SHORT TITLE

THE AUTONOMY OF THEOLOGY

THE AUTONOMY OF THEOLOGY

A Critical Study with Special Reference to Karl Barth and Contemporary Analytical Philosophy

by

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PREFACE

A study of the autonomy of theology with reference to the philosophical thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the theological thought of Karl Barth, could be approached in a number of different ways. It could, for example, concern itself with an explication and comparison of Barthian and Wittgenstinian views on the subject. It could analyze Barth from a Wittgenstinian point of view or Wittgenstein from a Barthian point of view. Alternatively, it could deal with the problem in historical perspective. It could ask to what extent the similarities in Barth's and Wittgenstein's positions could be traced to a common source in Augustine and Kierkegaard.[1] My approach to the problem is yet another alternative. This study focusses on the question of the autonomy of theology itself and seeks a constructive answer to it in the light of linguistic philosophy and Barthian theology. I have not attempted to fit Barth and Wittgenstein into the same category, be

1. cf. Norman Malcolm, Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 71 in connection with Wittgenstein's high regard for Augustine and Kierkegaard.

it historical or ideological.

When I was beginning to write this thesis, I wavered between considering it as a study in theology or as a study in philosophy of religion or as a dialogue between the two. As the thesis has developed it has become, definitely and deliberately, a study in the philosophy of religion. I stress this because, if it is read as a proposal in theology, it is bound to be misunderstood. My aim has been to lay bare the logic of theological discourse, particularly as it relates to the problem of autonomy. My aim has not been to prescribe what the content of theology should be.

This warning is particularly important in connection with statements like "God is a personal transcendent being". It might seem that the argument of this thesis was meant to deny that this statement, and others like it, had any place in Christian theology. This is not the case. What I question is not the validity of this proposition, but its logical status within Christian theology as a whole. It is not, I argue, a logically fundamental assertion of Christian theology and is not intelligible <u>if</u> it is taken this way.

To those reading the thesis it may appear that I am attempting to provide an _apologia_ for the theology of Karl Barth. I feel uncomfortable about this suggestion, but it is not without foundation. I do not consider myself a Barthian, nor would I expect Barth's "_Imprimatur_" upon what I have written. At the same time, I am in general sympathy with much of Barth's theology and I have not tried to conceal it. Furthermore, I have not gone out of my way to criticize Barth's position. I have concentrated instead on using Barth to illustrate the logic of theological discourse. If, as a philosopher of religion, I have entered the theological ranks on Barth's side, it is because Barth's theology is based on a fuller appreciation of the logic of divine identification than is that of his opponents. On the other hand, on the question of the _meaning_ of the word "God", I would be much closer to Paul Tillich or H. Richard Niebuhr. Barth's position here only leaves me confused.

I do not want to represent this thesis as either a Wittgenstinian or an Analytic Philosophy of Religion. Wittgenstein's own views on religious language can be found in _Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and_

Religious Belief (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966). This book came into my hands after the thesis was completed. In general, Wittgenstein's views are consistent with the position advocated here. They are not, however, identical.

Except for isolated passages, I do not regard my argument as an example of linguistic analysis. It is simply a philosophical investigation into the logical structure of theological discourse which has been informed and inspired by the work of some linguistic analysts - in particular Wittgenstein and John Austin. In relation to linguistic philosophy, I claim no more.

There are three respects in which this thesis represents original scholarship. In the first place, it treats the question of autonomy as a problem in its own right. It starts with a definition of "autonomy" and then asks to what extent and in what respects theological statements can be said to be autonomous. In other studies the question has been dealt with only in restricted contexts and as a purely preliminary consideration to other interests.

Secondly, the development of the logic of theological discourse into three types of statement is

original. The scheme which I develop here takes its start from a basic theme in modern theology (particularly to be found explicitly in the writings of Paul Tillich and H. Richard Niebuhr and, in a more implicit sense, in Karl Barth) as well as in the Biblical writings, and develops a systematic account of what is involved in the logic of this theme. This starting point is the notion that a man's god is that which he worships, i.e. that the relation of worship defines the meaning of the word "god" and, consequently, the nature of the language-game known as "theology". The central concept in my scheme, that of the identification of God, is original to this thesis, although the concept is implicit in and indispensable to Barthian theology.

Finally, the attempt of Chapter Two to give a systematic treatment to Wittgenstein's notion of "language-game" as well as the attempt to approach the question of the justification of a language-game exegetically, is original. Other studies of the term "language-game" in Wittgenstein have addressed themselves to other problems than what Wittgenstein used the term to refer to. Discussions of Wittgenstein's obscure utterance "This language-game is played",

have either taken the notion that the playing of a language-game is its justification as their starting point, or have attempted to demonstrate the fallacy involved in this idea.[2] No study, to my knowledge, has attempted to deal seriously with what Wittgenstein meant by this utterance.

For the position which I have developed in this study, I owe a substantial debt to two of my former teachers. The insight that I have developed into the concept of the identification of God, I owe to Prof. A. McKinnon. Professor McKinnon's treatment of utterances like "Christ is God" has proved indispensable to my understanding of the logic of Karl Barth's Christology.

The second substantial debt that I owe is to Prof. D.D. Evans. My debt to Professor Evans goes far beyond what can be acknowledged here. I have made considerable use of his work on self-involving language in the body of this thesis. I also owe to him my preoccupation with the meaning of the word "God" and my interest in logical analysis. It is he, more than anybody else, who has made this thesis possible. My

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2. e.g. cf. Ninian Smart, Philosophers and Religious Truth, (London: SCM, 1964), pp.141-142.

indebtedness to Professor Evans is not lessened by the fact that he is in strong disagreement with a number of the positions I have taken.

For my introduction to "Oxford" philosophy, I am indebted to G.J. Warnock who met with me for a series of tutorials in Michaelmas Term, 1965. Chapter Two of this thesis has been based on a paper that I originally prepared for him.

Finally, I acknowledge my thanks to those who have taken time to read this thesis, chapter by chapter, and who have given me their comments, criticism and encouragement. In addition to my advisor, Prof. J.C. McLelland, these include Prof. I.T. Ramsey of Oxford University, Prof. D.D. Evans, and two Oxford students, Mr. Richard McKinney and Mr. Peter Zimmer.

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Chapter One

AUTONOMY IN THEOLOGY

The word "autonomy" signifies a relation - or lack of one - rather than a property. The title of this study, The Autonomy of Theology, might suggest otherwise, as if "autonomy" were some aspect of theology that could be analyzed out of it or predicated to it. "Autonomy" is a relational word and a relation involves two terms. Thus I cannot speak of the autonomy of theology as such. I have to specify what theology is alleged to be autonomous from - and in what respect - in order for my title to have any meaning.

Philosophers, for example, often speak of "the autonomy of value". What this phrase means, to put the matter simply, is that moral obligations can never be derived solely from descriptions of the way things are. No description of the conditions under which poor people live can ever - by itself - entail that I ought to do what I can to alleviate poverty.

At the same time, the descriptions of the way things are are not irrelevant to moral obligations. That I ought to alleviate poverty is very much

connected with the sub-human conditions under which poor people live. It is simply not derived from those conditions.

By "the autonomy of value" then, philosophers do not simply mean that statements of moral obligation have nothing to do with statements of fact. This would not be true. Statements of moral obligation are autonomous from statements of fact with respect to their logical derivation.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines autonomy as "Right of self-government, personal freedom, ... a self-governing community." To generalize the meaning of the word, autonomy could be defined as "Freedom from external control."

It is important to make the point that autonomy is freedom from external control. It is not freedom from external influence. To say that A is autonomous from B is not to say that A has nothing to do with B. Autonomy refers to the fundamental independence of something, but not to its total independence.

Autonomy is not a reversible relationship. If A is autonomous from B, it does not follow that B is

autonomous from A.

As the dictionary definition indicates, "autonomy" is a word which is "at home" in discourse concerning the constitutional basis of communities, and, by analogy, in discourse about human freedom. In the case of communities, autonomy refers to the right of a community to formulate and enforce its own laws.

From these general considerations, I want to make two points concerning the use of the word "autonomy" with respect to theology. First, the word is clearly being used "away from home." Consequently, care must be taken in using the word. It is not self-evident what the phrase "the self-government of theology" could mean. What in theology, as an intellectual discipline, could correspond to the constitutional freedom of a nation? I will discuss this presently.

Secondly, autonomy is not irrelevancy. A statement like "Theology is autonomous of the facts" does not imply "Theology is irrelevant to the facts" - whatever these statements may mean. Autonomy is, as I noted above, an irreversible relation and it does not mean complete independence. Consider, for example, the

analogous statement "Mathematics is autonomous of the facts." The truth of mathematical propositions is not dependent on "the way things are." At the same time, the way that mathematical propositions are used makes them highly relevant to the world of "facts".

What can be meant by "the autonomy of theology"? What is the analogy in an intellectual discipline to self-government in a community or moral freedom in an individual? No obvious candidate presents itself. Things like "the axiom system" or "the criterion of meaning" could be mentioned. The problem would then be to formulate an axiom system or an adequate criterion of meaning for a given discipline. It is not at all clear that this can be done, especially for theology.

As a working definition of autonomy, I suggest the following: A discipline is autonomous insofar as the truth values of its propositions are not logically determined by the truth value of the propositions of any other discipline. For the purposes of the definition I consider "meaningless" to be a truth value.

To take an example of how the definition works, some theologians would hold that the meaning-

fulness of theological statements depends on the truth of statements such as "Man is aware of his contingency." If this statement were false, it is held, theological statements would be meaningless. If the contention of such theologians is true then, according to my definition and to the extent that their contention is true, theology is not autonomous.

The definition contains one serious defect which I cannot remedy but only acknowledge. It depends on our being able to distinguish, in some cases sharply, between different intellectual disciplines. This cannot always be done. Where is the dividing line between philosophy and history? between history and biblical studies? between biblical studies and systematic theology? between systematic theology and philosophy? We don't have clear-cut distinctions. (We don't have them anywhere in language. We say we know the difference between a dog and a cat, but what would we call something that looked exactly like a dog but ~~who~~ which purred and climbed trees?)[1]

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1. cf. Friedrich Waismann, "Verifiability", Logic and Language (First and Second Series), ed. A. Flew, (New York: Anchor, 1965), pp.122-151.

Furthermore, "theology" is an ambiguous term. Sometimes it is used to refer to the whole range of subjects studied in most seminaries or divinity faculties. At other times it is used to refer to the more specialized discipline we call "Systematic Theology".

In this study, "Theology" will refer primarily to "systematic theology" rather than church history or biblical studies, for example. However, it is evident that the distinction between the theological disciplines is even less well defined than that between theology and the non-theological disciplines.

All of these considerations imply that it would be very difficult - if not impossible - to speak of the autonomy of theology in any absolute sense. Clearly theology is not autonomous of biblical studies nor the latter of history. What would be the effect on theology if the body of Jesus were discovered - or if it turned out that there was no such person as Jesus of Nazareth? In a sense, the purpose of this study will be to define the limits of the autonomy of theology.

The main problem with which I will deal, however, finds its source in recent British empiricism

and the challenge to theology of the verification principle. The classical statement of the verification principle is to be found in A.J. Ayer's Language, Truth and Logic.

> We say that a sentence is factually significant to any given person, if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express - that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false. If, on the other hand, the putative proposition is of such a character that the assumption of the truth, or falsehood, is consistent with any assumption whatsoever concerning the nature of his future experience, then, as far as he is concerned, it is, if not a tautology, a mere pseudo-proposition. The sentence expressing it may be emotionally significant to him; but it is not literally significant.[2]

The most forceful statement of the implications of the verification principle for theology is to be found in Antony Flew's article "Theology and Falsification". His article is built around his parable of the gardener. Two explorers discover a clearing in the jungle and one of them advances the opinion that it has been tended by a gardener. They try to find out if this is true. They watch; they set up an electrified barbed wire fence, they bring in bloodhounds - all with no result.

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2. A.J. Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic (New York, Dover, 1946), p.35.

> Yet still the Believer is not convinced. 'But there is a gardener, invisible, intangible, insensible to electric shocks, a gardener who comes secretly to look after the garden which he loves.' At last the Sceptic despairs, 'But what remains of your original assertion? Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even from no gardener at all?'[3]

Flew contends that the religious believer intends utterances like "God created the world" to be logically analogous to that of the explorer who said "A gardener has been here." The believer is committed to a hypothesis that has become so qualified in the face of contrary evidence that it has become vacuous. What is the difference between a God and no God at all?

Flew's formulation of the challenge is powerful because it asks so little. He does not ask the believer to prove that God exists, that he created the world, that he is love, etc, ... He does not even ask - as does Ayer, for example[4] - that the empirical evidence

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3. A. Flew, "Theology and Verification" New Essays in Philosophical Theology, eds. A. Flew and A. MacIntyre (London: SCM, 1956), p.96. Flew's parable is adapted from that of John Wisdom. cf. John Wisdom, "Gods", Logic and Language, pp.200-202.

4. Ayer, op.cit., p.115.

be adequate to justify the hypothesis. He asks only that the believer show that his assertions have some content.

My own views on the problem of the verification of religious utterances will become evident in the course of this study. Presently I am not concerned with the problem of verification itself, but with pointing out that theologians and philosophers of religion have reacted to the problem in at least two fundamentally different ways. To a certain extent this study will be concerned with issues that exist between these two types of response to the problem of verification.

The first type of response that I will mention is that of those philosophers and theologians who accept the relevance of the verification principle. In particular I will look at the response of one philosopher of religion - John Wilson - to the problem of the verification of religious utterances.

Wilson accepts Flew's presupposition concerning the nature of religious assertions - namely, that they are genuine assertions of fact. The statement "God exists", he holds, records a "fact" and all assertions concerning matters of fact are subject to the test of the

verification principle. Wilson holds that there is no real difference logically between the statement "God exists" and other statements like "Tables exist".

> God is real in the same sense, though not in the same way, that physical objects are real. He must be real in the same sense: for the word 'real' has, in fact, only one sense - either something is real and exists, or it is unreal and does not exist. 'Real' and 'exists' are definitely not ambiguous words. ... Briefly, then, my contention is that if God is real and exists, the unambiguous logic and language of statements about existence, and the verification needed for these statements, must apply as much to God as much as to anything else, for these are part and parcel of what we mean by words like 'exist' and 'real' ...[5]

Wilson's position is very close to that of John Hick, to whom I will be referring occasionally as one of the most prominent advocates of the "facticity" of God. Hick regards the denial of God's "facticity" as tantamount to heresy.

> The religious worshipper has always supposed that God exists independently of anyone's believing or disbelieving that he exists, and that he is a personal Mind who can know and enter into personal relationship with his creatures. ... A conviction as to the reality of God is, Christian faith will insist, either a response to fact, rendered appropriate

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5. John Wilson, Language and Christian Belief (London: Macmillan, 1958), p.13.

> and rational by its conformity with fact, or it is delusory and is rendered inappropriate and irrational by its divergence from fact.[6]

Wilson finds the ultimate verification of religious assertions in religious experience. He does not clearly define what he means by the term other than by supposing that there can be a kind of experience which is not sensual but which could be called "the experience of God." However, the difficulties which are raised by the vagueness of the expression "religious experience" are not particularly relevant here. I grant that there is such a thing as "religious experience" - although I would not represent it in the same way as Wilson does - and, as a Christian, grant that it is veridical (i.e. that it is really experience of God.)

The point that must be stressed in Wilson's account, however, is the fundamental role which he assigns to religious experience in belief. To Wilson, having religious experience is the whole point, or very nearly the whole point, in religious belief.

> Christians at least suppose everyone to be capable of religious experience ('knowing God'), and believe it to be of immense

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6. John Hick, Faith and the Philosophers (London: Macmillan, 1964), p.239.

> importance and benefit to the lives of all men.[7]

Wilson's equation of knowledge of God with religious experience is of paramount importance. For Wilson, religious experience forms the logical basis of belief in God.

> Both the statement 'God exists' and the (logically subsequent) statement 'we know God' must be based on certain experiences: experiences which justify the belief that God exists and that we have acquaintance with Him.[8]

On the basis of his assumption that religious experience is the real point of religious belief, and his assumption that any rational Christian would agree with him, Wilson makes this proposal:

> What we can legitimately demand of religious believers is that they should try to put forward some sort of unanimous programme for the benefit of those who want to have these experiences and test the assertions based on them.[9]

> What is required above all is that believers should present a solid front, at least on those assertions about which they agree. They

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7. Wilson, op.cit., p.29.
8. ibid, p.49.
9. ibid, p.29.

> should be able to put forward a clear and unanimous programme, describing some approved method of obtaining the experiences which are relevant to the key assertions of their faith. ... Until they lay down some sort of agreed tests for their assertions, by means of religious experience, I do not see how they can expect anyone to place rational belief in them.[10]

Wilson suggests that the reason that believers have not embarked upon such a programme is because they haven't been good empiricists. Perhaps the real reason is that all believers are not crypto-Methodists!

I have chosen Wilson's response to the problem of the verification of religious assertions, not because it is representative, but because it is not. Wilson represents one extreme in philosophy of religion. His position typifies what I would call a non-autonomous approach to theology. For Wilson, theology stands or falls with the truth of assertions concerning the occurrence and nature of certain experiences which are called "religious". Theology must satisfy an empiricist criterion of meaning.

At the other extreme are those philosophers

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10. ibid, pp.30-31.

who reject Flew's challenge as a misunderstanding of religious assertions. Statements like "God created the world" are of a quite different logical type than statements like "John made that chair." They are not hypotheses, nor are they statements of a world beyond sense experience. An example of this type of approach is that of R.M. Hare who sees religious assertions as expressions of what he calls '<u>bliks</u>'. That is to say, religious assertions like "God created the world" are not <u>explanations</u> of the world but are more like expressions of one's attitude towards it.[11] For Hare, theological statements are autonomous because they are not falsifiable. However, he implies that <u>bliks</u> can be evaluated. He distinguishes between sane and insane <u>bliks</u>. He does not, unfortunately, give us any indication of the basis upon which this evaluation can be made.

It is difficult to single out any one philosopher as representative of the autonomous approach to theology. Among philosophers who tend in this direction are Norman Malcolm and D.Z. Phillips.

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11. R.M. Hare, "Theology and Falsification", <u>New Essays in Philosophical Theology</u>, pp.99-103.

None, however, have published works that typify the autonomist position as it is represented in much of the current oral discussion of philosophy of religion.

The best summary of some of the themes of the autonomist approach to the philosophy of religion is that given by John Hick. Hick, it should be noted, is quite unsympathetic to this type of philosophy and, while providing an excellent summary of the issues, does not represent the position as objectively as might be desired.

> This view draws its inspiration, philosophically from the later teachings of Wittgenstein, and theologically from the Barthian emphasis upon a self-authenticating divine revelation which neither seeks nor permits rational support. ... From the autonomous standpoint, 'believing in God' together with the religious modes of speech in which it expresses itself, proceeds without raising the question of the existence of God. This view focuses attention upon the person who has a use for, and accordingly finds meaning in, distinctively religious language and who engages in distinctively religious practices. ... To some degree at least he lives the life and speaks the language of faith. But - and here the puzzling side of this position appears - such a man does not necessarily hold that 'God exists'. Consequently, it is not proper to ask him how he knows, or why he believes, that God exists; nor to enquire what experiencable states of affair are entailed by God's existence, such that their occurrence or non-occurrence might yield confirmation or disconfirmation of this belief. Questions

> of this kind are ruled out as having no place within authentic religious language. The believer talks <u>to</u> God, not <u>about</u> him ...[12]

The problem of the autonomy of theology is, as Hick suggests, set in the context of Wittgenstinian philosophy and Barthian theology. The implications of Wittgenstein's later philosophy for the problem of religious knowledge will be examined in the next chapter. Barth's approach to theology will be referred to throughout the study and special attention will be paid to his understanding of the relation of philosophy and theology in a later chapter.

The question of the existence of God is a critical one for the whole study. Hick seems to equate autonomous theology with 'death of God' theology. In fact, they are quite different and the relation between them will have to be examined. The difference between philosophers like Hick and Wilson, on the one hand, and "autonomist" philosophers and theologians on the other, is not over whether the proposition "God exists" is essential to theology. Rather, the issue turns on how the proposition "God exists" is to be construed. Does

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12. Hick, <u>op.cit.</u>, p.237.

the logic of "God exists" imply that theology must answer the challenge of the verification principle? Is the word "exists" used univocally of tables and of God? Is theology dependent on an analogia entis?

I have tried to develop the distinction between autonomous and non-autonomous theology in the context of the problem of verification. The distinction transcends this context. It could be made by referring to the contrast between the ontological and cosmological arguments for God's existence. The ontological argument is an example - indeed almost an archetype - of autonomous theology. The ontological argument tries to show that God's existence is self-justifying, that it cannot be denied without contradiction. The cosmological argument, on the other hand, holds that God's existence is logically an inference from the existence of the world.

To call the ontological argument an archetype of autonomous theology may seem surprising. Immanuel Kant, through whose eyes we are largely conditioned to see the argument today, looked on the argument as natural theology at its worst; the ultimate attempt to base theology on the foundation of pure reason alone.

This point is helpful in clarifying the contrast between autonomous and non-autonomous theologies. The problem is not that of the classical contrast between reason and revelation. Reason is not a source of truth. There are no "truths of reason" any more than there are "truths of revelation". Reason is not a "thing" from which we argue, rather it describes and evaluates the way in which we argue. Revelation is not a body of propositions, rather it is God's self-disclosure to man. Theology, like any other realm of enquiry, must be rational. The "rationality" of the ontological argument is not an objection to seeing it as an example of "autonomous" theology. The question of autonomy is basically the question whether, and to what extent, theology is accountable both for its truth and its meaning to disciplines outside itself.

Chapter Two

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS AND PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

1. Introduction

David Pole, in his short study of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, gives the following account of the way in which a Wittgenstinian might deal with a certain kind of philosophical problem:

> We are asked say, whether a particular planet or a particular kind of chemical substance really exists; and these questions ... can in principle be settled within the terms of existing language, within the rules of the game. But what of the question, 'Is matter real?' Indeed it is not hard to establish that matter is real if all that is called for is to show that some particular material thing - one's own hand, for instance - is real. And an idealist who rejects such a demonstration must therefore be rejecting these procedures themselves. The denial of the reality of matter succeeds in asserting nothing about the world, but, if anything, disputes the legitimacy of a given language - game. And this game is one that is in fact played among men. There seems to be no further answer one can give than to say that.[1]

The argument as it stands is a misrepresentation of Wittgenstein. However, its errors are instructive

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1. David Pole, The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein (London: Athlone Press, 1958), pp.53-54.

ones. For the moment then, let us imagine the argument to be valid.

To the philosopher of religion, Pole's argument suggests parallels for the case of God. If to dispute that "matter exists" is to reject a language-game concerning material things, then it seems equally true that to dispute that "God exists" is to reject the language-game of theology. If, in the case of "matter", it is legitimate to invoke Wittgenstein's dictum "This language-game is played"[2] to justify the game, why wouldn't it be equally legitimate to justify theology in the same way?

My purpose in this chapter will be to examine Pole's argument[3] and to ask how far it can be applied to the case of theology. To do this, three aspects of Wittgenstein's thought will have to be examined: the

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2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), 654. (Unless designated as a page number, all references to Philosophical Investigations refer to paragraph numbers in Part I.)

