represents the principal concern of Christian scholars. A dichotomy between description and imagination is enhanced by this view of the matter.[46]

The chapter on Kaufman's metaphysics has nevertheless made it clear that his differentiation of theology from the sciences has more to do with the reticence of the latter to acknowledge the theoretical assumptions within their explanations than with a recognition of the mediated aspect of reality as such. Kaufman concurs that imagination is at work at all stages of the knowing process, including the scientific. As he has said in his book on relativism, "a new element of 'givenness' appears . . . as each new level of consciousness

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[45]Both Thiemann and Kaufman refer to the work of Michael Polanyi in their delineation of the subjective features of scientific research, ibid., pp. 254-257; Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 22, 281n.1. For works by Michael Polanyi, see Personal Knowledge (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Meaning, co-authored with Harry Prosch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

[46]Gordon Kaufman, An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 21-34; note, however, this caveat: ". . . when a theologian is drawing upon what is already explicit in tradition and what is implicit in myth and ritual, he or she is engaged more in discovering something given in the culture than in creating something new" (emphasis added), p. 33.

emerges through the creative act of imagination."[47] The question that must be raised is whether scientists are as aware of their implicit suppositions as they should be.

It is interesting to note, in this regard, that Thiemann has used his argument for the "imaginative nature of all human concepts" to underline the importance of description, not construction. He acknowledges that his polemic against the perceptual model of the sciences actually strengthens Kaufman's case for the priority of imagination in theology.[48] Thiemann nevertheless insists that Kaufman remains bound by the foundational claims of the sciences. The latter believes that an objective basis for theology can be established, and that imagination plays a pivotal role in this venture.

Thiemann's criticisms are similar to those of Victor Froese in the sense that he has assumed Kaufman is searching for a value-free vantage point from which to evaluate theology. There is some truth in this claim. Yet Thiemann, in his rush to defend the orthodoxy of Christianity, makes the same mistake that Froese does. He overlooks the fact that

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[47]Gordon Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, pp. 69, 95-103.

[48]Ronald Thiemann, "Revelation and Imaginative Construction," pp. 249, 258. David James Bryant has noted this peculiarity in Thiemann's article and discussed its implications, "Theological Imagination and Symbolic Heritage: An Examination of the Role of Imagination in Constructive Theology" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1986), pp. 94-101. This thesis has been published under the title, Faith and the Play of Imagination (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1989).

Kaufman's liberal theology is as value-laden, kerygmatic, and narrative as his own. Kaufman has always had a deep appreciation for the relative nature of knowledge, as demonstrated by his description of theology as a world-view, perspective, and categorial scheme.[49] The differences between Kaufman and Thiemann can thus be characterized as a matter of degree rather than fundamental break. While Thiemann has sought to redescribe the Christian faith by means of its internal logic and narrative quality, Kaufman has placed more emphasis upon the emancipatory and dialogical aspects of this belief.[50]

Thiemann's remarks pave the way for an examination of the explicitly theological criticisms that have been made of Kaufman's position. Several scholars have suggested that his distinction between description and imagination leads not only to a dichotomous view of the human and natural sciences, but to an improper understanding of deity as well. Thiemann, for instance, claims that Kaufman no longer believes in the prevenience of God's grace. Kaufman's accent on the decision-making processes of human beings means that theology is

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[49]Cross-reference his recent article, "The Historicity of Religions and the Importance of Religious Dialogue."

[50]For Thiemann's development of a non-foundational theology, see Revelation and Theology, pp. 71-91. The theological differences between these two men are similar to the divergent epistemological views of Joseph Runzo and Gordon Kaufman. While Runzo endorses a pluralist ontology in which the principal standards of evaluation are "coherence" and "internal pragmatism," Kaufman maintains that another criterion is needed, something that this author has called "external pragmatism," cross-reference chapter one.

not constituted by the prior action of God.[51]

Garrett Green echoes this sentiment in his review of The Theological Imagination. Kaufman, with his "vast historical building project," has failed to realize that his task as a theologian is to reflect the glory of God that is already mirrored in reality:

> However much of the theologian's work is constructive, it depends finally on something that is . . . given, or in theological language, it responds to grace. The classical word for that which is given to the theologian by grace is revelation.[52]

Some of Kaufman's remarks lend themselves to such an incisive indictment of his thought. He overestimates the discontinuities of history when he says that the present historical situation is so novel that the paradigms of the past are no longer useful.[53] Although the ecological and nuclear crises require radically new technological, political, and psychological solutions, the roots of this predicament can be traced to the ancient vices of pride and greed, along with the perennial desires of power and prestige.

Kaufman's claim that there is no one else except us who can decide the future of theology also reveals his implicit anthropocentrism. As he has said with reference to Chris-

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[51]Ibid., pp. 54-56, 159n.22.

[52]Garrett Green, "Reconstructing Christian Theology," p. 221. Bruce McCormack has made a similar critique, "Divine Revelation and Human Imagination: Must We Choose Between the Two?"

[53]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 177-184; Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 5-14.

tianity, "The question . . . of who Jesus is (or was) and how we should interpret him theologically must be entirely and explicitly a matter of our decision."[54] Clark Pinnock therefore appears to be right when he says that Kaufman has advocated "a religious autonomy in which man gives the word (of God) to himself" (text inside brackets added).[55] He has forfeited the objective nature of God by making theology dependent upon a type of internal "decisionism" (Thiemann) that is immune to external criticism.

Finally, Kaufman's predilection for a human solution to complex theological questions is indicated by his definition of salvation as "a fulfillment of human needs and desires."[56] He claims that there is no reason why people should orient their lives according to the deity's purposes unless God is related in a significant manner to the problems that humanity is facing. The intrinsic relation between theology and anthropology makes it necessary for believers' fantasies of what God is like to be connected in a concrete manner to their aspirations, goals, and ideals.

This selective analysis of Kaufman's writings makes it sound as though his critics are right. He has apparently

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[54]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 125-126.

[55]Clark Pinnock, "God Made in the Image of Man," p. 35; cross-reference Ronald Thiemann, Revelation and Theology, pp. 54-55.

[56]Gordon Kaufman, An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 53-58.

replaced the sustaining presence of God with a philosophy of self-actualization which places humanity at the centre of the action. A further reading of the texts nevertheless sensitizes the reader to the fact that Kaufman has made careful qualifications to each of the above statements.

With respect to the issue of humanization, he has said that the idolatrous link between God and human-centredness can be avoided by balancing the paradigmatic example of Jesus with the relativizing influence of the Godhead. Believers move from a Christocentric to a theocentric perspective when they use the transcendent power of God to modify Jesus' demands of absolute obedience and self-effacing love.[57]

Kaufman also makes it clear that the novel situation in which the world presently finds itself is a result of past decision-making processes. Nations have endorsed the nuclear arms race and advocated unlimited industrial growth on the basis of their need for political and economic security. They have since been made aware of the fact that ideological paranoia and technical rationality have been allowed to "get out of hand." Kaufman is cautiously optimistic about countries becoming more responsible with the limited power that they have left.[58]

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[57]Ibid., pp. 56-58; The Theological Imagination, pp. 43-46, 114-122.

[58]The strength of Kaufman's theology lies in his refusal to give in to a fatalism that pronounces future events beyond human control. As he has said with reference to the ecological crisis: "It is only because of our historical existence

Finally, the backdrop for Kaufman's insistence upon autonomy whenever he detects the slightest hint of heteronomy continues to be a strong affirmation of the prevenience of God's grace, Thiemann's protestations to the contrary notwithstanding. Kaufman has recently made the Promethean statement that believers face the horrible possibility of nuclear annihilation "naked and alone."[59] He goes on to say that this contingency can be prevented if human beings know themselves to be "nourished and sustained . . . by life-giving powers which we have not made and by circumstances largely out of our control."[60] According to Kaufman, the full potential of human autonomy is realized when God is conceived as "working in and through the human spirit itself." Believers' acceptance of the fact that life is a gift from God enables them to have hope in--and work toward--a sustainable future.[61]

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in culture that ecological sensitivities are possible, and it will only be through a further sophistication of our cultural life that the ecological problems may in some measure be met. There is no way 'back to nature' for us; there is only the (hoped for) possibility of a movement forward into a more profound and sensitive freedom," The Theological Imagination, p. 236. Hans Jonas has made an important contribution to this debate in his study of social accountability, The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[59]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, p. 12.

[60]Ibid., pp. 34-35.

[61]Ibid., pp. 40-41. These remarks represent a modification of the author's initial views of the matter, A Review of Theology for a Nuclear Age, by Gordon Kaufman, Mennonite

This confirmation of the theonomous foundation of Kaufman's theology prompts a reinvestigation of the reasons for Thiemann's critique. The latter has claimed that an affirmation of divine prevenience is not possible without a theology of revelation. The logic of God's unmerited grace demands a theological framework in which self-disclosure plays a central role.[62] Kaufman has questioned the necessity of this link. According to him, faith can be viewed as a response to the divine initiative without requiring a God who comes "from beyond the bounds of history" to save humanity. That the two theologians would clash over the proper role of divine prevenience is understandable.[63]

B. A Clarification of Kaufman's Position vis-à-vis His Earlier Epistemological Emphases

A view of Kaufman's theology of construction through the eyes of his critics has left the indelible impression that there are numerous, perhaps insoluble tensions within his

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Quarterly Review 60/4 (1986):573-575 [a modified version of this review has appeared in Toronto Journal of Theology 2/2 (1986):305-307].

[62]Ronald Thiemann, Revelation and Theology, pp. 1-15.

[63]Kaufman does not totally rule out a theology of revelation:". . . with certain constructions of the concept of God, specifically those based on the model of the human person or agent, knowledge of God will quite properly be understood as depending upon his act of disclosure," An Essay on Theological Method, p. 67. His chief difficulty with a model of personal agency has to do with its dualistic implications. This dilemma has prompted him to shift to a divinity whose redemptive activity can be "discovered" through the imaginative reconstruction of reality, see below.

thought. These polarities have to do with the relationship between faith and reason, church and culture, and description and imagination. There are merits to these criticisms, as have been noted. What most critics have failed to appreciate, however, is the steady progression of Kaufman's theology, a development that takes its inspiration from his analysis of the knowing process. The time has therefore come for another look at these epistemological roots. This overview will set the parameters for the interpretive conclusions that are to follow.

The reader will recall that there are three stages in Kaufman's epistemology: (1) the dynamic spirit of humanity, (2) the experience of limitedness, and (3) the synthesis of these dualities into a meaningful whole. The reader will also remember that Kaufman used the second level of knowledge to establish his theology of revelation, and that he shifted his emphasis when this method became suspect. While the idea of an absolute Limit gave rise to a deity who revealed the divine purposes from "beyond history," a correlation of the first and second stages of his epistemology resulted in more empirically based analogies. Kaufman developed the model of a personal divine Agent on the basis of this link between experience and finitude. God could be conceived as "embodied humanity," through which the divine intentions were being enacted.

The full implications of his epistemological theory were

not realized, however, until 1975, when Kaufman came to the conclusion that a deliberate synthesis, rather than a (mere) juxtaposing of experience and limit was necessary for coming to terms with "God." Neither a disclosure of divine purposes nor a comparison of biblical analogies and phenomenological observations was adequate because these two methods did not give sufficient weight to the imaginative nature of theological concepts. The third aspect of Kaufman's epistemology, in other words, had been overlooked. He set out to correct this error by developing a theology of construction on the basis of all three stages of his theory of knowledge.[64]

Kaufman begins the discussion of his new method by saying that the first task of a theologian is to construct a comprehensive image of the world. The dynamic spirit of humanity represents the first stage of epistemology and so theologians have to provide a description of the natural and historical framework within which they are working.[65]

There are similarities between this phenomenological interest and the ontological concerns of Alfred N. Whitehead, Paul Tillich, and Langdon Gilkey. Together with these metaphysicians of nature, Kaufman has underlined the importance of interpreting "the overall context within which experience

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[64]Kaufman's shift to a theology of construction is anticipated by his essay, "God as Symbol," God the Problem, pp. 82-115. Cross-reference his comments about this transition, "Apologia Pro Vita Sua."

[65]Gordon Kaufman, An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 47-49.

falls." There is little sense in developing a theology without a cosmology.

He has a word of caution, however, for scholars who base their theological prolegomena on the dominant philosophy of the day without a critical assessment of the latter. Secular, scientific, and naturalistic world-views represent highly imaginative constructs that have been developed to account for certain regularities and anomalies. These interpretations have to be treated with care if they are going to serve as the underpinnings for theology.[66]

The second moment of theological construction consists of a relativization and humanization of everything that has been envisioned up to this point. Kaufman maintains that the concept of God facilitates such a procedure. The restricted scope and idealistic possibilities of the world's future are enhanced by an affirmation of divinity.[67]

Kaufman acknowledges that the move from a natural to a supernatural interpretation of the world is not a necessary one. Many people are satisfied with the cosmological and anthropological answers that they have received in regard to the, at times, inexplicable circumstances that envelop their lives. Kaufman nevertheless wonders whether the "over-againstness" of reality does not lend itself to an awareness

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[66]Note Kaufman's remarks, The Theological Imagination, pp. 209-237, 238-262.

[67]Gordon Kaufman, An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 49-58.

of deity. Consciousness of the essential mystery of life is conducive to an identification of this experience with God.

Kaufman underlines the difference between his use of the word "God" in his theology of construction and theology of revelation. The idea of an absolute Limit undergirded his earlier affirmation of the transcendence and aseity of God. He now states that the dualism implied in such a referential statement can be avoided by emphasizing the conceptual aspects of divinity. The second-order nature of the concept of God transforms the dilemma of metaphysical dualities into the epistemological problem of linguistic performance.

Kaufman also differentiates his use of "God" from that of "world." The term "world" has been formulated with the image of a whole in mind, for it represents the overall context of existence. The word "God" does not denote such a comprehensive idea. The primary symbol that is evoked when one thinks of deity is that of boundary or edge. Deity cannot be associated with the universe in a simplistic manner for God, by definition, stands apart from and in some tension with the world.[68]

According to Kaufman, relativization and humanization constitute the two functions of divinity. A belief in the one and only God curtails egocentric affirmations of human-

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[68]Ibid., pp. 49-50, 58. Kaufman has recently revised this idea to take account of theism as an inclusive worldview. The consequence of this shift in thinking is documented below.

ity, while the life of Jesus facilitates a gracious characterization of divinity. The ability of Jesus to turn aside wrath and replace it with something more wholesome reveals the immanent nature of divine redemption.[69]

The third moment of theological construction consists of a comparison of this concept of God with the initial worldview that has been constructed.[70] The reason that Kaufman gives for this final synthesizing procedure is that theologians have to return to experience to see if the "God" they have imagined resonates with life situations. Too many thinkers elaborate their doctrines of God without addressing the concerns of society. Their logical and speculative reflections have to be modified in order to engage citizens in activities that matter most.

The converse is also true, namely that experiential and pragmatic factors have to be evaluated on the basis of a particular concept of deity. Phenomenological theologians make the mistake of thinking that God follows as an almost inconsequential next step to their discovery of appropriate metaphysical categories. They have not realized that there is as much work to be done after their scientific research as before. Images of power, nature, and being have to be qualified in the light of Christianity's affirmation of a transcendent and omnipotent God. Theological metaphors have to

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[69]Ibid., pp. 55-56.

[70]Ibid., pp. 59-65.

capture the intuitive sensibilities of believers who are the final arbiters in interpreting the circumstances in which they find themselves.[71]

Kaufman feels that black, feminist, and liberation theologians have also paid too much attention to the experiential components of their research. The value of these contextual approaches lies in the seriousness with which the social and cultural situation is explored. Prejudice and discrimination go unrecognized unless they are named as such (Luther). A vindication of the rights of blacks, women, and the poor nevertheless fails to guarantee a future role for men, whites, or capitalists. The long-term significance of these innovative theologies rests in their ability to translate local realities into "universal" truths. The defusion of a difficult political situation is possible through a vision of humanity that touches the hearts and lives of the fiercest opposition.[72]

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[71]James Gustafson has used these two aspects of the theological enterprise to conceive of God as a "power that bears down upon and sustains us," Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:195-279. He cites scientific data in his elaboration of the compatibility between the limited freedom of humanity and the radical otherness of God. The question that needs to be asked is whether this is the type of deity that people want to live with. Kaufman, for one, has noted a tension between Gustafson's apologetic use of natural science and confessional affirmation of God's transcendence, "How is God to be Understood in a Theocentric Ethic?" p. 26.

[72]Kaufman deals briefly with this subject in An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 61-63. Contextual theologies that are of particular significance for North America include Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity, by Cornel West (Philadelphia: Westminster Press,

Kaufman focuses on the material ramifications of his constructive formula in his next two books.[73] This will be the subject of the next chapter. What is of particular interest here is the ensuing adjustments that Kaufman has made to his method. An analysis of these revisions will place his current use of a "categorial scheme" and view of God as a "vital force" into their proper epistemological perspective.

1. A Cosmological Image of God

Kaufman's first modification of his constructive method consists of a reconception of the function of divinity. It played the dual role of relativization and humanization in An Essay on Theological Method. Kaufman now claims that this fosters a too dichotomous understanding of deity's influence.[74] An affirmation of the radical otherness of divinity can easily degenerate into an accent of deity's terrifying and tyrannical presence. The humanity of God, in turn, can be used to sanction the desires of a particular cultural or religious group. A new symbol of deity is required, one that contains within itself these diverging theological emphases while avoiding the excesses to which each is prone.

Kaufman submits that the image of God as a sustaining

1982); and Christian Realism and Liberation Theology, by Dennis McCann (New York: Orbis Books, 1981).

[73]Note Kaufman's prefatory remarks, The Theological Imagination, pp. 11-17; see also Theology for a Nuclear Age.

[74]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 41-46; Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 34-40.

presence or cosmic force fulfils these requirements.[75] The idea that reality is larger than life makes it possible to conceptualize a God whose teleological purposes dwarf the obsessively consequential concerns of believers. The human species can be better understood if it is placed within a time frame that records its accomplishments as a "glitch" on the horizon of a rather long natural and historical process.

This cosmic reality not only overshadows humanity, but contributes to its sustenance as well. The biological and spiritual feasibility of homo sapiens is in large measure due to the hospitable features of the earth's climate and geography. These physical and natural realities undergird the image of God as a providential provider. The transcendent and immanent features of deity can be enveloped in the idea of a "fundamental telos" that is appreciative, yet mindful of human endeavours.[76]

The second advantage of this cosmic analogy is that it fulfils the directives of the third moment of theological construction to a greater extent than Kaufman's earlier im-

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[75]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 46-57; Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 41-46.

[76]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, p. 55. This cosmic reality is referred to as a "hidden creativity at work in the historico-cultural process" in Theology for a Nuclear Age, p. 41. It should be noted that this teleological understanding of God is dependent on the actual discernment of divine agency in the historical process. Given the havoc that humans have wrecked on the earth in the last century, along with the theological implications that this has for God's salvific intentions, Kaufman's affirmation of divine providence has become increasingly tenuous, cf. chapter six.

ages have. The reader will recall that the last stage consists of a synthesizing process in which a new concept of God emerges from a dialectical comparison of divinity and the world. The logical implication of this constructive emphasis is that the idea of an absolute Limit is inadequate because it does not add anything positive to the total procedure. God has to be imagined as a "conceptual whole" in order to meet the demands of a comprehensive world-view.[77]

Kaufman's elaboration of God as a vital force goes a long way toward addressing this concern. The fact that divinity is "related to every segment and every dimension of our experience" enables the world to be sacralized. Pantheism is nonetheless averted by his claim that deity is only present in those mundane processes of history and nature that result in liberation and healing.[78] A duality between humanity and divinity remains within the idea of an inclusive reality whose sociological, historical, and natural supports represent key components in the sustenance of life.

Kaufman's selective use of a personal model of agency denotes the third asset of his cosmological conception of God. The intentional and active features of an agential analogy are retained within this holistic image. Deity is

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[77]Kaufman deals with this problem in An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 49-51; The Theological Imagination, pp. 27-34; Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 26-28.

[78]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, p. 275; Theology for a Nuclear Age, p. 57.

similar to human beings in the sense that plans for the world have been mapped out. The anthropological idea of purposefulness renders a divine teleology comprehensible.

This model also facilitates the realization of divine intentions in natural and historical events. Evidential theories do not appeal to Kaufman because of their implicit use of a scientific notion of objectivity.[79] God is simply embodied in the sense that human and institutional factors contribute to the redemption of the world. Enactment of these creative forces can be referred to as divine activity.

Kaufman declines, nonetheless, to incorporate the personal features of an agential analogy in his new image of God. Deity cannot be conceived as an individual entity because this reinforces the egocentric and imperialistic tendencies of Western society. Familial images neglect the extent to which the conduct of parents, children, and friends are shaped by economic and social factors. Political symbols, in turn, suffer from the affliction of domination. References to God as King, Ruler, Judge, and Lord make it sound as though a strong centralized government is the best earthly substitute for the Kingdom of God.

A cosmological concept of God, according to Kaufman, alleviates some of these problems. A delineation of deity in

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[79]Gordon Kaufman, "'Evidentialism': A Theologian's Response," Faith and Philosophy 6/1 (1989):35-46. For a broader discussion of this theory, see Faith and Rationality, eds Alan Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

terms of the intricate ecological and historical web of events means that greater respect has to paid to the multitude of factors that contribute to redemption. Workers and employees as well as leaders and owners have a hand in the furtherance of the common good(s). This networking image fosters a genuinely participatory model of divine action. The sustainable features of the human enterprise, a venture that is bound up with the ecological viability of the earth, furnishes a vision by which solidarity can be achieved.

2. A Christian Categorial Scheme

Kaufman's development of a Christian categorial scheme represents the second major modification of his theological method. The concepts of "God" and "world" have served as alternatives to "church" and "culture" in his account of the public aspects of Christianity. They are also the pillars upon which his theological method has been constructed. The world symbolizes the overall framework of meaning in terms of which ideas of God are conceived.

There are several drawbacks in limiting Christian theology to an explication of these concepts. The term "world" can be associated with nature as well as history. The word "God" is given the difficult task of "holding together in one religious symbol" the contrasting themes of relativization and humanization.[80] Although Kaufman's conception of divin-

[80]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 216-218; Theology for a Nuclear Age, p. 34.

ity as a vital cosmic force represents a cogent response to this dilemma, its comprehensiveness tends to gloss over those aspects of the Christian faith which set it apart from other religions.

These ambiguities have prompted Kaufman to add the terms "Christ" and "humanity" to "God" and "world" to form a cohesive Christian categorial scheme.[81] A correlation of humanity with conscious existence facilitates a more direct association of the world with that part of the universe that has been here long before human beings. Explicit reference to Jesus Christ also clears up some of the confusion surrounding his image of deity. The life and death of Jesus give believers some idea of what Kaufman has in mind when he speaks about the normative qualities of selfless love. Christ's humanizing characteristics allow God to be related more closely to the relativizing aspects of theology. The transcendence and immanence of divinity are embodied in the concepts of God and Christ.

This categorial scheme serves as a corrective to the assimilative features of Kaufman's third moment of theological construction. The ability of a cosmological image to compete with secular and naturalistic world-views is gained at the expense of the scandal of faith. Kaufman continues to show his colours as a Christian theologian through his regard

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[81]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 99-122; cross-reference "Religious Diversity, Historical Consciousness, and Christian Theology," pp. 3-15.

for human beings as the recipients of the gospel message and through his reflection on the contribution that Jesus Christ can make to a supersensible interpretation of reality.

C. Kaufman's Theology of Construction as an Ideal Possibility

The time has come to analyse Kaufman's latest theological reflections in the light of two hypotheses. The first entails a subjective interpretation and the second a realistic or ontological explication. Viewing Kaufman's theology from the presuppositional and pragmatic features of his own thinking, George Lindbeck has said that there is not much difference between his neo-orthodox period and his theology of construction. Every time Kaufman makes the Enlightenment point that creativity stands at the foundation of thought, he returns to Scripture and tradition to expand upon his views of God and Christ. Lindbeck concludes that Kaufman's theology can be described as "a post-Wittgensteinian transcription of an at least quasi-Barthian position."[82] His affirmation of a Christian categorial scheme places him closer to the confessional stances of H. R. Niebuhr and Karl Barth than the experiential starting points of Langdon Gilkey and R. R. Niebuhr.

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[82]George Lindbeck, A Review of An Essay on Theological Method, by Gordon Kaufman, p. 263. Hugh Jones has made a similar analysis, "Gordon Kaufman's Perspectival Language." For the relevant passages in Kaufman's writings, see An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 8-9, 50-51; The Theological Imagination, pp. 49-51, 126-127.

The naturalistic aspects of Kaufman's thought have prompted William Dean to disagree with this interpretation. Kaufman has recently said that empirical changes within history "call for, indeed force upon us, changes in our religious symbolism." These alterations necessitate the identification of deity with events that enhance life.[83] Kaufman's pronouncements have convinced Dean that the realistic dimensions of his thought cannot be ignored. His depiction of divinity as a "hidden creativity" that is working itself out in the evolutionary process demonstrates that God is a reality that overrides imaginative constructions.[84]

A delineation of the context out of which Lindbeck is writing will assist in an assessment of his remarks. He has brought attention to the second-order nature of theological language through his comparison of a cultural-linguistic and experiential-expressive approach.[85] According to Lindbeck, theologians using the latter method have proceeded on the false assumption that religious affections are a reasonably reliable foundation on which to ground their descriptions of divinity. They have not realized that the word "God" is a

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[83]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 9, 41-44.

[84]William Dean, History Making History, pp. 140-141; cross-reference his discussion of the relation between epistemology and ontology, American Religious Empiricism, pp. 41-86. See also Paul Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, pp. 43-100.

[85]George Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, pp. 30-45.

highly imaginative idea that has been constructed from a variety of personal, social, and cultural images. The primary task of a theologian is to analyse the function of theological language in social settings, rather than to conceptualize God on the basis of a given experience. Attention has to be paid to the communitarian effects of religious utterances.

The benefits of Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model have already been noted. The suspension of ostensive reference in favour of theoretical frameworks facilitates an emphasis on the internal efficacy of Christianity. Theologians can take more time in detailing the nuances of their beliefs because they are no longer subject to the immediate demands of relevancy.

This insight is of particular use to Lindbeck because of his interest in ecumenical dialogue. The embedded nature of church doctrines has led some theologians to espouse the irreformability of these beliefs. Lindbeck maintains that a recognition of the regulative character of creeds enables this impasse to dogmatic reform to be broken. The historical relativization and contextualization of controversial Catholic doctrines make it possible for Protestants to confess the theological import of these articles of faith, while denying their ontological validity.[86]

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[86]Ibid., pp. 73-111. Lindbeck gives two examples of what he has in mind. The doctrine of papal infallibility was inaugurated at a time when the authority of the Roman Catho-

The innovative features of Lindbeck's proposal rest in his functional interpretation of theological statements. Church doctrines have traditionally been defended on the basis of a propositional theory of truth. A one-to-one correspondence between words and objects to which they refer represents the hallmark of this method. Orthodox scholars' adoption of this essentially Platonic world-view helps to explain their resistance to doctrinal revisions. The idea that creeds "mirror" (Rorty) unchanging realities limits the task of theologians to discovering and categorizing these entities.

Lindbeck has serious reservations about this method. Theologians can only conjecture about the true nature of the ousia (substance, essence) that is spoken about in Trinitarian and Christological formulas because there is no way of getting behind this abstract concept to noumenal reality. Doctrines thus have to be assessed on the basis of their performative usefulness. The social and cultural effects of

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lic church was being threatened by the political unification of Italy (1870). This makes the impetus for ecclesiastical centralization understandable, if not acceptable.

The immaculate conception of Mary, in turn, becomes comprehensible once it is viewed in terms of the Western church's preoccupation with original sin. The church's need to erect ever more safeguards against fetal contamination (virgin birth, infant baptism) has culminated in a doctrine that declares the birth of the mother of Jesus to be free of all impurities. The deductive logic of this concern enables believers on both sides of the issue to acknowledge the significance of this belief, while upholding the integrity of their own views.

creeds and confessions establishes their significance.[87]

Lindbeck concentrates on the conventional implications of this pragmatic theory of truth. He states that the primary purpose of Christianity is to encourage linguistic competency with respect to the Bible and performative capability in regard to ecclesiological rituals. The inculcation, recital, and enactment of these rites and services nurture a strong Christian identity.[88]

Other scholars have drawn more radical conclusions from this functional interpretation of linguistic usage. Richard Rorty maintains that a comparison of cultural traditions is the only means by which proximate standards of truth can be arrived at. There is no ontological given "deep inside us" that can be discovered. The best that we can do is under-

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[87]Ibid., pp. 64-69, 104-108. John L. Austin makes a similar point with his distinction between the "locutionary" and "illocutionary" force of a spoken sentence, "Performative Utterances," in The Philosophy of Language, ed. A. P. Martinich, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 115-124. Cross-reference Colman O'Neill's evaluation of Lindbeck's theology, "The Rule Theory of Doctrine and Propositional Truth," The Thomist 49/3 (1985):417-442.

[88]George Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, pp. 128-135. There are times when Lindbeck goes beyond what Kaufman has referred to as the "conservative establishmentarian" use of his cultural-linguistic model, A Review of The Nature of Doctrine, by George Lindbeck, p. 241. Lindbeck at one point says that "theology and the church should do everything possible to practice and encourage culturally interesting readings of the text. In this way, they may help, not only the church, but also the world," "Barth and Textuality," p. 372. There are other places, however, where humanistic and liberating interpretations are referred to as "progressive translations" which imprison the text within "alien frameworks of interpretation," ibid., pp. 364-367, note discussion below.

stand the criterion of rationality that we have "put there" ourselves.[89]

Jeffrey Stout has proposed a holistic form of historicism as an alternative to the irrationalism of theology and the autonomous pretensions of philosophy. Critical rationality and deductive analysis are still regarded by the academic community as the best means by which to ground their individual fields of research. Stout submits that these methods are of limited value because they disguise the innumerable factors that make up a society. An integral approach to the study of philosophy, ethics, and religion is required. Careful historical research yields an appreciation for the overall "belief structure" of a culture.[90]

Besides these non-theistic proposals, Sallie McFague represents one of a handful of North American theologians who have explored the radical implications of a pragmatic theory of knowledge.[91] She claims that the abolition of ostensive reference allows for a new freedom in the use of theological

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[89]Richard Rorty, The Consequences of Pragmatism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. xlii; see also Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature.

[90]Jeffrey Stout, The Flight from Authority, pp. 1-21, 256-272. He cites William Frankena and John Rawls as two ethicists who have paid insufficient attention to religious and historical factors, pp. 179-200, 228-255. Cross-reference William Dean's discussion of these issues, American Religious Empiricism, pp. 41-86; History Making History, pp. 81-97, 138-139.

[91]Sallie McFague, Models of God, pp. 3-57. Cornel West is another, Prophecy Deliverance!.

images. The only operative criterion is a heuristic one that encourages believers to be as experimental as possible in their descriptions of God. Worshippers should allow their imaginations to wander so that they can find out for themselves which metaphors resonate with the richness of their religious experiences.

Favourable comparisons can be drawn between Kaufman and the above named scholars. He has created a theoretical framework to account for the multifaceted aspects of theology in the same way that Lindbeck has used a regulative theory to highlight the coherence of beliefs. The concepts of God, world, humanity, and Christ represent key categories of Christianity, to which the themes of nature, grace, sin, and salvation can be attached.[92] The internal logic of faith is made explicit by these correlations.

Kaufman's retention of some of the more traditional features of Christianity is also indicated by his sustained emphasis on the transcendence of God. He continues to conceive of God as an absolute Limit in order to avoid deity's identification with the world. This theme has recently been developed in relation to the fundamental mysteriousness of life. The knowledge that we can destroy the earth through a nuclear holocaust makes us keenly aware of the contingency of history. A sense of awe and mortality is evoked by this

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[92]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 120-121.

terrifying possibility.[93]

A third similarity has to do with the pragmatic approaches of these theologians. Kaufman evaluates imaginative concepts in terms of their usefulness in the same way that Lindbeck judges doctrines on the basis of their performance. Symbols of God are of benefit if they free believers from the binding tendencies of traditional theological formulations. The translation of dogmas into categorial schemes facilitates an appropriate response to the requirements of faith.

Kaufman, however, is less reticent about the revolutionary implications of a cultural-linguistic model. Second-order theology entails not only the rearrangement and redescription of dogmatic truths, but their radical deconstruction and reconstruction as well.[94] References to the immutability, omnipotence, and fatherliness of God foster a distorted view of what deity is like. These concepts have to be destroyed so that more humane and redemptive models can be created. Changing historical circumstances demand imaginative rejoinders to the ever new aspects of reality itself.[95]

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[93]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 11-14; see also "Mystery, Critical Consciousness, and Faith."

[94]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 16-29, 53-56.

[95]There are essentially two phases to this deconstructive and reconstructive activity. The first entails the reduction of theological language to its metaphorical base, thereby revealing its distance from and paradoxical relationship to the signified, i.e. God. This iconoclasm, of which Sallie McFague's theology is a good example, has received its impetus from the literary method of deconstruction that has

Kaufman is also much more emphatic about the social and political consequences of Christianity. While Lindbeck intimates that the emphasis on praxis by "progressive theologians" represents an extratextual reading of Scripture,[96] Kaufman claims that emancipation stands at the centre of the biblical message. The liberating stories of Exodus, the prophetic voices of Micah (6:6-8) and Isaiah (1:10-17), and the mediatory tone of Jesus and Paul have convinced him that the Bible goes well beyond a call for proper ritualistic practices. Justice is regarded in these passages as an intrinsic part of the Word of God.[97]

The radical nature of Kaufman's pragmatism facilitates a

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been gaining momentum in the United States, cf. Patrick Hartin, "Deconstruction and Theology," Journal of Theology for South Africa 54 (1986):25-34; Christopher Norris, Deconstruction: Theory and Practice (London: Routledge, 1982).

Kaufman and McFague nevertheless eschew the nihilistic tendencies to which some deconstructionists are prone. The purpose of reducing a text to its author(ity)-less and structure-less status is to demonstrate the human, fallible quality of residual metaphors that remain, rather than to accentuate their meaningless status. Kaufman and McFague continue to assert the value of referential language, thereby making a displacement of one set of metaphors or conceptual schemes with another possible. Cf. the discussion of this point by John B. Cobb, "Deconstruction and Reconstruction of 'God,'" in Witness and Existence: Essays in Honor of Shubert Ogden, ed. Paul Devenish (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 162-176; Shiela G. Davaney, A Review of Models of God, by Sallie McFague, Religious Studies Review 16/1 (1990):36-40; and David Griffin, God and Religion in the Postmodern World (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. ix-xii.

[96]George Lindbeck, "Barth and Textuality," p. 365.

[97]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 238-262; Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 57-58.

correlation of his thought to that of Richard Rorty, Jeffrey Stout, and Sallie McFague. Like Rorty, Kaufman indicates his willingness to discard all concepts that are out of step with current cultural and historical realities. The relativity of history demands such a precarious approach to the study of theology. Theological images have to be rebuilt while one's faith is still afloat, instead of allowing it to sink while holding on to the illusory idea that old metaphors are satisfactory.[98] The "interruptive" (Tracy) nature of history guarantees the continual upheaval and transformation of Christianity.

Kaufman's thought also bears some resemblance to the experimental work of Sallie McFague. McFague has developed the metaphors of God as Mother, Lover, and Friend to fill the creative void that has been left by the stultifying effects of tradition.[99] Kaufman underscores her call for new imaginative images. "Idealizing symbols" have a way of "drawing us beyond ourselves" to a profound sense of the real.[100]

In spite of this favourable assessment, Kaufman eschews the more personalistic and metaphoric aspects of McFague's

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[98]Kaufman uses Neurath's analogy of a boat being repaired at sea to develop this idea, "Mystery, Critical Consciousness, and Faith," p. 62; cross-reference Hilary Putnam's use of this image, Realism and Reason, p. 204.

[99]Sallie McFague, Models of God, pp. 91-180.

[100]Gordon Kaufman, "Mystery, Critical Consciousness, and Faith," p. 64; cross-reference McFague's modified endorsement of Kaufman's position, Models of God, pp. 17-21, 37-40.

theology. The concept of God as a cosmic reality represents for him a better constructive analogy because it highlights the complexities of life in a way that her existential and interpersonal images do not.[101]

Finally, Jeffrey Stout's holism represents a moderating influence on the consequential tendencies of Kaufman's theology. Stout is in agreement with Rorty and Kaufman when they say that the relative nature of history nullifies an ontological rendering of conceptual schemes. The historical dependence of theoretical frameworks requires the grounding of philosophy and religion in the social and cultural fabric of a particular time period.

Stout, however, does not give up on the significance of the past as easily as Kaufman does. He claims that the labelling of ancient writings as naive by twentieth-century researchers simply confirms their historical prejudices. Their failure to appreciate the circumstantial biases of their own evaluations makes them ill equipped in describing the subtle shifts of history. A good investigator begins with the assumption that historical works made sense to their contemporaries.[102] Allowance for real differences heightens, rather than diminishes a person's appreciation of the past.

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[101]Gordon Kaufman, A Review of Models of God, by Sallie McFague, Theology Today 45/1 (1988):95-101. Sheila Greeve Davaney echoes Kaufman's views in her review of McFague's book.

[102]Jeffrey Stout, The Flight from Authority, pp. 149-176.

The implication behind these remarks is that an acknowledgment of relativism represents only the first task of a theologian. An evaluation of innovative concepts on the basis of ideas that have made their influence felt through the warp and woof of time constitutes the second stage. This procedure substantiates the fact that relativity itself is a modern idea. Caution and moderation are the rule of thumb when making claims about the novelty of one's position.[103]

D. Kaufman's Theology of Construction as a Realistic Option

Stout's suspicions about the incommensurability of theoretical frameworks set the stage for an alternate interpretation of Kaufman's thought, one that leads in the direction of metaphysics and ontology. Kaufman has always understood that an acknowledgment of relativity does not yet constitute knowledge. Curiosity about truth provides the impetus for setting up inclusive standards of judgment.[104] Although Kaufman employs the principles of internal coherence and pragmatism in his constructive theology, the hypothesis of this section is that there is a third, substantial criter-

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[103]Ibid., pp. 256-272; cross-reference Hilary Putnam's remarks, Realism and Reason, pp. 287-303.

[104]". . . the relativist (like anyone else) is never content simply to accept his position, simply to confess it. As a man who is seeking truth, he always also attempts to establish it, to buttress it in one way or another with 'rational' arguments, to satisfy himself that his position has more than simply passing and temporary interest, that it has, in some sense, 'universal' or 'general' validity," Gordon Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, p. 10.

ion that he uses to evaluate and revise his concepts of God. This standard can be referred to as realism, or rather, as having to do with an image's ontological significance.

The best way to proceed with this investigation is to consider the responses of two process theologians to Kaufman's theology of divine agency. David Griffin and David Mason have taken the opportunity to pursue this theme along the lines of a natural metaphysic. An assessment of their comments will provide the backdrop for a discussion of the metaphysical plausibility of Kaufman's views.[105]

David Griffin begins his article with the statement that Kaufman's theological use of an agential model represents an

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[105]There are times when David Griffin and David Mason sound more like idealistic than realistic philosophers. Mason uses the insights of Alfred N. Whitehead to speak about God as a universal influence that "acts as a lure toward the actualization of an ideal possibility," "Can We Speculate on How God Acts?" p. 31. This highly abstract language is accompanied by an assertion of the internal nature of God, "Selfhood, Transcendence, and the Experience of God," p. 299.

A similar analysis obtains in the case of David Griffin. He differentiates his "rigorous ideal conceptuality" from ordinary language philosophy and uses the writings of Whitehead to develop the idea of the sentience of all living organisms, "Gordon Kaufman's Theology: Some Questions," pp. 554, 559-560, 570-572.

Significant differences between these authors and the ones cited in the last section nevertheless remain. Sallie McFague, Richard Rorty, and Jeffrey Stout have developed heuristic and historical models in reaction to the "metaphysics of presence" that has dominated Western philosophical thought. They are interested in the pragmatic consequences of imaginative ideas, note McFague's discussion, Models of God, pp. 24-28. David Mason and David Griffin, on the other hand, are committed to the development of holistic theologies that can be correlated with the most recent phenomenological descriptions of humanity and the world. They trust that this procedure will result in a compelling account of God's immediate influence, see below.

advance over the "agnostic, relativist, and conative side" of his thought.[106] His employment of a human analogy to speak about the historical activities of God indicates his willingness to consider the manner in which deity is present.

Griffin goes on to say that Kaufman's reticence about the direct impingement of divinity hinders his exploration of the full implications of a personal model. Although his concentration on the human relations of deity is useful, he has failed to explain how natural events are linked to the effective consequences of God's master-act.

This lack within Kaufman's thinking has prompted Griffin's development of a more immanent interpretation of an agent-act model.[107] He claims that the intentional features of this analogy facilitate an immediate correlation of God and the world. Deity affects reality in the same way that a mind regulates bodily movements, i.e. through its conscious or "subjective" presence. The attribution of sentience to all living things, similar to but on a different scale than the mind's relation to the body, clears the way for the conception of God as a latent redemptive presence.[108]

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[106]David Griffin, "Gordon Kaufman's Theology: Some Questions," p. 557.

[107]Ibid., pp. 559-560, 570-572.

[108]Note this statement by Schubert Ogden: "We respond with virtual immediacy to the impulses that come from our brains, and it is over our brains (or their individual cells) that our decisions as selves or minds exercise a virtually direct power or control. I hold with Hartshorne that the interaction between God and the world must be understood

There are a number of difficulties with Griffin's proposal. First, his emphasis on the interior influence of divinity exacerbates the problem of dualism that has been the Achilles heel of Kaufman's theology of divine agency. While Kaufman has insisted on the inextricable link between divine purposes and historical events, Griffin reinforces the "residually Cartesian" aspects of an agential model when he recommends human consciousness as a suitable analogy for divine immanence. This makes him subject to all of the criticisms that have been presented in the last chapter.

The second problem with Griffin's stance has to do with his idealistic interpretation of deity. Following the lead of Alfred Whitehead and John Cobb, he has claimed that God represents a universal influence within each moment of reality that lures it to its redemptive possibility.[109] This speculative account of divine immanence highlights the imaginative content of theological symbols at the expense of God's prevenience. Viewing divinity as a forever unreachable goal causes believers to despair because they have lost sight of

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analogously to this interaction between our minds and bodies with the difference that the former interaction takes place . . . between God and the whole world of his creatures," The Reality of God and Other Essays, p. 178, see also pp. 57-60. For Charles Hartshorne's discussion, see Man's Vision of God (New York: Harper & Row, 1941), pp. 174-211.

[109]David Griffin, "Gordon Kaufman's Theology: Some Questions," pp. 564, 571; cross-reference John B. Cobb, Jr., God and the World, pp. 42-66; Alfred N. Whitehead, Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology, corrected edition, eds. David Griffin and Donald Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), pp. 343-346.

the sustainable features of existence.

These difficulties aside, the merits of Griffin's position can be found in his metaphysical conception of God as an "all-encompassing whole." The direct correlation of deity and the universe enables one to speak about the suffering presence of God in a way that Kaufman's "ultimate Limit" does not allow. This immanent analogy draws attention to God's ability to take up all the miseries and revengeful acts that the world has ever known and transform them into something redemptive. The contingent features of deity are also illuminated by this organic image. Divinity is "open to change" and "growth" in the same way that people and the environment adapt to new circumstances.[110]

There are passages in Kaufman's early writings that echo Griffin's panentheistic description of God. The long-suffering, ever-responsive, and mitigated power of divinity is underscored in his Systematic Theology.[111] It has only been recently, however, that Kaufman has incorporated these yielding attributes into his more compelling view of God. Divinity is to be conceived today as a vital entity that sustains as well as limits human existence.[112]

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[110]David Griffin, "Gordon Kaufman's Theology: Some Questions," pp. 570-571.

[111]Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, pp. 210-222, 389-410; cross-reference Griffin's remarks, "Gordon Kaufman's Theology: Some Questions," p. 567.

[112]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 50-54; Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 42-45.

The significance of Griffin's proposal also comes to light when it is contrasted with the imagistic theology of Sallie McFague. The latter thinker has eschewed ontological descriptions because of their tendency to reify the Immanuel qualities of deity (Gott mit uns).[113] McFague claims that this difficulty can be avoided by remaining on the lower level of metaphorical attribution. The negative aspects (via negativa) of experience can be accounted for by staying receptive to a variety of divine images and by making less referential claims about God.[114]

The question must be raised whether a more substantial definition of God is required. Theological concepts need to be grounded on a solid foundation if they are going to symbolize something other than affective feelings toward the Godself. McFague tends toward existentialism with her images of God as Mother, Lover, and Friend.[115] It would appear that Griffin's insistence upon a correspondence between religious experiences and the metaphysically Real has some merits. An evaluation of the ontological significance of an analogy reveals its strengths and weaknesses.

Another process thinker who has responded favourably to

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[113]Sallie McFague, Models of God, pp. 24-28, 60-63.

[114]"Theological constructions are 'houses' to live in for a while, with windows partly open and doors ajar; they become prisons when they no longer allow us to come and go, to add a room or take one away--or if necessary, to move out and build a new house," ibid., p. 27.

[115]Ibid., pp. 91-180.

Kaufman's agent-act model, but taken the opposite approach to that of Griffin is David Mason. Mason begins his discussion by saying that sentience cannot be used as a model for conceptualizing divine immanence.[116] Consciousness has been limited to a highly select group of developed organisms and so another concept has to be found to symbolize the intricate connection between God and the world.

Mason proposes the idea of an event as a viable alternative to Griffin's mind-body analogy. He claims that an "occurrence" is able to account for finite antecedents in a way that consciousness cannot because it represents a "focal point in a web that reaches beyond itself indefinitely."[117] This materialistic lattice motif allows for the indeterminacy of history to be enmeshed within the framework of existence. The unpredictability of the universe is due, not to the whimsical character of human behaviour (as is implied by a sentient model), but to the inherent temporality of events.

Mason uses this corporeal image to refer to events as agents in their own right. He claims that consciousness or subjectivity can be ascribed to events because they act as objective conditioning factors in determining subsequent oc-

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[116]David Mason, "Can We Speculate on How God Acts?" p. 27. He refers to a statement that Whitehead has made in regard to this matter: "Consciousness is the crown of experience, only occasionally attained, not its necessary base," Process and Reality, p. 267.

[117]David Mason, "Can We Speculate on How God Acts?" pp. 19, 23-26, 28-29; for Kaufman's discussion of acts and events, see God the Problem, pp. 125-135.

currences. Events represent "subjects presiding over their own becoming" in the sense that they help to shape the future. Griffin's notion of the sentience of all living things has been replaced by the "subjective aim" of actual occasions.[118]

Mason develops a theology of divine agency on the basis of this natural metaphysical theory. God is to be identified with the subjective possibility within each event that lures it to its fullest potential. An actual occasion continues to be the final arbiter in its own enactment, but deity represents the persuasive influence through which the unrealized future is transformed into the fleeting present and constituted past.[119]

Several preliminary observations about Mason's proposal are in order. First, he is as enamoured by the idealistic prospects of a metaphysical description as Griffin is. His causal theory of events has been developed to make deity's immediate effect on the world comprehensible. Mason is less concerned about the empirical verifiability of his hypothesis. In fact, he claims that his reference to God as a subjective agent intercepts the difficulties associated with natural theology. The problem of corroboration does not even

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[118]David Mason, "Can We Speculate on How God Acts?" pp. 28-29.

[119]Ibid., pp. 30-31.

arise in the case of the internal presence of God.[120]

Mason's use of the term "consciousness" should also be noted. He continues to refer to events as "subjects" even though he disapproves of Griffin's ascription of sentience to living things. The reason for this paradoxical stance has to do with the inability of natural theologians to avoid anthropomorphic allusions. The attribution of intentionality and purpose to objects is normal because this is how human beings perceive their relationship to the world. The personification of nature facilitates the elimination of anthropocentric descriptions within a theologically oriented natural metaphysic.[121]

These subjective features aside, Mason's analysis of actual occasions as "objective factors conditioning subsequent events" opens the door to a realistic interpretation of his thought. He has included the basic elements that every historian has to take into account in examining a phenomenon: indeterminacy, self-determination, and a possible overarching explanation. This skeletal theory facilitates the development of objective, sociological, and empirical criteria in theology. Speculations about divinity are modified in the direction of the Real when attention is paid to ongoing

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[120]Ibid., p. 31; cross-reference his recent article, "Selfhood, Transcendence, and the Experience of God," p. 299.

[121]Note Kaufman's remarks, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, p. 38.

changes within history and nature.[122]

This brief inquiry into the theologies of David Mason and David Griffin paves the way for a detailed analysis of the realistic aspects of Kaufman's thought. His first explicit reference to empiricism occurs in relation to his discussion of the third moment of theological construction. Kaufman says that imaginative concepts of God have to be brought back to experience in order to made trustworthy. Creative ideas are enhanced when channelled through the ordinary nature of lived reality.[123]

This affinity for the metaphysically Real is further developed in the first chapter of The Theological Imagination. Kaufman begins by focusing on the unifying effects of a constructive theology. Its provision of an overarching frame of reference in terms of which everything can be explained represents its advantage over particular interpretations. The elucidating powers of a holistic theology allow for a detailed exploration of different facets of life.[124]

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[122]Edward Farley's book, Ecclesial Man, represents a good example of how Mason's theoretical discussion could be developed phenomenologically.