3. I refer to the argument as "Pole's argument" for convenience. Pole himself has reservations about it and offers it primarily as an interpretation of Wittgenstein. It is not a statement of his own position.

meaning of the term "language-game"; Wittgenstein's equation of "meaning" and "use"; and the context in which the assertion "This language-game is played" is used. Only when these matters are understood can Pole's argument and its applicability to theology be evaluated.

2. Language-Games

Wittgenstein uses the term "language-game" in two quite distinct ways. In the first place, he uses the term to refer to model languages with limited vocabularies and a few simple and well-defined rules governing their use. His purpose in constructing these model language-games is to compare and contrast them with the complex vocabulary of ordinary language.

The second way in which Wittgenstein uses the term "language-game" is in reference to ordinary language itself. It is this use with which I am concerned here. This is the sense in which the term is used in Pole's argument.

Wittgenstein, in his later philosophy, was preoccupied with his vision of the analogy of using language with playing games. He used this vision as a means of dealing with the kind of philosophical problems

with which he was most concerned. He used the vision, but he never really articulated a systematic account of the various kinds of language-games that there are within language as a whole and of the relations between them. Consequently the term appears in his writings now in one context, now in another, without its meaning being made sufficiently clear.

Wittgenstein explicitly refused to give a definition of the term. No more a definition could be given to the expression "language-game" than to the single word "game". There is nothing in common between chess, baseball, solitaire, and ring-a-ring-a-roses. There are only "family resemblances";

> ... a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.[4]

Where Wittgenstein won't help us, then, we must help ourselves. In the Investigations, a number of different senses of the term can be detected. Let us look at them.

First, Wittgenstein characterizes by the term

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4. ibid, 66.

"language-games" the various things language is used to do. Here Wittgenstein is concerned to show that language cannot be reduced to a few basic forms of speech - for example, assertion, question, and command.

> Here the term 'language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or form of life.[5]

Wittgenstein claims that the number of such language-games is countless. He mentions - among others - description, reporting, speculation, telling a joke, translating, praying - and so on. These language-games can be assimilated grammatically. Even questions can be expressed in the form of statements. But this does not change the fact that language is used to do many different things.

This way of approaching language, i.e. as a composite of many different speech activities, has been given systematic expression in Austin's work on performatives. Austin draws attention to the fact that many of our utterances 1) cannot be evaluated in terms of truth or falsehood but 2) do have the form of

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5. ibid, 23.

declarative sentences. Examples are:

"I estimate the distance to be about five miles."

"I advise you to read that book."

"I promise to be there on time."

"I thank you for your gift."

The feature that Austin emphasizes about these utterances is that in each of them we do something by uttering them. By saying "I estimate", I estimate; by "I promise", I promise. These are linguistic acts; acts which are performed by language. Hence the term "performative".

Austin characterizes the job which is being done by language as its illocutionary force. All language, according to Austin, has illocutionary force. Take the utterance "There is a bull in the field." This may be a statement, but it may also be a warning. Austin insists that, in coming to terms with the utterance, its illocutionary force must be taken into account.

> The total speech act in the total speech situation is the only actual phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged

in elucidating.[6]

When all language is seen as performative, the problem of the truth or falsity of our utterances takes on a greatly diminished role in their evaluation. Only utterances like statements can be true or false. Promises, on the other hand, can be sincere or insincere. They cannot be true or false (except insofar as an insincere promise is called a false promise.)

Austin's analysis of performatives is of considerable importance to theology. D.D. Evans has shown its implications for the analysis of the Biblical doctrine of Creation.[7] To the problem of this study they are of more limited interest.

The first sense of the term "language-game" in Wittgenstein, then, is that of different kinds of speech-acts or performatives. To move to a second sense, Wittgenstein talks about language-games in reference to individual words. Thus he speaks of "the language-game

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6. J.L. Austin, How to Do Things with Words (New York: Oxford, 1965), p.147.

7. D.D. Evans, The Logic of Self-Involvement (London: SCM, 1963).

with the word 'game'."[8] Now it is self-evident that individual words - such as the word "game" - can be used in a great number of different speech activities. To talk about "the language-game with the word 'game'" then, is not to talk about a particular speech activity like promising or reporting. It must involve a quite different sense of the term "language-game".

What Wittgenstein seems to have in mind here is the constellation of rules - explicit or implicit - that govern the use of the individual word. However, he does not often use the term "language-game" in this second sense and I simply note it in passing.

There are three further senses of the term which cannot be sharply distinguished either from each other or from the two senses that I have outlined above. To these I now turn.

At one point in his argument, Wittgenstein remarks; "The kind of certainty is the kind of language-game."[9] In context, he is comparing the certainty that

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8. Wittgenstein, op.cit., 71.

9. ibid, p.224.

another person is in pain with the certainty that twice-two is four. Wittgenstein wants to avoid giving mathematical certainty some sort of epistemological priority over other kinds of certainty and, at the same time, he wants to avoid assimilating his knowledge that someone else is in pain with mathematical certainty. He claims, therefore, that to speak of the certainty that twice-two is four is to be playing a different language-game than to speak of the certainty that so-and-so is in pain.

It seems to follow, then, that we can speak of the language-games of mathematics, psychology, physics, biology, theology, history, etc., etc., - each with its own kind of certainty. This way of understanding language-games is particularly important for the problem of this study. The question of the autonomy of theology involves the question as to whether theology is an autonomous language-game in this sense.

To move to still another sense of the term, Wittgenstein frequently talks about the language-game in which this or that word is "at home". Precisely what Wittgenstein means here is easy to demonstrate but difficult to define. The word "pain" is "at home" in

language about persons while it is not "at home" in language about stones. The word "sin" is "at home" in theology but not in mathematics.

The difficulty in defining what Wittgenstein means is this: The phrase "The language-game in which the word '...' is at home" looks as if it is logically similar to the phrase "the game in which a baseball bat is used"; i.e., it looks like a definite description. In fact, it is not a definite description. It is more like the phrase "the game in which cards are used." This is easily demonstrated.

Consider, for example, the word "promise". It is "at home" in a number of language-games; e.g., the speech act of promising, the language-game <u>with</u> the word 'promise', language about personal-relationships, law, etc., etc. It is clear, then, that the phrase "the language-game in which the word 'promise' is at home" refers to no particular language-game but to a whole class of interrelated language-games.

The phrase functions, then, to exclude rather than to define. The phrase implies that there are linguistic contexts in which a word is <u>not</u> "at home". In particular, Wittgenstein is anxious to exclude the unrestricted use in philosophy of terms which are "at

home" elsewhere. Wittgenstein does lay down one criterion, however, which is relevant to our understanding of this sense of the term.

A word is "at home" if it is being used in the linguistic context in which it was learned.[10] I learn to use the word "pain" in the context of language about people and animals; not in the context of language about stones or numbers. I learn to use the word "good" in a variety of contexts. I learn to speak of good deeds and of good times, of good qualities and of good automobiles. In a sense, the context in which a word is learned <u>is</u> what is meant by a language-game.[11]

There is one further sense of the term that more or less ties together the various senses. Think of a simple object - a book, for example. How many ways are there that we can talk about it; analyze it, so to speak, into its "component parts"? We can talk of it as a collection of pages between two covers. We can

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10. <u>cf</u>. <u>ibid</u>, 77.
11. <u>cf</u>. <u>ibid</u>, 156.

talk of it in terms of its dimensions and its colour. We can talk of it in terms of its style and content - and so on. In each of these ways of talking about it, we are talking about the same thing. Each way of talking about it forms, in some sense, a complete analysis of the object. After we have mentioned the covers, pages, and ink, what is there about the book left to mention? Nothing - and everything!

Each of these methods of analyzing the book forms a different language-game.[12] The reason why different ways of talking about a thing are different language-games is because they are not reducible to each other or to some hypothetically fundamental way of talking about things. There is no way to reduce language about the style and content of a book to language about its cover and pages. On the other hand, if two ways of talking about something can be shown to be equivalent, they are merely two forms of the same language-game.[13]

If we have at our disposal so many ways of talking about a simple object like a book, we begin to see how complicated it would be simply to try to enumerate

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12. cf. ibid, 48-64.

13. cf. ibid, 61.

the different language-games involved in talk about physical objects alone. The number of ways in which we can talk about language can scarcely be smaller!

This is the reason why it is so difficult to specify exactly what Wittgenstein meant by the term "language-game". As there are different ways of analysing a book into its "component parts", so there are different ways of analysing language into its "component parts". In Wittgenstein's later philosophy, language-games look very much like the "component parts" of language. Whether these "parts" are speech acts (language-games as activities), individual words (language-game with the word '...'), the subject matter of language ("The kind of certainty is the kind of language-game"), linguistic context (language-game in which a word is at home), etc., will depend on the particular purpose of a given analysis.

Having come to some sort of understanding concerning what a language-game is, it still remains to clarify the point of the concept. Why was the notion of language-games developed in the first place? What is the reason for introducing this notion into philosophical discussion?

Wittgenstein's later philosophy arose from his reflection upon, and his partial reaction to, the philosophical position which he had articulated in his Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. The central thesis of the Tractatus is that the function of language is to picture reality. A true proposition is one in which the elements of the proposition stand in a one-to-one relationship, so to speak, with the elements of the situation it purports to describe.

In his later reflection, Wittgenstein came to see that this view of language was, at best, an over-simplification; that language functions in a far more complex way than the view of the Tractatus allowed.

Wittgenstein introduces the notion of language-games in order to emphasize that language cannot be reduced to any one basic type of language. The notion of language-games expresses a reaction to reductionism.

For example, probably the most important reductionist proposal in contemporary philosophy is that of the doctrine known as Phenomenalism. The main spokesman of this position today is A.J. Ayer.[14] The

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14. cf. A.J. Ayer, "Phenomenalism" Philosophical Essays (London: Macmillan, 1954), pp.125-166.

phenomenalist starts from the premise that when I look at something, a red balloon, for example, I do not strictly speaking see a red balloon. Rather I see an oval red patch in my visual field. From this premise the phenomenalist argues that statements such as "I see a red balloon" are logical constructions from statements such as "I see an oval red patch". The phenomenalist concludes that statements about things are reducible, in principle at least, to statements about sense-data.

Philosophers who oppose phenomenalism often do so on the basis of some notion of the stratification of language such as the Wittgenstinian language-game.[15] Statements about material objects cannot be reduced to statements about sense-data, they claim. These are two different language-games.[16]

There can be, then, almost as many attempts

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15. Related notions are Waismann's "language-strata" and Ryle's "categories". cf. F. Waismann, "Language Strata", Logic and Language, pp.226-247; G.Ryle, Dilemmas (Cambridge: University Press, 1964) Chapter I.

16. For an excellent account of the importance of the problem of reductionism in linguistic analysis cf. J.O. Urmson, Philosophical Analysis (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), pp. 146-162.

at linguistic reduction as there are kinds of language-games. The proposal of phenomenalism is that all statements are reducible in principle to those of a particular content; namely, sense-data. There can be, and have been, attempts to reduce all utterance to a particular type of speech act. As I noted earlier, Wittgenstein deals with the possibility of reducing questions to statements and concludes that all the reduction succeeds in doing is to give the utterances the same grammatical form.

Waismann notes that each language-game, or language-stratum as he calls them, has its own peculiar logic.[17] This suggests the possibility of another type of reductionism, namely the attempt to assimilate the logic of one language-game to that of another.

This type of reductionism is not at all uncommon. It is by making mistakes like this that children learn the subtleties of language. The child learning the language is apt to ask questions which assimilate the logic of one word to that of a quite different logical type. These are unanswerable

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17. Waismann, op.cit., p.235f.

questions like "What do villages do?" or "Who made that flower?". Through asking questions like these the child comes to learn the inappropriateness of the questions and, consequently, the logic of his language.

It is a reaction to this type of reductionism that lies behind Gilbert Ryle's thesis in Concept of Mind. Ryle maintains that most philosophical psychology since Descartes has unwittingly and illegitimately made a reduction of this nature. In particular, he claims, Cartesian philosophy of mind has assimilated the logic of statements like "I think" to that of statements like "I eat". From this mistake they have gone on to postulate a mental substance - mind - to fulfill the role in mental acts that the body fulfills in bodily acts. Ryle attempts to show that the logic of utterances like "I think" is quite different from utterances like "I eat" and does not require the postulation of a mental substance, or, as Ryle puts it, a "ghost in the machine".[18]

The importance of this kind of reductionism

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18. Gilbert Ryle, Concept of Mind, (Penguin, 1963).

for this study will be immediately evident. The major issue in philosophy of religion between philosophers like Flew and Hare is just this: Are utterances like "God created the world" and "John made that chair" of the same logical form? Can logical considerations which are applicable to statements concerning material reality be applied to statements about God?

3. Meaning and Use

An account of what Wittgenstein meant by speaking of language-games only begins to lay the foundation for an examination of what I have called "Pole's argument". The next step involves a look at one aspect of Wittgenstein's theory of meaning.

What are we asking for when we ask for the meaning of a word? Wittgenstein answers:

> For a large class of cases - though not for all - in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus: The meaning of a word is its use in the language.[19]

The main importance of this account of meaning is to be found in what it is meant to exclude. In

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19. Wittgenstein, op.cit., 43.

particular, Wittgenstein was concerned to show the inadequacies of two alternative theories of meaning.

Consider the case in which somebody asks you the meaning of the word "chair". If there is a chair present when the question is put, you can answer by pointing to it. Can it be implied from your answer then, that the chair is itself the meaning of the word "chair"? To generalize, could it be said that the meaning of a word is the object it names?

While the example does not do the position justice, this is the theory of meaning which Wittgenstein held in the Tractatus. "A name means an object. The object is its meaning."[20]

Wittgenstein replies to his earlier theory in this fashion:

> It is important to note that the word "meaning" is being used illicitly if it is used to signify the thing that 'corresponds' to the word. That is to confound the meaning of a name with the bearer of the name. When Mr.N.N. dies one says that the bearer of the name dies, not that the meaning dies. And it would be nonsensical to say that, for if the name ceased

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20. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 3.203.

> to have meaning it would make no sense to say "Mr. N.N. is dead."[21]

The other theory of meaning which Wittgenstein meant to exclude with his equation of meaning and use is the notion that meaning is a mental act that accompanies the utterance of a word.

To take an example, suppose you tell somebody that the howling of your neighbour's cat kept you awake last night. You are asked "Do you mean the tabby cat?" and you reply "No, I meant the black one." Are we to suppose that you were performing some mental act of meaning "the black one" when you uttered the words "my neighbour's cat": an act of meaning which is distinguishable from your act of uttering the words?

Wittgenstein explicitly rejects such an account of meaning:

> Can I say "bububu" and mean "If it doesn't rain I shall go for a walk"? - It is only in language that I can mean something by something. This shows clearly that the grammar of "to mean" is not like that of the expression "to imagine" and the like.[22]

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21. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, 40.
22. ibid, p.18.

The meaning of a word, then, is not the object which the word denotes, nor is it a mental act which accompanies the utterance of the word. A word's meaning is its use. The implications of this theory of meaning for Wittgenstein's philosophical method are of great relevance to this study.

The significance of Wittgenstein's position can probably be seen with the greatest clarity in a point which I touched upon in the last section: Wittgenstein's refusal to define "games" in general and "language-games" in particular. He examines the variety in different kinds of games - card-games, ball-games, children's games - and asks:

> What is common to them all? - Don't say: "There must be something common, or they would not be called 'games'" - but look and see whether there is anything common to all. - For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but look![23]

"Don't think, but look!" Here is the heart of the Wittgenstinian method in philosophy. Don't try to impose a common meaning on the various ways in which we

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23. ibid, 66.

use the word "game", but "look and see" how it is used in all its variety. The task of philosophy is not to prescribe an ideal language - to make language work the way we think it ought to - but to describe the functions of language as it is.

> Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it.
> For it cannot give it any foundation either.
> It leaves everything as it is.[24]

Wittgenstein's treatment of the word "game" is an instance of the method in action. He looks at board-games, card-games and ball games. He compares chess with noughts and crosses; solitaire with ball games; tennis with ring-a-ring-a-roses.

> And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.[25]

From this conclusion Wittgenstein develops his doctrine of "family resemblances"; a position which has

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24. ibid, 124.
25. ibid, 66.

considerable relevance to words which have caused much philosophical speculation (such as "good", "truth", "beauty", etc.).

> I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than "family resemblances"; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc., etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. - And I shall say: 'games' form a family.[26]

4. "Dieses Sprachspiel wird Gespielt"

"This language-game is played." This phrase is particularly important for the application of Wittgenstein's philosophical insights to the problem of theology. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, part of the problem of the autonomy of theology consists in deciding whether theology can be justified simply by noting that the theological language-game is played.

The context in which this phrase appears is one which involves difficult - and even obscure - issues. However, enough sense can be made of

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26. ibid, 67.

Wittgenstein's meaning for the purposes of the problem of this chapter without becoming deeply involved in these difficulties and obscurities. Wittgenstein is discussing utterances which concern memories of things like wishes and intentions. He looks for, but fails to find, anything that corresponds to the memory of a wish or of an intention.

> "I remember that I should have been glad then to stay still longer." - What picture of this wish came before my mind? None at all. What I see in my memory allows no conclusion as to my feelings. And yet I remember quite clearly that they were there.[27]

Here we have the situation in which we say that we remember a wish and yet, when we examine our memories, we do not find the memory of a mental act which we could label as our "wish". We do not find anything in our memories to which the word "wish" corresponds.[28] Wittgenstein comments:

> Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to look at what happens as a 'proto-phenomenon'. That is, where we ought

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27. ibid, 651.

28. Wittgenstein's remarks are particularly confusing because he is dealing with memories. Actually it is as difficult to find anything corresponding to "a wish" as it is to find anything corresponding to "the memory of a wish".

> to have said: this language-game is played.
>
> The question is not one of explaining a language-game by means of our experiences, but of noting a language-game.[29]

The meaning of Wittgenstein's remark becomes a little clearer as he continues. In some language-games, being able to point to an object of one's remarks is a part of the game. But not all games need function in this way. Discourse about remembered wishes is one game that does not.

> One can refer to an object when speaking by pointing to it. Here pointing is a part of the language-game. And now it seems to us as if one spoke of a sensation by directing one's attention to it. But where is the analogy? It evidently lies in the fact that one can point to a thing by looking or listening.
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> But in certain circumstances, even pointing to the object one is talking about may be quite inessential to the language-game, to one's thought.[30]

The point that Wittgenstein is making here is one which I have already mentioned in another context. He is warning us not to assimilate the logic of one language-game to that of another on the basis of

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29. ibid, 654-655.
30. ibid, 669.

grammatical similarity.[31] His watchword remains: "Don't think, but look!"

The decisive consideration for the problem of this chapter, however, still concerns Wittgenstein's meaning when he says "This language-game is played." David Pole, in the argument with which this chapter was started, refers to the statement as if its purpose was to justify a language-game. In the context in which Wittgenstein uses it, however, there is no question of the justification of a language-game but only of its explanation. Wittgenstein notes that we do use language concerning remembered wishes and urges us to accept our language as "the given" instead of looking for some "given" prior to our language. The question of whether the language-game is justified or not is not at issue.

5. The Justification of Language

The point has now been reached at which Pole's argument can be examined. The problem under discussion in his argument is that of the reality of matter. Pole suggests that a Wittgenstinian might approach the

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31. cf. ibid, 664.

problem this way: Within the material object language-game we have procedures for determining whether a particular type of object is real or not. If the question of the reality of matter is the question of whether this or that material object is real, there is no problem. However, if these procedures are rejected, the legitimacy of the language-game itself is rejected. At this point, only one answer can be given: "This language-game is played."

Pole's own reservation to the argument is this: The question between a realist and an idealist is not resolved by noting that the material object language-game is played. The idealist doesn't dispute this. The question, rather, is the legitimacy of the language-game: Ought it to be played?

To examine the argument, I want to start from the point that was established in the last section: Wittgenstein does <u>not</u> use the assertion "This language-game is played" to justify a language-game. The point that he is making is simply to note that a particular language-game has a use and to urge us to accept the language-game as the starting point of our inquiry. He is warning us not to try to get behind the language, so

to speak, and to look for a more logically primitive explanation.

For Wittgenstein, there can be no proving - or disproving, for that matter - the legitimacy of a language-game. Philosophy simply describes. However, if this is the case, Pole's interpretation of Wittgenstein must be mistaken. On the other hand, if it is mistaken, how might a Wittgenstinian deal with the problem of the reality of the material world?

The answer probably lies along lines such as these: Wittgenstein had complete confidence in ordinary language - that is, in language as it is ordinarily used, language that is "at home". If we have a word in our vocabulary, it is because we have a job for that word to do. The task of the philosopher is to discover and describe what this job is. (It should be noted that no disparagement of technical language is implied by Wittgenstein or by other "ordinary language" philosophers. Technical language is ordinary language.)

Where language is not justified, according to Wittgenstein, is when it is pulled out of the context in which it has a job to do and put into a context in which it can be given no clear meaning. "Philosophical

problems arise when language goes on holiday."[32] The job of the philosopher is to deal with confusions which "arise when language is like an engine idling, not when it is doing work."[33]

Pole's misinterpretation arises because he assumes that Wittgenstein would let the question "Is matter real?" stand and try to answer it. The Wittgenstinian approach to such a problem, I maintain, would be to throw out the problem. Pole is quite right when he says that we can and do speak of this or that material thing as "real"; that we have procedures for determining whether this thing or that is real. However, "real" is one of those words which needs a definite context in order to be intelligible. We speak of a "real boat" (as opposed to a toy boat), "a real duck" (as opposed to a decoy), "real rubber" (as opposed to synthetic rubber), etc.,[34] But what would be meant by

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32. ibid, 38.

33. ibid, 132.

34. cf. Austin's brilliant analysis of the word "real". J.L. Austin, Sense and Sensibilia (New York: Oxford, 1964), Chapter VII.

either asserting or denying the proposition "Matter is real"? The word "real", it might be argued, is doing no work at all in this context. In relation to matter as such, no intelligible content can be given to the distinction between "real" and "not real". Language has gone on holiday. It is the problem itself - and not the material world - that is illusory.

In the final analysis, Pole's interpretation of Wittgenstein is not wide of the mark. Pole goes wrong only insofar as he attributes the view to Wittgenstein that the mere playing of a game is its justification. For Wittgenstein, however, the "justification" of language is its use. Only language that has, or can be given, a use is "all right". Asking questions like "Is matter real?" is a kind of language-game, but it is a language-game in which language has gone on holiday. The fact that "this language-game is played" is of no consequence.

6. The Implications for Theology

If my argument in the last section is correct there can be no short way with the critics of theology. The possibility of justifying theology by the fact that

it is played was anticipated at the beginning of the chapter. Now, however, the ground for this possibility has turned out to be less than adequate. The question that must be put, rather, is this: Does theological language have a use? Or is theology simply a systematization of vacationing language?

Flew's contention, if he may be interpreted in terms of Wittgenstein, is this: Theological language does not have a use. It pretends to have one. It pretends to give an ultimate explanation of the world. The parable of the gardener, however, shows that theological language fails to give such an explanation. There is no difference between a real God and an imaginary one.