[123]Gordon Kaufman, An Essay on Theological Method, pp. 58-65, 72n.22. Wallace Stevens' observation bears repeating: "The imagination loses vitality as it ceases to adhere to what is real. When it adheres to the unreal and intensifies what is unreal, while its first effect may be extraordinary, that effect is the maximum effect that it will ever have," The Necessary Angel, p. 6.

[124]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 21-22, 28-30.

This apology for systematic thought leads to Kaufman's symbolization of deity as a comprehensive whole. God can no longer be conceived as an absolute Limit or humanizing Ideal because this only leads back into the labyrinth of theological dualism. Kaufman claims that the image of God as a cosmic force solves this dilemma. The relativizing and humanizing aspects of God can be enveloped in the single image of divinity as a dynamic presence.[125]

Another material consequence that follows from Kaufman's concern for the metaphysical plausibility of his views pertains to his replacement of personal and political images with biological and organic symbols. Gustafson has accused Kaufman of being overly concerned about the historical aspects of theology.[126] Kaufman takes this criticism to heart when he conceives of deity as a cosmic whole. The integral relation between nature and history gives rise to the concept of God as a

> complex of physical, biological, and historico-cultural conditions which have made human existence possible, which continue to sustain it, and which may draw it out to a fuller humanity.[127]

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[125]Ibid., pp. 51-57.

[126]James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:264-266, 271-272.

[127]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, p. 42; cross-reference the exchange between Kaufman and Gustafson, "Panel Discussion," James M. Gustafson's Theocentric Ethics: Interpretations and Assessments, eds. Harlan Beckley and Charles Swezey (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1988), pp. 210-212, 235-238.

A final example illustrates the degree to which empiricism has become a key element within Kaufman's constructive theology. He has recently said that "God's own being and destiny" are dependent on the fate of the earth.[128] The creation of the world and the incarnation of Jesus Christ are cited as theological reasons for this mitigated interpretation of divine omnipotence. Deity is dependent upon the agents through whom the divine objectives are being accomplished.

There is a good historical reason for this "panentheistic" belief. The fact that human beings are able through the use of nuclear weapons to obliterate the very thing for which God "sent his Son to die" (John 3:16) diminishes the power of deity. Kaufman does not suggest that the destruction of the earth would mean the death of God. This conclusion would be based on a too unequivocal identification of divinity and the world. He says, however, that a nuclear holocaust would represent a disaster for deity. An atomic war would place the salvific end to which God has committed the world in serious jeopardy.[129]

William Dean thus appears to be right when he says that

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[128]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, p. 45.

[129]Ibid., pp. 1-15, 45-46. For other theological responses to the threat of a nuclear holocaust, see Charles Davis, "Christian Hope in a Nuclear Age," Fourteenth Lecture of the Robinson T. Orr Visitorship (London, Ontario: Huron College, 1984); John Bennett, "Divine Persuasion and Divine Judgment," The Christian Century 102/19 (May 29, 1985):554-557; Douglas J. Hall, Thinking the Faith, pp. 223-228.

Kaufman's views have been affected by empirical changes within history.[130] Whereas earlier, Kaufman was satisfied with ferreting out the logical implications of his theology, he now realizes the momentous effects that an historical phenomenology can have. Recent events have forced him, along with other Christian theologians, to re-evaluate his most cherished beliefs.

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[130]William Dean, History Making History, pp. 140-141.

CHAPTER SIX

THE RELATION OF DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND HUMAN FREEDOM

Introduction

Contrasting methods have been used to interpret Kaufman's thought in the preceding chapters. His epistemology has been judged on the basis of the criteria of internal coherence and pragmatism. His metaphysics has been assessed in terms of its differences from a secular world-view and phenomenological approach. His theology of revelation has been elucidated in relation to a personal analogy of transcendence and a teleological model of immanence. His theology of divine agency has been clarified according to the intrinsic character of God's master-act and humanity's effective agency. Finally, Kaufman's theology of construction has been explicated in terms of the divergent emphases of conceptual idealism and empirical realism.

This methodological summary verifies that Kaufman has shifted from a presuppositional perspective to a modified empirical or phenomenological approach. While the criteria of coherence and pragmatism were operative in his theory of knowledge, the primacy of practice has been contrasted with a

natural metaphysic to gain an appreciation of his theology of construction.

The object of this chapter is to employ another set of contrasting themes to illuminate Kaufman's thinking, but to do so in relation to the material aspects of his theology. The connection between divine sovereignty and human freedom is a theological issue that Kaufman has felt the need to clarify within his own thinking. An examination of this motif will shed light on the merits of his constructive method.[1]

The first remark that needs to be made about divine providence is that it has received little attention in the twentieth century. While acknowledging its historical importance, theologians have proceeded to what they consider to be of more immediate relevance, namely the existential or internal presence of God.[2] The nineteenth-century idea that deity is in control of the processes of history and nature, and that human beings are co-partners in this development, has given way to a much grimmer assessment. It appears that

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[1]A quotation from Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith sets the tone of this investigation: "The antinomy (between divine predestination and human freedom) arises from the necessity in our conceptual thinking to abstract and separate--and eventually think into opposition--elements which in the deepest reaches of the faith underlying personal existence are inseparable and a unity" (text inside brackets added), p. 113.

[2]Langdon Gilkey has made this point in "The Concept of Providence in Contemporary Theology," The Journal of Religion 43/3 (1963), pp. 174-185.

humanity is more limited than it has ever been before and that God, if present at all, is to be found in the innermost reaches of the human heart.

There are, of course, good reasons for this distancing of deity from the objective features of history. The first and second World Wars, the Jewish Holocaust, the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Cold War between East and West, and the nuclear and ecological crises have all left their mark, causing some believers to give up their faith or, if they have retained it, to reconceive of God in terms of a suffering Presence who stands in solidarity with the victims of these historical circumstances.[3] The manifestation of radical evil has necessitated a complete re-evaluation of divine omnipotence.

Christian theologians have responded to this dilemma by reaffirming the transcendence of God. Karl Barth declared in 1918 that the connection between divinity and humanity had been decisively broken. More recently, James Gustafson has criticized theologians for their anthropocentrism. These Protestant thinkers have underlined the fact that divinity

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[3]For an early treatment of this theme, see H. R. Niebuhr, "War as the Judgment of God," The Christian Century 59/19 (May 13, 1942):630-633; "War as Crucifixion," ibid. 60/17 (April 28, 1943):513-515; "Is God in the War?" co-authored with Virgil Aldrich, ibid. 59/31 (August 5, 1942): 953-955. For more recent treatises on the ambiguous relation of God and the world, see Elie Wiesel, Night, trans. Stella Rodway (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1960); Shusaku Endo, Silence, trans. William Johnston (London: Quartet Books, 1978); and Douglas Hall, God and Human Suffering.

cannot be identified with the political and social causes of humanity in a univocal manner.[4] The events of the twentieth century demonstrate that deity is transcendent, not immanent within the processes of history.

This emphasis on the otherness of God has served as a healthy corrective to the inflated view that Western society has had of itself. Given the present predicament in which this, our civilization finds itself, it should come as no surprise that Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Karl Rahner called for a disengagement of the acts of God from the deeds of humanity.

Contemporary explications of divine transcendence have nevertheless taken a different direction from several decades ago. Whether attention is drawn to Michael Novak's disparagement of the idealistic youth of the 1960's, the Hartford Appeal's employment of divine transcendence to point out the dangers of liberation theology, or James Gustafson's prolonged treatise on the limited nature of human freedom,[5] the reader is left with the impression that this is not exactly what Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr had in mind when they affirmed the hiddenness of deity. While the latter balanced

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[4]See Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, trans. Edwyn Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933); James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective.

[5]Michael Novak, The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), pp. 315-332; Peter Berger and Richard J. Neuhaus, eds., Against the World For the World (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), pp. 1-7, 15-16; James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective.

pronouncements of divine judgment with endorsements of the emancipatory presence of God,[6] recent affirmations of divine pre-eminence appear to have more to do with the legitimation of a particular (conservative) political and social order than with the dynamic relation of sinfulness and redemption.

A closer reading of these declarations is required before moving to an explication of Kaufman's thoughts on the subject. If it can be demonstrated that behind every discussion of the otherness of deity stands an implicit endorsement of God's omnipotence, then the concept of divine sovereignty has played a more important role in the twentieth century than first surmised. The question that will remain is what type of divine governance is appropriate to Christianity, rather than whether God can be affirmed as sovereign.

A. Examples of the Dialectical Relation Between Divine Transcendence and Immanence

1. Karl Barth

Karl Barth was one of the first to recognize the radical theological changes that were necessary to account for the devastating events of the twentieth century. He had this to say in the aftermath of World War I:

> . . . the more profoundly we become aware of the limited character of the possibilities which are open to us here and now, the more clear it is that we are farther away from God (Romans 1:18; 5:12) and the consequences of the desertion more vast (1:24; 5:12) than we ever dreamed. Men's union

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[6]Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II:81-97, 204-212; Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/2:203-324.

> with God is shattered so completely that they cannot even conceive of its restoration . . . their death is their destiny . . . their life is an illusion . . . The question "Is there then a God?" is therefore entirely relevant and inevitable![7]

What is particularly interesting about Barth's theology is that although his initial writings were perceived as having too little to say about divine immanence, his theological endorsement of the Allied cause during World War II was regarded as too unequivocal.[8] In 1918, Barth likened the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the world to a tangent and a circle, saying that "the new world of the Holy Spirit touches the old world of the flesh" in the same way that a tangent touches a circle, that is to say, "without touching it."[9]

He was less hesitant about the political implications of the resurrection in 1941. In a letter to British Christians, Barth stated that they should confront and defeat the evil that Hitler and the Nazis had come to represent. Britain was warranted in taking military action because Christians lived

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[7]Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 37.

[8]Reinhold Niebuhr has taken note of this paradoxical aspect of Karl Barth's thought, Essays in Applied Christianity, ed. D. B. Robertson (New York: Living Books, 1959), pp. 141-175.

[9]Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 30. Reinhold Niebuhr uses a similar analogy to speak about the significance of the cross: "They (pacifists) do not understand that the perfect love of Christ comes into the world, but that it does not maintain itself there; that the cross therefore stands at the edge of history and not squarely in history; that it reveals what history ought to but not what history is or can be" (text inside brackets added), Love and Justice, p. 276.

in a "world that already has been consecrated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" and because "this new reality extends beyond the church to the universe as a whole."[10]

These statements proved too much for American theologians, who were not only accustomed to Barth's reticence about the convergence of divinity and humanity but highly ambivalent about the United States' involvement in the war as well. Reinhold Niebuhr summed up the matter when he said:

> . . . the real weakness of this unvarying emphasis upon what we cannot do and upon what Christ has already done is that it tempts the Christian to share the victory and the glory of the risen Lord without participating in the crucifixion of the self, which is the Scriptural presupposition of a new life, for the individual, the church, and the nation.[11]

This meant that the Allied offensive could not be perceived, as Barth had insisted, as "a beneficent, a merciful thing, which is done in the truest interest of even those most directly affected thereby."[12] Rather, the second World War had to be approached "with a bad and tortured conscience for the sins that have brought us to the tragic necessity of

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[10]Karl Barth, A Letter to Great Britain from Switzerland, trans. E. H. Gordon and George Hill (London: Sheldon Press, 1941), pp. 9-15.

[11]Reinhold Niebuhr, Essays in Applied Christianity, p. 170.

[12]Karl Barth, The Church and War: A Letter to American Christians, trans. Antonia H. Froendt (New York: Macmillan, 1944), pp. 27, 30. A shorter version of this text, entitled "A Letter to American Christians," with comments by Samuel M. Cavert, John C. Bennett, C. C. Morrison, Wilhelm Pauck, and Douglas Steere, appears in Christendom 8/4 (1943):441-472.

fighting."[13] For Wilhelm Pauck, John C. Bennett, C. C. Morrison, H. Richard and Reinhold Niebuhr, the "judgment of God" was a more apt description of World War II than Barth's depiction of the fighting as a "righteous cause."

Regardless of how one assesses Barth's justification of World War II,[14] the relevance of his remarks has to do with his dialectical presentation of judgment and redemption. Although God's condemnation of humanity applied equally to everyone, the grace of Jesus Christ was especially meaningful to those who resisted the evils of Nazism. In the concrete situation of Germany in the 1930's, where anti-Semitism, fascism, and a blatant disregard for human rights were rampant, the sovereignty of God was revealed as an inextricable dimension of those Christians and Allied nations who dedicated themselves to restoring a just state in Germany.

2. The Hartford Appeal

The second example of the implicit relation between transcendence and immanence can be found in a statement that was drawn up by a group of American theologians in 1975. Known as the Hartford Appeal, this document was issued be-

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[13]C. C. Morrison, in Karl Barth, "A Letter to American Christians," p. 464. For Reinhold Niebuhr's reflections on the matter, see Essays in Applied Christianity, pp. 163-165.

[14]Cross-reference my article, "Karl Barth's Theological Justification of World War II," ARC (A Journal of the Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University) 13/1 (1985):21-32, as well as John H. Yoder, Karl Barth and the Problem of War (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970).

cause of dissatisfaction with the growing secularization and politicization of the gospel. Rather than "the world setting the agenda for the church," as a 1968 document of the World Council of Churches had recommended, or Christians "struggling to bring in the Kingdom of God" by themselves, as liberation theologies seemed to imply, the Hartford Appeal proclaimed that a new emphasis on divine transcendence would refocus attention on God and God's will for the world.[15]

Taken at face value, this document vouched for the Yes of God's transforming grace (Barth) as much as the No of deity's displeasure over evil and unbelief. The Appeal declared that the church's task was to "denounce oppressors, help liberate the oppressed, and seek to heal human misery." Christians could have confidence in their struggle against oppressive and dehumanizing structures because of "God's reign over all aspects of life."[16]

In spite of these positive statements, several scholars concluded that the declaration represented a negative reaction to the social orientation of the Christian church. Speaking for those who had announced the death of an otherworldly God in favour of an incarnated Christ, Harvey Cox expressed his dissatisfaction with the dualistic overtones of

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[15]Peter Berger and Richard Neuhaus, eds., Against the World For the World, pp. 4-5. For evidence that this document is directed against the shortcomings of secular, social, and liberation theologies, see pp. 13-16, 51-56, 140-160.

[16]Ibid., p. 4.

the Appeal. Was it really necessary to make a distinction between the church's "mission" and the world's "programs," as though the former might become contaminated by too much involvement in the latter? And was God's "reign over all aspects of life" an appropriate expression of the manner in which deity was immanent? Had not Christ met, worked, and suffered with people of all walks of life without "lording it over them," as the Appeal's use of the word "reign" seemed to imply?[17]

Another theologian who viewed the Appeal as a regressive step was Gregory Baum, a Catholic priest who had helped draw up the ecumenical statements contained in the conciliar documents of Vatican II. Using H. R. Niebuhr's categories, Baum stated that "Christ, the Transformer of Culture" was a stance with which the major Christian denominations in the West had come to identify.[18] Believers considered the gospel to be a "call to personal and social transformation" and saw the humanization of the world as an expression of God's presence.

The Hartford Appeal appeared to be moving against this

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[17]Harvey Cox, John C. Bennett, Gabriel Moran, and Gregory Baum, "The Hartford Appeal: A Symposium," Worldview 18/5 (May, 1975), p. 23. Following this conference, an alternate statement of faith was drawn up. Known as the Boston Affirmations, the document begins with the sentence: "The Living God is active in current struggles to bring about a Reign of Justice, Righteousness, Love and Peace," "The Boston Affirmations, with an Introduction by Harvey Cox," Christianity and Crisis 36/2 (February 16, 1976):23-27.

[18]Harvey Cox, et. al., "The Hartford Appeal: A Symposium," p. 27.

humanistic stream towards a dualistic understanding of God and the world. Its repeated distinctions between human experience and the reality of God, salvation and human fulfilment, worship and the human community, and "the Church's activity" and "the raising of human consciousness" made it sound as though Christ stood in a paradoxical relation to culture. Baum viewed these statements with regret, for they undermined the traditional Christian position that human beings were the proper locus of the divine. Divine grace was operative within, rather than imposed upon (imputed to) believers from without.

These criticisms show that the Hartford Appeal has been less successful in a dialectical portrayal of transcendence and immanence. While Barth modified his affirmation of the otherness of God to account for the historical mediation of divinity, the proclamation's singular emphasis on "God's will," "God's reign," and "God's designs" reflects a vertical and even a-historical belief.[19] Its sharp contrast between deity and the provisional aspects of human religiosity makes it difficult to know how God is immanent.

A more precise analysis is required in order to understand why the Appeal has been interpreted as a reaction to, rather than affirmation of the social changes that have been

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[19]For the political implications of these differing views of transcendence, see Gregory Baum, The Social Imperative (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), pp. 24-26; "Divine Transcendence," in The God Experience: Essays in Hope, ed. Joseph P. Whelan (New York: Newman Press, 1971), pp. 120-136.

occurring in the church since 1960. Why is it that Barth's theology, though heavily imbued with transcendence, has continued to be received as a progressive and even radical endorsement of certain social policies,[20] while the Appeal has been labelled as politically and socially retrogressive?

The best way of answering this question is to consider Gregory Baum's analysis of one of the co-authors of this document, Peter Berger. Baum cites two reasons for Berger's conservative interpretation of religion: his deterministic assessment of human beings and his perception of society as inherently unstable. Regarding the first point, Baum shows how Berger has defined individuality in terms of the societal tasks that a person performs. Berger considers the socialization process to be a key element in the formation of a person's identity because he views human beings as essentially ambiguous creatures, at odds with themselves and in search of meaning.[21]

An individual's dependence on society for his or her identity is nevertheless considered by Berger to be only a marginal improvement over personal alienation. He believes that cultural groups--like their microcosmic counterpart, the

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[20]See Karl Barth and Johannes Hamel, How to Serve God in a Marxist Land, intro. Robert McAfee Brown (New York: Association Press, 1959); George Hunsinger, ed. and trans., Karl Barth and Radical Politics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976); John H. Yoder, Karl Barth and the Problem of War.

[21]Gregory Baum, "Peter Berger's Unfinished Symphony," in Sociology and Human Destiny, ed. Gregory Baum (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), pp. 113-116, 127.

individual--are held together by the slimmest and most delicate threads of meaning. Competing values and traditions may at any moment break the fragile unity that has been created.

These enigmatic sketches of society and the human personality render Berger's conservative view of religion intelligible. Religion is needed as a stabilizing force because culture cannot sustain itself in the face of the diffuse influence of pluralism. The overarching frame of reference that religious beliefs provide legitimizes those forces of order and justice that are in danger of being undermined.[22]

The political consequences of this definition are not difficult to ascertain. Innovative ideas are viewed as disruptive because they threaten the symbolic structures of meaning that have nurtured culture up to this point. Religion cannot be identified with revolutionary ideas, for this leads to conflict and an unstable society.[23]

This analysis helps to clarify the controversy surrounding the Hartford Appeal. Harvey Cox and Gregory Baum have claimed that a recognition of the fact that our institutional structures have created many victims, and that these displaced people are entitled to participate in the cultural process, enables society to move to a more wholesome under-

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[22]Note Baum's discussion, ibid., pp. 116-120.

[23]Peter Berger's affirmation of sociology as a humanistic discipline, together with his acknowledgment of the prophetic aspects of religion, represent a qualification of the above analysis, ibid., pp. 110-111, 117.

standing of the human community. God's spirit is at work in theologies of liberation.

Advocates of the Hartford Appeal, on the other hand, have maintained that an affirmation of transcendence is preferable to erring on the side of immanence. The excesses to which some contextual theologies are prone make it necessary to distinguish more sharply between God and worldliness.

Baum's investigation has nevertheless made it clear that the difference between these two imaginations has less to do with the issue of transcendence than with alternate interpretations of God's sovereignty. The Hartford supporters have accented the otherness of God in relation to liberation and secular theologies. Yet this has only served as a cover for their implicit sanctioning of existing political structures. The Appeal's critique of the new and innovative has unwittingly resulted in a divine immanence that defends the status quo. This proclamation is more appreciative of the time and energy that is required in maintaining society than the commitment that is necessary for its transformation.[24]

These differing views of God's sovereignty are useful for understanding Kaufman's thought. His early accounts of the transcendence of God resulted in a deprecation of the independent status of humanity. His recent statement that the very existence of God is contingent upon human beings'

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[24]For an explanation of the differences between a "logic of maintenance" and a "logic of mission," see Gregory Baum, Compassion and Solidarity, pp. 31-49.

choices indicates the extent to which he has shifted his thinking on the matter. He appears presently to have overestimated, rather than underestimated humanity's capabilities. A careful examination of these, seemingly contradictory aspects of his theology will be required.

3. James Gustafson

For our third example, we turn to a theologian whose comprehensive assertion of the priority of God has been unparalleled since the first half of the twentieth century. In his recent magnum opus, James Gustafson criticizes contemporary theologians for being preoccupied with the historical and humanistic implications of Christianity. The ecological and nuclear crises show that modern claims about the essential freedom of humanity are exaggerated. Human beings have less control over their destinies than ever before. The theological question that has to be asked is not: "What cultural and political institutions need to be established in order to foster the future of humanity?" but rather: "What is the proper relation of human beings to the structures of the world, a universe that includes not only people but nature and God as well?"[25]

The durability of Gustafson's proposal rests upon his combination of the Reformed emphasis on transcendence and the

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[25]James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:266, see chapter one for his critique of contemporary theology.

scientific community's claim that human beings are limited in their decision-making abilities.[26] Gustafson bases his theology on the historic Calvinist position that humanity is incapable of containing the infinite (finitum non capax infiniti). Far from standing in the service of humanity, God represents transcendent reality to whom believers respond with respect, reverence, and awe. Divinity symbolizes the ultimate Limit of a person's knowledge, insight, feelings, and understanding.[27]

Gustafson nevertheless avoids a confessional approach by locating this belief in the radical otherness of deity in experience. Unlike Barth, who denied any point of contact between God and humanity, Gustafson maintains that believers' expressions of piety are clear indications of the reality of their faith. The powerfulness of God is revealed in their devout responses of humility, repentance, gratitude, and consent to the overwhelming and sustaining forces of life.[28]

Gustafson bolsters his theocentric perspective on the basis of scientific evidence that verifies the limited nature of human freedom. The point has been frequently made that the more human beings attempt to manage and manipulate real-

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[26]Cross-reference Stephen Toulmin, "Nature and Nature's God," Journal of Religious Ethics 13/1 (1985):37-52; Gordon Kaufman, "How is God to be Understood in a Theocentric Ethics?"

[27]James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:189.

[28]Ibid., I:115-154.

ity (e.g. through technology), the more enslaved they become.[29] Gustafson's remarks reach beyond this illustration of the paradoxical character of humanity to its fundamental dependence on nature for life itself. Biological, geological, and sociological studies have confirmed that the human species is connected in an inextricable manner to the vital aspects of the universe.[30] A greater appreciation of the determinative role of nature is required before human beings can understand why they have been so morally ineffective in relation to the global issues that confront them.

The long-term significance of Gustafson's theological contribution should not be underestimated. In the space of two volumes, he has pinpointed the weaknesses of a consequential approach to theology and ethics. Nature, God, and humanity are defined by their mutual relationships, rather than by their usefulness. While humanity is dependent upon nature and God for its existence, deity and the universe provide the human species with enough resources to sustain itself.

There is, nonetheless, a disparate reciprocity between these realities. Humanity's confidence that the processes of history are subject to its care is intercepted by the powerful influence of God and nature. The resilience and longevity of the universe diminishes the value of the relatively

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[29]See Reinhold Niebuhr, The Irony of American History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), pp. 65-88.

[30]James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:251-279.

late appearance of humanity and consciousness.

Several questions about Gustafson's proposal remain. First, is it really true that intentionality is unrelated to the concept of God? There are, to be sure, as many facts that support a random assessment of events as a progressive interpretation. But does this mean that God, like nature, is to be conceived as a force which may or may not consider the world to be in its best interest?[31] Are intentionality and purposefulness not related in such a way that the question of goodness inevitably arises when one thinks about meaning?[32] If this is true (as this author would claim), then piety is incomplete without a God who, even if conceived impersonally, is linked to social, cultural, and historical realities that enhance life.

Secondly, has Gustafson's preoccupation with the natural aspects of reality not veiled some of the other ways in which humanity is determined by its circumstances? This query becomes especially pertinent when one considers the ethical focus of his second volume. Gustafson shows how families and

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[31]Scholars who have asked this question of Gustafson include Stanley Hauerwas, "Time and History in Theological Ethics: The Work of James Gustafson," Journal of Religious Ethics 13/1 (1985):3-21; Lisa Cahill, "Consent in Time of Affliction: The Ethics of a Circumspect Theist," ibid.:22-36; Gordon Kaufman, "How is God to be Understood in a Theocentric Ethics?" pp. 18-26. For Gustafson's reply, see "A Response to Critics" and "Response."