This is a valid argument, given Flew's premises. What we have examined of Wittgenstein's philosophy would seem to support him. This is what seems to have led Paul van Buren to call Wittgenstein's identification of meaning and use "the modified verification principle".[35] I will discuss this point in the next section.

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35. Paul van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel (London: SCM, 1963), p.104.

Flew's challenge is fully justified insofar as he is asking theologians to show that their language has a use. It is not justified insofar as he assumes that he already knows what that use is. At this point - especially at this point - Wittgenstein's injunction must be obeyed by philosophers of religion. "Don't think, but look!" The first task of philosophy of religion must be to describe what the use - or the pretended use - of theological language is. Just what are the fundamental assertions of theology? Or is theological language assertive only in respect to its grammatical form? The answers to questions like these can only be discovered by an analysis of the language and concepts of theology. The question of whether theological language is self-justified or whether it is justifiable at all, can only be asked on the basis of such an analysis.[36]

How do these considerations relate to the problem of the autonomy of theology? Basically, if it was to be concluded that theology was autonomous, the analysis of theological language would have to show that

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36. For a similar application of Wittgenstein's method to philosophy of religion cf. D.Z. Phillips, The Concept of Prayer (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), Chapter I.

two conditions were satisfied. First the analysis would have to show that theological language has a use that couldn't be performed by non-theological language. Secondly, it would have to show that the use of theological concepts, in one way or another, guaranteed their autonomy. This might be done in a number of ways. One way would be to show that the ontological argument contained an accurate account of the Christian doctrine of God, i.e. that the ontological proof of God's existence was a valid theological (but not necessarily philosophical) argument. This possibility (and what I mean by it) will be discussed in the next chapter. I simply note here that one theologian, Karl Barth[37], and two philosophers, Norman Malcolm[38] and D.Z. Phillips[39] - all of whom might be described as "autonomists" - have attempted, in one way or another, to justify the ontological argument. This fact is not without significance.

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37. Karl Barth, Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum (London: SCM, 1960).

38. Norman Malcolm, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments", Knowledge and Certainty (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1963), pp.141-162.

39. Phillips, op.cit., pp.12-29.

Another way to show that theological language is autonomous would be to show that the propositions which can be used to falsify or verify theological assertions are themselves theological assertions. Generally speaking, this is Barth's method in theology.[40]

The analysis of some basic concepts of theology will be my concern in the next three chapters. I will follow, roughly, the trinitarian structure of Christian theology. First, I will examine the concept of God in general. Secondly, I will relate the results of this examination to the role of Christology in Christian theology. Finally, I will examine the notion of religious experience with reference to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

7. Van Buren and Linguistic Analysis

One attempt to apply Wittgenstein's philosophy to the problem of religious knowledge is that of Paul van Buren in his book The Secular Meaning of the Gospel.

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40. cf. for example Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics I/1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), pp.38-47. Barth insists that theological prolegomena is itself theology. Theological prolegomena is concerned with the nature and method of theology - an endeavour which has often been regarded as philosophical; prior to theology.

Van Buren's study is concerned with similar problems as will be discussed in subsequent chapters. In general, I regard van Buren's thesis as untenable and his argument as fallacious. In particular, van Buren has based his thesis on a fundamental misinterpretation of Wittgenstein.[41]

Van Buren is aware that there is a difference between logical positivism and the vaguely defined movement in philosophy known as "linguistic analysis". He is also aware that "Linguistic analysis is what the name implies: a method, not a philosophical doctrine.[42]

However, Van Buren treats linguistic analysis as if it were a doctrine as well as a method. In his discussion, linguistic analysis appears to be indistinguishable from logical positivism.

> It is now recognized that different kinds of language are appropriate to different situations. The language of love is not that of biology, nor is the language of politics that of physics. The word "cause", for example, has different functions in the disciplines of

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41. A similar critique of van Buren has been given by Jerry H. Gill, "A case of Mistaken Identity: A Critique of Paul van Buren's The Secular Meaning of the Gospel" to be published in Christian Scholar. I have read the MS of Mr. Gill's article but what follows represents conclusions which I drew independently of Mr. Gill.

42. van Buren, op.cit., p.3.

> physics, economics, and history. There is no reason why one should look for the same sort of evidence for a biologist's statement concerning a certain experiment and a statement of love by a lover. The modified verification principle can help us to sort out the pieces of our language, lest we try to understand the language of love in terms of biology or the language of politics in terms of physics.[43]

It is true that the logical positivists may have been guilty of having an oversimplification of language. They were not, however, guilty of this oversimplification. No responsible positivist would have ever suggested that one should look for "the same sort of evidence for a biologist's statement ... and a statement of love by a lover." All that A.J. Ayer, for example, asks is that, if a proposition is to be accounted meaningful, one must know "what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false."[44] There is nothing here to suggest that biological assertions and statements of love should be verified by "the same sort of evidence"!

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43. ibid, p.15.

44. A.J. Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic, p.35.

Having misrepresented logical positivism, van Buren misrepresents linguistic analysis.

> The verification principle has continued to be important, but it has another function in contemporary linguistic analysis. There are a variety of "language-games", activities with their appropriate languages, and a modified verification principle is now used to ask what sort of things would count against it. If we know that, we can say in which "language-game" the assertion is "at home".[45]

When van Buren speaks of the "modified verification principle" he has in mind Wittgenstein's identification of meaning and use. There is some truth in this interpretation. One of the ways in which to discover how language is being used in a proposition is to apply the verification principle to it. But this is only one way, among others, of discovering how language is used. For Wittgenstein, the important thing about a proposition is not whether it is verifiable but whether it has a use. These are not identical demands. The difference between verification and use can be illustrated by considering performatives. "I promise to come tomorrow" is not the sort of proposition that can be

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45. van Buren, op.cit., p.15

verified or falsified. It is neither true nor false but only sincere or insincere, kept or broken. We do, however, have a use for such utterances and, consequently, they are meaningful. By discovering their use we discover what "language-game" they are being used to play. That "the meaning of a word is its use in language" is not the verification principle.

An example of where van Buren's misunderstanding of Wittgenstein leads him astray is in his account of prayer.[46] Having dismissed "God" as a meaningless word, he argues that prayer is really reflection. This is the meaning of the word "prayer", the use of this activity, in a world where "God" is no longer a meaningful word.

Van Buren's mistake is this: The believer does not use the word "prayer" as a substitute for the word "reflection". Those believers who commend the practice of praying are not necessarily committed to ascribing any value to the practice of "reflection". Prayer is speaking to "someone" and if that "someone" is removed, prayer doesn't become "reflection". Rather it becomes

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46. ibid, pp.188-190. It is interesting to note that for van Buren, it is more important to retain prayer in his secular Christianity than it is to retain God.

meaningless or illusory. The meaning of a word is its use, not what is left over after its use has been demythologized.[47]

Van Buren's misunderstanding of Wittgenstein is only in the background of my main disagreement with him. This concerns the use and, therefore, the meaning of the word "God". This, however, lies within the scope of the next chapter.

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47. For a more adequate application of the method of linguistic analysis to the problem of prayer cf. D.Z. Phillips, op.cit., passim.

Chapter Three

THE MEANING OF "GOD"

1. The Assertions of Theology

The result of my examination of Wittgenstein's philosophy and its implications for theology might be summed up in this way: Before the assertions of theology can be evaluated they must first be ascertained. The primary task, therefore, of the philosopher of religion must be to discover and articulate the fundamental assertions of theology. It must be emphasized that this is a task. The fundamental assertions of theology are not given to philosophy of religion as its starting point. What is given, rather, is the language of religious belief. The philosopher of religion - and in this respect he is no different from the theologian - must seek to discover the logic that lies behind religious language before he is in a position to specify what sort of considerations would be relevant in evaluating the legitimacy of theology.

If this is true, the philosopher of religion cannot remain detached from what may seem to be domestic arguments between theologians. It is not true that there is some entity called "religious belief" that can be

abstracted from the various "theologies" and studied in its pristine purity. The domestic arguments of theologians have important bearings on the problems in which the philosopher of religion is interested. The philosopher, then, cannot remain detached. He must, to a certain extent, be prepared to take positions on theological issues and to take those positions in full consciousness of what he is doing. He must, to that same extent, become a theologian.

It can be taken for granted that the fundamental assertions of theology will be closely connected with the meaning of the word "God". This is not to say that we are given the proposition "God exists" as that fundamental assertion. Paul van Buren, along with other "death of God" theologians would dispute this. Norman Malcolm, taking another view, points out that simply to believe that God exists is not to have arrived at religious belief. The religious person believes in God or he is not religious.[1] Even if it were granted that "God exists" is the fundamental assertion of theology, it could not be assumed that the philosopher could go ahead and treat the

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1. Norman Malcolm, "Is it a Religious Belief that 'God Exists'?" Faith and the Philosophers, pp.103-110.

proposition as if it were logically similar to, say, "Ghosts exist." It would have to be established first, what the word "God" means and, second, what work the word "exist" is doing in this context. These also are issues on which there is no unanimous agreement among theologians.

There are two preliminary observations that have to be made before I can begin building a constructive position. The first is to note the variety of uses to which the word "God" has been put within the Western Judaeo-Christian tradition. This variety has been noted by H. Richard Niebuhr:

> Now we mean by it the powers on which men call for help in time of trouble; now the forces which they summon up in their search for ecstasy; now the realities before which they experience awe and the sense of the holy; now the beings they posit in their speculative efforts to explain the origin and government of things; now the objects of adoration . . . 2

The second preliminary consideration concerns the self-involving character of language about God. I can detach myself from most "facts" or from philosophical or scientific theories. They may interest and concern me,

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2. H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture (London: Faber & Faber, 1961) p.24.

but they may not. I can detach myself from them; respond to them by saying "So what!". "The table is green but I don't really care," presents us with no interesting logical problems.

However, I am not free to respond seriously to theological propositions in this way. I cannot, for example, say "This is God's will for me but I don't really care." By admitting that something is God's will for me I imply that I am under an obligation about which I am not free not to care.

Helmut Gollwitzer speaks for many theologians when he insists that all theological statements must have this self-involving character.

> In regard to God statements are illegitimate which are neutral towards ourselves, that is, which do not at once affect also our own existence.3

Niebuhr makes a similar point when he insists that the word "faith" is definitive of the relationship between God and Man.

> The word theos directs us indeed toward an object but not quite in the same way that

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3. Helmut Gollwitzer, The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith, (London: SCM, 1965), p.78.

> anthropos does in anthropology or geos in geology. It is the name for that objective being, that other-than-the-self, which men have before them as they believe rather than as they see, hear, feel, or even as they reason.[4]

For Niebuhr, faith is nothing remotely like "believing what you know ain't true." Faith is irreducibly a self-involving relationship between man and God.

> The Christian statement, "I believe in God, the Father, Almighty maker of heaven and earth," is on the one hand an expression of confidence, on the other, an oath of allegiance. In the one sense it means "I trust in God"; in the other, "I will keep faith with him."[5]

I mention these two preliminary considerations because they have to be taken into account. In the first place, any analysis of the meaning of the word "God" must not fix arbitrarily on one sense in which the word has been used as if the others did not exist. Secondly, it must also be able to give an adequate account of the self-involving character of religious utterances.

I have said that my problem is to discover and describe the "fundamental assertions" of theology. Another way of putting this would be to say that my task was to describe the use of theological statements. Are they

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4. Niebuhr, op.cit., p.12

5. ibid, p.18

pseudo-scientific statements, purporting to explain the world? Are they metaphysical statements, descriptive, as it were, of a "world" behind the world of sense or of the ultimate nature of reality? Or do theological statements have another use, and, if so, what is it?

2. The Theological Use of Theological Statements

If we look at the Old and New Testaments it is not hard to find statements which are given some sort of priority as fundamental expressions of the faith. In the New Testament, an example of such an assertion would be "Jesus is Lord".[6] This assertion, and others like it in the New Testament are fundamentally Christological and will, for convenience sake, be discussed in Chapter IV.

In the Old Testament, and in the life of the Jewish tradition that has grown out of it, the Shema is probably the representative confession of faith.

> Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might. (Deuteronomy 6: 4-5)[7]

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6. cf. I Corinthians 12:3

7. All quotations from the Old and New Testaments are taken from the Revised Standard Version (RSV).

The assertion which the RSV renders as "The LORD our God is one LORD" can, in fact, be translated from Hebrew in a number of different ways. The RSV gives three alternative translations in a footnote. Literally translated, the Hebrew reads "Yahweh, our God, Yahweh, one." We are left to supply the verb where we will, to decide whether the word "one" should function as an adjective or an adverb, and to arrange the terms in such a way as they make sense. G. Ernest Wright makes this comment:

> The essential meaning...is clear, even though the exact English translation is not. The object of Israel's exclusive attention, affection, and worship...is not diffuse but single. It is not a pantheon of gods each of whose personalities has a disconcerting way of being split up by rival adherents and sanctuaries, so that the attention of the worshiper cannot be concentrated. Israel's attention is undivided; it is confined to one definite being whose name is Yahweh... . The word one is thus used in contradistinction to "many", but it also implies uniqueness and difference. Yahweh alone is sovereign Lord, the sole object of reverence and obedience. The verse says substantially what the First Commandment of the Decalogue says, and is an example of the existential manner in which biblical monotheism was expressed.[8]

The First Commandment states:

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8. G. Ernest Wright, "Exegesis of Deuteronomy", Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 2, pp. 372-373.

> "I am Yahweh[9] your God, who brought you
> out of the land of Egypt, out of the house
> of bondage.
> "You shall have no other gods before me."
> (Exodus 20: 2-3)

The Shema and the First Commandment must be understood against the background of polytheism. The point of the First Commandment is not that there is only one divine being. It is a commandment, addressed to the people of Israel, forbidding them to worship other gods. Far from denying the gods of polytheism, the First Commandment takes them so seriously as to make the possibility of worshipping them the object of its prohibition. "You shall have no other gods before me."

The meaning of the Shema is more complicated. It has at least two senses, both of which were noted by Wright in the quotation above. The RSV renders the Shema "Yahweh our God is one Yahweh." The suggestion in this translation is that Yahweh is not "schizophrenic", as it were; in particular, that he cannot be worshipped under the form of this god or that. To the Israelite it

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9. The RSV renders the divine name "Yahweh" by "the LORD". For the purposes of understanding both the Shema and the First Commandment it is convenient to substitute the divine name in the RSV translation where it appears in the Hebrew.

was impossible to say "We are all really worshipping the same God in different ways." This aspect of biblical monotheism is particularly important for the problems of Christology and we will return to it in the next chapter.

The rendering of the Shema which brings out its other sense most clearly is this: "Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone." The meaning here is virtually identical with that of the First Commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me." The Shema emphasizes the exclusiveness that is involved in Israel's relation to Yahweh, an exclusiveness that is spelled out in the command that follows: "You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might."

The fundamental expression of faith in the Old Testament, then, is expressed by the Shema understood synonymously with the First Commandment: "Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone." Yahweh is singled out from all other possibilities and called by the Old Testament "our God".

The consequences of this understanding of biblical monotheism for the problem of religious knowledge are considerable and of decisive significance for the problem of the autonomy of theology. In some

respects, the rest of this study will be a commentary on the point to be established here.

In order to make the point as clear as possible, let us consider John Hick's definition of monotheism:

> Monotheism...is the belief that there is but one supreme Being, who is personal and moral and who seeks a total and unqualified response from his human creatures. This idea came to fully effective consciousness among men in the word, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."[10]

The important aspect of Hick's formulation of monotheism lies in the use which he claims for religious language. To Hick, monotheism is essentially a metaphysical theory. Religious language is used to make metaphysical assertions - i.e. assertions about the ultimate nature of reality.

In the Old Testament, however, neither the Shema nor the First Commandment is given this kind of use. We fail to appreciate their significance if we see them even as the first step towards metaphysical monotheism. They are doing a quite different job. They have a use

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10. John Hick, Philosophy of Religion, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963) p.5.

which can only be described as theological. They assert, not anything about the ultimate nature of reality, but rather Yahweh's claim to the absolute fidelity of his people. The word "God" does not function as a name - this is done by the word "Yahweh" - but as a title. The word "God" signifies the status of the one who commands man's worship and faith.

If my contention is correct, a statement like "Money is his god" is not merely a metaphorical way of speaking. Rather it is the recognition that man's relationship to things like money has a theological dimension - that the First Commandment is broken by an "ultimate concern" with wealth just as it is by literally prostrating oneself before a golden calf. The statement "Money is the only worth while thing in life" is theological. The statement "There is a supreme being" is metaphysical.[11]

This theological use of theological statements has been either ignored by philosophers of religion or, it has been seen as secondary to their metaphysical

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11. I am not claiming that theological statements are non-metaphysical, nor that metaphysical statements are necessarily non-theological. The relationship between the two will be discussed later. Here it is important to stress the difference between the two.

use.[12] Many of the foremost contemporary theologians have not been so blind.

Paul Tillich, for example, calls the kind of relation one has with his god "ultimate concern". The expression of ultimate concern then becomes the distinctive feature of theological language.

> This...is the first formal criterion of theology: The object of theology is what concerns us ultimately. Only those propositions are theological which deal with their object in so far as it can become a matter of ultimate concern for us.[13]

H. Richard Niebuhr makes a similar point of departure to Tillich. For Niebuhr, one's god is one's "value-center." He distinguishes between polytheism, henotheism and monotheism, finding all present in contemporary Western culture.

> Radical monotheism is not in the first instance a theory about being and then a faith, as though the faith orientation toward the principle of being needed to be preceded by an ontology that established the unity of the realm of being and its

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12. There are notable exceptions. cf. H.H. Price "Belief 'In' and Belief 'That'" Religious Studies, Vol. I, No. I (1965) pp. 5-27; J. N. Findlay, "Can God's Existence be Disproved?" New Essays in Philosophical Theology, pp. 47-56.

13. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. I, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) p.12.

> source in a single power beyond it. ... Believing man does not say first "I believe in a creative principle" and then, "I believe that principle is gracious, that is, good toward what issues from it." He rather says, "I believe in God the Father, Almighty Maker of heaven and earth." This is a primary statement, a point of departure and not a deduction.[14]

One cannot begin to understand the theology of Karl Barth unless this theological use of language is presupposed. For Barth, theology can only proceed from the assumption that it worships only God; that God is, for theology, the measure of all things. The First Commandment is, according to Barth, a "theological axiom".

Barth's understanding of the First Commandment as a theological axiom illuminates his whole approach to theology. It deserves some attention. Barth defines an axiom as

> ...a proposition which is capable of no proof through other propositions but, on the other hand, for which such a proof is not needed, since it proves itself - a proposition, rather, which is sufficiently comprehensive and substantial to form the ultimately decisive presupposition in the proof of all other propositions in a

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14. Niebuhr, op.cit., pp. 32-33.

given scientific field.[15]

In the case of theology, Barth points out, the "ultimately decisive presupposition" is not a "self-evident truth" but a commandment:

> It is not simply a revelation of divine truth. Rather it is essentially an order of God to the man in Israel who is individually addressed by him. God not only designates himself as Lord, but he behaves as such in that he summons, commands, forbids: "You shall have no other gods before me."[16]

But what does the commandment forbid? What does it mean to have "other gods"? Barth answers:

> Wherever the heart of a man is; and therefore wherever is the basis of his ultimately real confidence and hope, the primum movens of his movement of life and also the foundation upon which his life rests, there also in all reality is his god.[17]

For Barth, the lordship of God extends even to epistemology. A man's ultimate criterion of meaning and truth is also one of his gods. God is Lord - even over the verification principle. Otherwise the verification principle is - a god.

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15. Karl Barth, "Das Erste Gebot als Theologische Axiom" Theologische Fragen und Antworten (Evangelischer Verlag AG. Zollikon, 1957) p. 127. The translation is my own.

16. ibid, p. 131

17. ibid, p. 134.

> Theology is asked again and again where it really has its heart, its concern, its interest and whether its heart might not perhaps secretly be a heart divided between this God and the other gods. ... It is asked about the source from which it derives its propositions. It is asked about the standard of certainty which it imputes to its propositions. ... And on every side other gods, other grounds and objects of fear, of love and of confidence will very seriously be brought into question before the Deus ecclesiae - even for theology.[18]

We must distinguish, then, between theological monotheism and metaphysical monotheism. The fundamental assertion of the latter has the form "There is one God". This utterance is used to make an assertion about the ultimate nature of reality or about a being who exists beyond the world of sense. The fundamental assertion of theological monotheism, on the other hand, has the form "Yahweh alone is God" where for "Yahweh" can be substituted any other "name" of God (e.g. "Allah") without the statement ceasing to be monotheistic.[19] This assertion is used to express an ultimate claim which is made upon man and to refer to the One on whose behalf the claim is made.

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18. ibid, p. 136

19. Throughout this chapter I will use "Yahweh" as an archetype of a divine name. Most of what I will have to say will not depend on which god is named in this assertion. I use "Yahweh" for convenience.

The distinction between the two can be seen in their relation to atheism. Metaphysical monotheism is negated by atheism. Atheism is the denial of the assertion "There is a God".

The relation of theological monotheism to atheism, however, is much more complex. Theological monotheism objects to atheism, not so much on account of its metaphysic, but because it covertly leaves the door open for polytheism. Atheism fails to see the theological dimension in life. Inasmuch as man lives and moves in terms of values, criteria of certainty, and the like, he lives and moves among the gods. The only true atheism in a theological sense would be absolute nihilism. Atheism which is not nihilistic opposes theological monotheism - not with no God - but with "other gods". H. Richard Niebuhr puts the point this way:

> Using the word "god" without definition we regard ourselves as either theists or atheists. But if we confine our inquiry to the forms of faith, then it seems more true to say that monotheism as value dependence and as loyalty to One beyond all the many is in constant conflict among us with the two dominant forms: a pluralism that has many objects of devotion and a social faith that has one object, which is, however, only one among many. If by gods we mean the objects of such faith then atheism is

> as irreconcilable with human existence as is radical skepticism in the actuality of the things we eat, and breathe, walk upon and bump into. Atheism in this sense is no more a live alternative for us in actual personal existence, than psychological solipsism is in our physical life. To deny the reality of a supernatural being called God is one thing: to live without confidence in some center of value and without loyalty to a cause is another.[20]

3. The Existence of God

The following objection to the argument of the previous section needs to be considered: It is all very well to distinguish between metaphysical monotheism and theological monotheism. You have still not rid yourself of metaphysical assertions. How do you know that this "Yahweh" exists? And granting that he exists, on what basis do you predicate the status "God" of him?

The general answer to the question of God's existence is this: The believer who asserts "Yahweh is my God" is not in a position to entertain even the possibility that "Yahweh" does not exist. He is prevented by the exclusive authority with which his god is related to him to entertain the possibility that there might be

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20. Niebuhr, op.cit., pp. 24-25.

other authorities - other "standards of certainty" - on the basis of which God's existence could be disputed.

To take an example; the believer cannot allow the verification principle to dispute the legitimacy of a statement like "Yahweh is God". He could only do this by admitting that there are other gods, other ultimate standards of truth, beside the God who is named in his confession. To name Yahweh as "God" is to deny this status to the verification principle. Gollwitzer puts the point this way:

> He who encounters us here is the one whose existence can be disputed only apart from the encounter, only in the form of misjudgment, whose encounter at once throws us on our knees and calls out our worship ... . He is the One who can be denied only by the man who does not know what he is doing and with whom he has to do, and can be doubted only in side-stepping the confrontation with him.[21]

If this argument looks strangely like the ontological argument it is no accident. In the last chapter I anticipated that the ontological argument might have theological - as opposed to metaphysical - validity. Now I must make sense of this distinction and relate the

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21. Gollwitzer, op.cit., p. 121f

ontological argument to the problem of the existence of God.

As an example of a "metaphysical" ontological argument, we can look at Descartes' formulation of it. Descartes starts from the definition "God is the supremely perfect being". His minor premise is "Existence is a perfection." His conclusion is that this perfect being - God - necessarily exists.

> It is not less impossible to conceive a God, that is, a being supremely perfect, to whom existence is awanting, or who is devoid of a certain perfection, than to conceive a mountain without a valley.[22]

In contrast to Descartes, Anselm's argument is of the theological type. Anselm defines "God" as "that greater than which nothing can be conceived." Anselm argues:

> Surely that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot exist in the mind alone. For if it exists solely in the mind even, it can be thought to exist in reality also, which is greater.[23]

From this, Anselm claims, it follows that God's

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22. René Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy Fifth Meditation, (Edinburgh; William Blackwood, 1873) p. 66. Translator's name not given.

23. Anselm, Proslogion, Chapter II, tr. M.J. Charlesworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965)

non-existence is inconceivable; that he exists *in intellectu* and *in re*.

There are four major differences between the arguments of Descartes and Anselm. In the first place, their intentions are different. Their arguments are presented for different purposes. They have a different role in the contexts of the thought of their respective authors. Secondly, Anselm and Descartes define "God" differently. Thirdly, Descartes' ontology is more comprehensive than that of Anselm. Finally, the conclusions of Descartes and Anselm should be formulated differently. In short, the arguments of Anselm and Descartes differ in intention, in both premises, and in their conclusions.

Anselm's purpose in presenting his ontological argument is, as is well known, "faith seeking understanding."[24] God's existence is not in doubt. It is believed. Anselm wishes to move from the situation of faith alone to the situation in which he has faith with understanding. God never ceases to be the object of Anselm's worship. This is evidenced by the fact that Anselm's "proof" is

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24. *cf.* *ibid*, Preface.

written in the form of a prayer. The God whom Anselm wishes to "prove" is none other than the object of his worship. His intention is, therefore, fundamentally theological.

Descartes' purpose, on the other hand, could be formulated, in contrast to that of Anselm, as "doubt seeking certainty." Descartes wishes to subject all of his beliefs to radical doubt in order to prove the certainty of that which he can claim to know.

> I will ... proceed by casting aside all that admits of the slightest doubt, not less than if I had discovered it to be absolutely false; and I will continue always in this track until I shall find something that is certain, or at least, if I can do nothing more, until I shall know with certainty that there is nothing certain.[25]

For Descartes, God is not primarily that which he worships. He may become that, but his role in the Cartesian system is quite different. God's existence, in Descartes, is (to paraphrase Tillich) a truth among other truths. It is an item of knowledge which is given the job of supporting other items of knowledge - in particular, the knowledge of the external world. For

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25. Descartes, op.cit., Meditation 2.

Descartes then, the proposition "God exists" is primarily an expression of a truth about the nature of reality. His intention is fundamentally metaphysical.

To turn to the definition of the word "God", it is difficult to define precisely the difference between Anselm and Descartes at this point. Descartes' definition ("God is a supremely perfect being") is implied by Anselm's ("God is that than which no greater can be conceived")[26], but it might be argued that a being greater than which another could be conceived was not supremely perfect. In this case it would follow that Anselm's definition was also implied by that of Descartes: that the two definitions were equivalent.

To help us see the difference between Anselm and Descartes at this point, let us look at Karl Barth's criticism of the Cartesian definition:

> The God of Descartes is hopelessly enchained to the mind of man. Neither in the description given of Him nor in the role described to Him does He bear the divine character which would distinguish Him as the being to whom objective existence beyond all human imagining must be ascribed, for the simple reason that it is He Himself who has inexorably

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26. cf. Anselm, op.cit., Chapter V

> and inescapably prescribed these thoughts for man.[27]

To put the matter another way, Descartes' definition identifies God as the exemplification of a human concept. What is shown to exist is the supremely perfect being. Barth's objection is that, while God may, under certain conditions, be called the supremely perfect being, under no circumstances may the supremely perfect being - this exemplification of a human concept - be identified as God. The products of human thought as well as the products of human hands are idolatrous if they are given the name "God".[28]

Anselm defines God as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." The important consideration in distinguishing this definition from that of Descartes is whether theological objections of the type which Barth applies to Descartes are also applicable to Anselm. Is not "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" also a human conception and therefore an idol if it is given the name "God"?

Barth replies in the negative. He contends

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27. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/1, p.360

28. cf. Hosea 14:3

that Anselm's definition is not a human conception but is derived from God's self-revelation. God reveals himself as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived".[29]

What Barth means here could be misleading. We could ask: Is there anything about Anselm's definition which qualifies it as an expression of God's self-revelation that is lacking in the Cartesian definition? Certainly the intentions of Anselm and Descartes are different. However, a good intention is no guarantee of good theology. Why should not a Cartesian claim that God reveals himself as the supremely perfect being? On what grounds could this claim be rejected? And yet of the God of Descartes, Barth says, "His divinity has nothing to do with the fact that He has revealed Himself."[30]

Barth's point is incomprehensible if we think of revelation as the source of true propositions about God. It becomes comprehensible only when we think of revelation as the event in which man is claimed by God as God; the event in which God imposes his sovereignty

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29. Barth, op.cit., p. 360.

30. ibid, p. 360.

upon man. It is this event - this relation between God and man - with which the Cartesian definition has "nothing to do". Of Anselm's definition, on the other hand, Barth says:

> The formula simply repeats the injunction inculcated on the believer's thinking by the revelation...not to imagine anything greater than God on pain of the consequence that the conception of a 'God' alongside such a greater than he would immediately cease to be a conception of the true God... .[31]

In other words, Anselm's formula, in a way that the Cartesian definition does not, reflects the relation between man and God which is established in revelation. Anselm defines God, not in terms of what he is in himself, but in terms of the unique relation which exists between God and all that is not God. God is "greater".

Anselm's definition insures that God remains the One who exists "beyond all human imagining". Anselm makes this explicit:

> Therefore, Lord, not only are You that than which a greater cannot be thought, but You are also something greater than can be thought. For since it is possible to think

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31. Karl Barth, Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum, pp. 102 - 103.

> that there is such a one, then, if You are not this same being something greater than You could be thought - which cannot be.[32]

The second premise in the argument of Descartes is the assertion that existence is a perfection. This premise has been called into serious question by Kant.[33] It is Kant's denial that existence is the sort of concept that could refer to a perfection that lies at the basis of most modern rejections of the ontological argument. The problem raised by Kant does not concern us here. The important thing to see is that the Cartesian argument rests on a general ontological presupposition. Its validity depends on existence - as such - being a perfection. A theology which rested on this argument would not be autonomous. It would stand or fall with the truth or falsity of this philosophical doctrine.

It is generally assumed that Anselm shares the ontology of Descartes at this point. However, no basis for this assumption can be found in Anselm.[34]

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32. Anselm, op.cit., Chapter XV

33. cf. Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, I, Second Division, Chapter III, Section 4.

34. I have defended this point in detail in "Is Existence a Predicate in Anselm's Argument?" to be published in a forthcoming edition of Religious Studies.

At no point does Anselm claim or imply that it is "greater", in general, to exist than not to exist. Anselm makes the claim only for "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." He does not commit himself to the relative merits of real and imaginary islands, dollars, unicorns, and the like. In at least one place he implies that only for God does his argument apply.[35] Even here Anselm does not leave the theological circle. Existence is not predicated univocally of creature and Creator.

The conclusion of Descartes is that this being, this "supremely perfect being", who is called God, exists. The conclusion follows from his premises. Anselm, on the other hand, is overstating his case when he concludes that God exists. Strictly speaking, what follows from his argument is that God's non-existence is inconceivable. Anselm has argued that if God is conceived as existing in intellectu solo, he is not "that than which nothing greater can be thought." It follows that God must be conceived as existing in re. It is inconsistent to conceive of God as existing in intellectu solo.

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35. cf. Anselm, Reply to Guanilo, III.

I stress this limit of Anselm's argument precisely because it is the same limit which exists in the argument I outlined earlier. The believer does not prove that God exists. Rather, he is in the position in which it is not possible for him to call God's existence into question. In this sense the ontological argument is theologically valid.

There is another limitation of this argument which also needs to be stressed. It only shows that once something has been identified as God, the question of its existence cannot be raised. The argument does not give us any basis for identifying this or that as God. Nor does it establish any necessity for having a god. What is established in the ontological argument is a rule within the theological language-game that governs the relationship between the word "God" and the word "exists". It does not establish that the game ought to be played.

The relevance of this whole train of thought for the problem of autonomy is this: The proposition "God exists" follows from the logic of theological discourse. It is not and cannot be falsified by the truth or falsity of non-theological propositions. In this sense, therefore, theology is autonomous.

The central problem, however, for the philosophy

of religion is not the proposition "God exists" but propositions of the form "Yahweh is God". The fundamental question is not the existence but the identification of God. The answer to this question will be the problem of the next chapter.

4. The Non-Existence of God

The argument of the last section applies to the question of God's existence as the question of the legitimacy of theological language. A believer is not in the position in which he can contemplate the calling of God's authority into question. In this sense, God's existence is necessary. It is important to note that there is another sense in which the believer can - and sometimes does - deny the existence of God.

It will be edifying to consider briefly the position of John Hick concerning the facticity of religious belief. Hick holds that propositions such as "God exists" are genuinely factual.

> In implicit opposition to all noncognitive accounts of religious language, traditional Christian and Jewish faith has always presumed the factual character of its basic assertions. It is, of course, evident to the most preliminary reflection that theological statements, having a unique subject-matter, are not wholly like any

> other kind of statement. They constitute a special use of language which it is the task of philosophy of religion to examine. But the way in which this language operates within historic Judaism and Christianity is much closer to ordinary factual asserting than to either the expressing of aesthetic intuitions or declaring of ethical policies.[36]

To this point, Hick's protest against non-cognitive accounts of religious language is quite justified - even given my distinction between the theological and the metaphysical uses of religious language. Difficulties arise, however, when Hick begins to spell out what he means by "factual".

> The common core to the concepts "existence", "fact" and "reality" is the idea of "making a difference". To say that x exists or is real, or that it is a fact that there is an x, is to claim that the character of the universe differs in some specific way from the character that an x-less universe would have. The nature of this difference will naturally depend upon the character of the x in question. And the meaning of "God exists" will be indicated by spelling out the past, present, and future difference which God's existence is alleged to make within human experience.[37]

To summarize Hick's argument: Hick holds that the believer "has always presumed" that his assertions

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36. Hick, op.cit., p. 94.

37. ibid, p. 106.

are factual. To say that an assertion is factual is to say that it implies that "the universe differs in some specific way" from a universe in which the assertion is not true. It follows that Hick holds the believer to be asserting that God's existence makes a difference to the character of the universe.

This conclusion is, I believe, questionable - both theologically and as a matter of fact. The believer holds that God stands in relation to the universe ("heaven and earth", "all things visible and invisible") as Creator. The words "exist", "fact", and "reality" are words which are "at home" in talk about the universe. Whether we follow Wittgenstein ("The world is the totality of facts"[38]) or Strawson ("The world is the totality of things"[39]) we are in much the same position. It is theologically dubious to extend - even logically - the notion of the universe to include God within it as a "fact".[40] It is logically dubious to apply to God the

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38. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 1.1

39. P.F. Strawson, "Truth", Truth, ed. G. Pitcher, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1964), p.40n.

40. It is dubious even if theological statements are given a metaphysical use. "I do not think that such

notions of "existence" and "fact" if the paradigms of their meaning are to be taken from the "existence" of things - or even from that of numbers. As Gollwitzer says, the definition of God's existence "must not be dictated by any modern consciousness set up as a norm."[41] And again:

> Theologically illegitimate are statements which fit God into a theoretic view of the world and treat him as an object in the sense of the Cartesian concept of object, that is, make him an entity among a series of entities and subject him to the regulating categories of a general ontology.[42]

Secondly, it is not at all certain that believers do regard their statements as positing a "difference" in the whole world of experience. Martin

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expressions as 'there is a Supreme Being who created the Universe...' describes a particular 'state of affairs'. To suppose it does is to treat the creator of the universe as himself but a certain universe, or part or aspect of such a universe. It is to miss the very point of the concept, 'Creator of all things, visible and invisible'. ... Not only is he to be thought of as the One who has actually made the actual universe, but equally as the One who could have made any possible universe, his capacity to make it being what is meant by its possibility." Charles Hartshorne, "Is God's Existence a State of Affairs?" Faith and the Philosophers, p.26. cf. also Charles Hartshorne, The Logic of Perfection, (Lasalle: Open Court, 1961) passim.

41. Gollwitzer, op.cit., p. 124

42. ibid, p. 78

Buber, for example, whose thought has been very influential in contemporary theology, has called God the "eternal Thou".

> Every particular Thou is a glimpse through to the eternal Thou. Through this mediation of the Thou of all being fulfilment, and non-fulfilment, of relations comes to them: the inborn Thou is realised in each relation and consummated in none. It is consummated only in the direct relation with the Thou that by its nature cannot become It.[43]

The relevance of Buber's position for the problem which Hick raises lies along these lines: For Buber, God is present in and through everything which stands as a Thou in relation to an I. To say "I encountered God in that situation" is to say that I entered into an I-Thou relationship with something in that situation. It would be illegitimate, however, to analyze the situation, so to speak, in order to isolate God's presence. God is "the Thou that by its nature cannot become It." The world of analysis is the world of It. To analyze a situation is to treat that situation - and everything in it - as an It. The presence of God is not an "entity" or a "quality" which can be analyzed

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43. Martin Buber, I and Thou, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1959) p. 75.

out of a situation.[44] For Buber, the presence of God makes no difference to the description of a situation. The difference lies in the way in which I am related to that situation. The word "God" does not belong in the language-game that we call "description". When we speak about God, we are playing a different game.

The situation with regard to God's existence then, is this: Insofar as the statement "God does not exist" is a denial of the legitimacy of all theological assertions, the statement "God exists" is held to be true and necessary by the believer. If, however, the created universe or some part of it is taken to provide us with the "paradigm case" of the word "exist", then the believer is not committed to the proposition "God exists". Even the word "exists" cannot be predicated univocally of creature and Creator.

On this point there is a broad range of theological agreement. I have already maintained that Anselm's argument assumes such a difference between the kind of existence to be ascribed to God and that which

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44. I am indebted to the Rev. David Chappell for suggesting this way of putting Buber's insight.

can be ascribed to anything which is not God. In God, and in God alone, existence is a perfection. I have also noted Gollwitzer's insistence that the divine existence cannot be defined in terms of creaturely existence.

The theologian who has probably placed the most stress on this distinction is Paul Tillich. Tillich argues that God is not a "being beside other beings" but "being-itself". Existence, for Tillich, is a term which applies only to beings in space and time. Since God transcends the realm within which existence is a (logical) predicate, God does not exist.[45] Facts are what God created and therefore God is not a fact.

Karl Barth avoids the paradoxical language of Tillich, but he makes the same point in a different way. Barth repudiates "the possibility of applying the profane 'es gibt' (there is) even to God and divine things."[46]

> We cannot move to a position lying somewhere ...above dogmatic work. Such a position apart and above would be making ontology... the basic science of the human possibilities.[47]

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45. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. I, p. 205

46. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, I/1, p. 44

47. ibid, p. 45.

Again:

> The God of the Gospel ... is neither a thing, an item, an object like others, nor an idea, a principle, a truth, or a sum of truths.[48]

At the same time, "God is". In this statement, Barth claims, "we define completely the subject of all other statements" of theology.[49] For theology then, while there can be no denial of God's existence, neither can there be any accommodation of the existence of God to a general ontology. For Barth, what is meant by the word "existence" when we speak of the existence of God can be discovered only in God's self-revelation.

> Our subject is God and not being, or being only as the being of God. In connexion with the being of God that is here in question, we are not concerned with a concept of being that is common, neutral and free to choose, but with one which is from the first filled out in a quite definitive way. And this concretion cannot take place arbitrarily, but only from the Word of God, as it has already occurred and has been given to us in the Word of God.[50]

5. Theology and Metaphysics

The basic assertion of a theology has the form "Yahweh is God". Up to now I have been concerned to

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48. Karl Barth, Evangelical Theology: An Introduction (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964) pp. 6-7

49. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, II/1, p. 258

50. ibid, pp. 260-261.

distinguish sharply between the metaphysical statement "There is a God" and the theological assertion. But now the question arises: "Does not the statement 'Yahweh is God' purport to express a fact? And, if this is the case, is not the theological assertion also a metaphysical one?"

Provisionally, we can say that theological assertions are factual - and hence metaphysical - if by this is meant that the believer is doing more than expressing his outlook on life. Theological assertions are factual insofar as they assert the legitimacy of God's claim to the worship of all men. However, it will be helpful to look at the performative force of this utterance "Yahweh is God" in order to see what kind of a fact it is.

D. D. Evans, on the basis of Austin's work, has distinguished between five classes of performatives: constatives, commissives, exercitives, behabitives and verdictives.[51] The first, constatives, have an abstractible factual content. Constatives could be described as the class of linguistic acts which can be performed with "facts". We can state them, guess them, report

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51. Evans, op.cit., p. 38

them, describe them, infer them. We can argue about them, place bets on them, and give evidence for them.

The utterance "Yahweh is God" has constative force. By this utterance, the believer is stating or testifying that the bearer of the name "Yahweh" has the status "God".

In a commissive utterance, "the speaker commits himself in more than a verbal way."[52] A promise, for example, is a commissive performative. In a promise the speaker commits himself to act in a certain way.

The utterance "Yahweh is God" is an implicit commissive. The utterance is an acknowledgement[53] that the bearer of the name "Yahweh" has divine authority, that he has a legitimate claim on the loyalty of the believer. In saying "Yahweh is God" he acknowledges Yahweh as his "value center" (Niebuhr), his "ultimate concern" (Tillich), his "standard of certainty" (Barth); as the norm by which his whole life is to be judged.

In an exercitive utterance the speaker

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52. ibid, p. 32

53. For the importance of the verb "to acknowledge" in theology cf. ibid, pp. 41ff. cf. also Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, I/1, pp. 234-238.

exercises authority. An exercitive can only be validly performed by somebody who has authority to perform the act concerned. Appointing somebody to a position, a command, baptism and marriage are all exercitive acts.

The utterance "Yahweh is God" is not an exercitive performative. The believer acknowledges Yahweh 's authority; he does not create it. On the other hand, the utterance "I am your God" when uttered by Yahweh does have exercitive force. It is not simply an autobiographical report of Yahweh 's authority. It is an order addressed to the hearer to respect that authority. As we saw in Section 2, the declaration of the Shema that Yahweh is God is virtually synonymous with the First Commandment.

Words like "thank", "apologize", "commend" are classified by Evans as behabitive. They relate "the speaker to another person in the context of human behaviour and social relation"[54] and they imply certain attitudes on the part of the speaker.

By saying "Yahweh is God" the speaker relates himself to Yahweh and implies that he has certain

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54. Evans, op.cit., p.34.

attitudes towards him. To have Yahweh as God is to love him with heart, soul, might and mind. The utterance has behabitive implications but some of these implications can be denied. The believer can say "Yahweh is my God, but I do not love him as I ought." The believer cannot deny, however, that he feels that he owes Yahweh this love.

Verdictive utterances stand on the border between constatives and exercitives. They are distinguished by such words as "rate", "value", "judge", "find", "grade", etc. A verdictive differs from an exercitive in that what I judge to be the case must be dependent on what is the case. A man is not legally guilty until so pronounced by a judge who has the authority to pronounce this sentence. At the same time, a judge cannot prononounce a man guilty until his guilt has been established by proper evidence. In an exercitive, however, what is the case is so <u>because</u> of my saying so; because I exercise my authority. A verdictive differs from a constative, on the other hand, insofar as the truth of the content of the utterance is not ascertainable apart from the verdictive utterance.

> Roughly speaking, 'matters of fact' ... can be settled by some agreed method of

> common sense or of science. As against this, 'matters of opinion or judgment'... either have no agreed method, or have a method which depends partly on the special conventional authority of some people. This distinction, however, is not clear-cut in everyday life; and even in a court room there may be wrangles concerning a celebrity's alleged 'vulgarity': Is it a matter of fact or a matter of opinion?[55]

In some respects, the utterance "Yahweh is God" functions like what Evans calls an "unofficial verdictive".

> Sometimes I might be agreeing with an authoritative verdict, where my utterance is a matter of performatively accepting the authority of law or judge; such an utterance would be an unofficial Verdictive with strong Commissive elements. It would be similar to a religious utterance in which I agree with a divine verdict.[56]

The difficulty here is that it is almost impossible to distinguish between a divine verdictive and a divine exercitive. Does God pronounce his creation to be good (Genesis 1:31) because it is good or is it good because God pronounces it as such?[57] Can any intelligible distinction be made between a divine verdictive and a divine exercitive?

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55. ibid, pp. 36-37

56. ibid, p. 37

57. cf, ibid, pp. 155ff.

In either case, man's acceptance of Yahweh's claim to be God looks very much like an unofficial verdictive. In accepting Yahweh as God man accepts Yahweh's exercitive-verdict concerning other gods and concerning man himself. Gollwitzer puts it this way:

> No one can legitimately speak of God without thereby making a confession about himself, a confession to his own new being and a confession of his being a sinner, that is, without thereby pronouncing a life and death judgment on himself. Statements which are intended to be about God are always already a confession of vital decisions; they are veritable judgments, not in the sense of neutral indicatives, but of verdicts, of judicial sentences, and in that sense; statements of faith.[58]

This digression into the performative force of the statement "Yahweh is God" has been necessary to emphasize what is probably the key contention of this chapter: Theological statements are <u>irreducibly</u> self-involving. One cannot treat statements about God - even provisionally - as if they were what Evans calls "flat constatives". The self-involving characteristics of theological assertions are inseparable from the logic of the word "God". One cannot set these self-involving characteristics aside, as it were, in order to inquire

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58. Gollwitzer, <u>op.cit.</u>, p. 78.

disinterestedly about whether this or that so-called god exists or whether this or that is God. The believer can, of course, see the point of such questions. But he must also insist that the questions miss the point of what is involved in believing in God.

To put the matter another way: theological assertions are used to refer to God as the norm of man's actions, attitudes and judgments. They are primarily self-involving. They are factual insofar as they are about that which the believer acknowledges as God. To treat theological statements as primarily explanations of the world or statements about the ultimate nature of reality, and only secondarily as self-involving utterances is to be playing a quite different game. Philosophers like Flew may succeed in showing theologians that their assertions are not explanations of the empirical world - and theologians need to be shown this - but they do not show that "God" is a meaningless word.

6. Van Buren and God

I have tried to show that statements cannot be legitimately analyzed by the philosopher of religion who tries to set aside the self-involving features of theology in order to concentrate on its "facticity".