[32]For a fuller discussion of this matter, see Stanley Hauerwas, Character and the Christian Life, pp. 83-128.

health contribute to the wellbeing of the human species.[33] These are basic issues, concerns that have not received enough attention in recent years. Yet does this analysis not obscure the fact that nations less prosperous than our own consider political and economic factors to be of primary importance? Gustafson takes account of economic pressures in his discussion of malnutrition, the dissolution of the family, and population growth.[34] He fails, however, to elaborate upon these themes. The inclusion of political realities within his description of the "structures of the world" remains an underdeveloped aspect of his thought.

Finally--and this is to push the last point to its logical conclusion--has Gustafson's emphasis on divine transcendence not resulted in a legitimation of the more conservative theological and political movements of society? The Hartford Appeal has been interpreted as a reactionary statement, in spite of the fact that liberation has been included as a part of its proclamation.

A similar critique can be made of Gustafson's work. He spends so much time clarifying the fact that human beings are limited by determinative forces that he leaves the reader with the impression that deity has more to do with fate than

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[33]James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, II:153-250.

[34]Ibid., II:153-155, 219-228, 237-242.

redemption.[35] This is not an altogether accurate picture; Gustafson takes note of the sustaining and salvific aspects of existence in several passages.[36] He, however, has not given a ringing endorsement of the gracious presence of God. One thus cannot help but think that his depiction of God's transcendence reinforces the--albeit necessary--preservative forces in society. His equivocal affirmation of God and humanity as agents of transformation leads to the conclusion that redemption is not the primary focus of his theology.

This ambivalent assessment of Gustafson's thought has consequences for our analysis of transcendence and immanence. It would appear that a dialectical depiction of the reality of God is insufficient, for it presupposes that an equilibrium between these two attributes can be maintained.[37] This is an illusion for, as has been demonstrated, there comes a point when a movement or theologian is interpreted as being on one or the other side of the debate. An investigation of Kaufman's theology will necessitate an evaluation of his priorities. As can, perhaps, be predicted, the presence of deity in movements of liberation and reconciliation is something to which Kaufman is committed. This analysis will have to wait, however, until one final example of divine tran-

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[35]Cross-reference footnote 31.

[36]James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:236-242, 247-251.

[37]For the conservative tendencies of this Durkheimian view, see Gregory Baum, "Peter Berger's Unfinished Symphony."

scendence has been shown to be operative in contemporary theological circles.

4. Premillenarian Movements of the Twentieth Century

For our last illustration, it is necessary to move outside of the theological mainstream to a movement that has interpreted the otherness of God in a particularly auspicious manner. Reference is being made to the premillenarian movements of the twentieth century, some advocates of which have said that a nuclear holocaust would represent an enactment of the will of God.[38] These Christians have claimed that a nuclear war would denote God's punishment of the sinful and presage Christ's return to rescue the faithful from their dreadful plight.

In an important historical survey of this movement, Timothy Weber has argued that a person's premillenarian views are not necessarily connected to the idea that the world deserves to be destroyed.[39] Some Christian evangelicals who believe in a final divine judgment are staunchly opposed to the nuclear arms race and have worked diligently to address

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[38]In particular, Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970); The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon (King of Prussia, Pa.: Westgate Press, 1980).

[39]Timothy P. Weber, Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1982, enlarged ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983, 1987), pp. 96-104, 226 (see page 234 for a modification of this point).

the social problems of hunger and despair.[40]

Weber goes on to demonstrate the historical, if not determinative correlation between a community's millennial position and its interpretation of contemporary events. It is significant that American evangelicals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries believed that God's judgment would come after a thousand year reign of Christ on earth, not before. These Christians had every reason to believe that the millennium was close at hand. They were living in a time of relative peace (1776-1850) and during an era when religious revivals were at their peak (1734-1750; 1800-1850). Harmonious circumstances lent credence to their optimistic, postmillenarian views.[41]

Events after 1850 caused evangelicals to shift to a premillenarian stance, a position that assumed the judgment of God would come before the millennium of peace could be established.[42] The American Civil War, together with the industrialization and urbanization of the United States, were the initial factors that contributed to this pessimistic assessment of modernity. The first and second World Wars enhanced this view with their demonstration that the world

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[40]Cross-reference Ronald Sider, ed., The Chicago Declaration (Carol Stream, Ill.: Creation House, 1974).

[41]Timothy Weber, Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming, pp. 13-14, 41; Cushing Stout, The New Heavens and the New Earth (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 43-44.

[42]Timothy Weber, Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming, pp. 41-42, 84-98, 106-112, 128-131, 204-210.

was becoming an increasingly dangerous place to live. The resettlement of Jews in Palestine after the war represented additional proof to these Christians that they were living in the last days. For them, the Jewish reoccupation of Israel was a fulfilment of biblical prophecy and an immanent sign of the Second Coming of Christ.

These historical circumstances led to a link being made between Armageddon and a nuclear catastrophe.[43] Premillennialists regarded the stockpiling of atomic weapons by the two superpowers as a perfect symbol of the enmity between Christ and anti-Christ. The Book of Revelation's prediction of a cosmic battle between God and Satan appeared to be unfolding. These Christians believed that the execution of God's wrath would be complete, destroying everything that was opposed to His will.

They nevertheless lived with hope. They knew that God had promised to save those who had been faithful to Him, either by being raptured into heaven before the horrible suffering occurred or after they had been purified by the tribulation itself. Because both of these possibilities were mentioned in Matthew 24, evangelicals could not agree on the exact mode of redemption.

These believers also emphasized the fact that the rest of the world was not entirely lost. God, in His compassion, had warned of the inevitable destruction that was to come so

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[43]Ibid., pp. 211-226.

that people would have time to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. There was hope for all people, although it was clear that a nuclear holocaust would be the outcome if the world refused to acknowledge the supremacy of its Creator and Saviour.

The first thing that needs to be said about this theology is that it resembles the early Gnostic stories of salvation. Matter is viewed as evil and escape from the world is considered to be the only means by which human beings can be truly content. God is regarded as a perfect entity far removed from the darkest reaches of the underworld. Jesus Christ, as a distant representative of God's saving grace, rescues humanity just before the earth is swallowed up by its passions.

This is an exaggeration of the mythical elements of premillennialism, but it helps to make a point, namely, that its primary purpose is to convict people of their sinfulness. Although this rather terrifying picture of the world has some interpretive value, its immediate objective is to "scare people into heaven."

Timothy Weber has focused on this goal of conversion to demonstrate the social significance of premillennialism.[44] Gospel preachers regularly present messages of "doom and gloom" in order to induce conversion experiences; and people respond to these heart-felt sermons because much of what is

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[44]Ibid., pp. 52-56, 66-81, 228-234.

being said resonates with their observations of life. They can see that the world is not getting any better and that they are becoming increasingly alienated from it. Dramatic conversions represent a therapeutic manner through which feelings of estrangement can be expressed and channelled into more appropriate modes of communication and action. Acknowledgment of their helplessness enables individuals to respond to the determinative forces of oppression and poverty.

Unfortunately, this is not the only purpose for which the premillenarian message has been used. The reason for this is that its largely negative assessment of the world leads almost inevitably to a legitimation of those eschatological events which it views with horror. That is to say, there comes a point when the premillennialist realizes that personal salvation is insufficient for coping with the political realities of life. The only discourse that is familiar, however, is one that divides the world into good and evil. The fundamentalist thus concludes that the best way of restoring order in a fallen world is through a powerful centralized authority.[45]

Timothy Weber provides a detailed account of this transformation of evangelical revivalism into political conservatism. He shows how premillennialists have combined their

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[45]This helps to explain the association of premillennialists with right-wing politics. Their narrow theological interpretation of the world leads them indubitably from a privatistic understanding of salvation to a protective understanding of the social process.

Christianity with political and economic solutions to the "impending doom."[46] Hal Lindsey and Jerry Falwell have endorsed a strong American military policy. Jim Keever has written about ways in which Christians can survive a nuclear blast. And Mary Relfe has provided a list of precautionary steps that should be taken before the money markets collapse, or rather, before they are taken over and controlled by a global organization.

These statements reveal the extent to which premillennialism has been undergirded by an apocalyptic vision of the earth. These evangelical Christians believe that the wrath of God is immanent and that this terrible justice is due to the sinfulness of the world. They thus wait in anticipation of the coming of the Lord, while being comforted by the assurance (hope) that as faithful followers of Christ, they will be saved from this devastation.

The sociological portrait of Christianity that emerges from such a bifurcation of reality is intimidating. Divine immanence functions as a highly selective reality while the otherness of God, interpreted primarily as judgment and condemnation, is applicable to the rest of the world.

A growing number of evangelicals have acknowledged the inadequacies of this tragically separated view of God. If divine grace is present in an individual, then it is at least

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[46]Timothy Weber, Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming, pp. 218-226, 235-238.

theoretically possible for divine immanence to be operative in the whole world. The global significance of redemption becomes evident during this shift from a personal to a social understanding of salvation. Christianity is recognized as a reality that transcends particular forms of revivalism.[47]

Unfortunately, the political position that often emerges from this new social understanding of the gospel is some form of fervent nationalism. Instead of changing their views of reality, premillennialists simply transfer their dualistic assumptions onto the political landscape; the dividing line between believers and unbelievers is extended to nations. While the United States is assured of God's favour as long as it "upholds its moral standards," the consequences for nations that do not believe are "self-evident."

This analysis reveals the theological ambiguity of premillennialism. Progressive tendencies within the movement have been overshadowed by more sensational correlations of divine judgment and a nuclear holocaust. This apocalyptic vision tends to reinforce the impotency already present in alienated communities. Although divine immanence has become socially significant, it has been used, more often than not, to sanction conservative ecclesiastical and political ar-

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[47]This shift in thinking is not without its consequences. Tony Campolo, a prominent American evangelist, has recently been accused of unorthodoxy and even heresy for claiming that Jesus is "mystically present" in every person, regardless of whether he or she is a Christian, "Cancellation of a Christian Speaker Leads to a Reconciliation Process," Christianity Today 29/13 (Sept. 20, 1985), p. 31.

rangements. Theological problems with the premillennialist position thus remain, not the least of which pertain to its overly narrow interpretation of God's gracious presence.

B. A Comparison of These Examples with Gordon Kaufman's Most Recent Theological Reflections

The first observation that needs to be made about Kaufman's understanding of the sovereignty of God is that it differs substantially from each of the above examples. In relation to Barth's accent on the triumph of God's grace, Kaufman has said that the defeat of evil is not a forgone conclusion. Humanity has the capability of ending its life through a nuclear holocaust. The idea that God would never allow such a catastrophe to occur has to be re-evaluated in light of this new-found freedom.[48]

One is also left with the impression that the type of liberal humanism that Kaufman espouses would not meet the approval of the authors of the Hartford Appeal. Kaufman says at one point that human beings represent the "furthest point out in the evolutionary process."[49] Their capacity for self-transcendence and purposeful thought makes them responsible for the world in a way that other creatures are not.

This accent on human freedom has consequences for Kaufman's understanding of God. Because humanity has played such a significant role in the construction and nurture of the

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[48]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, p. 7.

[49]Ibid., p. 44.

historical process, deity is to be conceived as a reality that works in and through the spirit of human beings.[50] The material effects of their activities represent a part of what it means for God to have created and be providing for the world.

This type of incarnational thinking leads Kaufman to the conclusion that the very fate of divinity is dependent upon the choices of human beings.[51] The life and death of Jesus Christ are particularly symbolic of the sacrifice that deity has been willing to make in order for a metanoia of human spirituality to take place. The selflessness of God is described in Philippians 2 as the "emptying of divinity" into the likeness of humanity.

This identification of God and the world means that deity is no longer omnipotent in the traditional sense. The return route to things as they once were has been cut off by the initiative that God has taken on behalf of humanity. The universe has been equipped to pass on God's love and compassion to its inhabitants. Redemption, reconciliation, and peace rest, in part, on the shoulders of human beings.[52]

Kaufman does not assume that these creative acts of liberation and reconciliation are an inevitable result of God's prevenience. On the contrary, the superpowers' ability

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[50]Ibid., p. 40.

[51]Ibid., p. 45.

[52]Ibid., pp. 55-58.

to blow themselves up and the world along with them means that the redemptive purposes of God could be defeated. It is here where divinity becomes implicated in the events of history. Kaufman claims that the blackened and lifeless earth that would be left after a nuclear holocaust would denote a significant disaster, if not death for divinity.[53]

These theological reflections indicate the extent to which Kaufman and the authors of the Hartford Appeal differ in their understanding of God. There is for the latter "nothing . . . in the world as it is or as it shall be . . . that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39, emphasis added).[54] The reason for this confidence has to do with the Appeal's accent on the sovereignty of God. It assumes that divine power will overrule all Promethean attempts to take control.

Kaufman is willing to minimize divine omnipotence in order to take the abilities and responsibilities of human beings into account. He acknowledges that his endorsement of these earthly entities could lead to a catastrophic end.

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[53]Ibid., p. 45. John C. Bennett has made a similar observation: ". . . when we consider how short the conscious history of humanity has been, how short the period of its spiritual, moral and cultural achievements compared with the eons of preparation for human awareness on this planet, a self-inflicted early end of the human adventure would be an unbelievable tragedy. It would be a defeat of God's own purposes," "Divine Persuasion and Divine Judgment," p. 554. For a different assessment of the matter, see Charles Davis, "Christian Hope in a Nuclear Age."

[54]Peter Berger and Richard Neuhaus, eds., Against the World for the World, p. 5.

Humanity has shown that it is capable of a great deal of evil. He puts his faith, nonetheless, in the redemptive possibilities of history, correlating the constructive nature of human action and the benevolent immanence of God.

There will be occasion to evaluate the merits of this unambiguous affirmation of the presence of divinity. Kaufman's endorsement of divine transcendence will need to be taken into account in this discussion. A brief look at the other two case studies is, nevertheless, first required.

One of the first things that strikes a reader familiar with Gustafson's work is the extent to which Kaufman has taken his criticisms into account. Kaufman's eschewal of personal images in Theology for a Nuclear Age shows the effects of these incisive comments about his anthropocentrism. No longer is God likened to an individual who enters into a covenantal relationship with others. Neither are the life and death of Jesus Christ employed as the sole examples of divine redemption. Jesus represents one of many people who have fostered a holistic and integrative interpretation of salvation history.[55]

The reason for Kaufman's negative assessment of God as a divine Person pertains to the asymmetrical implications of this analogy. The concept of deity as an individual leaves the impression that communication with God is a private

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[55]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 51-58.

affair. Non-personal media do not have to be taken into account when faith is spoken of in an immediate sense.[56]

Dominant and hierarchical policies are also reinforced by the images of God as Father, Lord, and King. The idea that divinity represents "the head of a household," "the master of his estate," and "the leader of his country" perpetuates the (masculine) roles of authority that have been in vogue for many centuries.

Kaufman proposes divine images which he believes are more cognizant of the natural and historical aspects of life. Divinity is to be imagined as an "ecological web" that facilitates the birth and nurture of the earth and its inhabitants. This echoes Gustafson's allusion to the "structures of the world' that are "bearing down upon and sustaining us."[57]

The differences between these two theologians should not, however, be underestimated. The key points of contention have to do with the ascription of purposiveness (intentionality) to deity and the relation of this volitional drive to humanity. Gustafson acknowledges that there is an ordering in creation which enables believers to discern and act upon divine direction.[58] He nevertheless modifies this hopeful stance by claiming that the conditions of the world are

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[56]Ibid., pp. 33-39.

[57]Ibid., pp. 44, 56; cross-reference James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:266, 277-278.

[58]James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:133-136, 271.

experienced, more often than not, as limiting rather than as capacitating.

Gustafson also does not attribute benevolence or malevolence to deity. God is like natural events in the sense that the latter are oblivious to the effects they have on human beings. At certain times, divinity benefits the human project while on other occasions God undermines the social and cultural histories that have been built up.[59]

Kaufman's vision of reality is more humanizing. He has retained that aspect of humanity which he considers indispensable for understanding God: human beings' projection of meaning onto the world. He believes that a manifestation of God's intentionality is an inevitable result of believers' affirmation of the purposefulness of history.[60] The dark shadow that has been cast on our age is diffused by the mo(u)rning light of ongoing movements of liberation and reconciliation.

This teleological emphasis has important consequences for Kaufman's theology. His support for social movements committed to changing the structures of society leads to a less monolithic interpretation than his image of God as a "cosmic web" would seem to warrant. The achievements of divinity are reflected in specific actions, events, and in-

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[59]Ibid., I:271-279; cross-reference "A Response to Critics," p. 199.

[60]Note Kaufman's early development of this theme, Relativism, Knowledge, and Faith, p. 112.

stitutions, rather than applied in a general sense to the world.

A final comparison is, nonetheless, necessary in order to clarify the exact nature of this teleological concern. Kaufman's theology seems genuinely optimistic when compared to the premillennialists' catastrophic view of history. A juxtaposing of these ideas will reveal the differing sources of their futuristic views.

Of all the examples analysed above, the linking of God's judgment with a nuclear holocaust represents an ideology farthest away from Kaufman's. While premillennialists have cited biblical passages that portray a dark future, Kaufman echoes Isaiah's vision of "the wilderness becoming a garden" and "the wolf and lamb feeding together" (41:19; 65:25) He has indicated his preference for a transformed universe of peace over joyful predictions of the world's destruction.[61]

There are Scriptural warrants for a doomsday approach to reality. The Hebrew prophets' graphic descriptions of how the other nations will be tortured and destroyed is their way of assigning recompense to Israel, a vassal state that is continually being victimized by her neighbours (Isaiah 41:1-4, 11-16; see also Deuteronomy 7). The Book of Revelation functions in a similar manner, providing solace to Christians by predicting the fall of Babylon, a mythical city in which

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[61]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, p. 57; cross-reference his remarks about premillennialism, pp. 7-8.

kings and merchants have exchanged belief in God for power and material goods (Revelation 18). The anticipated vanquishing of their foes provides believers with hope that their suffering will not last forever.

The question must be raised whether this is the type of vision that should characterize a Christian's relation to the world. There are Scriptural passages that foster a more ecumenical interpretation of the relationship between religions and nations. Isaiah refers to a time when everyone will gather in Jerusalem and believe in one God (45:14-25). Revelation 21 states that there will be no more pain or death when God comes to dwell eternally with humanity.

Kaufman's theology of divine immanence gains its credibility from these accounts. He allows for the possibility of a cosmic battle between good and evil taking place:

> The more the future yawns before us as . . . fearful possibility, . . . the more we are seduced into attempting to seize full control of that future by trying to deter absolutely the enemies threatening us.[62]

Yet he does not regard these appalling prospects as determinative. The Scriptures speak about justice and condemnation in the context of repentance and redemption.[63] This means that the threat of nuclear annihilation does not have to reduce human beings to a state of paralysis. Believ-

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[62]Ibid., p. 11.

[63]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 41-57.

ers can re-engage themselves by looking beyond the numbing effects (Lifton) of the nuclear menace to more redemptive, albeit less sensational features of the historical process.[64]

This analysis indicates Kaufman's direct opposition to the apocalyptic tendencies of the premillennialist movement. He has defused the force of the latter through his identification of those points at which participation in social and political life aid in liberation and reconciliation. This reconstructive approach has come in part from the biblical record, in part from an immanent view of God. His correlation of deity and humanity results in a high value being placed on those processes of nature that support the furtherance of (human) life.[65]

C. A Comparison of Kaufman's Theologies of Immanence and Transcendence

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from the above assessment is that Kaufman has qualified his understanding of

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[64]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 44-46, 58-60; Robert Jay Lifton, The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), pp. 283-387. For authors who have developed positive alternatives to the premillennialist option, see Ira Chernus, "Mythologies of Nuclear War," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 50/2 (1982):255-273; "Symbolism of the Bomb," The Christian Century 100/29 (Oct. 12, 1983):907-910; "War and Myth: 'The Show Must Go On,'" Journal of the American Academy of Religion 53/3 (1985):449-464; G. Clarke Chapman, Facing the Nuclear Heresy: A Call to Reformation (Elgin, Ill.: Brethern Press, 1986).

[65]For a more muted affirmation of the value of (human) life, see Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/4:324-469; James Gustafson, Christian Ethics and the Community, pp. 139-149.

transcendence to such an extent that only divine immanence remains. He has left little room for a God who stands in judgment of the affairs of humanity.

Indeed, numerous commentators have described his latest position as functionally atheistic, humanistic, and "survivalist." Shannon Jung has suggested that God no longer plays a significant role in Kaufman's theology. The latter's conflation of divine immanence and the spirit of humanity shows that he is more interested in humanity's response to the crises of our age than in the reality of deity.[66]

Jung underlines his point by contrasting Kaufman's position with that of Stanley Hauerwas. Hauerwas has maintained that the future is secondary to the establishment of Christian communities; the existence of the church is a sign of the peace of God that Christ has already proclaimed.[67] Kaufman, on the other hand, has placed an almost absolute value on the continuation of the earth, revealing the extent to which the survival of the species is a priority for him. Jung views this emphasis with regret, for it fails to place life within a larger theological and eschatological framework. Human beings are as accountable to God as to themselves and the future.[68]

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[66]L. Shannon Jung, "Nuclear Eschatology," Theology Today 40/2 (1983), p. 190.

[67]Stanley Hauerwas, Against the Nations, pp. 132-168.

[68]Shannon Jung, "Nuclear Eschatology," pp. 186-193.

Richard Bauckham echoes Jung's concerns about Kaufman's exaggerated interpretation of human freedom.[69] It is precisely the idea that humanity is in charge of history that has led American military experts to talk about the feasibility of nuclear war. Their optimistic assessment of human rationality fosters a naiveté about the uncontrollable factors that would be unleashed in an atomic attack. Bauckham claims that Kaufman's accent on human responsibility places him on the same level as these strategists. His theology bolsters illusions of technological, economic, and political supremacy.

Clarke Chapman, in turn, has criticized Kaufman for his overly rationalistic approach to the nuclear threat.[70] Kaufman's recognition that humanity is capable of destroying itself is an important first step in the defusion of international tensions. Chapman wonders, however, whether Kaufman has taken sufficient account of the religious implications of nuclear weapons. Premillennialists are as enamoured by the mythical images of hell and destruction conjured up by the atomic bomb as by its "practical" value.

This means that a stronger mythology than Kaufman has provided will need to be developed if liberal theologians

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[69]Richard Bauckham, "Theology after Hiroshima," Scottish Journal of Theology 38/4 (1985), pp. 594-597.

[70]G. Clarke Chapman, "American Theology in the Shadow of the Bomb," Union Seminary Quarterly Review 41/3-4 (1987), pp. 31-34. This point is reiterated in the first chapter of Facing the Nuclear Heresy.

hope to make inroads into the apocalyptic and neo-conservative mood of the American public. The concept of God as "an ultimate point of reference" may be intellectually correct, but it is affectively weak when compared to an impassioned deity that is involved in a cosmic struggle against evil.[71]

There are merits to the above observations. Kaufman is so concerned about the problem of theological dualism that he is willing to entertain the idea of a "finite" God in order to take the edge off images that portray deity "as sitting high in the heavens, far above the din of the world." He has added his voice to those Christians who affirm the intrinsic nature of God. Divinity is intimately involved in the processes of life, sustaining its progress while being subject to its whims and follies.[72]

It would nevertheless be a mistake to make conclusive statements about Kaufman's present theological position without considering his earlier views. He has been criticized more often for being sceptical about the reality of God than for being sanguine about deity's presence.[73] The solid neo-orthodox training that Kaufman received from H. R. Niebuhr

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[71]G. Clarke Chapman, "American Theology in the Shadow of the Bomb," p. 34. Ira Chernus has made a similar critique of liberal theology in "Symbolism of the Bomb."

[72]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, p. 54; Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 45, 55-57.

[73]See Michael McLain, "On Theological Models"; David Griffin, "Gordon Kaufman's Theology: Some Questions"; and David Mason, "Can We Speculate on How God Acts?"

and Karl Barth represents the reason for this muted account of God's immediacy. These eminent Protestant theologians taught him the dangers of a too close identification of God and the human enterprise.[74] A brief survey of the effects of this influence will facilitate a better understanding of Kaufman's affirmation of divine immanence.

This investigation will be limited to four quotations that verify the importance of divine providence in Kaufman's early writings. The first comes from his book, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective:

> That God finally achieves the purposes which he had originally posited despite all opposition and difficulties; that nothing can thwart him in the realization of his goals, neither the immensity and complexity of the universe he has created nor the sin and disobedience of some of his creatures; that he is equal to every task he sets himself--that is his ultimate glory. . . . God is no mere ground of being, a self-establishing but static foundation for himself and all else; God is the one who can act with confidence and supreme success, the mighty Agent . . . who "triumphs gloriously" (Ex. 15:1 and seq.) in all that he undertakes.[75]

The view of theological authority that emerges from such an unequivocal assertion of the sovereignty of God is formidable. Deity is described in such monological terms that it is difficult to know if a dialectical relationship between God and the world exists. Human and natural influences are

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[74]For a good example of Barth's influence on Kaufman, see Gordon Kaufman, "The Ground of Biblical Authority: Six Theses," Journal of Bible and Religion 24/1 (1956):25-30.