On the other hand, can a theologian or philosopher of religion, while recognizing the self-involving nature of theological utterances, set aside their metaphysical content as non-essential? Basically, this is the thesis of Paul van Buren.

Van Buren's position can be summarized briefly. The word "God", as Flew has shown, cannot name an entity which explains the existence of the world. The "theistic hypothesis" will not do the work that we require of anything that is to count as an explanation. Following Hare and R.B. Braithwaite[59], among others, van Buren shows that theological language is used by the believer to express his perspective of the world and his commitments to certain ethical ideals. Van Buren argues that since the meaning of an expression is its use, theological language really refers to the "Christian way of life."[60] Statements about God, van Buren maintains, can be translated into statements about man, but not vice-versa.[61]

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59. R.B. Braithwaite, An Empiricist View of Religious Belief (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955)

60. Paul van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, p.101

61. ibid, p. 103.

Van Buren's method is nothing if not puzzling. The "God" whom van Buren rejects is the "God" of British empirical philosophy - the "God" of Flew and Hick. Of Hick's approach, van Buren says:

> The faith-statements which have occupied these philosophers belong essentially to the area of "natural theology" as it was taught in the eighteenth century. ... It may be too strong to say that they have been working with the religious language learned in Sunday school, but the theologian cannot help feeling that the most serious problems of faith have not been dealt with when the logical difficulty of saying "There is a God" or "God exists", is pointed out.[62]

Elsewhere, van Buren makes a curious admission:

> Either the "God" of which Christians have tried to speak is the God of grace and self-revelation, or he is the neutral "it" of natural theology. The "divine being" of the cognitive approach is not easily assimilable to Pascal's "Dieu d'Abraham, Dieu d'Isaac, Dieu de Jacob, non des philosophes et - des - savants."[63]

It is one thing to find "the neutral 'it' of natural theology" meaningless and non-existent. It is quite another thing to hold that because the "God" of natural theology is dead, the word "God" is dead,[64] and

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62. ibid, p. 104

63. ibid, pp. 98-99

64. ibid, p. 103.

therefore that language about the "God of grace and self-revelation" is really nothing but language about human existence in disguise. Van Buren never begins to ask what the word "God" might mean in the language of faith. He assumes - from the failure of natural theology! - that the language of faith can get by without it.

I have tried to argue that the word "God" refers to a "status" - the status of being the ultimate authority over human existence. Consequently all language about God does involve a reference to man. This is not to say, however, that language about God is reducible to language about man. Furthermore, the word "God" is also a name of that which has the status "God". Except possibly in nihilism, the class of "gods" cannot be empty. There may only be one member of this class; there may be many. Man may even be his own god. Nevertheless, theological language is always language "about" that which bears the title "God". It is never simply language-about-human-existence in disguise. The "factual" element in theological language is no more expendable than its self-involving characteristics.

7. Conclusion

It has been objected to the thesis that I have advanced in this chapter that my position misrepresents the traditional intention of Christian theology.[65] Theologians, it is held, are primarily concerned to make statements about ultimate reality. The self-involving characteristics of theological statements are secondary to their metaphysic. Statements like "Money is his god" are only metaphors.

I do not dispute the fact that some theologians have attempted to make statements which they have intended as descriptions of a reality which lies beyond and above empirical reality. Theologians have used religious language to make purely metaphysical statements. What I do maintain is that statements such as these are not the fundamental assertions upon which theology is constructed.

The difficulty with the "metaphysical" theologian's position is this: If theology starts from

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65. The objection has been advanced in private discussion by Mr. Ian Watson, an Oxford graduate student.

the premise that there is a being with certain characteristics, such as omniscience, omnipotence, and so on, it is logically impossible to establish convincingly that God is the legitimate recipient of man's adoration and trust. This is the old question of the autonomy of value. One cannot derive an "ought" from an "is". D.D. Evans has put it more precisely by showing that no language which is not self-involving entails language which is self-involving. Applying it to the problem of religious language he says:

> Human commitments, attitudes or feelings are somehow involved in the meaning of religious language; no genuinely religious utterance is entailed by a mere statement of fact.[66]

It would be illegitimate to conclude from this that theological statements have no reference to a being who is called "God". Obviously, theological statements are intended to make such a reference. What must be denied is that metaphysical utterances qua statements of fact can serve as the fundamental assertions of theology. Theology cannot be justified by showing that a being answering a certain description

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66. Evans, op.cit., p.57

exists.

Justice cannot be done to the peculiar logic of theological statements unless it be assumed that what I have called the "theological use" of theological language is logically primitive to either a metaphysical use or an "existential", "self-involving" or "anthropological" use of theological language. Statements such as "God is omnipotent" are theological insofar as they are derived from propositions referring to God as the legitimate recipient of man's worship. Statements such as "Man is a sinner" are theological insofar as they are derived from statements about man's relation to God.

The situation here has logical parallels with the suggestion advanced by P. F. Strawson concerning the relation of body and mind. Strawson maintains that the concept of a "person" is a "primitive concept" to which both material object predicates (e.g. "weighs one hundred and fifty pounds") and personal predicates (e.g. "thinks") are applicable. Strawson denies that the concept of a person is a logical construction from the concepts of body and mind. Rather, he maintains, the notion of pure consciousness is a logical abstraction

from the primitive concept of a "person".[67]

That theological statements involve both metaphysical and self-involving or "existential" elements is explicitly affirmed by Barth in particular and European neo-Reformation theology in general. My contention that the theological use of religious language is logically primitive to its metaphysical or existential uses is confirmed by Karl Barth when he says:

> The well-known definitions of the essence of God and in particular of His freedom, containing such terms as "wholly other," "transcendence," or "non-worldly," stand in need of thorough clarification if fatal misconceptions of human freedom as well are to be avoided. The above definitions might just as well fit a dead idol. ...The concept of God without man is indeed as anomalous as wooden iron.[68]

Gerhard Ebeling is even more explicit:

> A theology which is oriented towards faith cannot make God its theme without making men its theme; nor make man its theme without making God its theme. For "God and man" are not two themes but one. To separate God and man misunderstands both. ... True knowledge of God is not of God

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67. P. F. Strawson, Individuals (London: Methuen, 1959), Chapter 3.

68. Karl Barth, "The Gift of Freedom", The Humanity of God (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960) p.72

> in himself. For a neutral, objective knowledge of God, which sets him at a distance, is a contradiction in itself. True knowledge of God is of God who is for us and with us.[69]

In this chapter I have attempted to describe the use of theological language and to designate, in general, the form of a fundamental theological assertion. As a paradigm of such an assertion I have examined the statement "Yahweh is God", concentrating on the logical characteristics of the concept "God" with special reference to the problem of the "existence" of God. I have concluded by arguing that the theological use of theological statements is logically primitive in relation to either their metaphysical or existential use.

I have not touched, however, the most important problem in the analysis of theological assertions. Assertions of the form "Yahweh is God" identify the bearer of a given name, in this case "Yahweh", as that which has the status designated by the term "God". The problems involved in making this identification will be the theme of the next chapter.

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69. Gerhard Ebeling, The Nature of Faith (London: Collins; Fontana, 1966) p. 108.

Chapter Four

THE IDENTIFICATION OF GOD

1. Three Kinds of Statements about God

The argument of the last chapter depends on a distinction being made between two uses of the word "God". In the first place, the word is a proper name. Secondly it is a predicate. The bearer of the name "God" is that to which the predicate "God" can be validly applied. It follows from this consideration and from the way in which it is developed in the last chapter, that we must distinguish between three types of theological statements.

In the first place, some statements about God follow from the meaning of the word "God" as a predicate. I will call these utterances "M-statements". Given that the meaning of the predicate "God" involves the relations of "ultimate concern", "value-centre", "standard of certainty" and the like, a number of statements can be made which must be true of that which is identified as God. The statement "God is good", for example, is an M-statement. If to have a God is to have a standard of value, a criterion of what is good, then to say that

something is God is to say that it is good.

Secondly, there are statements which assert that this or that (e.g. "Yahweh") is God; that to which the predicate "God" is applicable. These are statements by which God is identified and I will distinguish them by the term "I-statements". The logic of this type of statement will be the main concern of this Chapter.

Thirdly, given an identification of God, there are other statements about God which I will call "P-statements". A P-statement predicates an attribute (e.g. "is merciful") of that which has been identified as God (e.g. "Allah").

If we are given a statement about God in isolation from other statements which the person who asserts it is willing to make about God, one can not always distinguish it as an "M-statement", an "I-statement" or as a "P-statement". The statement "God is being-itself" is, for Tillich, an I-statement while for Barth it is a P-statement. Tillich identifies God as being-itself. Barth, on the other hand is willing to say that God is being-itself only on the understanding that "being-itself" is predicated of the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ (i.e. the God who is identified by reference to Jesus Christ).

2. The Role of Divine Identification in Theology

To identify God is to assert that the bearer of a given name has divine authority over men. Here the word "name" must be understood in a broad sense, for there are a number of ways in which a god can be identified without reference to any word or set of words which we would ordinarily call a "name". A proposition (or group of propositions) is an identification of God if and only if it provides the criterion by which all further language about God is to be judged.

A god may be identified in one of three ways. The first is by way of definition. God may be defined, for example, as "the supremely perfect being" or as "being-itself". Statements of the form "God is being-itself" may be identifications of God (i.e. definitions) but they may not. It all depends on the role they play in the theological system in which they are uttered. Such a statement is an identification of God only if it is the standard by which all other language about God is judged. It is not an identification of God if it is derived from other propositions about God.

It is important to note that I assume that

there is a distinction between a definition of the word "God" as an I-statement and a definition of the word "God" as an M-statement. An M-statement gives some indication of the kind of language-game that is being played. An I-statement need not. In Niebuhr and Tillich the two types of statements are clearly distinguished. "God is what concerns man ultimately" is, in Tillich an M-statement. "God is being-itself" is an I-statement.

It is also important to note that, if God is identified by definition, an I-statement can also function as an M-statement. If God is identified as, for example, the "supremely perfect being" and no indication is given of the kind of language-game that is being played, we must assume that, for the person who makes this identification, theology is, in Wittgenstinian terms, the language-game with the phrase "supremely perfect being".

Secondly, a god may be identified within the context of certain myths; by the narration of stories in which the god (or gods) is a principle character. It is not necessary that the believer holds these myths to be literally true. He need only hold that the symbolism of the myths provides an adequate criterion of truth for language about his god. The gods of Greek

polytheism, for example, were identified in this way.

Thirdly, if God is not identified mythically or by definition, he must be identified by reference to realities which are empirically given.[1] Thus, "Yahweh is God" is not an empirically given reality in the same sense as the bearer of the name "Moses" is empirically given. Consequently, in the Old Testament, God is identified, not simply as "Yahweh". Yahweh himself is identified in terms of a historical event. He is the God who brought Israel out of Egypt.[2]

> "I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." (Exodus 20:2)

In the Christian tradition, God is identified often, but not always, in the doctrine of the Incarnation. The statement "Jesus Christ is God Incarnate" can, and perhaps should, be understood as the way in which

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1. There is no absolute distinction between this kind of identification and the mythical type. The distinction is necessary to make it clear that definition and empirical reference do not exhaust the possible ways in which a god can be identified.

2. The reference to the Exodus is not simply an identification of God. It is also the event upon which Yahweh bases his claim to Israel's loyalty. cf. Walter Beyerlin, Origins and History of the Oldest Sinaitic Traditions (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965) p. 52

Christians identify God.

God can be identified (less specifically than in the preceding examples) simply by reference to a religious tradition. For example, Moses was given instructions to identify Yahweh to the people of Israel as "the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:15). D. Z. Phillips assumes this kind of identification when he claims that the criterion for speaking of the same God is reference to the same religious tradition.

> To say that one worships the same God as someone else is not to point to the same object, or to be confronted by it. How did Paul, for example, know that the God he was worshipping was the God of Abraham? What enabled him to say this was not an empirical method of verification as in the case of two astronomers who wonder whether they are talking of the same star. What enabled Paul to say that he worshipped the God of Abraham was the fact that, despite the many changes which had taken place in the concept of God, he and Abraham stood in a common religious tradition.[3]

Actually, the problem is more complex than Phillip's remarks would suggest. Not every Christian would agree that the fact that another person stands in the Christian tradition implies that they both

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3. D. Z. Phillips, The Concept of Prayer, pp. 25-26.

have the same God. We saw an example of this in the last chapter. Barth denies that the God of Descartes is the same God who is revealed in Jesus Christ in spite of the fact that Descartes claimed that the God of whom he spoke as the "supremely perfect being" was the God of the Christian tradition.[4] The issue, as far as Barth is concerned, is that the identification of God by reference to the Christian tradition is not specific enough. God, Barth claims, must be identified by reference to God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Descartes' identification, the definition of God as the "supremely perfect being", does not fulfil this requirement. On this basis, Barth claims that the God of Descartes is not the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. On the other hand, there are many Christians who would want to insist that the God who is worshipped in the Christian tradition is the same God who is worshipped by men of faith in other religious traditions. Reference to a common religious tradition, therefore, is neither a necessary nor a sufficient criterion for speaking of the "same" God.

In addition to identifying God by reference

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4. cf. Descartes, Meditations, Preface. Descartes sees his proofs of God's existence as a defense of Christian faith.

to a tradition, God may be identified by reference to a series of events within a tradition as a whole; by a recital of the salvation history of that tradition. Thus Joshua identifies Yahweh, the God of Israel, by recounting the salvation history of the Hebrew people; by referring to the whole series of events in which God was held to have revealed himself to Israel.[5]

Within a given tradition, God may be identified in a number of different ways. There may be no agreement among theologians concerning the basis and criterion of our language about God.

To take an example: H. Richard Niebuhr identifies God by definition. God is being-itself.[6] But if God is identified as being-itself, he cannot be identified by reference to Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the Incarnation must be understood in another way. Consequently, Niebuhr sees Jesus, not as the criterion for language about God, but as the incarnation of radical faith in the God who is being-itself.

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5. Joshua 24: 2-13

6. H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture, p. 38.

> The greatness of his confidence in the Lord of heaven and earth as fatherly in goodness toward all creatures, the consistency of his loyalty to the realm of being, seem unqualified by distrust or by competing loyalty. ... His confidence and his fidelity are those of a son of God - the most descriptive term which Christians apply to him as they contemplate the faith of their Lord.[7]

Karl Barth, whose Christology will be examined later in the chapter, identifies God by reference to Jesus Christ. Consequently the type of Christology which Niebuhr holds is regarded by Barth as heresy.

> The NT Statement of the divinity of Christ may be regarded ... as the apotheosis of a man, a "great man", who as such ... made such an impression upon his environment, that quite inevitably there arose the enthusiastic impression and idea, "He is a God." ... This is the Ebionite Christology, or the Christology historically reconstructed on the lines of Ebionitism.[8]

It is clear, then, that the way in which God is identified is of considerable theological importance. The different ways in which theologians identify God contribute to many theological disagreements. It will not, however, be my purpose to argue for any particular way of identifying God as normative for Christian

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7. ibid, p. 42

8. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, I/1, p. 461.

theology.[9] What is of interest here is the logic of the identification of God rather than its content.

Let me sum up what has to be said about the logic of divine identification in four general remarks:

(1) The role of divine identification in theology is that of what Wittgenstein calls a "paradigm" in a language-game. It is the criterion by which language about God is judged. The logic of the statement "Yahweh is God" can be compared to Wittgenstein's remark about the standard metre bar in Paris.

> There is one thing of which one can say neither that it is one metre long, nor that it is not one metre long, and that is the standard metre in Paris. - But this is, of course, not to ascribe any extraordinary property to it, but only to mark its peculiar role in the language-game of measuring with a metre-rule. ... It is a paradigm in our language-game; something with which comparison is made.[10]

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9. I have not tried to conceal my general sympathy for Barth's position. However my intention in the rest of this chapter is not to justify Barthian theology but to use it in illustrating the logic of divine identification.

10. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, 50. cf. A. McKinnon, "The Meaning of Religious Assertions: A Response to the Positivist Critique", Encounter, Vol. 21 (1960), pp. 398-407. I am indebted to Professor McKinnon for pointing out the relevance of Wittgenstein's remark for theology as well as suggesting the general approach to the problem that I have taken in this chapter.

(2) The way in which God is identified may depend on the context of the identification. In some cases a general reference to a religious tradition may be quite sufficient as an identification of God. Joshua's identification of God as the "God of Israel" followed by a recital of the acts of this God, is adequate to the context in which it is uttered. It distinguishes this God from the other gods of ancient Canaan. No more specific identification is necessary. On the other hand, the disagreement between Barth and Niebuhr is not resolved by reference to the God of the Christian tradition. Both Barth and Niebuhr claim that the God that they identify in different ways <u>is</u> this God. For most theological disputes, a simple reference to a religious tradition is not a sufficiently specific identification of God.

(3) There may be a limit to the specificity with which God can be identified. If the doctrine of the Incarnation is understood as the identification of God in Christian theology, there is such a limit. The Chalcedonian definition of Christological doctrine states that in Christ, humanity and divinity are united <u>without</u> <u>separation</u>. The Christian

cannot, then, specify any particular aspect of the person of Christ which can serve as the standard of language about God. Christ's divinity cannot be abstracted from his total humanity. This point is of particular importance in the Christology of Karl Barth.

(4) As the standard by which language about God is to be evaluated, the identification of God is unfalsifiable. Since the identification of God is the criterion of truth for theological language there is, by definition, no higher criterion of truth on the basis of which it could be falsified.

3. The Logic of Barthian Christology

a. Christology as the Criterion of Theological Validity

The foregoing general remarks on the problem of divine identification can best be understood by examining an instance of this logic at work in the thought of a particular theologian. The Christology of Karl Barth is well suited to this purpose. Barth is conscious of the importance of the problem for theology and his answer to the question of how God is to be identified is a definite one.

The identification of God is, as I established

in the previous section, the standard by which all language about God is to be judged. Barth starts from the premise that God must and has identified himself. "Revelation" is Barth's word for God's act of self-identification. Revelation, Barth declares, is to be found in Jesus Christ.

> Revelation in fact does not differ from the reconciliation that took place in (Jesus Christ). To say revelation is to say "The Word became flesh."[11]

If Jesus Christ is the means by which God is identified, it follows that all language about God must stand under the criterion of Christology. This is, in fact, the standard Barth applies.

In the first place, the doctrines of God the Father and of God the Holy Spirit, are derived from Christology.

> The second article (of the Creed) does not just follow the first, nor does it just precede the third; but it is the fountain of light by which the other two are lit. It is ... susceptible of historical proof, that the Christian Confession arose out of a shorter and indeed probably quite short primitive form, which included only what we confess today in the second article. It is believed that the original Christian

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11. Barth, op.cit., p. 134.

> confession consisted of the three words, "Jesus Christ (is) Lord", to which were only later added the first and third articles. This historical event was not arbitrary. It is also materially significant to know that historically the second article is the source of the whole.[12]

It is important to notice that, for Barth, even the doctrine of Creation has a Christological basis. God is not identified as "Creator of heaven and earth." If this were the case, the procedure of Tillich or Niebuhr would be a proper one for theology. God could be identified as "being-itself" and Christology would be a matter of explaining in what sense "Being-itself" could be said to have "become flesh." Barth is quite consistent here. God is identified by reference to Jesus Christ. Therefore, the doctrine of Creation must be explained Christologically.

Barth expounds the Christological basis of the doctrine in two ways, which I shall distinguish by the terms "hermeneutical" and "theological".

We know God as Creator, Barth claims, because the Bible speaks of him as Creator. This, however, is no doctrine of literal inerrancy, for Barth qualifies

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12. Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline (London: SCM Press, 1949), p. 65.

this statement very strictly. The Bible has no authority in itself. It is authoritative only because and insofar as it testifies to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

> The fact that the Bible gives us a reliable basis for our knowledge and confession, that it tells the truth on which we can rely, on which each individual Christian can confidently build his own conclusions, is itself true in and by reason of the fact that the Bible gives us God's own witness to Himself, that it gives us the witness to Jesus Christ. Its word in all words is this Word. And it is this Word, its witness to Jesus Christ, which makes all its words the infallible Word of God.[13]

Barth's hermeneutic, therefore, is thoroughly Christological. The Bible is authoritative, but only as interpreted - from beginning to end - in terms of its witness to Jesus Christ. It follows that we can speak of a Biblical doctrine of Creation, but only insofar as this doctrine is Christologically interpreted.

> The whole Bible speaks figuratively and prophetically of Him, of Jesus Christ, when it speaks of creation, the Creator and the creature. If, therefore, we are rightly to understand and estimate what it says about creation, we must first see that - like everything else it says - this refers and testifies first and last to Him. ...

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13. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, III/1, p. 23.

> It is true enough that the statement about God the Creator has its infallible basis in the fact that it is in the Bible. But even on this basis it will be seen by us only if we halt before this centre of the Bible, directing the question of its basis to Jesus Christ and allowing Him to answer it.[14]

Barth's theological exposition of the Christological basis of the doctrine of Creation not only supplements but also provides the rationale for his hermeneutical exposition. In brief, Barth contends that in Jesus Christ, God is revealed as Creator.

> The person of Jesus Christ proves that there is a sphere in which God acts and reveals Himself apart from His own sphere; and that there is someone upon whom and with whom He acts, and to whom and through whom He reveals Himself, apart from Himself. The person of Jesus Christ is the proof that although the creature is not a second God beside the One, although it is not of the nature of God and therefore self-existent, it does exist after its own fashion by the will of God. It is the proof that the creature is not excluded and denied, but established and determined by him.[15]

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14. ibid, pp. 23-24.

15. ibid, p. 25 Justice cannot be done to Barth's exposition of the Christological basis of Creation in one short quotation. cf. ibid, pp. 22-34; Church Dogmatics, I/1, pp. 448-453. What is important here is not how Barth establishes his point but that he is logically bound to make the attempt.

First, then, Christology forms the basis and standard of language about God the Father and about God the Holy Spirit. In the second place, as we have already seen, Christology provides the norm for Barth's hermeneutics. The Bible is to be interpreted Christologically throughout. Thirdly, Jesus Christ is the criterion of truth or falsity in attributive propositions about God. This point is of considerable importance. It is often assumed - especially in philosophical critiques of religion - that God can be defined as "an omnipotent, omniscient being who created the world" and that discussion can proceed on this basis. My own reservation about this procedure is that it does not do justice to the self-involving features which are inherent to theology. Barth's objections are different. According to Barth, God is not defined in terms of his omnipotence and his omniscience. He is identified by reference to Jesus Christ. If we are to attribute qualities like omnipotence to God, we can do so only on the basis of his self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

It is worth looking at this notion of omnipotence to see how Barth deals with the problem

of divine attribution. Barth's criterion, here and elsewhere is this: How can the notion of God's omnipotence be understood in the light of His revelation in Jesus Christ?

> Properly speaking the idea of God can have only this divine Subject as its content and the divine predicate must be sought only in this Subject as such, outside of which it can have no existence and cannot therefore become the content of an idea.[16]

In Jesus Christ, God reveals himself in his freedom. Indeed, for Barth, freedom is the distinctive characteristic of God's authority.

> If we enquire how, according to His revelation in Jesus Christ, God's lordship differs in its divinity from other types of rule, then we must answer that it is lordship in freedom.[17]

> God's freedom is the freedom proper to and characteristic of Him. It is freedom not merely to be like the reality different from Himself, but to be as the Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer acting towards it and in it, and therefore as its sovereign Lord. Again, it is His freedom not merely to be in the differentiation of His being from its being, but to be in Himself the One who can have and hold communion with this reality (as in fact He does) in spite of His utter distinction from it.[18]

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16. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, II/1, p. 300

17. ibid, p. 301

18. ibid, p. 304.

Since God is truly free, Barth argues, he is also omnipotent. There is no real possibility that is not God's possibility. In fact, God is the ground and the measure of all possibility.

> It can be said that God can do "everything" only if the "can" is understood to mean that He Himself in His capacity to be Himself is the standard of what is possible, and if the "everything" is understood as the sum of what is possible for Him and therefore genuinely possible, and not simply the sum of what is "possible" in general. God cannot do everything without distinction. He can do only what is possible for Him and therefore genuinely possible. This does not imply any limitation of his omnipotence. Rather, it defines His omnipotence as His and therefore as true omnipotence.[19]

But - and here is the important point for this discussion - it is not any god who is omnipotent, but the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. More particularly, if this God is the omnipotent one, then omnipotence itself is not God. That is, omnipotence is not the criterion by which God is identified.

> The definition of God by the abstract concepts of the infinite, the simple, the immovable, etc., to define Him in terms of power in itself has as its consequence, not merely a neutralisation of the concept of God, but its perversion into its opposite.

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19. ibid, pp. 532-533.

> Power in itself is not merely neutral. Power is evil.
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> . . . . . .
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> But Holy Scripture and the revelation to which it bears witness do not lead us on this dangerous path. In it, it is God who is revealed as full of power and therefore as divine in itself. If we are to continue our previous course, and therefore by the standard of God's self-revelation, we must in all circumstances understand it this way, refusing to reverse subject and predicate.[20]

From the point of view of my analysis of theological statements, Barth's attitude towards the notion of omnipotence is ambiguous. Barth is consistent in denying that the statement "God is omnipotent" is an I-statement. What is not clear is whether it should be considered as an M-statement or a P-statement.

This question is complicated by two factors. In the first place, Barth often gives the impression that he recognizes no M-statements in Christian theology. He talks as if once God has been identified by reference to Jesus, the nature of the language-game that theology is playing takes care of itself. At other times he recognizes that, in relation to Jesus, a number of different language-games can be played. He acknowledges

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20. ibid, p. 524.

that a purely descriptive approach to Jesus is not theology. (cf. Section c. below.) In fact, Barthian theology is coherent only on the assumption that Christian theology is involved in a particular language-game in relation to a particular object which is also played (idolatrously) in relation to other objects.

The critical question is this: Could a person acknowledge something as God while denying that that which he worshipped was omnipotent? Barth suggests that the answer is "No". As we saw, he equates being "full of power" with being "divine in itself". If this is the case, it would follow that "God is omnipotent" is an M-statement. To identify something as God is to identify it as omnipotent. As we shall see in the final chapter, it makes a significant difference to the problem of autonomy whether "God is omnipotent" is to be construed as an M-statement or as a P-statement.

b. The Unfalsifiability of Divine Identification

In my discussion of the problem of the identification of God at the beginning of this chapter, I held that the role that divine identification plays in theology involves its unfalsifiability. There is no

higher standard of language about God by which the identification of God could be judged. Alastair McKinnon, speaking specifically about utterances like "Christ is God", makes the same point:

> The religious believer does not, I submit, perform a measuring operation upon the object of his faith. Such an operation does more than simply treat this object as less than divine. It assumes at the outset that something else (e.g. Aristotle's conception of God or that of Second Isaiah) is the proper touchstone of divinity.[21]

To a great extent, Barth's Christology can be read as a commentary on the point that McKinnon is making. It is in this light that his insistence that Christ's divinity is an analytic - and not synthetic - truth must be understood.

> Jesus is the Lord, because he has it from God, whom he calls his Father, to be the Lord, because with this Father of his, as the Son of this Father, ... he <u>is</u> the Lord - an "is" which, if we are not in a position, with those who at first uttered it, to affirm it, we just deny, but which cannot be derived or proved or discussed, but can only be affirmed in an analytic proposition, as the beginning of all thought about it. In distinction from the assertion of the deification of a man or of the hominisation of a divine idea, <u>the statement of the divinity of Christ is to be understood</u>

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21. A. McKinnon, <u>op.cit.</u>, p. 400.

in the sense that Christ reveals his Father.[22]

Barth develops this point in explicit contrast to what he considers to be the two fundamental Christological heresies: Ebionitism and Docetism. Ebionitism is the attempt, according to Barth, to base the assertion of the divinity of Christ on the unusual personality of Christ and the effect that he had on his contemporaries. Here we have an attempt to identify Christ's divinity with his humanity or, rather, to make his divinity a logical conclusion from the nature of his humanity. Docetism, on the other hand, finds in Jesus Christ the personification of a divine idea. As examples Barth cites "the truth of the community of godhead and humanity" or "the truth of the creation of the world by God's Word and Wisdom." Docetism is fundamentally an attempt to abstract Christ's divinity from his humanity; to recognize Jesus Christ as the personification of an idea about a God who could actually be identified without reference to the incarnation.

The actual circumstance that it was Jesus

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22. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, I/1, p. 465. Italics mine.

> of Nazareth in whom this idea was first seen as a phenomenon, was more or less accidental and indifferent, so indifferent that the concrete humanity of his earthly existence or, finally, even of his historical reality could also be queried.[23]

Barth objects to both of these Christologies on the ground that they are based on a criterion of divinity which is quite independent of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Consequently, both heresies can speak of the divinity of Christ only in a figurative sense.

> These two conceptions or explanations of the statement about the divinity of Christ appear to be in greater contradiction to each other than is really the case. The first regards Jesus as the, or as a, peak of history soaring into superhistory. The second regards him as the sucker of super-history penetrating down into history. According to the first he is the highest phenomenon of human life, according to the second the most perfect symbol of divine presence. Obviously it should not be too difficult to relate these two conceptions dialectically to one another and to reconcile them with each other. They have at least the view in common, that in the NT statement of the divinity of Christ we are, strictly speaking, dealing with a manner of speaking loosely meant and loosely to be interpreted.[24]

It is illuminating to contrast Barth's position with a point that John Wisdom touches on in the course

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23. ibid, p. 461

24. ibid, p. 462.

of a discussion on the logic of religious statements. Wisdom maintains that statements such as "Jesus Christ was God incarnate" are not nonsensical. He supports this contention by considering the statement "In Nero God was incarnate."

> If I say of a cat, "This cat is an abracadabra" I utter a senseless string of words, I don't make a statement at all and therefore don't make an absurd statement. But if I say of a cat which is plainly dead, "In this cat there is life" I make a statement which is absurd because it is against all reason. ... In the same way the words, "In Nero God was incarnate" are not without any meaning; one who utters them makes a statement, he makes a statement which is absurd and against all reason and therefore not beyond the scope of reason. Now if a statement is not beyond the scope of reason then any logically parallel statement is also not beyond the scope of reason. ... The statement "In Jesus God was incarnate" is logically parallel to "In Nero God was incarnate." The latter we noticed is not beyond the scope of reason. Therefore the statement "In Jesus God was incarnate" is not beyond the scope of reason.[25]

However, if the assertion of the divinity of Nero is "against all reason," there must be overwhelming evidence against it. What sort of evidence is relevant?

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25. John Wisdom, "The Modes of Thought and the Logic of God", The Existence of God, ed. John Hick (New York: Macmillan, 1964) pp. 295-296.

Wisdom answers:

> Was Jesus God incarnate? The law in this matter is not as simple nor as definite nor as fully written out in the statutes as we might wish it could be. The question is large, slippery, subtle. But it is not true that nothing is more relevant to it than another, so that nothing supports one answer more than it supports the other. On the contrary, every incident in the life of Christ is relevant to this question as every incident in the life of Nero is relevant to the same question about him.[26]

Wisdom's discussion only makes sense, however, on the assumption that we have a criterion for what would count as "God incarnate" quite apart from the actual person in whom God was incarnate. Wisdom's contention that the deity of Nero is "against all reason" needs to be challenged. It is not at all inconceivable that a tradition should exist in which Nero was looked upon as God incarnate - in which Nero was the criterion for language about God. Such a tradition would - from our point of view - be inhuman and demonic. This judgment, however, is not dictated by "reason" but by the fact that our society has become accustomed to thinking of God as he is

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26. ibid, p. 297.

identified in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. It is our tradition - and not our "reason" - in which we find the criteria for rejecting Nero's divinity. Nero is not God incarnate because Jesus Christ is. There can be no impartial weighing of the evidence in issues like this. We are deluding ourselves if we believe that we can compare Nero and Jesus "objectively" and draw our own conclusions regarding their divinity. Statements in which God is identified are not objectively verifiable or falsifiable. They can only be disputed - explicitly or implicitly - from other criteria for language about God. To have other criteria for language about God is, in many cases if not in all, to have another god. What we can begin to know "objectively" is what kind of a God we would have if the claims of either Jesus or Nero were to be accepted.

c. The Limits of Specificity

If God is identified by reference to something which is empirically given - e.g. historical events or a person - the following question arises: Is this empirically-given person or event <u>itself</u> God? If not, what is it about the event or person that constitutes

its divinity? Can we not be more specific? Can we equate what we mean by "God" with the event or person or, on the other hand, can we abstract what we mean by "God" from that event or person?

The attempt to equate God with the event or person by which he is identified has some affinities with what Barth has called Ebionitism - the "deification of a man." Similarly, the attempt to be more specific about what we mean by "God"; the attempt to abstract "pure divinity" from the concrete event or person by reference to which God is identified, has some affinities with what Barth has called Docetism - the "hominisation of a divine idea." However, these attempts also bear some relation to the heresies commonly associated with the names of Eutyches and Nestorius respectively.

Eutyches was condemned for holding that in the incarnate Christ there was only one nature: divine. Against this, the Council of Chalcedon ruled that Christ had two natures, divine and human which were to be acknowledged without confusion and without change. Nestorius, on the other hand, was condemned because he had disputed the application of the title

theotokos ("Mother of God") to Mary. Mary should be considered the mother only of Christ's human nature, Nestorius taught.

> If anyone wishes to use this word theotokos with reference to the humanity which was born, joined to God the Word, and not with reference to the parent, we say that this word is not appropriate for her who gave birth, since a true mother should be of the same essence as what is born of her.[27]

It seemed to the critics of Nestorius that the distinction upon which his argument rested was a dangerous one. Cyril argued that the view of Nestorius destroyed the unity of the Incarnation.

> So confessing the Word united hypostatically to flesh, we worship one Son and Lord Jesus Christ, neither putting apart and dividing man and God, as joined with each other by a union of dignity and authority - for this would be an empty phrase and no more - nor speaking of the word of God separately as Christ, and then separately of him who was of a woman as another Christ ... .[28]

Against Nestorianism, the Council of Chalcedon decreed that the two natures of Christ were to be

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27. "The First Letter of Nestorius to Celestine", Christology of the Later Fathers, The Library of Christian Classics, Vol. III, ed. E.R. Hardy (London: SCM, 1954) p. 348

28. "The Third Letter of Cyril to Nestorius", Christology of the Later Fathers, p. 350.

acknowledged without division and without separation.

The implication of the Chalcedonian definition for our problem is this: In the first place, the human nature of Christ cannot be made the object of Christian worship. God is not to be equated with the human nature of Christ nor can the issue of his divinity be set to one side in order that we may centre our interest in his humanity.[29] In the second place, it is illegitimate to suppose that we have any criterion beside or above the Incarnation by means of which we can distinguish the divine from the human in Christ. We can neither abstract his divinity from his humanity nor his humanity from his divinity. Nestorianism is not so greatly opposed to Docetism as it may first appear.[30]

Barth's most powerful expression of this limitation of the specificity of theological language is found in his discussion of "God's Language as God's

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29. cf. Paul van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, passim . In spite of van Buren's meticulous attention to the development of Chalcedonian Christology, I fail to see that he avoids this position in that he offers us the human Jesus as the object of our faith and worship.

30. For Barth's discussion of the two nature doctrine cf. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, IV/2, pp. 36-116.

Mystery." Barth stresses that when we speak of revelation we cannot speak of it in abstraction from what he calls its "worldliness."

> When God speaks to man, this happening is never so marked off from the rest of what happens that it might not promptly be also interpreted as a part of this other happening. The Church in fact is also a sociological entity with definite historical and structural features. Preaching in fact is also an address. Sacrament in fact is also a symbol in compromising proximity to all other possible symbols. ... Jesus Christ in fact is also the Rabbi of Nazareth, historically so difficult to get information about, and when it is got, one whose activity is so easily a little commonplace alongside more than one other founder of a religion and even alongside many later representatives of His own "religion". ... The veil is thick. We do not possess the Word of God otherwise than in the mystery of its worldliness.[31]

Barth rejects the notion that the worldliness of revelation is a barrier without which theology would be better off. Revelation is, to Barth, the coming of God to man in man's worldliness. "Were God to speak to us in a non-worldly way, He would not speak to us at all." Revelation is both the "veiling" and the "unveiling" of God, without confusion and without separation.

The facts are not that God was veiled

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31. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, I/1, p. 188.

> from us by some unfortunate disturbance and then unveiled Himself by removing this veil. ... The facts are that God Himself veils Himself and in the very process ... unveils Himself.[32]

Again:

> The worldly form without the divine content is not the Word of God, and the divine content without the worldly form is also not the Word of God. We can neither remain rooted before the worldly form as such, nor fly beyond this and hope to enjoy ourselves still with divine content only.[33]

If theology is to refer to Jesus Christ in identifying that which is truly divine, it must recognize that its identification cannot be made more specific than this. It cannot equate Jesus with God but neither can it abstract what it means by "God" from the concrete revelation of God in Jesus Christ. A theology which transcended these limits in response to philosophical demands for greater specificity would cease to be what Barth, at least, would be willing to admit was Christian theology.

> To grasp the Word of God does not from any standpoint mean being able to discern the connection between the two sides, being able to know or to express, why or how

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32. ibid, p. 192.

33. ibid, p. 200

> far at a given moment it is the veiled Word that signifies unveiling for us or the unveiled that signifies veiling.[34]

d. "Other Gods"

Let us now return to the point that D.Z. Phillips raises concerning the conditions under which it can be said that two individuals have the "same" God. Phillips, it will be remembered, argues that it is a sufficient condition that two individuals belong to the same religious tradition for it to be said that they have the same God. I argued that Phillips' answer oversimplified the problem.

However, Phillips is quite justified insofar as he is denying that we can have a criterion which transcends the particularity of various religious traditions on the basis of which we can compare and judge the language about God which is uttered within these traditions. This point can be seen quite clearly in Barth's treatment of the problem.

Karl Barth has often been accused of a lack of charity, to say the least, towards non-Christian

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34. ibid, p. 199.

religions. Indeed, it is not difficult to find good grounds for such an accusation in Barth's occasional pronouncements concerning other religions.

> The God of Mohammed is an idol like all other idols, and it is an optical illusion to characterise Christianity along with Islam as a "monotheistic" religion.[35]

However unacceptable the arrogant and uncharitable tone of statements like this may be, Barth's position is not without its point. It will be instructive to set the question of charity to one side in order to consider the rationale of Barth's negative attitude to non-Christian religions.

To Barth, any god is "another god", and therefore an idol, if it is a product of human thought. In religion, man worships his own images of God and, therefore, religion is idolatry: unbelief.

> From the standpoint of revelation religion is clearly seen to be a human attempt to anticipate what God in his revelation wills to do and does do. It is the attempted replacement of the divine work by a human manufacture. The divine reality offered and manifested to us in revelation is replaced by a concept of God arbitrarily

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35. Karl Barth, The Knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the Teaching of the Reformation (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938) p. 21.

and wilfully evolved by man.[36]

Barth's argument can be misleading. His phrase, "a concept of God arbitrarily and wilfully evolved by man", may suggest that Barth is rejecting concepts of God as they are held outside the Christian faith.

> The final principles of the various philosophical systems are just as much idols as the idea of the uncanny in the outlook of the animistic religions; and the view of God expressed, say, in Islam is no less defective than absence of any unitary idea or image of God in Buddhism or ancient and modern atheistic movements.[37]

The truth of the matter, however, is that, for Barth, any image of God, Christian or non-Christian, is an idol. Barth manifests the impartiality of his condemnation later on.

> In our discussion of "religion as unbelief" we did not consider the distinction between Christian and non-Christian religion. Our intention was that whatever we said about the other religions affected the Christian similarly.[38]

Barth's point can be illustrated by considering

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36. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, I/2, p. 302.

37. ibid, p. 302

38. ibid, p. 326.

the following example: Philosophical discussions concerning the existence of God often start with a definition of God. The philosopher tries to articulate what he is thinking of when he utters the word "God"; he tries to present his mental image of God in words. The result is that we are offered statements like "God is a personal Mind who created the world and who loves His creatures." One kind of objection to this procedure is philosophical. Wittgenstein, as we saw in Chapter Two, denies that the meaning of a word is what we happen to think of when we utter it. The meaning of a word is its use. The image that comes to our mind when we utter a word may be quite irrelevant to the meaning of that word.[39] The equation of our mental image with the meaning of a word may be quite misleading. In the case of "God" it is misleading in that such a procedure inevitably abstracts the metaphysical from the self-involving elements in theological language.

Barth's point, however, is quite different.

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39. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, 6.

The issue for him is theological. The image that we have of God - be we Christians or non-Christians - is, in fact, an idol. The God that we manufacture in our imaginations is not the God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ. The former is a false God precisely because it is a product of our imaginations. The very possession of an image of God is idolatry.[40] All religion - including Christian religion - is unbelief.

Barth does, of course, speak of the Christian religion as the "true religion". But he speaks of it as "true" only on the basis that Christianity qua religion is first of all unbelief.

> We can speak of "true religion" only in the sense in which we speak of a "justified sinner".[41]

The justification of Christian religion is not something that lies in its own power. The Christian religion is justified only "in the name of Jesus

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40. Except in that God may "elect" our images of him as true knowledge of God. cf. Church Dogmatics, II/1, pp. 179 - 254. This is one of the most problematical aspects of Barthian theology and one which is crucial to the question of the validity of much of Barth's theologizing. It is, however, a side issue to the main argument of this study and will have to be ignored.

41. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, I/2, p. 325.

Christ."[42] It is not that Christians have a superior or truer image of God. All images are idols. The justification of Christian religion is the fact that the true God is the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. True religion is not the religion which forms the most adequate theological images on the basis of the Christian revelation. True religion is that religion which lives by the grace of God as he is revealed in Jesus Christ rather than by the adequacy of its theologizing.[43]

There are, of course, many issues at stake here. Barth's position depends heavily, for example, on his own version of the doctrine of total depravity. This, and other similar issues, are beside the point of our immediate concern. What is the point is Barth's consistent refusal to separate the word "God" from God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. We do not know God apart from the particularity of this revelation. We have no basis upon which we can identify the Christian God with the God of Islam. All religion is unbelief. Only Christianity is true because of God's revelation

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42. cf. ibid, p. 346

43. cf. ibid, pp. 352-357.

in Jesus Christ and insofar as Christians live by the grace and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. The fact that other religions may agree with Christianity that God is personal or that he is transcendent is not a sufficient condition for saying that they worship the same God. Satan is also "personal" and "transcendent".

The question with which, as far as I have been able to discover, Barth does not deal in any detail - and which is crucial to the question here - is this: Granted that the Christian (in the sense of one who identifies God by reference to Jesus Christ) has no basis for equating his God with, say, the God of Islam; does the Christian have a basis for declaring them to be different? As we saw above, there are places where Barth seems to be in no doubt that they are different Gods. Elsewhere he is more cautious, but only because there is a historical and material connection between Islam and Christianity.[44] Barth is on good theological grounds when he resists any attempt to establish the identity of the gods of different traditions by

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44. cf. ibid, p. 828.

trying to transcend the particularity of the way in which God is identified within those traditions. However, if it is impossible to abstract what we mean by God from the particularity of his revelation in Jesus Christ, it is also impossible to equate what we mean by God with that particularity. The divine and the human are united in Christ without separation but also without confusion. Unless the Christian has good grounds for rejecting the God of another tradition as "another god" (as he would, for example, in the hypothetical case of a religious community who looked to Nero as God incarnate) it would seem that the only theologically tenable position for the Christian, in relation to the God of another tradition, is that of a reverent agnosticism. The question as to whether Allah is identical with the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ is one which ultimately lies beyond the competence of theology.

4. Conclusion

The account of the problem of the identification of God in this chapter has been necessarily oversimplified. The oversimplification

has been necessary in order to illustrate, as clearly as possible, the logical structure of divine identification.

The Christian identification of God by reference to Jesus Christ cannot be as clear cut as I have made it appear in my discussion of Barth. Jesus Christ is not someone who stands in a historical, cultural, or religious vacuum. He is, in fact, someone who lived in a particular historical, geographical, and cultural context and - what is most important - identified himself with the religious tradition of Israel. Consequently, the way in which God is identified in the Old Testament (e.g. by reference to the Exodus) is not something quite distinct from the identification of God by reference to Jesus Christ. Even if the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is the ultimately decisive criterion of language about God (and for which, therefore, the logical considerations developed in this chapter apply), this does not rule out the existence of secondary identifications.[45]

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45. For a helpful treatment of this problem cf. W. Pannenberg, "Dogmatische Thesen zur Lehre von der Offenbarung", Offenbarung als Geschichte (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961)

In this respect, language about God has a logical structure and complexity which is similar to language about persons. Consider what Wittgenstein says about personal names:

> The name "Moses" can be defined by means of various descriptions. For example, as "the man who led the Israelites through the wilderness", "the man who lived at that time and place and was then called 'Moses'", "the man who as a child was taken out of the Nile by Pharaoh's daughter" and so on. ...
>
> But when I make a statement about Moses, - am I always ready to substitute some one of these descriptions for "Moses"? I shall perhaps say: By "Moses" I understand the man who did what the Bible relates of Moses, or at any rate a good deal of it. But how much? Have I decided how much must be proved false for me to give up my proposition as false? Has the name "Moses" got a fixed and unequivocal use for me in all possible cases? - Is it not the case that I have, so to speak, a whole series of props in readiness, and am ready to lean on one if another should be taken from under me and vice-versa?[46]

In relation to our immediate problem Wittgenstein's remarks show that there is no problem - in principle - for God to be identified by reference to a whole series of events; a series which may have no definite limits and whose individual elements we are

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46. Wittgenstein, op. cit., 79.

prepared to dispense with if the need arise (e.g. Are Christians still willing to cite the story of Jonah and the whale as one of the events by which God is identified?). Consequently, although we may have some ultimate criterion for language about God (e.g. Jesus Christ in Christianity, the Koran in Islam) this does not mean that other points of reference may not have some bearing on the understanding of the word "God" in a given tradition. In Christianity, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ does not make the Exodus tradition superfluous. It only makes it secondary.