[75]Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective, p. 166.

negated in order to enhance the freedom and power of deity.

The adverse anthropological effects of this concept of God are indicated by another statement that Kaufman has made in the same book:

> . . . the Creator could allow us to fall back at any moment into the nonexistence from which he called us, but he chooses to sustain us in existence with his creative power. Our free actions, even our deliberate disobediences of his will, do not and cannot compromise in any respect whatsoever this his absolute freedom over us. Nor is our finite freedom compromised by the fact that it is continuously and freely given by God. His freedom and ours are on different levels: his is that of the Creator, ours is creaturely.[76]

This passage echoes Peter Berger's conferral of a provisional status on human beings. People are portrayed as flimsy entities, on the verge of falling into the abyss of meaninglessness the moment something goes wrong. This ambiguous assessment of humanity reinforces the idea that a powerful deity is required to hold this chaotic situation together.[77] The otherwise innocuous recognition of believers' dependence on God has resulted in Kaufman's deprecation of their autonomy.

A final set of quotations adds evidence to the fact that Kaufman conceived of God in a more omnipotent fashion in his early writings. A summary of this view appears at the end of

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[76]Ibid., p. 146.

[77]"God's power and knowledge are so great that he is able to govern with wisdom even a universe in which other free agents are acting, and his unity is sufficient to draw and hold together an otherwise chaotic and crumbling historical process" (emphasis added), ibid., p. 159.

the sixth chapter of God the Problem:

> It must be admitted that the doctrine of providence here entailed is more austere than the pietistic views often found in Christian circles. . . . This is no God who "walks with me and talks with me" in close interpersonal communion, . . . This is the Lord of heaven and earth, whose purposes we cannot fully fathom and whose ways are past finding out (Rom. 11:33). "It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers" (Isa. 40:22). His thoughts are not ours, and our ways are not his (Isa. 55:8). He has brought this world into being for his own reasons, he is moving it through a history in accordance with his own objectives, and he shall accomplish his purpose when the eschaton comes.[78]

Kaufman outlines the human impact of this sovereign view of God:

> Doubtless we men, both as species and individuals, have place within those purposes, and certain of his subacts are responsive to our acts; in this we can rejoice, finding meaning for our lives and comfort for our souls. But the place we have is his to determine and assign, not ours; at the very most our lives are but infinitesimal constituents in his all-comprehending act, and his responsiveness to the particularities of our activity must be understood as a function and phase of his master act ordering all human and cosmic history.[79]

There are more similarities between these two passages and Gustafson's theocentric perspective than with ideas presented in Theology for a Nuclear Age. The glory of God in these citations takes precedence over any desires and ambitions that believers may have.

These quotations provide background for Kaufman's current endorsement of divine immanence. The first impetus for

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[78]Gordon Kaufman, God the Problem, p. 146.

[79]Ibid., pp. 146-147.

his reconception of God has to do with the theological dualism that is evident in the above excerpts. Kaufman no longer believes in suppressing the effects of human agency in order to enhance the freedom and power of deity. When referring to its operation within the processes of history, divine transcendence is to be conceived in tandem with immanence.[80]

Another reason for Kaufman's shift in thinking pertains to his initial reliance on existential interpretations of human behaviour. Early twentieth-century philosophers emphasized the contingency of humanity, providing the impetus for Protestant accounts of the "ever-present" Word of God.[81] The preceding passages reflect this theological undervaluation of human agency. Kaufman's subordination of believers to an "all-comprehending" divine master-act disguises the objective theological effects of their historical behaviour.

Kaufman has rectified this situation by grounding human agency on the idea of self-subsistence. The social, cultural, economic, and political institutions that have been established, along with the biological life that has made such endeavours possible, represent the abiding physical

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[80]Cross-reference Gregory Baum's discussion of such a possibility, "Divine Transcendence," pp. 120-136.

[81]Note Langdon Gilkey's critique of Barth's anthropology along these lines, "The Concept of Providence in Contemporary Theology," pp. 177-190.

materials for one's conception of God.[82]

The final reason for Kaufman's shift from transcendence to immanence has to do with the devastating events of the twentieth century. An emphasis on the otherness of God was warranted fifty years ago, when the Holocaust and World Wars made it painfully clear that there was a great, if not insurmountable distance between human exploits and the divine presence. Kaufman submits that a different response is required in the nuclear age. The economic, political, and ecological difficulties in which the world presently finds itself demand an identification of God with struggles of liberation and justice. An affirmation of the presence of deity spurs believers into responsible action.

These comments have a direct bearing on the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom. The chief difficulty that Kaufman has with orthodox pronouncements of divine omnipotence has to do with their monolithic tone. Some theologians have portrayed the sovereignty of God in such an all-encompassing manner that their views no longer function as accurate descriptions of metaphysical reality.[83] The events of the twentieth century have shown the folly of

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[82]Although Kaufman considered the concept of self-identity to be an important part of theology in his early writings (see chapter three), he did not regard human activities as having an objective effect upon God. He has recently revised this notion in order to clarify the real interdependence of divinity and humanity.

[83]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 51-57.

claiming too much for the power of one's god.

Kaufman submits that a mutual understanding of humanity and divinity is more reflective of the multiple factors that determine the course of history. Natural and human activities contribute to the pre-eminence of God in the sense that they undergird redemptive responses. This roundabout way of acknowledging the contingent nature of deity may sound like a refutation of one of the historic tenets of the Christian faith. Kaufman insists that it is not. Careful examination of "firmer" assertions of the absoluteness of God reveals a closer affinity to "subjective feelings of confidence and conviction" than phenomenological accounts of historical circumstances.[84] A complementary interpretation of God and the world is more credible. This judicious approach is cognizant of the fact that the movement of history is more ambiguous than most of us, including God, would like it to be.

Conclusion

The last few paragraphs have painted an idyllic picture of the link between Kaufman's early emphasis on transcendence and his latest accent on divine immanence. This has been done in order to highlight the contextual implications of his constructive theology. Recent theological discussions have focused on the proper locus of the divine, especially in regard to liberation, secular, and feminist theologies. Kauf-

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[84]Ibid., p. 56.

man's renewed appreciation of divine immanence fosters an ongoing dialogue about this issue.

The reader, however, should not be left with the impression that Kaufman's theology has undergone such a complete transformation that he is able to satisfy everyone's needs. There are some passages in Theology for a Nuclear Age that can be favourably compared to his earlier accent on the absoluteness of God. A brief analysis of this book, together with two articles that Kaufman has recently published, will serve as a qualification of the above assertions.

A 1985 essay, entitled "Theology as a Public Vocation,"[85] serves as a good entry point into Kaufman's continuing emphasis on the priority of divinity. He begins by saying that neither the church nor history nor religion nor philosophy can lay ultimate claim to the concept of God. These disciplines and institutions have too often used the absolute reference point of reality for their own purposes. Another avenue has to be found which allows the "voice of God" to speak for itself. Kaufman claims that the vocation of theology is conducive to such a critical direction. This discipline represents the means by which ideologies can be uncovered and censured.[86]

This analytical function of theology is correlated to

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[85]In The Vocation of a Theologian, ed. Theodore Jennings (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 49-66.

[86]Ibid., pp. 60-66.

the theme of transcendence in another essay, entitled "Mystery, Critical Consciousness, and Faith."[87] Kaufman begins with a phenomenological description of mystery. It pertains to those historical junctures at which people are forced to reconsider the value of their beliefs.[88] Moments of crisis lead to an awareness that there is more to life than one's own way of perceiving things. This upheaval of one's frame of reference can be referred to as the experience of uncertainty or mystery.

Kaufman draws an analogy between this discovery of finitude and the transcendence of God. Deity represents a reality that upsets and reorients one's values. This disruptive experience should be viewed as a step towards a wholesome vision of the world. Standing in the presence of God induces acts of contrition which, in turn, lead to a deeper appreciation (second naiveté) of those symbols and values which human beings hold dear:

> It is, doubtlessly, only as we actually fail to accomplish our purposes . . . that 'grace' breaks through the mystery that establishes and sustains us, creating in us the new modality of existence which is faith.[89]

These two articles facilitate a reinterpretation of

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[87]This article has appeared in The Rationality of Religious Belief: Essays in Honour of Basil Mitchell, eds. William Abraham and Steven Holtzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 53-69.

[88]Ibid., p. 55.

[89]Ibid., p. 67.

Theology for a Nuclear Age. Kaufman highlights the dysfunctional relationship between divinity and humanity when he alludes to the difficulties of the past, the disunity of the present, and the uncertainty of the future.[90] Humanity's fearful discovery of the contingency of life makes the transcendence of God comprehensible.

This historical interpretation of divine Mystery is employed as a relativizing factor in the fourth chapter. Even though deity is representative of those occurrences that enhance existence, Kaufman suggests that there is a distinct possibility of lives being lost in the movement towards social change. He interprets this potentiality in a positive light, saying that Jesus' exhortation to "lose one's life in order to find it" (Matthew 16:24-26) means that believers should be willing to give up their lives for the sake of liberation:

> . . . neither a peaceful and contented life on earth, nor eternal bliss in heaven is its (salvation's) expected reward. On the contrary, radical self-giving in struggle with the worst evils of contemporary life, culminating perhaps in complete self-sacrifice--crucifixion--is what is to be expected. (text inside brackets added)[91]

This statement serves as a modification of Kaufman's high valuation of (human) life. He most certainly would claim that the struggle for justice has almost always to be undertaken within the parameters of a non-violent stance.

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[90]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 11-14.

[91]Ibid., p. 59.

This does not mean, however, that a Christian has to place an ultimate value on his or her own life. Believers should be willing to forfeit their wellbeing for the sake of the other, whoever that might be. A theological rationale for martyrdom has thereby been provided.[92]

Other theologians have broadened this pacifist interpretation of self-sacrifice to include revolutionaries and war veterans. To name only one such account, the American Catholic bishops have minimized the differences between a soldier defending peace, a pacifist involved in non-violent political activities, and a conscientious objector.[93] The equivocal meaning of the term "self-sacrifice" allows for a rapprochement between these differing interpretations. Each of the above positions can be justified on the basis of Jesus' command to "love one's enemies" (Matthew 5:43-48) and to "lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13).[94]

Notwithstanding the ethical implications of this point, the above analysis substantiates the need for a nuanced approach to the issue of divine transcendence and immanence.

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[92]Paul Ricoeur has made a similar link between self-sacrifice and martyrdom, Essays on Biblical Interpretation, pp. 110-117; History and Truth, trans. Charles Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), pp. 223-246.

[93]National Conference of Catholic Bishops, The Challenge of Peace, A Pastoral Letter on War and Peace, May 3, 1983 (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1983), pp. 22-26.

[94]For a lengthier discussion of this matter, see Gordon Kaufman, Nonresistance and Responsibility, pp. 64-66.

Deity cannot be identified with the world in an unequivocal manner because of the innumerable limit situations in which human beings find themselves. Pain, suffering, sacrifice, and even death are necessary aspects of reconciliation and liberation. The gracious presence of God manifests itself within the divine Mystery that is the world, rather than being imputed from above. Repentance is the first step towards rejuvenation.

This dialectical description sheds light on Kaufman's discussion of the sovereignty of God. Deity is omnipotent in the sense that the sustaining dimensions of life exert a powerful influence on the future direction of the universe. Realization of this fundamental telos is not, however, a foregone conclusion. There are objective agents within history, human as well as natural, that undermine the redemptive potentialities of God.

This (negative) reality leads Kaufman to the conclusion that the sovereignty of God has more to do with advocacy and solidarity than with verifiable accounts of divine supremacy. The incremental gains of reconciliatory acts, combined with the more dramatic results of emancipatory enfranchisement, represent enough evidence (manifestations) of God's "extrinsic" presence for believers to go on.

CONCLUSION

One of the more obvious conclusions that can be drawn from this study of Kaufman's thought is that he has shifted from a circumscribed confessional approach to a self-acknowledged apologetic agenda. This latter concern has entailed the construction of a comprehensive concept of God to meet the demands of an inclusive world-view which is a concomitant part of all societies.

This hypothesis has been undergirded by the way in which each chapter has been structured. An investigation of Kaufman's epistemology revealed his interest in a universal standard by which knowledge could be judged. An analysis of his metaphysical views disclosed that he was partial to a theoretical framework which could encompass ever-widening aspects of reality. An examination of his theology of revelation clarified the fact that a self-disclosure model was dependent on its philosophical integrity.

His subsequent shift to a theology of divine agency indicated his increasing attention to material analogies that could serve as objective bench marks for understanding deity. His avowal of a theology of construction, in turn, showed how these realistic concerns could be related dialectically to an emphasis on the imagination. Reconstructed images of God

were able to bypass the anecdotal and proceed to the heart of the matter because they had been freed from the literal demands of ostensive reference which were so much a part of the biblical records.

This more objective reading of Kaufman's thought results in a theology in which the metaphysical aspects of Christianity have been conjoined with the determinative features of Western society. Kaufman regards North America's discovery of relativity as a secular affirmation of the doctrine of monotheism. He likewise considers its historicization of nature to be a logical extension of the humanistic emphases of the Judaeo-Christian heritage. The world can be explained in terms of an intrinsic teleology that reflects the goodness of God.

Kaufman's view of consciousness as the starting point of identity also resonates with the Scriptures' privileging of the human species in relation to the universe. Human beings symbolize the volitional component of the meaningful world through which God's activities are being enacted.[1]

These three themes represent a distillation of the gospel message into a Christian categorial scheme. This faith perspective not only interconnects God, world, humanity, and Christ, but conceives of these relationships in terms of an overarching framework in which deity is symbolized by a com-

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[1]Gordon Kaufman, The Theological Imagination, pp. 58-79, 80-95, 209-237.

plex web of ecological and economic relations. This networking image represents the most sophisticated expression of Kaufman's non-dualistic, empirically-oriented concerns. His experience of the universe as a series of mutually dependent events has inspired his conception of God as a cosmic whole.

These metaphysical musings on the historic-organic solidarity of divinity bear a close resemblance to process theology. The goal of this latter approach is to integrate the pertinent aspects of existence into a comprehensive idea so that it can stand as a reference for deity. The term "God," after all, represents the most inclusive, perfect, and substantial reality, and so its viability is determined by its ability to take into itself the very things that undermine its existence (contingency, secularity, evil, deconstruction).[2]

There will be occasion to evaluate the merits of this realistic comprehension of God. Another reading of Kaufman's thought is nevertheless possible, an interpretation that has to do with the utopian aspects of the theological enterprise. This alternate direction is outlined in one of Kaufman's essays, in which he says that a theologian is to organize

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[2]This ideal of human and natural mutuality does not have to be linked to a supernatural vision of life. John Dewey has accomplished the same task with his natural metaphysic, see A Common Faith (New Haven: Yale University, 1934). While echoing many of Dewey's ideas, Henry N. Wieman has provided a more thoroughgoing theistic explanation of historical and natural processes, The Source of Human Good (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946).

"the most comprehensive concepts in the culture" into a meaningful whole.[3] The purpose of this unifying endeavour, however, is not to provide an astute phenomenological description of the realities that have determined human existence (*à la* Gustafson), but to facilitate liberation from them.

Ontology in this instance has been recycled into a theology of responsible agency. Theologians have to make sure that the concepts with which they are working resonate with the lived experiences of those who participate in worship, political life, and cultural existence. Yet this correspondence between theoretical ideas and concrete realities should not overshadow the theological reason for beginning such an exploration in the first place. The drive toward understanding (*Verstehen*) culminates in an awareness that not all people are in as equitable a position as they would like to be, and that this situation is reflective of an institutionalized arrangement.

This empirical observation results in the introduction of a critical element into the conversation that places a greater distance between the ideal and real than outlined above. The overriding tendency in this context is to be guided by the hopeful signs of a utopian vision rather than be transfixed by the debilitating effects of the present

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[3]Gordon Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination*, pp. 245, 249, 256-257.

situation.

This preference for an historical ideal leads to a less monolithic interpretation of Kaufman's theology. His image of God as an organic unity leaves the impression that countervailing movements are significant insofar as they have been defined in terms of their function within a larger whole (à la Durkheim). There are merits to this proposal, especially when the metaphor of a web is linked to global ecological and economic concerns.

Yet this comprehensive approach disguises the fact that some religious, social, and national movements have to be dealt with on their own terms, groups for which liberation is a better word than reconciliation. The minority status and oppressive situation in which some communities find themselves represent the reasons for their push for emancipation.[4]

Kaufman's confessional approach reappears within this conflictual view of society (Marx, Weber). Throughout his career, he has considered universalization from the relativistic standpoint of the non-conformist aspects of his Christian tradition. This historical backdrop provides the framework for his sceptical, critical, pragmatic, and ideal-

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[4]For a good analysis of the differences between a theology of reconciliation and liberation, especially as this relates to the Mennonite church experience, see Mark Neufeld, "Critical Theory and Christian Service: Knowledge and Action in Situations of Social Conflict," Conrad Grebel Review 6/3 (1988):249-261.

istic views. Kaufman is not only interested in a religious group's contribution to an overall understanding of reality. He has also shown signs that he regards the scandalous nature of Christianity as a theological theme in its own right. The life and death of Jesus summon people beyond the bounds of conventionality.

Without reviewing all of the ways in which this critical approach is operative, Kaufman's categorial scheme can be taken as a representative case. Each of the concepts in this frame of reference can be interpreted in such a way as to highlight its transcendent relation to ecclesia and culture. The word "God" refers not only to a societal principle of absolute value but also to the one and only God whom Jews, Christians, and Muslims worship (Deut. 6:4; Ephesians 4:6). The term "world" denotes not only the natural universe into which we are all born, but also specifies the fact that even the most elementary forms of life have a component of meaning built into them. "Humanity," in turn, indicates that there is a species of creature that does not fit as easily in the nature of things as some people would like. Human beings are capable of a great deal of evil as well as good.

Finally, "Christ" represents the most concrete example of what Kaufman has in mind when he speaks about "a spirit of creativity and liberation and healing."[5] The other categories are qualified by the life, death, and resurrection of

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[5]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, p. 57.

Jesus in the sense that they gain their vitality from this portrait. Their natures are constituted by this historic personage.

This alternate reading of Kaufman's thought sets the stage for an exploration of what his theology would look like if his categorial scheme were attached more firmly to the sociological institutions that have given rise to these concepts. Kaufman has been criticized for failing to embody his ideas sufficiently. He has been reluctant to answer his critics on this charge because he is afraid that a reintegration of theological ideas into institutions such as the church will lead to a retrenchment of the idolatrous tendencies to which the term "God" is prone. One has only to look at the historical impact of this word to understand the grounds for this fear. Yet an indigenization of theological images is necessary in spite of the risks involved. Kaufman himself has insisted on a contextual appropriation of faith,[6] and so it is in this spirit of cultural adaptation that the following reflections are intended.

The ecclesiastical movement that first comes to mind when one thinks of extending the confessional aspects of Kaufman's theology pertains to the various groups that have identified themselves as being in a <u>status confessionis</u> in relation to societal dilemmas. This phrase was first employ-

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[6]Gordon Kaufman, <u>The Theological Imagination</u>, pp. 277-279.

ed by Karl Barth and the Confessing Church of Germany to make clear to their fellow citizens that they no longer considered Hitler's actions to be incidental to belief (adiaphora). His anti-Semitism, interference in the church, and designation of the mentally-ill as less than human stood as direct threats to the gospel message. The Confessing Church responded with this declaration:

> Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to trust and obey in life and in death. We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation.[7]

This confession of faith was unique because it represented a specific response to an abnormal situation rather than a set of doctrines that could serve as the foundation for a new denomination (as creeds and confessions had in the past). The Barmen Declaration was similar to Reformation documents in the sense that it rejected natural theology and emphasized Jesus Christ. Yet the point of its theological claim was to rectify an increasingly dangerous and unjust political situation, rather than to provide the impetus for a new ecclesiastical structure.

This same type of confessional approach has been used to

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[7]Arthur C. Cochrane, The Church's Confession Under Hitler (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 239. Cross-reference Karl Barth, The German Church Conflict, eds. A. M. Allchin, Martin Marty, and T. H. L. Parker (London: Lutterworth Press, 1965).

name apartheid and the nuclear arms race as "heresies." Both the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches have issued statements which say that the events in South Africa have reached a point where believers can no longer remain neutral. The very core of Christian unity, as this is symbolized in the Lord's Supper, is being undermined by the segregationist policies of the white churches. These world organizations have declared that this issue represents

> a status confessionis for our Churches, which means that we regard this as an issue on which it is not possible to differ without seriously jeopardizing the integrity of our common confession.[8]

The idea of a "confessing church" has also made its presence felt in regard to the nuclear arms race. Although most churches have been reluctant to say that the atomic bomb represents an ethical dilemma of such magnitude that it compromises the very nature of Christianity, several thinkers, most notably Clarke Chapman, have entertained this possibility.[9]

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[8]John W. de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vincencio, eds., Apartheid is a Heresy (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 170; A Moment of Truth: The Confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, 1982, eds. G. D. Cloete and D. J. Smit (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984). For the Lutheran statement, see The Debate on Status Confessionis: Studies in Political Theology, ed. Eckehart Lorenz (Geneva: Department of Studies, The Lutheran World Federation, 1983).

[9]Clarke Chapman, Facing the Nuclear Heresy. See also Robert McAfee Brown, "1984: Orwell and Barmen," The Christian Century 101/25 (1984):770-774; George Hunsinger, "Barth, Barmen, and the Confessing Church Today," Katallagete 9/2 (1985):14-27; Arthur Cochrane, The Mystery of Peace (Elgin,

Chapman considers the dropping of atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima to have changed the course of history to such an extent that the church in the United States has to reconsider its naive support for nuclear deterrence. Chapman believes that the naming of his country's diabolic fascination with the "Bomb" as a heresy represents the best way of alerting America to the fact that it represents one of the principal dangers to world peace. Tensions between East and West can be eased through nuclear disarmament.[10]

There are affinities between Kaufman's thought and these contextual approaches. For example, Kaufman has described the nuclear "holocaust" of 1945 as a momentous crisis (krisis) that requires the most radical deconstruction and reconstruction of the Christian faith. This echoes Chapman's account of these events as a moment of truth (kairos) that compels believers to take a stand vis-à-vis their government's "sacred doctrine" of nuclear deterrence.[11]

This situational approach also resonates with Kaufman's open-ended view of current theological trends. Declarations of faith that have emerged in the face of German fascism, South African apartheid, and the nuclear threat are the result of the church's involvement in difficult historical

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Ill.: Brethren Press, 1986), pp. 139-155.

[10]Clarke Chapman, Facing the Nuclear Heresy, pp. 63-98.

[11]Ibid., pp. 54-63, 71-85; cross-reference Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. vii-x, 11-14.

circumstances, rather than the internal logic of its body of doctrine.

The diverging implications of these two emphases have already been noted. While George Lindbeck and Jaroslav Pelikan regard theological reform in terms of its feasibility within the church as a whole, Kaufman has jettisoned this formal procedure for a more radical, critical method. The primary function of faith for him has to do with responding "to the needs which the situation itself presents."[12] This statement reflects Luther's claim that one can truly confess Christ only at the point "at which the world and the devil are presently attacking."[13] Belief is defined as an historical witness against evil rather than as an assent to a set of propositional statements.

One's ecclesiology is also affected by this confessional approach to faith. Once belief has been interpreted as the proclamation of the gospel at a particular time and place (Barth), this is but a small step from saying that the church is distinguished on the basis of the authenticity of its witness. Kaufman would be pleased with the sociological ramifications of this view. It implies that the church's significance is dependent upon the manifestations of deity, rather than upon its historical continuity.

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[12]Gordon Kaufman, Nonresistance and Responsibility, p. 75.

[13]Quoted in Douglas Hall, Thinking the Faith, p. 108.

This opens the door to a portrayal of the church as a social movement, in which local congregations represent redemptive catalysts in the world.[14] The internal maintenance of the church--whether expressed in terms of its institutional viability or doctrinal consistency--is secondary. The most important task of the believers' church is to provide a means through which society can be transformed.