This concludes my discussion of the identification of God. The problem that remains to be discussed is this: How does a believer come to accept a given criterion as the ultimate identification of God? How does a believer recognize God? This will be the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Five

THE RECOGNITION OF GOD

1. Religious Experience as the Direct Experience of God

The question of the recognition of God is intimately tied to the question of religious experience. The notion of religious experience is, however, an obscure one. The phrase refers to a different kind of experience in almost every philosopher or theologian who appeals to it. While I will want to insist that there is an empirical dimension in theology - and therefore that the notion of religious experience is a valid one - the phrase carries connotations which I do not wish to endorse. Therefore, it will be necessary to undertake a critique of religious experience as it is often understood before expounding a constructive view in relation to the problem of divine recognition.

The view of religious experience which I wish to criticize is that which holds that theology is based on man's direct experience of a non-empirical

reality to which he gives the name "God". A prominent spokesman for this view is John Baillie, whose position we will briefly examine.

Baillie holds that our knowledge of God is not inferential but direct. There is, in human experience, something that can be called "the encounter with God".

> It is not as the result of an inference of any kind, whether explicit or implicit, whether laboriously excogitated or swiftly intuited, that the knowledge of God's reality comes to us. It comes rather through our direct personal encounter with Him in the Person of Jesus Christ His Son our Lord.[1]

But in what sense do we encounter God in the Person of Jesus Christ? Baillie uses the word "Presence" to articulate the way in which a believer experiences God.

> For the New Testament, as for the Old, God is One who is known directly in His approach to the human soul. He is not an inference but a Presence. He is a Presence at once urgent and gracious. By all whom he finds, and who in Christ find Him, He is known as a Giver. The knowledge of God of which the New Testament speaks is a knowledge for which the best

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1. John Baillie, Our Knowledge of God (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 143.

> arguments were but a sorry substitute and to which it were but a superfluous addition.[2]

Baillie is not holding, it is important to note, that there is any such thing as a "pure" experience of God. God is present to man in the form of a "mediated immediacy".

> Though we are more directly and intimately confronted with the presence of God than with any other presence, it does not follow that He is ever present to us apart from all other presences. And, in fact, it is the witness of experience that only 'in, with, and under' other presences is the divine presence ever vouchsafed to us.[3]

2. Critique of Religious Experience

To Baillie, then, religious experience is an experience of the empirical with something extra - a Divine Presence - added. Baillie's view must be treated with respect. It could be suggested that this position is a convenient - and protected - defense for a kind of discourse which has become indefensible. Indeed, Baillie's insistence that religious experience is unique seems to close the door on any rational

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2. ibid, p. 126

3. ibid, p. 178

dialogue between faith and unbelief.

> We are holding that our knowledge of God rests...on the revelation of His personal Presence as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. ... Of such a Presence it must be true that to those who have never been confronted with it argument is useless, while to those who have it is superfluous.[4]

It would, however, be particularly unedifying to take this short way with Baillie. In the first place, his stress on the uniqueness of religious experience is not completely consistent with another aspect of his argument. Baillie holds that some non-believers have indeed experienced the Presence of God in the form of a sense of the holy or of moral obligation.[5] For such non-believing "believers", it is difficult to see how Baillie could maintain that, since they have experienced this Presence, argument is "superfluous".

The main reason for avoiding the short way with Baillie, however, is this: While Baillie is addressing himself to the problem of religious knowledge and is defending it by an experience which - for those who have not had it - is as problematical as the

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4. ibid, p. 132

5. cf. ibid, pp. 243-245

"knowledge of God" for which he is seeking to provide an apologetic, it is not true that Baillie is driven to this position by the failure of more respectable methods. Baillie is not just inventing his "sense of a Presence". His position is expressed in a way which is reminiscent of the way in which many "simple believers" who have never heard of the problem of religious knowledge would and do seek to articulate what their faith means to them.

There are, however, a number of questions that have to be raised concerning Baillie's position. The first is a question which I shall raise, but not answer. It is a question that each believer can only answer for himself. Let us grant that Baillie is referring to an experience which at least some religious believers have had. Does Baillie's articulation of that experience - involving as it does a non-empirical "Presence" - accurately represent what the believer actually experiences? Is it the case that the believer is endowed with something that, as C. B. Martin points out in his critique of Baillie,[6] looks very much like a

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6. cf C.B. Martin, "A Religious Way of Knowing", New Essays in Philosophical Theology, pp. 80-81.

sixth sense? I leave the question there. It is one that can only be answered by the individual believer on the basis of a Humean introspection and examination of his memory. Can the believer find, beside the various empirical items in the memory of his religious experience, a non-empirical item which can be labelled "the Presence of God"? Later in this chapter I will offer an account of religious experience which, I believe, has the same experience in mind as does Baillie, but which involves no appeal to extra-empirical data.[7]

As far as this chapter is concerned, however, the real issue involved in Baillie's position is neither the reality of the experience which he describes nor the validity of Baillie's description of it. It is, rather, the epistemological status of that experience

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7. It might be objected that it is unfair to Baillie to accuse him of relying on a "sixth sense". He does, after all, relate the "Presence" to one's experience of moral obligation or sense of the holy - experiences which do not, strictly speaking, rely on a sixth sense. I should be quite willing to grant the validity of such an objection. It is important, nevertheless, to raise the question of the suggestion in Baillie's position that a "sixth sense" is involved in religious experience. Baillie is not alone in talking this way.

in relation to religious knowledge. In what sense is a man's faith to be based upon an experience of the type that Baillie describes?

The experience, it can be granted, does have what might be described as a "biographical priority". To the question "Why do you believe?" a believer may reply "Because I have experienced God", reporting how it is that he came to be committed to his faith. As we shall see later, this is not the logical basis of his faith. The believer does not experience something and conclude from its attributes that it is God. Rather, he experiences something as God, as the source of all meaning in and authority over his life. The former is an impossibility. Since God, by definition, transcends what may be included in any experience of him, no experience can contain adequate criteria for applying the word "God" to the object of that experience. As Barth says:

> In the world which is the world of men, in which everything is problematical, everything must first be tested, and certainly nothing is to be tested with the result that it is identical to God... .[8]

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8. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, I/1, p. 513.

What has to be denied here is that religious experience can serve as the logical basis of theology. To be more precise, a theology which looked to religious experience as its logical basis (i.e. as the point from which its propositions were derived or against which they were tested) would be in danger of distorting what has traditionally passed for Christian theology.

There are two ways in which philosophical analysis of theological language can go wrong. The first, and most commonly recognized way, is by attributing to religious believers propositions which they do not hold. I do not believe that the thinker who bases theology on religious experience errs in this direction. The second source of error in philosophical analysis - and it is probably an error of which no analysis is completely free - is to give a distorted picture of the object of its analysis. It may lay great emphasis on aspects of religious belief which play a minor role in theology itself while ignoring other aspects which are of great importance to the religious believer.[9]

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9. These remarks presuppose some standard of what an undistorted theology would be. Of course

It is here that philosophies and theologies of religious experience have the greatest tendency to go astray.

This is the point that arose in Chapter One when we examined John Wilson's theory of religious experience as the Christian answer to the challenge of the verification principle. Wilson errs, not in maintaining that there is such a thing as religious experience, but in supposing that it is of such great importance to the religious believer that the philosopher can legitimately demand "a clear and unanimous programme, describing some approved method of obtaining the experiences."[10] Wilson's demand may be legitimate for the theologies of some Methodist sects, where religious experience is stressed. It is completely out of place, for example, in Roman Catholicism, where religious experience receives

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there is no absolute standard. The Bible or the Creeds provide the best guidelines (in Christian theology) as to what is of major importance. A good theology, as well as a good philosophy of religion, will seek to reflect the Biblical and Credal emphases.

10. John Wilson, Language and Christian Belief, p. 30.

more distrust than emphasis.[11] Barth puts the point more strongly when, speaking of religious experience as the logical basis of religious belief, he says:

> We might very well take the responsibility of saying Yes at this point, if we were dealing not with the criterion of dogmatics, but with the principle of a philosophy or view of the world, not with the proclamation of the Church at all, but with a community of emotional sensationalists whose game was emotion.[12]

D. M. Baillie, brother of John Baillie, is also critical of religious experience from this point of view. He points out that interest in religious experience on the part of theologians is a post-Schleiermachian development and argues that faith in God must precede religious experience.[13] F. R. Tennant agrees:

> We may believe in the Beyond, or in God, on less direct grounds reached by more circuitous paths; and then reasonably interpret numinous or religious experience

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11. cf. Father Weigel's remark (R.M. Brown and G. Weigel, An American Dialogue (Garden City: Doubleday, 1960), pp. 174-192) that what distinguishes Protestants from Catholics is the Protestant emphasis on personal and immediate experience of God. This remark, coming as it does from a Roman Catholic, is a bit of a shock to the Protestant who tends to take personal experience of God as an essential element in religious belief.

12. Barth, op.cit., p. 247.

13. D. M. Baillie, Faith in God (New Edition, London: Faber & Faber, 1964) Chapter III.

> in terms of the theistic concept and world view: on the way back, so to say, as distinguished from the way out...[14]

The reason why distortion is likely to arise in a theology which bases itself on religious experience is that it tends to overlook the importance of the question of the identification of God. This oversight may simply produce distortion. It may, on the other hand, be disastrous.

The most John Baillie, for example, could be accused of is a relatively minor distortion. He takes pains to emphasize that Christian theology must be centred in the person of Christ. But at a decisive point in his argument, Baillie is ambiguous. Baillie's "Presence" is found pre-eminently in Christ, but also in other places. What Baillie does not indicate is whether the statement "Jesus Christ is God Incarnate" is synthetic or analytic. Do we know the divinity of Christ because we discover the "Presence" in our encounter with him or do we speak of the "Presence" in other experiences because they "testify" to Jesus Christ? Baillie speaks as if it were the former - as if God were identified as

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14. F.R. Tennant, Philosophical Theology Vol. I, (Cambridge: University Press, 1928), p. 311.

"Presence". If this is the case, Baillie is guilty of separating the divine and human natures of Christ, of identifying God in distinction (but not, it must be insisted, in abstraction) from the total humanity of Jesus Christ.[15]

The result of taking religious experience as the logical basis of theology becomes disastrous when the focus of attention moves from the object of experience to the experience itself - as if the experience were the important thing and its object, God, the means to the end. In taking his experience as the "measure of all things", man implicitly identifies his experience, and therefore himself, as God. It is at this point - but not before this point - that Christian theology and empiricism must part company.

3. Religious Experience and the Recognition of God.

God is not identified by religious experience. He is recognized by it. Man doesn't experience God in the same way as he experiences, say, a table. He doesn't

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15. cf. John Baillie, op.cit., pp. 185-187.

experience something which is known from its attributes to be God. Rather, he experiences something as God - as that which is ultimately significant for him and as that which claims absolute sovereignty over him. Confronted with this ultimate significance and absolute claim he either acknowledges the object of his experience as God or he tries to avoid this acknowledgment as in Francis Thompson's poem The Hound of Heaven.

In relation to John Baillie's position, it is not enough that the believer experiences a "Presence". He must experience it as God. In his own way, Baillie recognizes this.

> He is a Presence at once urgent and gracious. By all whom He seeks He is known as a Claimant; by all whom He finds, and who in Christ find Him, He is known as a Giver.[16]

There is no necessity here to go beyond the empirical in talking about the "given" of religious experience. The theological dimension of experience is not some extra-empirical datum requiring a sixth sense, but the awareness of significance and obligation which accompanies all experience. We do not live in

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16. Baillie, op.cit., p. 126.

terms of empirical "flat constatives", so to speak. We experience things and events in terms of their significance for us and in terms of the responsibilities they impose upon us. This being granted, there can be no real objection to speaking of experiencing something as ultimately significant.[17]

It will be objected that what Christians mean by God is not something empirical. An experience of the God in whom Christians believe would have to be an experience of a non-empirical sort. To this objection, I would want to answer that it is doubtful - even to the believer - whether God can be experienced in this direct way. I want to suggest that the experience of God - which believers undoubtedly have - can be more adequately described as an overwhelming sense of the ultimate significance of God's revelation (which is empirically given) than as the experience of some non-empirical "Presence". We do not experience

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17. I don't think that what I have described here is too different from I.T. Ramsey's "cosmic disclosures". Ramsey analyzes "disclosures" as involving "discernment" and "commitment"; notions which are very similar, if not identical to what I mean by "significance" and "obligation". cf. I.T. Ramsey, Religious Language, (London: SCM, 1957) Chapter I.

God, as Barth says, except in the form of worldliness. J. C. McLelland puts it this way:

> The Christian meets God hidden within the true humanity of Jesus Christ, and must not search for some further proof, some naked divinity better than that. He is called to be content with signs, outwardly human, "secular" - but to the eyes of faith, signs of the presence of God.[18]

The Christian does not necessarily experience God in his transcendence. Indeed, it is difficult to know what the experience of transcendence could be. Transcendence (by definition?) cannot be experienced. What is required is that the direct object of the Christian's experience should point beyond itself. What is directly present to the Christian in his religious experience is not God. The object of his experience is Church proclamation, Scripture, sacrament, and so on. These objects of experience point beyond themselves to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, in turn, directs the attention of the believer to the Father. When the believer seeks to articulate the sense of significance and authority that he finds in Jesus

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18. J.C. McLelland, "The Mundane Work of the Spirit", Theology Today, Vol.XXII (1965), p.206.

Christ, he discovers that this significance points beyond the world of sense. But what lies "beyond" is not itself experienced. It is in Jesus Christ, and not in some amorphous "Presence" that, the Christian faith claims, God is to be recognized.

It may be objected that while we experience things and events as significant (or as involving us in commitments and responsibility) this significance is not in the events themselves, but that we invest significance in the events that we experience. This allegation is not without its point, but neither does it do justice to the way in which I experience things or events. I do not choose the significance that an experience has for me. I experience events as possessing significance. The significance of an event may be intimately personal. I.T. Ramsey's example of the judge and defendant who recognize each other as old friends amidst the impersonality of the courtroom is such an event.[19] The significance which the two men experience is intensely personal. However, this is not to say that the words "subjective"

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19. I.T. Ramsey, op.cit., pp. 19-20.

or "arbitrary" would be appropriate to characterize their sense of significance. The significance is there - it is "given" - but it could only be discerned by someone who had access to other facts: in this case, the previous relationship of the judge and the defendant.

Some events have a significance which transcends the purely personal. A dramatic example of this was the Cuba crisis of 1962. The whole world experienced this event as invested with a profound and - for a time - a deeply shocking significance. It would seem ludicrous to characterize as "subjective" or "arbitrary" what the whole international community experienced in that event.

Experiences are not, of course, significant in themselves. They are significant in relation to other things or events. The significance which the judge and defendant experience in Ramsey's example depends on the biographies of those two men. The significance which the world experienced in the Cuba crisis was intimately related to the facts of the international affairs at the time and to its possible consequences for the future of mankind. To speak of

an "experience of ultimate significance" is not, then, to speak of something that is significant in itself. It is to speak, rather, of something whose significance is broadly related to the whole life of man and which he experiences as, for want of a better expression, the criterion of all significance.

4. The Holy Spirit and the Recognition of God

In a sense, these remarks on religious experience have begged the question of the recognition of God. They answer the biographical question of how the believer comes to recognize something as God, but they leave another question unanswered. We live in a world in which there is no unanimous answer to the question "What is God?". On what basis can a believer say that his God is the true God?

In response to this question, I can only repeat the answer which has been developed in the last three chapters. The believer experiences something as God: He is faced with its claim to his loyalty and grasped by a sense of its significance. But the believer is not and cannot be in a position to put what he experiences as God to the test. To imagine

that there might be a criterion by which God could be judged is to imagine that there might be other gods.

This answer, however, is eminently unsatisfactory. By what right can I set my judgment - or my experiences - above that of other men who worship other gods. It seems that I must either set myself up as the judge of God - and therefore as God - or admit that Jesus Christ is the Incarnation of God only for me and for whoever happens to agree with me. Only the true God can know that he is the true God.

This may seem to be an unsatisfactory situation, but it is a situation with which the religious believer must live. There are no "objective" criteria for testing religious experience. Religious experience can be tested only by faith. This comes out quite plainly in Barth's comments on the Holy Spirit. Man, according to Barth, is not capable of distinguishing the true God from other gods. That man does recognize the true God is possible only by the grace of God; only by God himself opening the eyes of the believer to the Truth.

In the OT and NT the general expression

> for God's spirit, the Holy Spirit, is God Himself, in so far as He is able, in an inconceivably real way, without therefore being less God, to be present to the creature, and in virtue of this relation to Himself to vouchsafe life to the creature. The creature indeed requires the Creator in order to live. He thus required relation to Him. But this relation he cannot create. God creates it through his own presence in the creature, i.e. in the form of the relation of Himself to Himself. The Spirit of God is God in his freedom to be present to the creature, and so to create this relation, and thereby to be the life of the creature.[20]

Barth's appeal to the Holy Spirit is not, however, an apologetic device. It cannot be. Nowhere is the circular nature of Christian theology more apparent than here. There is no guarantee of the Spirit apart from its witness to Jesus Christ. If I am able to recognize God in Jesus Christ only by virtue of the witness of the Holy Spirit, I can only know that I have the Spirit because I have recognized God in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is nothing but "the Spirit of Christ". As McLelland says

> The Holy Spirit does not correspond to "human spirit" but to "Spirit of Christ". He does not witness to himself by working on our spirits, giving ecstatic experiences such as may be found in all

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20. Barth, op.cit., pp. 515-516.

> religions. Rather, he witnesses to Jesus Christ by working on our whole humanity, giving new depth and openness.[21]

The importance of McLelland's remark should be fully appreciated. What is essential in Christian belief is the confession "Jesus is Lord". How a man comes to make this confession, be the cause a vivid religious experience or the result of a Christian upbringing, is relatively unimportant. There are no "right" reasons for becoming a Christian. That the confession is made - whatever the biographical "facts" may be - is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is a theological necessity. Christians are under an obligation to assert something which, "objectively" speaking, they have no right to assert. That which Christians acknowledge as God claims to be universal - the God of all mankind. In the tension between their obedience to a God who claims universality and their recognition of their own fallibility, they must speak of the grace of God, in the form of the Holy Spirit, as the only possible basis upon which God can be recognized.

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21. McLelland, op.cit., p. 207

Chapter Six

AUTONOMY AND ITS LIMITS

1. Autonomy and the Existence of God

The question of the autonomy of theology as it has been discussed in philosophical circles in recent years is largely, if not completely, the question of how the proposition "God exists" is to be understood. Hick notes that "autonomists" seem to regard the proposition as a spurious one.[1] D. D. Evans, who has pioneered the research into the self-involving nature of religious language, maintains that even after the self-involving nature of theological language has been noted, the question of God's existence still remains.[2]

From an historical point of view, Hick's and Evans' insistence on the importance of the proposition "God exists" is quite understandable. Ever since Aquinas - and possibly since Anselm - it has been generally assumed that the justification of theology and the justification

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1. John Hick, Faith and the Philosophers, pp. 237 - 238

2. D. D. Evans, The Logic of Self-Involvement, pp. 22 - 24.

of the proposition "God exists" are one and the same. This assumption, as I have tried to show in the course of this study, is highly questionable. Let me try to restate the problem more directly.

In the first place, propositions of the form "X exists" depend for their truth value on the meaning of the word 'X'. Take, for example, the proposition "Witches exist." If by the word "witch", I understand a woman who possesses magical powers and who rides through the air on a broom stick, I am inclined to deny the proposition "Witches exist." When it is pointed out to me that a witch is, in fact, an adherent of a pre-Christian pagan cult which still survives; when I see an adherent of that cult interviewed on television; when I understand that the unbelievable stories about witches arose out of distorted reports by Christians about the rites of that cult,[3] my attitude to the proposition "Witches exist" is radically changed. I see the whole question in a new light.

Prior to the question, "Does God exist?" then, is the question "What does 'God' mean?". Here is where

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3. cf. Margaret A. Murray, The God of the Witches (Background Books, 1962)

the real dispute lies. It is my contention that, when this question is properly analyzed, it can be seen that the justification of the proposition "God exists" and the justification of theology are two different, but related, issues.

First: The meaning of the word "God" is not what I happen to think of when the word "God" is uttered. The question of the meaning of a word is seldom so subjective. From the philosophical side of things we can say, with Wittgenstein, that the meaning of a word is its use in language, and not necessarily the mental image that the word conjures up in my mind. Theologically we can say, with Barth, that if I identify God by reference to my image of Him, I am worshipping an idol. There are few, if any, believers who would be willing to say that they have adequate mental images of God. But in order to admit this, the believer must have some reason for judging his mental image to be inadequate, some standard of what is meant by God which is independent of his mental image.

To turn to the use of the word "God", I have tried to call attention to the fact that the word "God" is used both as a proper name and as a predicate. In

this respect the word "God" is logically similar to the word "Father". My son can call me by the name "Father" because my relation to him is of the type described by the predicate "father". Similarly, the name "God" is given to that which stands in the relation "God" to man.

The meaning of the predicate "God" is of decisive significance. A man's "god" is that to which he gives, or acknowledges as the recipient of, his unqualified loyalty.[4] It has been my contention that man, in fact, has objects to which he gives his unqualified loyalty irrespective of whether he uses the word "God" or not. Even the atheist has his gods.[5]

The question "Does God exist?" is too simple to serve as the starting point for theological discussion. The gods exist. There are things to which men give their unqualified loyalty. These are the gods.

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4. A polytheist would have to be described differently. His loyalty to each god is unqualified, but only within a particular aspect of his life. To do justice to the logic of polytheism would require considerably more attention than I have been able to give it here.

5. This is not to say that "Every man really believes in God." Every man has his gods, but the god in which a man believes is not necessarily the God of the Christian faith.

This does not, of course, dispose of the question "Does the Christian God exist?". Does that which is identified by Christians as God really exist? Again the question is not as clear as it first appears.

The problem is to know what to do with this word "exist". In one sense, of course the God of Christian faith exists. Christians worship "something" and that "something" is found in, but is not identical with, Jesus Christ. It is not possible to worship without there being an object of one's worship. One can't worship nothing.

Here is the crux of the argument. A man can worship any one of a whole range of possible objects of worship. He can worship, say, "Reason". In this case, the question of existence doesn't arise. The validity of his worship is not dependent on his adhering to the proposition "Reason exists". It "exists" only as an ideal. The worshipper need not posit a spiritual entity which bears the name "Reason" in order to hold that his loyalty to Reason is legitimate. Reason need not be reified in order to be worshipped. The question of the existence of Reason is really a distraction and an irrelevancy.

This works well for "Reason". What about

"the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ"? Here the situation is very confusing. The "existence" which Christians ascribe to their God is, in the first place, distinct from creaturely existence. He is not an entity in the universe but, as Tillich puts it, "the ground of being". Neither does he exist, say, as "Reason" exists. In the Christian scheme of things even ideals like "reason" are related to God as part of his creation. If "existence" is defined by the existence of physical objects or even by the existence of ideals, then, for the Christian as for the atheist, God does not exist.

What, then, is the difference between the Christian and the atheist? Basically there are two. In the first place, they identify God differently. The Christian identifies God by reference to Jesus Christ. The atheist identifies the legitimate object of human loyalty as "Humanity" or as "Reason" or as "the evidence of our senses". This kind of difference cannot be resolved. To hold something as God is to deny that there is a higher object of loyalty to which common appeal could be made.