There is much in this decentralized view of Christianity that commends itself to Kaufman's theology. Most importantly, it provides a means by which his 1982 summons to the members of the American Academy of Religion to become involved in the processes of peace can be acted upon. The confessing church movement is but one way through which academics can move beyond objectivity and neutrality to affirmations of solidarity and empowerment.[15]

There are, nonetheless, aspects of this "minority strategy" (Baum) that would give Kaufman reason to pause. The most general criticism that he would make is that this situational approach lacks an adequate theoretical base. It is one thing to stand as a witness against evil and in solidar-

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[14]See Gregory Baum, "The New Ecclesiology"; Theology and Society, pp. 26-30, 170-178; Alain Touraine, The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements, trans. Alan Duff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[15]Gordon Kaufman, "Nuclear Eschatology and the Study of Religion," pp. 12-13. Cross-reference Richard Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity," in Post-Analytical Philosophy, eds. Cornel West and John Rajchman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 3-19.

ity with the poor. It is another matter to incorporate this timely response into a social form. Revolutionary movements require an institutional apparatus through which their raison d'être can be embedded in the life of the second generation.[16]

The difficulty of translating moments of truth into viable social movements is illustrated by the use of the word "heresy" to name the evils of apartheid and nuclear war. Confessional theologians have been drawn to this term because it allows them to draw a clear dividing line between truth and falsehood. Yet this distinction brings them back into the complex problem of delineating the parameters of the Christian faith. There are innumerable scriptural, theological, ethical, and ecclesiastical implications that follow from taking a stand on a particular issue. These concerns have to be addressed before a confession of faith can be affirmed as a valid doctrine--or an ethical practice denounced as a heresy.

The need to integrate specific expressions of faith into an overarching frame of reference reopens the question of apologetics. Kaufman does not regard the church as a suitable vehicle for addressing this matter, largely because of its pluralistic nature. There continues to be a wide gap between those theologians who consider the institution of the

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[16]Note Gregory Baum's comments about this matter with reference to the preferential option for the poor, Theology and Society, pp. 74-75, 82-85.

church to be the best symbol of Christian unity (Pelikan, Lindbeck) and those who prefer to show their ecumenism in other ways (the confessional theologians cited above). Kaufman has thrown his support behind the latter of these two options.[17]

His relativistic standpoint with regard to the church, however, has not stopped him from offering a different type of solution to the dilemma of holding believers accountable. Although he discounts ecclesia as the proper agent for this task, Kaufman believes that some type of structural format is needed to embody his encompassing ideas. It is to this alternative that we must turn.

The best way of introducing this second option is to recall the comments that Kaufman has made in regard to the ethical issue of pacifism. He has suggested that a pacifist's primary responsibility is to ask the United States to live up to its highest ideals, even though these standards conflict with his or her peace stance.[18] Kaufman realizes that this is not a perfect solution to the dilemma that arises when deep convictions and pluralism meet. It is, nevertheless, one way of moving beyond the church/world distinction that is operative in so many theologies. The heart

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[17]See especially his review of Foundations of Christian Faith, by Karl Rahner, "Is There Any Way from Athens to Jerusalem?" pp. 345-346.

[18]Gordon Kaufman, Nonresistance and Responsibility, p. 71.

of the gospel message has to do with "advancing into an evil situation and attempting to rectify it," rather than keeping the parameters of faith within the confines of the church.[19]

The pertinence of this recommendation becomes apparent when one views it in terms of Robert Bellah's discussion of the intricate relationship between religion and society. Following Durkheim's insights into the matter, Bellah has documented the emergence of an American civil religion that goes beyond identifiable ecclesiastical structures and theological positions.[20] He demonstrates how references to God by Presidents of the United States have more to do with the values that American people hold dear, such as liberty, equality, and justice, than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These allusions to divinity serve as reminders of the transcendent ideals within American life.

Bellah goes on to show how these supersensible norms have been used in times of crisis. Abraham Lincoln's pronouncement that "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether" represented a rallying point in the removal of slavery during the Civil War.[21] Criticisms of the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War were also premised on its Declaration of Independence. The right of other

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[19]Ibid., pp. 64-65; cross-reference his definition of the church as "the world being transformed," p. 52.

[20]Robert Bellah, Beyond Belief, pp. 168-189.

[21]Ibid., pp. 176-179.

nations to decide their own destiny (be they South or North Vietnam) followed as an inevitable result of America's revolutionary past.[22]

Bellah's innovative hypothesis has elicited both criticisms and praise. On the negative side, Will Herberg has wondered whether this religion is nothing more than a glorification of the "American way of life." Bellah's curious assortment of religious symbols within a public framework appears to be little more than a forum for extolling the virtues of optimism, pragmatism, individualism, democracy, and free enterprise.[23]

Herbert Richardson is another scholar who has questioned the propriety of Bellah's analysis. The chief problem that a civil religion represents for him is that if, indeed, this phenomenon has become a reality in the United States, it makes it difficult to know how the power of the state can be restricted.[24] Historically, the civitas and the ecclesia were represented by separate institutions, one ruled by an

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[22]Ibid., pp. 182-183, 185-186; cross-reference Bellah's reflections on the Nixon era, "American Civil Religion in the 1970s," in American Civil Religion, eds. Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), pp. 259-264. It should be noted that Bellah does not extend his analysis to the Vietnam war in exactly the same manner as it is stated here.

[23]Will Herberg, "America's Civil Religion: What It Is and Whence It Comes," in American Civil Religion, pp. 76-80, 86-87.

[24]Herbert Richardson, "Civil Religion in Theological Perspective," in American Civil Religion, pp. 161-184.

emperor and the other by the pope. This arrangement allowed each organization to be circumscribed by the influence of the other. Now, however, that religion and politics have been conflated into one entity, there is a greater danger of the former being used as an ideological tool of the latter.

Other thinkers have read Bellah's article in a more charitable manner. While concurring with Herberg's worries about its degradation into a self-glorification of American ingenuity, Martin Marty has suggested that this is not the only way in which a civil religion can be interpreted. Publicly endorsed symbols serve prophetic as well as priestly roles. Abraham Lincoln's statement in regard to the issue of slavery represents but one example of how religious sentiments can be used to reorient the thinking of Americans. There is a transcendent element within the culture itself that stands in judgment of its social, political, and historical manifestations.[25]

Marty's analysis is substantiated by Sidney Mead's insight into the fact that every religion embodies a futuristic ideal. Following Whitehead on this point, Mead says that each person is "committed to an ideal world beyond the present world and to the incarnating of that ideal in actual-

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[25]Martin Marty, "Two Kinds of Civil Religion," in American Civil Religion, pp. 139-157. For Bellah's reflections on the importance of transcendence in contemporary life, see Beyond Belief, pp. 196-208.

ity."[26] This dialectical element redeems the concept of a civil religion for Mead. It allows the "not yet" to stand over against the imperfect social actualizations of freedom and equality.

These sympathetic interpretations of Bellah's position shed light on Kaufman's summons to "help a society come to a deeper understanding of its own deepest convictions before God."[27] Kaufman is not saying that believers should forgo their religious faith in favour of a national one. Rather, he is asking them to be sensitive to the moral insights that have been developed in the United States so that they can use this knowledge to call it to greater faithfulness. Some of these values will be the result of the influence of the Judaeo-Christian heritage. Yet it is the latter's unique manifestation on North American soil that is important, for this facilitates a truly contextual approach to Christianity.

This is, at least, Kaufman's way of solving the dilemma of being a responsible American citizen while endorsing a Christian pacifist position. Believers are to bring their faith to bear on the social, political, and religious situation in such a way that their own integrity and that of the state is not fatefully compromised.

This discussion of a civil religion helps to clarify

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[26]Sidney Mead, "The Nation with a 'Soul of a Church,'" in American Civil Religion, p. 60.

[27]Gordon Kaufman, Nonresistance and Responsibility, p. 71.

Kaufman's motivation in formulating a comprehensive concept of God. He has moved away from scriptural and ecclesiastical traditions because he believes that deconstructed and reconstructed divine images can speak more directly to the issues at hand. This liberation from classical sources has nevertheless led him to a point where his description of deity bears a close resemblance to America's perception of itself.

The United States is similar to Kaufman's cosmic metaphor in the sense that it represents a world power that sustains the life of other nations through its web of social, political, and economic arrangements. Conversely, its economic and political health is dependent on the good will and commitment of other countries to maintain fiscal and diplomatic ties. These observations lend credence to Kaufman's description of God as a reality that has power over, as well as is subject to the responsible actions of human beings.

Although this correlation is an exaggeration, it underlines the fact that the ultimate purpose of Kaufman's apologetic agenda is to help the United States come to a better understanding of itself. He believes that his cosmic concept of God fosters a new vision of mutuality and reconciliation.

This theological proposal can be viewed in one of two ways, as Martin Marty has made clear. Its ideological component comes to the surface when it is used to disguise the dependency relationships that so many countries have with the

United States.[28] Even though the internal logic of capitalism makes it appear that repayment with interest is a natural part of the economic workings of the world, Latin American countries do not regard their debt load as a good example of equity with their neighbours to the north. The dispute that has erupted over the proper interpretation of this economic link indicates a place where Kaufman's organic metaphor is no longer operative. A conflictual model is in order, a method that "just happens" to coincide with the rising importance of liberation theology in South America.

A similar critique can be made of process theology. An embodied concept of God represents one of its more important innovations. The mind of deity has been correlated with the subconscious impulse of the world while the earth has been regarded as the most suitable symbol for the divine body. This image appears to be the perfect solution to the subjective and objective attributes of God. It allows divinity to be intimately involved with the life of each believer while being materially incorporated into the world as a whole.

The negative effects of this holistic image become apparent when its two aspects are analysed separately. Even though spiritual accountability is considered by institutional religions to be an integral aspect of faith, this

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[28]See Arthur McGovern, "Dependency Theory, Marxist Analysis, and Liberation Theology," in The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honour of Gustavo Gutierrez, eds. Marc Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989), pp. 272-286.

obligation is undermined by the assumption of a mind/body analogy that a believer has virtually immediate contact with God. A Christian's direct relationship with deity makes it appear as though he or she is not subject to any verification procedure.[29]

The opposite problem arises when the world is viewed as God's body. Whereas the internal processes of faith make historical identification difficult, the material parameters of a cosmic divine body are so encompassing that it is just as difficult to make discriminating judgments about God's presence.

These weaknesses are evident in Kaufman's theology. His comprehensive image of deity hinders the development of criteria that can adjudicate between faith movements torn between policies of reconciliation and liberation in their transformation of society. A similar ambiguity is evident in process theologians. Having provided an intellectually compelling picture of God's relationship with the world, they have come up short in furnishing practical norms for the discernment of this historical reality. Their theological vignettes are, on the one hand, too individualistic, and on the other hand, too comprehensive and speculative.

This dilemma appears to be surmountable. The enveloping aspects of Kaufman's organic model have been modified by his

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[29]Cross-reference David Mason s affirmation of this point, "Selfhood, Transcendence, and the Experience of God," p. 299.

allusion to divine Mystery, a metaphor that he has used to disrupt America's benign support for the atomic bomb. Far from representing a reification of the best that the United States has to offer, deity stands in judgment of American imperialism. A similar sign of hope is to be found in Kaufman's categorial scheme. His employment of the concepts of God, humanity, world, and Christ permits the extension of these ideas into diverse directions, thereby undercutting the monolithic overtones of his cosmology.

Process theologians have also balanced the more abstract and inclusive features of their work with social and political analyses. To name just two examples, John Cobb has compared his position to that of German political theologians (Johann Metz), while David Griffin has edited a volume on the relationship between spirituality and society.[30]

One wonders, however, whether a more practical portrait of theology can be adduced from these metaphysical musings on the propriety of a civil religion. One of the recurring questions that have been raised with respect to this phenomenon pertains to its institutional basis. Does a civil religion manifest itself primarily in regard to the political policies of the state, or are there other social, cultural, and religious venues through which it gains its credibility?

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[30]John B. Cobb, Jr., Process Theology as Political Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982); David R. Griffin, ed., Spirituality and Society: Postmodern Visions (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988).

This query takes the reader back to the purpose of this conclusion, namely, the furnishing of a more substantial framework for Kaufman's theological views. The churches who have declared themselves to be in a status confessionis represent a logical extension of the relativistic and idealistic aspects of Kaufman's thinking.

Yet enough questions have been raised about this confessing church model that it is necessary to complement this ad hoc, perhaps even postmodern vision of the world with another option. If it is true that confessions have to be evaluated in terms of creeds, and ethical practices in terms of the common good, then a sociological structure will need to be found that can accommodate these apologetic concerns. This institution will embody some of the cosmopolitan characteristics of a civil religion while being more receptive to an explicitly religious framework.

It is difficult to know how such an apologetic agenda could be implemented without violating Kaufman's sanction against an ecclesiastical structure. An alternative that has emerged during the course of this dissertation is the university. Robert Neville has maintained that the global context in which religions find themselves requires a non-partisan facility that can examine the consequences of belief with as much "philosophical and hermeneutical objectivity as pos-

sible."[31]

Robert Segal and Donald Wiebe have supported this Enlightenment project of rationality.[32] They consider scholarly affirmations of the sui generis nature of religious experiences to be a backward step, for this reintroduces the idea of value-laden research into an institution whose raison d'être is to maintain an "arm's length" relationship with communities that have a vested interest in the university's investigations. The tendency to become prejudiced is especially strong in the area of religion. The affective feelings that are involved in examining beliefs different from one's own require a "bracketing" (Ninian Smart)[33] of one's value judgments.

Kaufman would have problems with the positivistic manner in which Wiebe and Segal have outlined their social-scientific method. There is for him no doubt that our thinking is shaped by a theoretical framework, and that this conceptual scheme extends to all aspects of life, including research carried out at the university.

Yet it is conceivable that Kaufman would endorse a

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[31]Robert Neville, Creativity and God, p. 145. Cross-reference pp. 174-180 of this dissertation.

[32]Robert Segal, Religion and the Social Sciences; Donald Wiebe, "The Failure of Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion."

[33]See Ninian Smart, The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

variant of this approach were its rationalistic orientation linked more closely to a substantive, historically-informed reason. Like Segal and Wiebe, Kaufman is worried about the parochialization of religion and theology, and so the university could serve as a vehicle for addressing these concerns.[34]

The question must nevertheless be raised whether the university represents the best avenue for Kaufman's apologetic interests. The fact that it represents an academic arm of the state means that it is not as free to institute its own policies as it would like to think. Its proximity to the reins of power makes it susceptible to recommending strategies that undergird the social order, rather than ones that

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[34]Historical precedent for a comprehensive method can be found at the University of Chicago. Its Divinity School has emerged from denominational beginnings and adopted an empirically-based phenomenological method. See Bernard E. Meland, ed., The Future of Empirical Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 1-62.

Another option would be to align oneself with the historicist stance that Jeffrey Stout and Cornel West have developed at Princeton University. The writings of Jürgen Habermas could be added as a valuable asset to their social-historical method. His work on substantive reason represents a mitigating factor between the positivistic views of Segal and Wiebe and the relativistic ideas of Stout and West, see The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. I, Reason and the Rationalization of Society, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981).

The question of a "universal," as opposed to a "parochial" education has become increasingly important in light of the recent controversy regarding prejudice in university education. Does the bias toward a normative interpretation of Western culture, along with the assumption of a white, Anglo-Saxon, male interpretation of history, mean that reverse discrimination is justified? See the disturbing article by Dinesh D'Souza, "Illiberal Education," The Atlantic Monthly 267/3 (March, 1991):51-79.

call it into question.[35]

This political tie is strengthened by the concept of objectivity. The idea that there is one historical truth to which events correspond disguises the reality of "minority reports" that interpret the same phenomenon from different vantage points. The inclusion of incidental witnesses within a value-neutral model spoils the idea of a homogeneous rationality.

This all-too-sketchy negative assessment of academia reopens the possibility of the churches becoming (being) significant social agents of transcendence and transformation. The church has always been an institution that stands, at least theoretically, in an uneasy relationship with the political order. This enables it to be both priest and prophet

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[35]The work that Peter Berger and Richard J. Neuhaus have done on behalf of the American Enterprise Institute represents a good example of the ambiguities that are involved in becoming closely associated with the ruling political adminstration. Their book, To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Life (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1977) allows religion to play a creative role. The de facto pluralism of the United States enables the church to be a "mediating structure" that contributes to society through its social and educational services, pp. 33, 40-45.

Read as a neo-conservative document, however, this newfound "freedom" and "power" of the church turns out to be nothing more than a way for the government to become less involved in its social responsibilities, see especially pp. 1-7. This decentralization of authority leads to greater disparities along racial, cultural, and religious lines. Not all families, neighbourhoods, and congregations are organized enough to profit from government programs. The associations that benefit from this pluralistic structure also see no reason to become involved in the larger political process. It "pays" for them to foster in-house attitudes.

in regard to the structures of society. While it blesses and celebrates those cultural ideals that are in keeping with its two-thousand-year-old history, it stands on guard against social tendencies that dehumanize, oppress, and destroy.

A good illustration of this balancing act can be found in the pastoral letters on peace and the economy that have been issued by the American Roman Catholic bishops. They begin both documents with the statement that they are responding to the current crises because of their Christian commitment. The Scriptures speak a great deal about justice, economic sharing, the poor, non-violence, and the peaceful kingdom of God. Faithfulness to this gospel message has compelled them to take issue with the nuclear arms race and the excesses of capitalism.[36]

The bishops do not limit their communication to those for whom the Christian Scriptures are normative. Although they consider their religious convictions to be relevant to the political situation, they also want to appeal to historical memories that do not have any direct link to these beliefs. The bishops accomplish this task by mentioning the endeavours that the United States has made in the areas of peace and economic justice. Its arms control treaties (SALT I & II), ban on nuclear testing, Keynesian economic reforms

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[36]National Conference of Catholic Bishops, The Challenge of Peace, pp. 9-18; "Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy," Origins: NC Documentary Service 16/24 (1986), pp. 411, 415-419.

(in the 1930's and 40's), financial generosity in regard to the rebuilding of Europe after World War II, and aid to Third World countries attest to its historic efforts at fostering peace and encouraging economic parity.[37]

This dialectical approach reflects the apologetic concerns of Kaufman and Bellah. There is as much to be gained from an appeal to ideals that have embedded themselves within American consciousness as an engagement of sacred texts. The two-hundred-year old history of the United States represents a good starting point on which to base standards of justice and equality.

These cultural roots are nevertheless inadequate in furnishing ultimate criteria. America's tragic record on slavery, its subjugation of aboriginal peoples, its emphasis on the equality "of opportunity," and its tendency to isolate itself from the rest of the world reinforce the need to reach beyond this past to gain a better understanding of American ideals. It is for this reason that the Roman Catholic bishops invoke the much older tradition of the Scripture, and church doctrine. The limited transcendence of norms found in the United States Constitution requires the retrieval of a much richer past.

This step beyond the "great American experiment" leads to some radical political and economic recommendations on the

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[37]National Conference of Catholic Bishops, The Challenge of Peace, pp. 64-66; "Economic Justice for All," pp. 437-438, 440-443.

part of the bishops. They not only condemn the possibility of a limited nuclear war, but conjoin this analysis with an affirmation of non-violence, a stance that historically has been excluded from Catholic pronouncements on peace.[38]

This bold approach is also evident in their statement on the economy. The bishops at one point call for "government intervention" and "an overall economic plan." They realize that this sounds perilously close to a socialist or even totalitarian solution. They nevertheless defend their position by saying that because private enterprise has shown such a lack of moral vision, the government has to take initiative in rectifying the growing disparity between rich and poor. There needs to be a reclamation of the common good.[39]

These innovative proposals show how the church can be a constructive social force. Although the bishops are not experts in economic and political matters, it is precisely their distance from the centres of political power, along with their close association with people adversely affected by neo-conservative policies, that have elicited recommendations that would rarely appear in other, more academic, bureaucratic, and financial journals.

This intermediary approach goes beyond that of a civil religion. The latter's critique of society is limited to

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[38]National Conference of Catholic Bishops, The Challenge of Peace, pp. 34-37, 49-50.

[39]National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Economic Justice for All," pp. 442-443.

norms that have made their presence felt within a particular culture. A civil religion can only extend its ideals so far before the language of "freedom," "democracy," and "capitalism" begins to sound hollow in the face of mounting economic and political pressures.[40]

The symbol of the church takes on new potency when compared to the inadequacies of these national ideals. The concept of an international body that supersedes political boundaries enables Christians to break out of pre-disposed attitudes and see their social reality in a new light. The bishops' allusion to an "overall economic plan" is but one example of this liberating process. The lack of a clarion vision within the United States has prompted their appeal to the social teachings of the Roman Catholic church.

There are problems with this proposal. A world-wide ecclesia does not represent a truly universal theological or ethical standard because it continues to draw distinctions between believers and unbelievers, Christianity and other faiths. Whereas a civil religion is inhibited by national boundaries, the church is limited by its dogmatic convic-

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[40]The number of recent books on these ideas shows that the "virtues" of Western society can no longer be taken for granted, see Peter Berger, The Capitalist Revolution: Fifty Propositions about Prosperity, Equality, and Liberty (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Neil Gilbert, Capitalism and the Welfare State: The Dilemma of Social Benevolence (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983); Richard J. Neuhaus, The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); Michael Novak, The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism.

tions.

The pluralistic nature of Christianity reinforces this dilemma. The church remains divided on a number of issues, including the matter of how it can collectively symbolize the body of Christ. Although the Roman Catholic church, the Orthodox church, and the World Council of Churches represent parts of this "whole," they find it difficult to speak with one voice. Churches continue to be as fragmented as nations in their handling of social and cultural issues.

A third issue has to do with the pastoral letters themselves. While political and economic experts have rejected the bishops' statements as naive, confessionally oriented theologians have complained that the communiqués are not radical enough. Stanley Hauerwas regards the bishops' affirmation of "conventional war" as the lesser of two evils as a classic example of the fateful compromise that is demanded of Christians when they think that they can be politically effective. He would prefer that the bishops go beyond their liberal stance and endorse pacifism as the only Christian option.[41]

Scholars attuned to the church's traditional accommodation of just war are upset with the bishops for the opposite reason. James Finn considers their conjoining of pacifist

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[41]Stanley Hauerwas, Against the Nations, pp. 176-179, 186-198. Cross-reference Gordon Zahn, "Pacifism and the Just War," in Catholics and Nuclear War: A Commentary on the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Letter, ed. Philip Murion (New York: Crossroad, 1983), pp. 121-131.

and just war theories to be confusing and even dangerous.[42] The just war theorist regards the use of coercion as a necessary, though undesirable fact of life because he or she is interested in keeping the public peace. The pacifist looks at the matter quite differently. His or her sanction against violence is a matter of principle, regardless of its effects in the political realm. The _teloi_ of these two stances are substantially different.

Finn concludes that it is counter-productive for the bishops to appeal to both traditions in order to defuse the threat of nuclear war. These protagonists view the situation from two different frameworks and so the bishops should take a stand on one or the other side of the issue.[43]

These criticisms demonstrate the difficulties that are involved in envisioning a public role for the church. Those for whom the radical sayings of Jesus are normative consider the _ecclesia_'s overt engagement of state policies to be misguided. Others do not regard political involvement as an option. The church is necessarily implicated in the "affairs of the world," and so it is better to take a stand on social

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[42]James Finn, "Pacifism and Just War: Either or Neither," in _Catholics and Nuclear War_, pp. 132-145. Paul Ramsey has published a similar response to the United Methodist Bishops' letter on peace, _Speak Up for Just War or Pacifism_ (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988). Cross-reference the United Methodist Bishops' statement, _In Defence of Creation: The Nuclear Crisis and a Just Peace: Foundation Document_ (Nashville, Tenn.: Graded Press, 1986).

[43]James Finn, "Pacifism and Just War: Either or Neither," pp. 144-145.

issues than to remain silent.[44]

Although these dilemmas are important, they should not detract from the purpose of this discussion. What is being offered is a constructive proposal that can accommodate Kaufman's apologetic concerns by extending his theology of divine agency in the direction of a more identifiable material structure. Just as the confessing church represents a logical implication of his idealistic views, the concept of an international ecclesiastical body follows as a natural result of his comprehensive image of God. These options enable Kaufman's theological priorities to be further embodied.

Questions nevertheless remain about the relation of this vision to the rest of Kaufman's thinking. Are his theologies of revelation, agency, and construction enhanced by the above analysis or are there changes necessitated in the light of this innovative proposal?

The best way of answering this question is to consider each of these theologies in turn. The reader will recall that the propriety of a theology of revelation revolves around the issue of its intrinsic and extrinsic viability. Thiemann has claimed that the idea of self-disclosure is warranted in light of its internal link to divine prevenience. Kaufman has taken a quite different view of the

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[44]Gregory Baum has suggested that the guilt surrounding the church's silence during the Jewish Holocaust has been a motivating factor in the ready response of Protestants and Catholics to current social issues, Theology and Society, pp. 141-156.

matter. He regards revelatory pronouncements as extrinsic religious authorities that impinge upon believers in an arbitrary manner. He has opted for an agential model because he believes that it allows human beings a more active, holistic role in the fulfilment of God's purposes.

A parallel can be drawn between this dispute and the relative merits of confessional and apologetic theologies. One of the reasons that the Confessing Church in Germany has been considered so important an historical witness is because it illustrates the efficacy of the Bible and the church as internally transcendent norms. While the majority of German citizens thought that the fascist policies of Hitler represented an appropriate way out of their economic and political straitjacket, Karl Barth and other Christians recognized the tremendous evil of Nazism. This provides hope that we, too, will be able to discern between right and wrong, God and evil when confronted by ideologically compelling trends within our own countries.

Kaufman shows empathy for this "conceptual relative" position when he speaks about Americans searching for and living by the deepest convictions of their society. Part of what has shaped the consciousness of the United States is the Judaeo-Christian heritage, and so it is possible to view this faith tradition as an intrinsic cultural ideal that compels America to be critical of itself.

This correlation facilitates a more positive evaluation

of revelatory theologies. Sacred texts and religious communities become less arbitrary when one realizes that they, in addition to responding to the particular needs of a people, have affected other societies through mutual influence. Talk about "extrinsicism" can thus be avoided by emphasizing the (internal) continuity that exists between the earliest Hebrew nomads and the latest manifestations of monotheism on the North American continent. Theologies of revelation remain operative in the sense that foundational historical events, both in the distant and recent past, subvert as well as substantiate the stated raison d'être of a religious or national group.[45]

The limitations of a self-disclosure model come to the fore, however, when one reconsiders the example of World War II. Although the Confessing Church of the 1930's is symbolic

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[45]The assumption of internal continuity can be extended to the whole world, making it possible to view inter-religious dialogue as the logical outcome of a recognition of the interdependence of historical events and beliefs. I take this to be the premise on which Kaufman and others have actively engaged in a Buddhist-Christian dialogue, see issues 4, 5, and 9 of Buddhist-Christian Studies (1984, 1985, 1989); Francis H. Cook, "The Second Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter: A Report," Eastern Buddhist 19/1 (1986):127-134; and Reginald Ray, "From Dialogue to Mutual Transformation: The Third Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter," Eastern Buddhist 20/2 (1987):115-127.

Although this inter-faith dialogue does not relate directly to a theology of self-disclosure, it demonstrates the possibility of uncovering mutual sources on which sacred texts and themes have been based (For instance, Jews, Christians, and Muslims all claim the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as their "Father"). A conversation of faiths is thus not excluded on the basis of a revelatory theology, provided that the latter is viewed as intrinsically dependent.

of the internal efficacy of God and Jesus Christ, especially when its statements are contrasted with the pervasively ideological use to which the name of God was being put at that time, an extrinsic and arbitrary force was nevertheless needed to restore a just state in Germany. Neither Barth's pronouncements nor the assassination plot that included the participation of Dietrich Bonhoeffer was enough to stop the Nazi atrocities being inflicted on the Jews, Europe, and the rest of the world. A more coercive, albeit less desirable presence was required to bring Germany back to its senses.

This historical illustration reveals the shortcomings of Cartesian-based epistemologies and theologies. The latter have failed to account for the fact that self-doubt, whether conceived in a personal or communal manner, is only as radical as the social location in which it is found. This means that there are times when alien frameworks of meaning are needed to interrupt the direction of a culture or religion. The finitude of understanding that demarcates every society requires the correcting influence of "external" religious and political authorities.

This helps to explain Kaufman's shift to a theology of divine agency. He has included more empirically-based analogies in his thinking because his earlier theology can be mistaken for an existential "decisionism" (Thiemann) that is immune to objective critiques. Kaufman has rectified this situation by correlating the historic acts of God with the

gracious endeavours of human and natural agents. Those activities that foster liberation and reconciliation provide evidence of God's embodiment.

This dissertation has added to Kaufman's agent-act model by referring to events as "agents in their own right" (Mason). There are two advantages to speaking about historical efficacy in this way. First, it diffuses the difference between personal and non-personal agents. While human beings possess the lengthiest time-frame into which events can be placed, denoting their advantage over other agents, natural forces overtake the best intentions of the human species through sheer weight, size, and prominence. The concept of event is thus better than that of agent because in addition to incorporating the latter into its framework, an "occurrence" can be sensitive to the substantive consequences of history, effects that constantly move ahead of human anticipation and enactment.

This brings me to the second benefit of a model of "actual occasions" (Whitehead), namely its materialistic overtones. What I am attempting to develop is an objective theology that is, at the same time, non-deterministic. The latter objective can be achieved by placing ideas of intentionality, purposefulness, agency, and enactment within a theological framework that assumes indeterminacy as the basis of reality. Subjectivity remains within the hesitant stops and starts (gaps) that make up the continuity of time.

At the same time, a phenomenologically-based theology can be established by regarding nature and history as real, i.e. as objective, observable events that can be categorized and measured, and on the basis of which fairly reliable conclusions and predictions can be made. The significance of an empirical method rests in its ability to channel the conceptually prone aspects of Kaufman's thinking into a more conscious, social and political theology. Hence the interest in an historically material (Marxist) theology.

Unlike his emphases on revelation and agency, which stand as signposts for the diverging trajectories of his thinking, Kaufman's theology of construction has affinities with both the confessional and apologetic tendencies in his thought. The connection between his imaginative theology and a presuppositional approach comes to the fore when his constructive project is viewed as a refinement of his subjective epistemology, rather than as a reaction against the stultifying effects of a revelatory theology. What Kaufman is attempting to say with his "three moments of theological construction" is that novelty and change are at the core of our thinking. It is thus better to tap this powerful creative energy than to repress its excessive byproducts and by so doing, reduce life to a flat plane of chronological history that allows only one time-slot for each historical and/or natural event. There is too much richness in lived reality for Christians to confine themselves to a represen-

tational or ostensive view of time and space.

The Bible has to be viewed, therefore, as the outcome of a lengthy inventive process. One needs only to read parts of Mark, Genesis, and I Samuel to realize the extent to which biblical authors were engaged in writing and rewriting, editing and redacting in order to speak the words of truth as they heard and witnessed them. Whether a theology of revelation can be accommodated by this re-descriptive (fictional) scheme remains to be seen. Suffice it to say that it is the visionary and imaginative power of sacred words that engenders faith, not their translation into technically-accurate recitations.

The same holds true for contemporary society. The concept of eternal ideals is compelling because it allows us to trace the continuity between our novel images and ancient wisdom. Yet it is precisely this conscientization process that relativizes the significance of these traditions and makes room for our social and political contributions. The current tensions between a metaphysics of presence and a pragmatic method, between a theology of revelation and a theology of construction have to be viewed in this light. Deposited history is subverted as well as redeemed by the knowledge that we have to act on the basis of available, i.e. fallible information.

This realistic critique undergirds the apologetic potential of Kaufman's imaginative theology. Together with

Wallace Stevens, Kaufman has realized that new ideas, however exciting, last only as long as the realities to which they have been attached. He has thus taken more time to ground his conceptual ideas in culturally foundational experiences. This has led to his conception of God as a cosmic whole, an analogy that bears a striking resemblance to Americans' perceptions of themselves and what they regard as their global economic and political impact.

The imperialistic overtones of this image are nevertheless intercepted by Kaufman's affirmation of God as mutually dependent and as only one of four regulative principles in his Christian categorial scheme. He has built a self-limiting device into his holistic concept of God, enabling polyphonic voices to be heard. It is in this sense that his comprehensive analysis is both metaphysically astute and critically open.

I would like to bring this dissertation to a close by letting the two excursuses at the end of this thesis stand as alternate interpretations of Kaufman's theology. The first addendum pertains to a debate that took place between Reinhold Niebuhr and G. H. C. MacGregor concerning World War II. These theologians begin with what they consider to be the same biblical standard, sacrificial love, and with the same concern for a teleological or consequential interpretation of this norm. They nevertheless end up on opposite sides of the issue. Niebuhr regards the reality of sin as a mitigating

factor in the political applicability of agape. MacGregor, on the contrary, draws an equation sign between pacifism and the selfless love of Jesus and defends the long-term merits of non-violence. What starts off as an argument for the universal appeal of agape devolves into a concession that theological relativism represents the most cogent response to this pluralistic interpretation of the "same" truth.

This pessimistic assessment undergirds the idea that the use of all language is ideological. Although the intention of this debate is to bring pacifists and non-pacifists closer together, it functions instead as a forum for clarifying and justifying the (originally) divergent stances of each protagonist. The failure to establish common ground raises the question of whether there are any universal norms. Even though Niebuhr and MacGregor are both Christians, MacGregor regards the Allied offensive as misguided and serves as a British conscientious objector while Niebuhr supports the war effort while granting that it is a tragic, though necessary step to take.

The difficulty in reaching consensus, even at the high level of conceptual abstraction, lends credence to the idea that we--as theologians, sociologists, philosophers, and ethicists--must be willing to "muddle" our way through on the lower, anthropomorphic and naturalistic plane on which we have been born. This means, negatively, that our empirical analyses and visionary proposals will all be tinged with an

ideological brush. We cannot avoid recommending solutions that are of benefit to us. On a more positive note, this nominalist limitation means that we can feel more at ease in presenting novel theological suggestions. The need to construct a logically coherent, metaphysically sound, and comprehensive framework of meaning is no longer as pressing as it once was, largely because we have discovered its fictional character. Power can be transferred from the rule of the few to the enfranchisement of the many, in the midst of whom we stand.

This bleak picture of ontology is not the final answer. The second excursus presents a slightly different version of events, showing how Kaufman's sceptical views are obviated at the place where he responds to secular and naturalistic world-views with his own theological metaphysic. His bio-historical image of God has been constructed in order to steer a faithful course between historical egoism and romantic nostalgia. He regards this as a (practical) service that he can render American society. Believers have been provided with the wherewithal to recognize and associate with ongoing processes of divine grace.

Whether this active engagement constitutes a participation-in and belonging-to God that precedes our capacity to think, as Ricoeur would have us believe, remains an open question. Certainly, the ability of Emily Carr, a Canadian painter, to portray the essence of reality with a few brush

strokes points us in that direction. Her adeptness at discarding the mundane and concentrating on those things which touch us at the core of our world-identity demonstrates the integral place of intuition in our pragmatically oriented society. When all our consequential justifications are said and done, we need the hope and sustenance that a more affective analogy can provide. While this may constitute nothing more than a momentary flash of insight or feeling of relief, Carr's portrayal of this elusive whole suggests that we are drawn forward more by sustaining realities than by performative ideals. The appeal of potentiality goes stale all too quickly and so an ontological analysis is required as proof that our aspirations are, indeed, worthwhile.

I end, then, with an open rather than definitive interpretation of Kaufman's thought. The salient features of his theology have been elucidated. A concomitant part of this task has consisted of placing his thought within current social, religious, and theological trends. Yet I would prefer to leave the reader, including Kaufman, with more than one direction in which to head. Is this not, after all, what theological reflection is for, namely to break open the past in order to discover a new future? I trust that the two paths that have been cleared in relation to Kaufman's thought will afford the reader with such a hopeful possibility.

APPENDIX I

AN APPLICATION OF PRAGMATISM TO THE QUESTION OF PACIFISM

The universal relevance of Kaufman's pragmatism needs to be underscored. The means by which this will be accomplished is through an inquiry into the question of whether pacifism or non-pacifism represents a natural outcome of the Christian faith. This debate has a long history and cannot be fully covered here. This controversy is nevertheless pertinent because of its attention to the pragmatic features of non-violence. Kaufman's utilitarian criterion will help to determine whether pacifism can be effective or whether violence is a necessity in the light of human intransigence.

Two theologians will be considered who wrote about this dilemma at a time when it mattered, i.e. in 1940, just after the beginning of World War II. Reinhold Niebuhr, an American Protestant theologian, advocated the involvement of the United States in the Allied effort and wrote incisive critiques against the pacifist leanings of some of his fellow Americans. G. H. C. MacGregor, a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and long-time advocate of non-violence, wrote a response to Niebuhr and counselled his British colleagues

to become conscientious objectors. The problems of knowledge detailed in the first chapter are relevant to this debate and will be examined accordingly.

Brief attention will also be given to this issue insofar as violence and non-violence have been justified on deontological grounds. MacGregor supplemented his teleological arguments with an endorsement of pacifism on the basis of its inherent rightness. Paul Ramsey has used a similar premise to defend a jus in bello criterion of the just war theory. This discussion will demonstrate the weakness of using a single method in ascertaining the validity of a perspective.

Finally, the manner in which Gordon Kaufman has dealt with the problem will be elucidated. His conscientious objector status during World War II and membership in one of the historic peace churches have given him cause to reflect upon the merits of each position. The relevance of his criteria of truth will be determined by their ability to shed light on this controversy.

A. Debate Between Reinhold Niebuhr and G. H. C. MacGregor

Reinhold Niebuhr begins his discussion by saying that pacifism is valid insofar as Christians regard it as a perfectionistic ethic.[1] A non-resistant response represents a genuine alternative to violence as long as Christian ideal-

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[1]Reinhold Niebuhr, Christianity and Power Politics (Archon Books, 1969), pp. 4-11; cross-reference his discussion of pacifism in Love and Justice, pp. 241-301.

ists recognize that they cannot be effective in the political arena, where power has to be balanced with power. They have to temper their faith in non-violence if they wish to become politically active. The reality of sin in social relations necessitates a less than ideal solution to the problems of international conflicts. Expediency, compromise, coercion, and military force are required if justice is going to be done in the war between the Allied and Axis powers.

G. H. C. MacGregor agrees that pacifists have too often applied non-resistance in an indiscriminate manner. They have failed to recognize the difference between the relative value of life and the absolute demands of the gospel.[2] He also concurs that the question at hand is one of effectiveness. Pacifism could become the cause of great evil if it allowed the Nazi tyranny "to grow until it reaches unparalleled proportions."[3] If this were to happen, war would be justified as the lesser of two evils.

MacGregor nevertheless defends pacifism on the basis of its ultimate usefulness. Although war might be necessary in the short term, non-violence has been founded on the idea that reconciling love is the final answer to evil. Jesus fulfilled the requirements of justice by responding in suffering, sacrifice, and death to the sinfulness of humanity.

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[2]G. H. C. MacGregor, The Relevance of an Impossible Ideal, reprint ed. (London: Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1941, 1960), pp. 42-47.

[3]A prediction made by Reinhold Niebuhr, ibid., p. 20.

Christians are likewise called to follow the way of the cross, for it is only through an "active, self-sacrificing love" that "the evil will can be changed and redeemed" (as opposed to retributive justice which merely checks human wilfulness).[4] Non-violence is the proper response to this difficult situation.

1. Teleological and Consequential Considerations

The first factor that needs to be taken into account in this debate pertains to the varying definitions that have been assigned to pragmatism. Niebuhr considers the consequences of Hitler's expansionist policies to be an immediate concern. He is willing to enter into an armed conflict with Germany rather than settle for a negotiated peace. Violence is preferable to non-violence because there can be no peace without justice.

MacGregor pays heed to the current political situation by arguing that pacifism is relevant in an immediate sense. Redemption has been accomplished through Jesus' non-retaliatory death on the cross and so Christians are to believe that this "love-method" also works for them. The cycle of retaliation and violence can be broken through a peaceful alternative because the kingdom of God is present and operative

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[4]Ibid., pp. 48-52.

in the world.[5]

MacGregor realizes that he is not being realistic when he advocates non-violence as a utilitarian political ethic. The circumstances facing Britain and the Allies make an affirmation of the kingdom of God appear audacious. With war as a reality, the matter has more to do with deciding between pacifism and non-pacifism than with indicating the effectiveness of non-violence.[6]

MacGregor nonetheless claims that a pragmatic justification of non-violence is still possible from a long-range perspective. War only perpetuates violence and legitimates the killing of other people in the name of an ideological value such as the maintenance of a state. Responding non-violently to Hitler is better than going to war because it breaks the ever-increasing spiral of revenge and bloodiness as well as demurs from an overzealous commitment to human interests.[7]

MacGregor thus acknowledges that Christians will have to live with suffering and injustice in the short term, but insists that non-violence will be vindicated in the end. It

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[5]Ibid., pp. 36-37, 52. John H. Yoder cites several examples to substantiate his claim that non-violence can be politically effective, What Would You Do? (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1983), pp. 27-28, 80-111. He is interested in showing, contra Reinhold Niebuhr, that pacifism is workable.

[6]G. H. C. MacGregor, The Relevance of an Impossible Ideal, pp. 39-40, 46-47.

[7]Ibid., pp. 44-45.

is, in short, his belief that non-resistance will help to create a better society in the (distant) future that enables him in good conscience to sign up as a conscientious objector. The eschatological validity of non-violence warrants a Christian pacifist's preference for momentary injustice.[8]

2. Truth and Relativity

This discussion can also be analysed in terms of the pluralistic ontology (Joseph Runzo) and universal imperative outlined in the first chapter. Reinhold Niebuhr allows for the truthfulness of non-violence as long as pacifists acknowledge the circumscribed relevance of their stance. This represents an implicit endorsement of "two truths" in the sense that Niebuhr considers pacifism to be applicable on the personal level while coercion is necessary in the political arena. He advocates a tolerance of perspectives in which the legitimate bounds of each viewpoint are recognized and maintained.[9]

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[8]John H. Yoder has used a similar teleological argument in his defence of a pacifist position, The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1971), pp. 52-84.

[9]It is not being suggested that Niebuhr believed in two truths in an ultimate sense. His respect for a variety of perspectives facilitates an interpretation of his theology as a pluralist ontology [note his prolonged defence of tolerance in The Nature and Destiny of Man, II:213-243]. A more radical charge of dualism has been brought against Luther's theology. Hans-Werner Bartsch cites a passage from one of Luther's essays in which the question of war is posed in terms of its relationship alongside the Christian faith, "The Foundation and Meaning of Christian Pacifism," New Theology No. 6, eds. Martin Marty and Dean Peerman (London: Macmillan,

Niebuhr is nevertheless upset with the type of pacifism that claims political relevance. He regards this optimistic position as theologically shallow, going so far as to call it a heresy.[10] Liberal pacifism has "absorbed the Renaissance faith in the goodness of man," "rejected the Christian doctrine of original sin," and "reinterpreted the Cross so that it is made to stand for the absurd idea that perfect love is guaranteed a simple victory over the world" (as is poignantly illustrated by MacGregor's use of the term "love-method"). Niebuhr uses a universal criterion to reject a certain kind of non-violence.

A similar line of reasoning is evident in MacGregor's book. He initially justifies pacifism on the basis of a distinction between the role of the state and the role of the church. The government authorities represent an indispensable part of society, "defending a social structure whose protection and nurture . . . (believers) need and accept" (brackets added). At the same time, Christians "must fearlessly confess that state and nation still belong to the sphere of earthly and relative values, and that God alone has

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1969), pp. 190-191. Cross-reference Martin Luther, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved," Luther's Works (American Edition), ed. Robert Schultz, trans. Charles Jacobs, vol. 46 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 93-137. Luther's appreciation of the radical aspects of the gospel (particularly the Sermon on the Mount) compelled him to make a sharp distinction between the personal and social realms of faith.

[10]Reinhold Niebuhr, Christianity and Power Politics, p. 5.

claim to absolute and unconditional loyalty."[11]

MacGregor uses the priority of God to lend his pacifist support to the unity of the Christian church, "even across the boundaries of warring states."[12] He considers the break-up of the universal church to be a greater tragedy than the question of national loyalty, and so Christians, while acknowledging the proper role of the state, are to give their allegiance to the kingdom of the divine.

These quotations facilitate an interpretation of MacGregor's position as a pluralist ontology. He demarcates the authorities of the state and the church in terms of their respective spheres of influence. There are, nevertheless, other statements that militate against this circumscribed interpretation of his thought. MacGregor says at one point that anyone who does not follow the pacifist example of Jesus is making a "mockery of the Lordship of Christ."[13] The willingness to follow Jesus and accept suffering is considered in this passage to be the test of a true Christian. MacGregor thus fluctuates between a relativism in which the limited value of pacifism is recognized and an exclusivity in which non-violence is viewed as the only proper Christian stance.

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[11]G. H. C. MacGregor, The Relevance of an Impossible Ideal, p. 46.

[12]Ibid., p. 47.

[13]Ibid., p. 52.

B. The Deontological Bases of Pacifism and Non-Pacifism

The debate between Niebuhr and MacGregor has revolved around the question of teleology. There is, however, another ethical theory that can be used to defend violence or non-violence. James Gustafson and Paul Ramsey consider the inherent rightness of an ethical stance (deontology) to be a more important factor than its utilitarian consequences (pragmatism). Ethics has to do with choosing between right and wrong principles rather than with calculating the relative good that will be produced by a particular action.[14]

Both of the writers mentioned above recognize the importance of deontological considerations. Reinhold Niebuhr views non-resistance as an integral part of the gospel. Its essential validity is not an issue for him. He simply has doubts about the applicability of non-violence in the politi-

[14]Paul Ramsey, War and the Christian Conscience, p. 6; James Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, I:68-85. William Frankena has defined the difference between teleology and deontology in this manner: "The final appeal (of a teleological theory) . . . must be to the comparative amount of good produced, or rather to the comparative balance of good over evil produced. Thus, an act is right if and only if it or the rule under which it falls . . . produces at least as great a balance of good over evil as any available alternative" (text inside brackets added), Ethics, 2nd edition (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963, 1973), p. 14. A deontologist, on the other hand, "contends that it is possible for an action or rule of action to be the morally right or obligatory one even if it does not promote the greatest possible balance of good over evil for self, society, or universe. It may be right or obligatory simply because of some other fact about it or because of its own nature," p. 15. It should be noted that the above ethical definition of teleology equates end with goodness in a way that would be unacceptable to several Reformed theologians. Cf. James Gustafson, "Response."

cal sphere.[15]

MacGregor also considers the truth of pacifism to be irrefutable. It stems directly from the Scriptural account of Jesus' non-violent response to evil. "Jesus went to the Cross rather than betray the love-method; and in this sense every Christian may rightly and without presumption aspire to 'imitate the Cross.'"[16]

A deontological theory also facilitates a justification of violence. Paul Ramsey has argued for the validity of the just war theory on the basis of a categorical defence of noncombatant immunity.[17] He states that an absolute distinction between civilian and military forces is necessary to keep a war from getting out of hand. Nuclear weapons have made the destructive force of an attack too great to imagine and so strict deontological limits have to be placed on military weapons in order for them to be of use. According to Ramsey, the principle of noncombatant immunity ensures such a possibility. The killing of innocent victims can be kept to a minimum by restricting the deployment of missiles to countervailing forces.

The advantage of a deontological theory is that ethical

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[15]Reinhold Niebuhr, Christianity and Power Politics, pp. 8-9.

[16]G. H. C. MacGregor, The Relevance on an Impossible Ideal, p. 52.

[17]Paul Ramsey, War and the Christian Conscience, pp. 34-59.

action is based upon some irrefutable principle. A rule-oriented morality insists upon the ultimacy of a particular truth, regardless of extenuating circumstances. Each of the above theologians has availed himself of an absolute standard. The sanctity of life is a priority for MacGregor; the indiscriminate effects of war are of concern to Ramsey; and the sacrificial love of Jesus is considered by Niebuhr to be the final criterion on the basis of which human actions are to be judged.

Deontological theories are difficult to uphold, however, without taking teleological rationalizations into account. A good example of this is Paul Ramsey, who defends nuclear deterrence in spite of its implicit violation of the principle of noncombatant immunity.[18] Ramsey realizes that a nuclear attack could not be limited to countervailing forces. The deployment of a single atomic weapon would result in an indeterminable level of destruction, making its actual use indefensible. Ramsey nevertheless endorses the building of nuclear bombs on the basis of their deterrent effect. The immanent threat of these weapons has kept the superpowers from engaging in a world war, and so the United States is justified in continuing its policy of nuclear armament.

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[18]Ibid., pp. 312-324. For a critique of Ramsey's position along these lines, see Edward Laarman, Nuclear Pacifism (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), pp. 51-80, 165-200. Laarman argues that the principle of noncombatant immunity renders all nuclear theories of deterrence obsolete. For a similar type of reasoning, see John Yoder, When War is Unjust (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1984), pp. 32-41.

These statements indicate a point at which Ramsey is willing to forgo his usually strict adherence to the principle of noncombatant immunity. He considers the danger of an enemy to be a more important factor than his deontological criterion, and so he is willing to support a theory of nuclear deterrence that stops just short of an avowal of actual use. The strengthening of the military power of the United States is necessary until such time as a mutually acceptable plan of disarmament can be agreed upon.[19]

This illustration demonstrates the difficulty of holding to deontological principles without taking pragmatic criteria into account. Lest, however, it be thought that only rule-oriented theorists are susceptible to this cross-over form of argumentation, MacGregor's defence of pacifism represents an example of a teleologist resorting to a deontological theory in order to bolster his position.

MacGregor initially concurs with Niebuhr that pacifism has to be judged on its effectiveness. An appeal to Scripture is insufficient because Christians continue to disagree over the New Testament's categorical commendation of non-resistance.

During the course of his argument, MacGregor is forced to admit that the injustices Hitler is perpetrating cannot be

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[19]Ramsey, in fact, believes that a policy of "peace with strength" will speed up the disarmament negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union, War and the Christian Conscience, pp. 321-324.

stopped by non-violence. Niebuhr is correct when he notes the limited value of pacifism as a political strategy. It is at this point that MacGregor comes close to forgoing all utilitarian considerations in favour of the single deontological argument that pacifism should be followed because it has been attested to by the Scriptures. He has this to say in response to Niebuhr's charge that "capitulation or tyranny" are the only political options open to pacifists: "Jesus did not wage the expected Messianic war: He bid his disciples to submit to the exactions of the tyrant."[20]

What MacGregor is saying, in effect, is that the principle of non-violence should be obeyed even if it leads to something worse than war. The divine commands to "love one's enemies" and to "turn the other cheek" carry more weight than teleological considerations.

These last two examples lead to the preliminary conclusion that a "mixed" (Frankena) theory of deontological and

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[20]G. H. C. MacGregor, The Relevance of an Impossible Ideal, p. 45. John Yoder has this to say about a pacifist's "capitulation" to malevolent political forces: "There are things which we cannot control, which nonetheless are going to happen, which are going to impinge upon the situation where we ourselves are trying to do something else (be pacifists). This means that it will be an expression of wisdom . . . if we accept the fact that those deeds are going to be done and that we cannot stop them, and concentrate for ourselves on doing other things which no one will do. This looks to our friends of a majoritarian cast of mind like acquiescence to evil. It is: one of the differences between being powerful and powerless is that one has thought more about the fact that there are evils one cannot prevent" (text inside brackets added), The Priestly Kingdom, p. 101. According to Yoder, "making history turn out right" should be left up to God.

teleological arguments is required in presenting a cogent defence of a moral position. Ethicists have to take consequences as well as rules into account when considering the best course of action to take. Pacifism and non-pacifism cannot be judged on the basis of pragmatism alone. A broader historical, theological, and scriptural approach is required.[21]

C. Gordon Kaufman's Contribution to the Debate

The time has come to examine Gordon Kaufman's views on the matter. He has had a particular interest in pacifism because he served as an American conscientious objector during the second World War. While his compatriots were being loyal in a different manner on the European front, he was caring for mentally ill patients in a Michigan state hospital.[22] This experience has given him reason to reflect on the merits of non-violence.

Kaufman begins his discussion by saying that the self-

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[21]For an application of a mixed ethical theory, see my article, "Karl Barth's Theological Justification of World War II." I demonstrate Barth's use of a teleological argument to correct an overly literal interpretation of Paul's deontological injunction to "be subject to the governing authorities" (Romans 13:1). This imperative was difficult for the Confessing Church in Germany to understand because it appeared that Paul was demanding unconditional obedience to the state. Barth used Romans 12:21 and 13:3-4 to show that this passage could be interpreted in terms of "doing good" (teleology).

[22]The impact of this experience has been documented in Kaufman's autobiographical essay, "Apologia Pro Vita Sua," pp. 128-133.

giving love of Jesus cannot be used as a pragmatic criterion to calculate the humanitarian consequences of agape.[23] The pacifist is out of touch with the self-oriented desires of contemporary society because he or she takes the life and commands of Jesus seriously.

The eschatological nature of Christian ethics represents the context for Kaufman's endorsement of sacrificial love as a moral stance. Rejection of control over the affairs of the world is possible when God is recognized as the One who is in charge of history. Just as the crucifixion of Jesus is apprehended as redemptive when seen within the scope of God's saving grace, so can a Christian's abdication of power be viewed as transformative when coupled with the divine promise of faithfulness. The seemingly irrelevant doctrine of pacifism, with its even more irreverent attitude toward the innocent victim's life, is vindicated by a pronouncement of future justice (Romans 12:19).[24]

These two emphases resonate with MacGregor's defence of pacifism. Kaufman's evaluation of the sayings of Jesus as categorical imperatives lays the groundwork for his deontological endorsement of non-violence. His distinction between the present realities and future possibilities of selfless

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[23]Gordon Kaufman, Nonresistance and Responsibility, p. 54. The following analysis is based on four chapters of this book: "The Church and the World"; "Nonresistance and Responsibility"; "Christian Decision Making"; and "The Christian in the Church and World," pp. 46-115.

[24]Ibid., pp. 53-59.

love also clears the road for a limited affirmation of justice. Pacifism makes sense if one believes that the final outcome of the world is in the hands of God.

Kaufman diverges from MacGregor's position, however, when he allows for a coercive response to evil within his definition of sacrificial love. Loving the world without regard for oneself does not mean withdrawing into a defensive posture of pacifism when faced with the real problems of compromise, dirty tricks, and power politics. Rather, it entails risking one's life in order to tackle the often violent predicaments in which ethnic, religious, and national groups find themselves. Following Christ means "going into the very heart of an evil situation and attempting to rectify it."[25]

Kaufman is proposing a definition of selfless love that is determined as much by relational and relative factors as deontological ones. Although agape represents a categorical imperative, it has to be open, flexible, and free enough to adapt "its response to every situation."[26] Christians, in short, are entreated to take responsibility for the sinful world in which they live, even if this means forfeiting a strict adherence to pacifism in order to rectify a pervasive evil. Redemptive behaviour has to be defined in terms that are appropriate to the circumstances.

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[25]Ibid., p. 65.

[26]Ibid., p. 75, cross-reference pp. 65-66, 94-95.

Kaufman's willingness to stretch his understanding of agape to include an affirmation of violence needs to be underscored. He says at one point that pacifists should encourage their friends to join the Army if the latter believe that it is their Christian duty to do so. Ethics is defined by the need of the other, whoever that may be. Believers should be willing "to help and support him (the soldier) in his resolution, (making it) . . . possible for him to live according to the insights of his conscience as God has given him those insights" (text inside brackets added).[27]

Kaufman also speculates on the possibility of a pacifist politician voting in favour of a military bill introduced in the United States legislature. If it is true that the situation delimits a Christian's response to evil, he or she should be disposed to endorsing political policies that are in keeping with "the highest ideals and best moral insights of the total American society."[28] The obligation of a Christian is not only to countenance what he or she believes to be the right thing to do (in this case, for all people to become pacifists), but to measure life on the basis of the religious and moral insights of others. The Christian church can as-

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[27]Ibid., p. 73. The American Catholic bishops have noted that the soldier is as brave and daring in his willingness to die for what he believes to be right as the pacifist is in his acceptance of the consequences of refusing to kill, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, The Challenge of Peace, pp. 23-24.

[28]Gordon Kaufman, Nonresistance and Responsibility, p. 71.

sist a society in coming to "a deeper understanding of its own deepest convictions before God."

There is a tension between Kaufman's eschewal of pragmatic pacifism and his consequential interpretation of sacrificial love. Agape is true in a deontological sense because of the divine redemption that has been initiated on behalf of the world. At the same time, the correct enactment of selflessness is dependent upon its context. The best course of action to take is determined by believers' relationship to God and others.[29]

These seemingly divergent views can be reconciled by analysing Kaufman's use of the word "eschatology." The reader will recall that MacGregor used the future establishment of God's reign to justify Christians' tolerance of injustice. Kaufman dissociates himself from this position, saying that the reality of evil requires a more active interpretation of sacrificial love. There are times when the just demands of agape, interpreted in terms of Paul's injunction to "do good" (Romans 12:21, 13:3), override the eschatological promise of peace and good will. Some situations necessitate an immediate or consequential interpretation of teleology.[30]

Kaufman's epistemological insights also shed light on

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[29]Cross-reference H. R. Niebuhr's development of this point, The Responsible Self, intro. James Gustafson (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), pp. 61-68, 126.

[30]Kaufman makes a distinction between empirical and eschatological realities in his argument for a utilitarian ethic, Nonresistance and Responsibility, pp. 50-59.

this dilemma. He has said that besides convincing other people of his or her beliefs, a Christian should judge the actions of a cultural group on the basis of its own moral insights. These sentiments lend themselves to an interpretation of Kaufman's thought as a pluralist ontology. This relativistic perspective assumes that the ethical views of a Christian pacifist and American war veteran do not (necessarily) overlap. The military policy of the United States is determined by one frame of reference, while the merits of pacifism are contingent upon another (such as the demands of the gospel).

Precedence for this pluralist strategy can be found in a speech that Martin Luther King, Jr. gave to the American people in 1963, entitled, "I Have a Dream." King alludes to Isaiah's vision of "every hill and every mountain being made low" (40:4-5), but grounds his support for black rights on the Constitution of the United States. This document guarantees the right of every American citizen to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."[31] King found it worth his while to summon the heart and soul of a nation, instead of the memories of Americans who happened to be Jews or Christians.

Kaufman is well aware of the tension that arises when individuals and groups are faced with a conflict of world-

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[31]Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream," in A Testament of Hope, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), pp. 217, 219.

views. Christian pacifists feel compelled to oppose the military involvement of the United States, even though their American citizenship means that they are subject to its will.

This quandary has led Kaufman to a definition of sacrificial love that he believes can foster further dialogue. He submits that agape must be interpreted in almost every situation as engendering a pacifist response to violence.[32] The fundamental claims of the gospel cannot be diluted by other, so-called absolute ideals (such as the sovereignty of a state). At the same time, circumstances require a less than ideal solution to the problems of life. Violence may be necessary because a lack on the part of the enemy or neighbour, rather than a rule, dictates the correct behaviour of a Christian. "Loving one's enemies" cannot be equated with non-resistance.[33]

Kaufman has thus established a rapprochement between pacifism and non-pacifism while retaining his own belief in non-violence as the proper perspective. That is to say, his appreciation of the relativity of truth has led him to a point where he considers the responsible activities of Christians to be more appropriate than a doctrinaire belief in

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[32]Gordon Kaufman, Nonresistance and Responsibility, pp. 97-99.

[33]For the manner in which other theologians have tackled this thorny issue, see Reinhold Niebuhr, Love and Justice, pp. 218-221; Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/4:397-470; John H. Yoder, The Christian Witness to the State (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1964), pp. 60-73.

pacifism or non-pacifism. Agape is capable of being just, redemptive, and caring without losing its ability to love. Freedom in love represents the foundation of a Christian's response to violence and leads to a deeper understanding of both sides of the issue.[34]

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[34]Gordon Kaufman, Nonresistance and Responsibility, pp. 94-95. It is precisely the truthfulness of both views that makes dialogue so difficult. Violence begets violence, as pacifists have declared. And passivity can lead to great evil, as the world's silence about the Jewish Holocaust during World War II demonstrates. The realism of both sides is enhanced, not diminished by a relativist interpretation of events. Note Joseph Runzo's explication of this point, "God, Commitment, and Other Faiths: Pluralism vs. Relativism," Faith and Philosophy 5/4 (1988), pp. 355-359.

APPENDIX II

A CREATIVE EXPLORATION OF KAUFMAN'S IMAGINATIVE THEOLOGY

The purpose of this excursus is to reflect on the ramifications of Kaufman's theology of construction. If it is true that the relation between the ideal and real is more complicated than it first appears, then it is necessary to detail what this means.

This investigation will begin with a consideration of what Paul Ricoeur has had to say on the matter. His affirmation of the metaphysical possibilities of a creative theology will serve as a useful guide in determining the upper limits of Kaufman's ontological tendencies.

Three examples will also be used to illustrate the practical results of Kaufman's constructive approach. He has insisted upon the "cash value" of divine images. This preoccupation with lived reality has prompted a test of Kaufman's own theory.

Paul Ricoeur begins his discussion of hermeneutics with the statement that literary works facilitate a better imitation (mimêsis) of reality than phenomenological approaches. Fiction and poetry redescribe reality more realistically than

factual records because they highlight the significant and discard the trivial, contingent, and coincidental. Their freedom from ostensive reference enables them to bypass the incidental and proceed directly to the "essence of reality," or as Kaufman would have it, to the "heart of the real world of action."[1]

A number of parallels can be drawn between these statements and Kaufman's constructive approach. Both theologians affirm the creative potential of conceptual frameworks. The fact that works of art are not bound by a particular time and place facilitates an endless arrangement of relationships, realities, and perceptions.

Ricoeur recognizes that imaginative accounts are convincing to the degree that they reflect logical possibilities within the present. A narrative exposes levels of understanding that are hidden by the surface meaning of the text, enlightening the world of the reader in the process. This reciprocal relationship between the text and the reader echoes Kaufman's call for the experiential verification of constructive images. Divine metaphors help believers to understand <u>their own</u> world better.[2]

Ricoeur's views are also similar to Kaufman's in the

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[1]Both phrases come from Paul Ricoeur, <u>Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences</u>, pp. 142, 296. For a general discussion of the relation between imagination and description, see pp. 140-142, 176-181, 287-296.

[2]Ibid., pp. 157-164, cross-reference pp. 182-193, 274-296.

sense that he has developed a theory of distanciation that makes room for the critical aspects of the hermeneutical process. The act of reading creates a space between the interpreter and the text, facilitating a critique of ideology. A person's self-understanding is qualified by the new realities that are opened up by the fictional narrative.[3]

Finally, Ricoeur's support for Kaufman's historicist perspective is indicated by his recommendation of "testimony" and "witness" as bridge categories between the biblical text and the universe of the reader. The advantage that these terms have over alternatives such as "word events" (Ebeling, Fuchs) and "the world of the text" pertains to their realistic assessment of actual occasions. Their "conscious embodiment of the contingent effects of history" (Gadamer) makes them less susceptible to idealism.[4]

There is, nonetheless, one important difference between these two scholars. Ricoeur not only believes that the acts of God can be represented by images, symbols, and concepts, but that an absolute value can be conferred on these historic occurrences. He gives two reasons for this ontological affirmation. First, biblical narratives are able to restore believers to a level of belonging-to and participation-in God

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[3]Ibid., pp. 139-144; for a general discussion of the relationship between a hermeneutics of understanding and a hermeneutics of suspicion, see pp. 87-100.

[4]Paul Ricoeur, Essays on Biblical Interpretation, pp. 79-81, 105-117, 119-154.

that precedes their capacity for theological reflection. Ricoeur regards this as a metaphysical possibility. The nature and destiny of Christians are constituted as they place themselves "en route towards the orient" of the Scriptures.[5]

The second reason for Ricoeur's avowal of a divine ontology has to do with the reality of evil. He claims that metaphors, images, and concepts are unable to stand up to the deep-rootedness of sin because they are only symbolic of deity's victory over the "principalities and powers." The life and death of Jesus are no mere illustrations (representations)[6] of the defeat of evil. His crucifixion and resurrection have inaugurated a new theological reality. Believers are compelled to witness (martyreo) to the fact that the "unjustifiable has been overcome here and now."[7]

These remarks go well beyond Kaufman's metaphysical scepticism regarding the historic triumph of divinity. He agrees whole-heartedly with Ricoeur when the latter enjoins Christians to oppose evil by testifying to the redemptive acts of God. Kaufman's normative vision of Jesus is grounded in the salvific events of history. Reconciliatory gestures

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[5]Paul Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, p. 162; see also Essays on Biblical Interpretation, pp. 101-104, 109-117.

[6]See Dorothee Soelle, Christ the Representative (London: SCM Press, 1967).

[7]Paul Ricoeur, Essays on Biblical Interpretation, pp. 111-113.

have been made possible, rather than only conceivable by the liberating effects of self-sacrifice.[8]

Kaufman stops short, however, of viewing the transformative life of Christ as a divine guarantee. The events of the twentieth-century have shown only too clearly the problematics of an unequivocal affirmation of the omnipotence of God. Kaufman thus demurs from Ricoeur's ontological musings, while concurring that theological fiction (historie) opens up innumerable possibilities of redemptive action.

The differences between these two men aside, the time has come to test their theories about the paradoxical relationship between description and imagination. If it is true that fiction leads to the "real world of action," then this should be possible to demonstrate. Three examples will be used to illustrate this hypothesis.

The first person to be considered is Alex Colville, a Canadian artist who has come to be identified with the magic realist tradition. Colville endows his paintings with a extraordinary sense of lifelikeness through his use of a unified pictorial scheme. This is a process by which the linear perspective associated with three-dimensional space is incorporated into the two-dimensional plane of a canvas.[9] A striking resemblance to lived reality is the result.

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[8]Gordon Kaufman, Theology for a Nuclear Age, pp. 56-63.

[9]David Burnett, Colville (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1983), pp. 69, 76.

The interesting thing to note about this procedure is that a careful process of construction rather than duplication of reality is required. The spatial limitations of the canvas are used to highlight the subject matter. The latter is juxtaposed with another primary object to heighten the tension. Details that would distract from the painting's focus are eliminated. Finally, Colville uses an elaborate set of mathematical diagrams and drawings to arrange and rearrange the figures. All of this meticulous work is done in order to create "a synthesis of exceptional concentration," as Wallace Stevens has entitled this authenticating process.[10]

This constructive technique illustrates the role of imagination in replicating reality. This becomes especially evident when Colville's paintings are set beside those of French Impressionists. While the latter have relied on their sensibilities, Colville has channelled his creative ideas through the exact science of measurement, angles, and perspective.[11]

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[10]Wallace Stevens, The Necessary Angel, p. 164; quoted in David Burnett, Colville, p. 92. One of Colville's paintings depicts a dark horse running along a set of railroad tracks toward an oncoming train. The crouched, hunchbacked figure of a man is exhibited in front of the relaxed, supple form of a reclining woman in another picture. Colville utilizes this contrasting technique to create a palpable tension between contrary realities, note Burnett's comments, ibid., pp. 96-108 (the paintings appear on pp. 99, 102).

[11]Note Burnett's discussion of the intricate relationship between imagination and description, Colville, pp. 18, 68-84, 89-113, 190.

The second example of the paradoxical relationship between imagination and description can be found in Witness, a movie which portrays scenes of violence against the peaceful backdrop of an Amish setting. John Hostetler, a sociology professor who has published books on this religious group, regards the film as a deceptive depiction and exploitation of the Amish way of life. Hollywood producers "want the freedom to fictionalize and to alter reality in any way that will entertain with maximum profit."[12] The Amish, on the other hand, "understand the need for an accurate portrayal" of their existence. This is the only way in which their rural existence can be preserved and maintained.

Peter Weir, the film's producer, defends his depiction of the Amish by saying that their non-resistant stance is a poignant reminder of the possibility of peace within a violent world. The community's right to privacy should not stand in the way of the universal implications of its message:

> They're Americans and they are trying to survive in a difficult world, as we are. And the themes of this film are about surviving in this difficult world. . . . The Amish have no more right to special treatment than anybody else does.[13]

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[12]"Professor Protests 'Witness' Filming," Intelligencer Journal (Lancaster, Pa.), June 28, 1984. Portions of the newspaper clipping first appeared in "Marketing the Amish Soul," by John Hostetler, Gospel Herald (Scottdale, Pa.), June 26, 1984.

[13]"Angry Weir Defends Film Against 'Lies,'" Intelligencer Journal (Lancaster, Pa.), June 29, 1984.

Merle Good, a writer and film maker, has focused on the different assumptions being made by these two protagonists. Hostetler's sociological training has taught him to study the typical behaviour of a religious community, for this is how its social traits are verified. Weir, on the other hand, is interested in the exception to the rule, for it is the unique aspects of a group that make for an interesting story. Abnormal behaviour is highlighted to call attention to the values that are taken for granted by a community.[14]

Weir manages to say quite a bit about the subject of violence in the movie. He uses the relationship between an Amish widow and city policeman to portray the relative strengths of their respective sub-groups, the (in)effective response of pacifism on the one side versus the authoritative power of law and order on the other.

These observations substantiate Ricoeur's insight into the ability of fiction to bypass the anecdotal and proceed to the heart of the matter. Hostetler is correct when he says that the filming of Amish themes represents an invasion of privacy. Curiosity about one's neighbours will always be a part of the conforming tendency of humanity. This herd instinct requires a legal protection of the rights of minority

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[14]Merle Good, "Reflections on the 'Witness' Controversy," Gospel Herald (Scottdale, Pa.), March 5, 1985.

groups.[15]

Hostetler's outright rejection of the movie nevertheless reveals his lack of understanding of its purpose. The function of all media, including his sociological treatises, is to communicate something that is unfamiliar in a language that can be understood. The film achieves this by taking an urban outsider and placing him in a foreign setting. The policeman becomes the vehicle through which viewers gain an appreciation of another world.

The Amish community's response to this stranger remains, by and large, typical. Yet the fact that they, symbolized in part by the young widow, are moved by the man's inexplicable plight and unwanted presence reveals their humanity, compassion, and unyielding sense of morality in a fashion that would be hard to duplicate, much less document in a scientific research project. There is something quintessential about fiction that enables it to move from the banal to the sublime.

The third example that renders imagination's ability to reveal the metaphysical intelligible is to be found in the art of Emily Carr. Her mature work (1928-1936) was painted

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[15]The relevancy of this issue is underscored in a statement that the Lancaster County Amish bishops have made in regard to the movie: "They wish there were some way of 'setting up regulations' to prevent similar movies from being filmed here in the future. . . . John Hostetler . . . has been accurately stating the Amish point of view in his outspoken criticism of the film," "Amish Bishops Say 'Witness' is Wrong," Lancaster New Era, June 30, 1984.

with the concept of a whole in mind, in which there was an intertwining of religion and art, divinity and humanity. Lawren Harris, a theosophist and Group of Seven painter, first suggested this pantheistic idea to Carr. He told her that she had the "'innards' of the experience of nature to go by" but that she had to abstract its essence in order to communicate it.[16]

Carr heeded Harris' advice, connecting different aspects of nature into what she termed "a movement in space."[17] The rocks, trees, sky, ocean, and forests of British Columbia that she had depicted in her earlier paintings began to move in one continuous swirling motion, leaving the viewer with the sense that the circular direction of this movement bound all of life together. Carr commented on the importance of this theme in two journal references:

> I used to paint a picture and stick in an interesting sky with clouds etc. that would decorately balance my composition. It wasn't part of the concept of the whole. Now I know that the sky is as important as the earth and sea in working out the thought.[18]

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[16]Doris Shadbolt, The Art of Emily Carr (Vancouver, B.C.: Douglas & McIntyre, 1979), p. 144, cross-reference pp. 56-64.

[17]Ibid., pp. 122-126, 138-146. Paintings that reflect this movement in space include "Above the Gravel Pit," "Edge of the Forest," and "Stumps and Sky," pp. 133, 143, 163.

[18]Emily Carr, Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr (Toronto, Ont.: Clarke, Irwin, & Co., 1966), p. 187.

She added to this idea in another passage, saying that

> the picture side of the thing is the relationship of the objects to each other in one concerted movement, so that the whole thing gets up and goes, lifting the looker with it, sky, sea, trees affecting each other.[19]

Carr's work represents the most explicit example of an artist attempting to locate and define what an "essence" or "large idea" is. Carr was convinced that in addition to "A Rushing Sea of Undergrowth" and a "Dancing" and "Somber" sun, she could capture trees that were "Swaying," "Swirling," and "Laughing" in the breeze.[20] She was willing to sacrifice the sharp corners and heightened tension that were demanded of a hard realism in order to attain a mystical sense of union between God and the universe.

This romantic portrayal of reality comes close to the type of subjectivity that Ricoeur and Kaufman want to avoid. Yet Carr's claim to have delimited the metaphysically Real necessitated these modifications in order for the literal and abstract to occupy the same space. In her final years, Carr detailed the teeming woodlands of British Columbia by softening the hard edges between the shoreline and the sky, and by filling the cool air of metaphysics with the passion of her "native" soul. Almost all traces of French Impressionism and formal realism (Harris) were gone.

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[19]Ibid., p. 185.

[20]These paintings appear in Doris Shadbolt, The Art of Emily Carr, pp. 125, 131, 145, 157-158, 169.

These illustrations facilitate a deeper insight into Kaufman's theological concerns. Like Colville, Kaufman recognizes the importance of keeping a certain tension in his divine images. The mysteries of life are always looming, threatening to break up the security that is within one's grasp. This empirical observation translates into a conception of God as an elusive reality. Divine transcendence becomes especially real when nature's disdain for humanity's pollution is taken into account. The clockwork efficiency of the universe in destroying itself is enough of a divine critique to scare anybody.

What can be learned from the controversy surrounding the movie Witness is that reality is harder to document as one moves closer to the vital aspects of life. Kaufman has found this out for himself as he has explored the implications of his performative theology. Constructive images become increasingly reliable as they are brought back to experience and tested.[21]

Finally, Carr's profound contribution to the world of metaphysical realism parallels Kaufman's increasing interest in saying one thing about God. Some may find his image of divinity as a cosmic force uncompelling. This vital symbol nevertheless represents the same type of breakthrough for

[21]Numerous reviewers have noted the conceptually interesting but evocatively weak nature of Kaufman's images, Sallie McFague, Models of God, pp. 37-38, 196n.14; Garrett Green and Douglas Ottati, "Reconstructing Christian Theology," pp. 221, 226-227.

Kaufman as "a movement in space" did for Carr. No longer is the dialectical character of the divine reality as important as it once was. More significant is a deity whose comprehensive nature spurs people into action, similar to the way in which Carr's paintings lead the eye of the viewer in the direction of their climactic and awe-inspiring endings. The culmination of theology is to be found in a sustaining God whose embodiment in the death and rebirth of (human) life convinces people to take the consequences of their actions more seriously.

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