Secondly, the atheist and the Christian differ in what they ascribe to the object of Christian worship. Given that the question of the existence of God is not

a real question, the atheist would want to say, presumably, that the God whom the Christian worships is not all-powerful, not something that loves mankind, not the ground of being, and so on. The difference between the Christian and the atheist is not resolved by rejecting the question of God's existence. The question is simply restated by calling into question some of the things which Christians predicate of the object of their worship.

The issues that separate Christian and non-Christian are not at all simple. The problem that is of interest here is whether these differences can be resolved. Ultimately, the answer is no. The criterion which the Christian must use in deciding whether a particular predicate (e.g. omnipotence) is to be attributed to God, must be consistent with his commitment to that which he has identified as God (i.e. "that which is revealed in Jesus Christ"). He is answerable for his theological statements to that which he has acknowledged as God. The atheist, in denying the things that a Christian says about God, bases his denial on a far different criterion (e.g. lack of empirical evidence, the problem of evil). It is difficult to see how the

Christian, consistently with his acknowledgement of God, could accept the atheist's criteria as the decisive court of appeal in questions of what is, and what is not, to be said about the object of his worship.

The proposition "God exists" has no clear meaning. The word "God" is a title which may be given to any one of a number of possible objects of man's unqualified loyalty. The meaning of the proposition "God exists" depends upon the identification of God. "Zeus exists", "Yahweh exists" and "Reason exists" are quite different propositions, yet all may be seen as more specific articulations of the general proposition "God exists".

Furthermore, the word "exists" has no clear meaning. Consider the following propositions: "Tame tigers exist." "There exists a number x such that...." "There is such a thing as integrity." "Was there a cat in Goldfinger's house?" In each of the propositions we talk about the existence of something. In only one case, however, are we talking about the "furniture" of the universe. Only in the case of "tame tigers" are we talking of an entity which exists alongside

other entities like tables and chairs. The proposition "There is such a thing as integrity" might be used to remind somebody that expediency wasn't a sufficient justification for a particular action. In the case of Goldfinger's cat, we are asking a contextual detail about the novel Goldfinger. It is not a question of whether somewhere, in addition to tame tigers, tables and chairs, there is an entity called "Goldfinger's house" and whether in it there is another entity called "cat". In none of these cases do we have any difficulty with the existence claim. The context in which the existence claim is made makes its meaning quite obvious.

The situation is quite different in the case of the proposition "God exists". The context does not make clear what work the word "exists" is doing. It is only clear that none of our previous examples can provide a paradigm. We don't want to say that God exists alongside tame tigers, tables and chairs, but neither do we want to speak of his existence in terms of numbers, ideals or fictional characters. We may know in what senses we are not predicating existence to God, but we are not clear about the sense in which

we do say "God exists".

The answer to this problem that my analysis suggests is this: The proposition "God exists" is a shortened way of articulating the differences which exist between Christian (or Moslem or Jew) and atheist. As a kind of shorthand, the proposition is misleading. It suggests that what we are saying of God is logically similar to what we might say of tame tigers. In fact the difference between affirming and denying the proposition "God exists" is quite different from the difference between affirming and denying the proposition "Tame tigers exist". The real difference between believer and atheist involves a different answer to the question "What is the proper object of man's ultimate loyalty?" and a different answer to the question "What can be truly predicated of the object of the believer's worship?"[6]

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6. It is worth comparing my account of the difficulties involved in the proposition "God exists" with that of John Hick (cf. The Existence of God, pp. 1 - 2). In spite of the difficulties Hick prefers to retain the proposition as the most convenient way of expressing the difference between believer and non-believer. My objection to Hick is that, having admitted the difficulties, he proceeds to treat the proposition as logically similar to "Tame tigers exist" in admitting verification as a relevant procedure.

2. Meaning, Identification, and Autonomy.

At the beginning of Chapter Four, I distinguished between three kinds of theological statements. The first type, M-statements, follow from the meaning of the word "god". If a person's God is, by definition, his "value-centre", then the statement "God is good" is an M-statement. It follows from the nature of the language-game which the word "god" is used in playing.

The second type of theological statement, the I-statement, identifies that which bears the title "God". In Chapter Four I examined the logic of this type of statement with special reference to Barth's Christological identification of God.

The third type of theological statement is the P-statement. A P-statement follows, not only from the kind of language-game which is played in doing theology, but also from the particularity of a given identification of God. In Christian theology, the statement "God is love" is a P-statement insofar as the Christian holds that his knowledge of God's love is dependent on his knowledge of Jesus Christ.

When we apply this distinction to the question

of the autonomy of theology, we are faced with a complicated situation. The relation of P-statements to this question I will leave to the next section. Let us now look at M-statements and I-statements as they relate to the question of autonomy.

Are M-statements autonomous? At first glance, it would seem that they were. If they are logically true, i.e. if they follow from the rules of the language-game, it would seem that they are unfalsifiable and, therefore, autonomous.

This answer would, however, oversimplify the issues. M-statements involve an important ambiguity. Consider the statement "God is good". This statement could mean something like "The God who is revealed in Jesus Christ is good" or it could mean "If X is God, then X is good." The assertion can be used as a confession of one's faith in the goodness of a particular God or it can be used as a philosophical statement concerning the logic of the word "God".

The statement "If X is God, X is good" is a philosophical statement. It is a logical observation descriptive of the way in which theological language is used. Philosophical statements of this type are possible because the word "God"

is used in theology as a predicate and not simply as a proper name. Insofar as the word is used as a predicate it must have a meaning which is amenable to logical description. However, the fact that this type of philosophical statement is possible, can be taken as evidence for a limit to the autonomy of theology.

If we follow the definition of autonomy which was given in Chapter One, it is not clear whether we can say that the existence of a general meaning of the word "God" can be taken as an objection to the autonomy of theology. There it was said that a discipline was autonomous insofar as the truth value of its propositions was not dependent on the truth value of the propositions of any other discipline. Here, however, the theological proposition "The God whom I worship is good" is not dependent on a general definition of God which is given by philosophy. Rather, the philosophical statement is dependent on the way that the believer relates the word "God" to the word "good". Goodness is not something that God is discovered to possess, as if the believer had some standard of goodness independent of God. Rather, to worship something as God commits the believer to treat anything that is revealed

in that God as good. To call theology "non-autonomous" because a general meaning for the word "God" can be articulated, would be misleading.

Nevertheless, the objection is not without its points. Karl Barth sometimes gives the impression that there are no M-statements in Christian theology. The God who is revealed in Jesus Christ, Barth says, has nothing at all in common with other gods.[7]

It is difficult to know what Barth means in statements like this. Surely, for example, the way in which a Muslim describes Allah has very much in common with the way in which a Christian describes the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. If Barth means to deny this, his statement is simply false.

The qustion that concerns us here, however, is the suggestion that there are no M-statements in Christian theology; that the word "God" has no meaning apart from the Christian revelation. Is it not true that

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7. Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, pp. 35-36. Here Barth seems to be unambiguously denying any connection between a generic meaning of the word "God" and the God of Christian faith. Elsewhere, however, Barth uses a generic meaning to deny the status "God" to anything but the God of Christian faith. cf. Karl Barth "Das Erste Gebot als Theologisches Axiom" Theologische Fragen und Antworten, pp. 134 ff.

"Allah" and "the God that is revealed in Jesus Christ" have at least this in common: that they are both worshipped by men? Consequently we should have to say that any predicate which the Christian applies to "the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ" simply by virtue of the fact that it is this God whom he worships, is also applicable by the Muslim to "Allah" on the same grounds. It makes no sense for the theologian to assert that the Christian God and the God of Islam have "nothing in common" if, by this, he means more than he would if he asserted that only the Christian God is truly God and, therefore, that only of the Christian God can these M-statements be truly asserted.

A second problem in discussing the relation between M-statements and theological autonomy lies in the scope of meaning that is to be recognized in the word "God". Historically the word has meant many things: the object of man's worship and his ultimate explanation for the way things are; that which exercises ultimate power over the universe as well as that which evokes a sense of numinous awe. In Chapter Three, I argued that, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, a statement is theological insofar it is "about" God as the object of man's worship.

I distinguished theological language from metaphysical language in which the word "God" is used to refer to a supernatural reality. Metaphysical language about God differs from theological language about God in that the former need not be self-involving.

The question that arises here is whether the phrase "object of man's worship" effectively exhausts the meaning of the predicate "God" as it is used in theology.[8] What, for example, are we to make of the notion of "omnipotence"? Is this simply a property which is descriptive of the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ but not necessarily of any other God? Or is it a necessary condition that, in order to identify something as God, we must be prepared to ascribe omnipotence to it? Is "omnipotence" predicated of God in an M-statement or in a P-statement?

As we saw in Chapter Four, this is a question concerning which even Barth's treatment is ambiguous. Barth insists that it is only the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ that is omnipotent. However, whether

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8. It must be remembered that there is a distinction between what belongs to the meaning of the predicate "God" and what is descriptive of the individual who bears the name "God".

this is because omnipotence is to be ascribed only to whatever is identified as God or whether omnipotence is descriptive of the individual who bears the name "the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ", is not at all clear in Barth's answer.

In Chapter Four, we also saw that statements by which God is identified (I-statements) are autonomous given the fact that the meaning of the word "God" is "the object of man's worship". I do not have criteria independent of God by means of which I could identify him, nor do I have non-theological criteria by means of which I could falsify a competing identification. If, however, "omnipotence" is part of the meaning of the word "God" and not simply a term descriptive of certain gods, then we do have at least a partial criterion. If "omnipotence" belongs to the meaning of the word "God" then a display of a god's power counts in favour of his claim to divinity, while a lack of any evidence of his power counts against his claim.

Personally, I want to say that "God is omnipotent" is not an M-statement but a P-statement. Even if it could be shown that greed, for example, was omnipotent,

it is quite conceivable that men should still worship other more altruistic but less powerful gods. I concede, however, that a good case can be made for including "omnipotence" in the meaning of the word "God" and, if it is so included, the case for the autonomy of I-statements is considerably weakened.[9]

It should be noted here that even if "omnipotence" is predicated of God in P-statements rather than in M-statements, it still implies some limitation to the autonomy of theology - as we shall see in the next section.

3. P-Statements and the Limits of Autonomy

To this point, I have concentrated my attention on I-statements, i.e. statements in which God is identified and which I have called the "fundamental assertions" of theology, as well as M-statements which elaborate the meaning of the word "God". Theological

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9. Similar considerations apply for other statements like "God is a personal transcendent being" and "God is the Creator of Heaven and Earth". A case could be made for either as M-statements or for the latter as an I-statement. I believe them both to be P-statements. If I were shown to be wrong, my answer to the question of autonomy would have to be radically altered.

assertions do not end with the identification of God and the elaboration of what it means to worship something. Theology proceeds to make assertions about that which it has identified as God. Having identified God, theology is in a position to deal with questions such as "What is God like?" and "What implications does this have for the believer?" The answers to these questions are what I have called "P-statements". When we consider theology from the point of view of P-statements, we find important limits to its autonomy.

Let us look at the case in which God is identified by reference to Jesus Christ. If God is, in fact, identified by reference to Jesus, the truth of what Christians want to assert about God and about man's relation to God is not autonomous of the truth of descriptive statements concerning Jesus of Nazareth. The attitude of the Christian towards religious legalism, for example, is not independent of the attitude of Jesus toward the Law and of his polemical relation to the Pharisees and their attitude to the Law. The Christian understanding of the love of God is made concrete only by reference to the concrete manifestation of his love in the life of Jesus - especially in his

death and resurrection. The relation of theological statements to historical statements is not necessarily a direct one. On the contrary, the relation between these statements is generally indirect and very complex. It is difficult, if not impossible, to say how many and precisely which historical statements about Jesus would have to be falsified before the Christian would say that he had no grounds for the assertion "God is love."[10]

This means, of course, that there can be no ultimate objection by Christian theologians to what has been called "the quest of the historical Jesus." Barth's objection to this quest - in the form it took in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries at the hands of "liberal" theologians - can be granted.[11] The early quest, Barth maintains, assumed that the question of the divinity of Christ could be separated from the study of his humanity and centered its

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10. The complexity of the relation between theological assertions and the "facts" is well illustrated by John Wisdom in his article "The Modes of Thought and the Logic of God", The Existence of God, ed. John Hick, pp. 275-298.

11. cf. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, I/2, p. 137.

interest in the latter. If, however, Christians are to assert that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is an historical event - and not simply an interpretation of that historical event[12] - then Christian theology is not autonomous of the "facts" of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Even if we cannot separate these facts from the decisive role which they play in our theology, neither can we forget that the truth of the content of our theology is dependent on these facts being true. What Christians have to say about God and about God's relation to man is very much dependent on "the way things were." If I am unwilling to have my theology tested by testing the facts, then my faith is not in the real Jesus Christ but in some idealized Messiah to whom the facts are irrelevant.

The issues that are involved here are dramatically presented by Peter Berger. Berger quotes Tillich to the effect that historical discoveries are of no relevance to the content of Christian faith.

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12. Tillich's Christology suggests that Jesus is not the Christ apart from our receiving him as such. cf. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. II, passim.

Berger simply poses a question. Supposing a document should be discovered of undisputed authenticity whose text ran as follows:

> Peace salutation (be) unto you forever. This greeting (to the) master (of the) congregation. Greetings (to) all brothers in (the) congregation (of) righteousness. (The) bonds (of) death (have) not held me. Delivery came (by the) power (of the) Name (from the) wickedness (of the) Roman and (the) malice (of the) children (of) darkness in Israel. Death (did) not come on (the) Roman's cross. My body (was) lain in (an) empty tomb (to be) rescued by Shimon and Yochanan on whom (be) peace. (I) rest in (the) house (of) Miriam (the) sinner. (I) give thanks (to) YY for my deliverance. (The) cup (of) bitterness (has) passed.
>
> My great desire (is) to return (to the) peace (of the) congregation. Too much rumor (has) troubled Judea (of) new Messiahs and (of) mighty events. Now men say foolishly (that) my body (has) risen from (the) realm (of) death. YY alone lives forever. (I) seek peace. (I) bow (to) you master. (I) hold unto (the) congregation and wait (for the) coming (of the) teacher (of) righteousness on (the) clouds (of) light. Yeshua bar Yosef whom (the) people call (the) Nazarene.[13]

Berger's example does more than to show the futility of attempting to make the P-statements of

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13. Peter L. Berger, The Precarious Vision (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961) pp. 43 - 44.

theology autonomous of history when, in a faith like Christianity, God has already been identified in a historical context. It also shows that the I-statements of a theology must be consistent, both with itself and with the object to which it points. One could not rationally point to Jesus Christ as the ultimate revelation of God if Jesus had repudiated this status for himself. One's identification of God must be logically possible.

A more ambiguous requirement, but still a requirement, is that any particular identification of God must be a practical, as opposed to a logical, possibility. The requirement is ambiguous because it can never be clear when the practical difficulties of identifying God in a particular way disqualify it as a legitimate possibility. These difficulties are probably more psychological than logical.

We might ask, for example, if - since I can identify God by reference to Jesus Christ - I might not be able to identify God by reference to Mahatma Ghandi (assuming that Ghandi had not repudiated this status, etc.). This, we would have to grant, is a logical possibility. However, is it a practical

possibility? For practical purposes it seems doubtful that I could accept Ghandi as God Incarnate apart from a community of believers who shared my faith. The solitary individual who adheres to the true faith - be it in Jesus Christ, in Reason, in Ghandi, or even in Nero - may be doing something that is logically possible and which is even commendable. For some, it might even be a practical possibility. For most of mankind, however, the possibility of identifying God in any particular way depends upon the existence of a community of the same faith.[14]

The problem of evil is probably the classic example of a difficulty which arises when God is identified in such a way that the believer is led to assert that his God is a loving God. Having acknowledged God's love, the believer is faced with the empirical reality of suffering and evil. How, the sceptics ask, could a loving and omnipotent God have permitted the existence of a world like this?

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14. I do not mean an organized community. As a general rule, a person cannot give his unqualified loyalty to something (reason, money, Yahweh) unless there are others in his society who are of like mind. Man does not choose his gods in a cultural vacuum.

The believer, faced with personal tragedy or being deeply involved in the tragedies of others, may find his faith stretched to the breaking point.

However, if the existence of suffering can destroy a man's faith, one might want to ask whether the assertions of theology are not, in fact, dependent on the truth of statements which describe the world and its suffering. Are we not faced here with another limitation of the autonomy of theology?

The problem of suffering is a complicated one which I cannot attempt to discuss in detail here. What needs to be mentioned is that in the problem of suffering, we are not dealing with a formal contradiction. The statements "God is loving and omnipotent" and "There is suffering" are not formally inconsistent. It may be that it is difficult, if not impossible, to demonstrate their coherence and their consistency. The failure to demonstrate the fact of their consistency is not, however, to have demonstrated their inconsistency. The believer feels the tension which the fact of suffering involves for his faith. To feel the force of the problem of suffering, one must be a human being of some sensitivity and not simply

a logician.

Logically speaking, the believer has an out when he is faced with the problem of suffering. He can admit that he does not know how God's love and the fact of suffering can be reconciled but express the confidence that they are reconciled by God in his own mysterious way. This move would be illegitimate only if belief in God were a hypothesis advanced to explain the empirical universe - which it isn't. The believer does not say that there is nothing in the problem of evil to be resolved. He finds that its resolution is not at his disposal.

The fact of evil is a practical, rather than a logical difficulty which arises when God is identified as a God of love. For some people, owing to their personal circumstances or their depth of sensitivity, such an identification of God is a practical impossibility. The line between the existence of a difficulty and a practical impossibility cannot be rigidly drawn - if it can be drawn at all. As Basil Mitchell puts it, the fact of suffering counts against Christian faith, but not decisively.[15]

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15. cf. Basil Mitchell, "Theology and Falsification", New Essays in Philosophical Theology, pp. 103-105.

To say that an identification of God must be a practical possibility is to say that it must not give rise to too many expectations concerning the world of experience which prove to be at variance with the world as it really is. It is not a practical possibility to give one's unqualified loyalty to a god if the application of that loyalty in daily life is frustrated by the facts of life at every step. Up to a point the believer can regard his frustrations as temptations and as trials. Beyond this point he will begin to lose his faith. Where this point will come it is again impossible to say. I. T. Ramsey has described this aspect of the relation between the facts of experience on the one hand and the assertions of faith on the other as "empirical fit":

> There are in theology, as opposed to science, no deductive derivations, emerging one by one, to confirm or falsify the theory which is on our lips. The theological model works more like the fitting of a boot or a shoe than like the 'yes' or 'no' of a roll call. ... The test of a shoe is measured by its ability to match a wide range of phenomena, by its overall success in meeting a variety of needs. Here is what I might call the method of empirical fit which is displayed by theological theorizing...[16]

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16. I.T. Ramsey, Models and Mystery (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) p. 17.

4. Philosophy and Theology

I have deliberately separated the problem of the relation between philosophy and theology from the question of the autonomy of theology because it is not at all clear as to what constitutes a philosophical assertion. If one can at least begin to give an account of what a theological assertion is, the situation in philosophy is much more complicated. Is philosophy essentially a metaphysic - a comprehensive world view - or is it analysis - a descriptive study of the logic of ordinary language? Is philosophy either - or both? Very different answers would have to be given to the question of the relation between philosophy and theology depending on how philosophy is understood. We are best to admit, with Austin, that there is no such thing as the essence of philosophy:

> I believe the only clear way of defining the subject matter of philosophy is to say that it deals with what's left over, all the problems that remain still insoluble, after all the other recognized methods have been tried. It's the dumping ground for all the leftovers from other sciences, where everything turns up which we don't know

quite how to take.[17]

There is no single answer, then, to the question of the relation of theology to philosophy. If we are more specific, however, we can raise questions that get to the centre of much that has been discussed under the more general topic. The questions I want to discuss are (a) the relation of philosophy qua world view to theology and (b) the relation of philosophy qua logic to theology.

a. Theology and Weltanschauung

The notion of the task of philosophy as the articulation and elaboration of systematic cosmologies, ontologies or metaphysics is quite foreign to the spirit of linguistic analysis. This does not mean, however, that linguistic philosophers have no world-view. It simply means that they do not regard the articulation of their world-view as the purpose of their philosophical activity. They are concerned, rather, with the more "objective" task of the analysis and

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17. John Austin "Performative-Constative" Philosophy and Ordinary Language, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963) p. 42.

clarification of language.

The notion of a "world-view" is not, however, irrelevant to the question of the relation of linguistic philosophy to theology. This can best be seen in retrospect, as it were, in the light of an examination of the relation of theology to world-views in general.

In examining this subject I will follow again the comments of Karl Barth. In spite of Barth's reputation (which is not entirely undeserved) as an irrationalist[18] and as the epitome of anti-philosophical theologians, Barth's considered views on the subject are balanced and worthy of notice - if only to put his more extreme utterances in their proper perspective.[19]

It is important to stress that Barth does not imagine that there can be any separation of theology and philosophy: as if there could be a pure and

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18. cf. Brand Blanshard, "Critical Reflections on Karl Barth", Faith and the Philosophers, pp. 159-200.

19. For what follows cf. also Karl Barth, Credo, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964) pp. 183-186, and "Philosophie und Theologie", Philosophie und Christliche Existenz, (Basel und Stuttgart: Verlag Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1960), pp. 93-106. Barth's dialogue with his own philosophical tradition can be found in Karl Barth, From Rousseau to Ritschl (London: SCM, 1959).

unphilosophical theology, as if the theologian could rid himself of his own (explicit or implicit) view of the world.

> Everyone has some sort of philosophy, i.e. a personal view of the fundamental nature and relationship of things - however popular, aphoristic and eclectically vacillating. This is true even of the simplest Bible reader (and of him perhaps with particular force and tenacity). But it is definitely true of the educated Bible student, who in appearance and intention is wholly given up to observation.[20]

The theologian comes to scripture with the "spectacles" of a particular world-view. Without a world-view, Barth claims, the task of understanding the scriptures cannot even begin. Theology cannot proceed without philosophical presuppositions.[21] Barth further denies that to point out that a given theological assertion contains a certain philosophical presupposition constitutes a valid objection to that

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20. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, I/2, p. 728. Barth's remarks are addressed to the problem of Biblical interpretation in particular but they are applicable to the problem of the relation of philosophy to theology in general.

21. As, for example, the presupposition of what constitutes valid argument.

assertion. The theologian is not opposed to philosophy but, rather, to bad theology that may appear in the form of good philosophy. The criterion of judgment must always be theological.

> The proper course is first to listen to what the other, using his system of ideas, has to say about the subject itself, i.e., as an exponent of Scripture, and to pass on to criticism only if criticisms have to be raised on the basis of the subject. If, then, the criticism is to be a positive contribution to scriptural exegesis, in the philosopher-theologian it is not the philosopher but the theologian who will have to be criticised.[22]

The question for Barth is not how to find a Christian philosophy (The Gospel, for Barth, cannot be assimilated to any world-view) nor is it to rid theology of all its philosophical presuppositions. Rather the question is how the theologian - as a human being with a human outlook on life - can at the same time be a theologian, responsible only to that which he has acknowledged as God. To answer this question, Barth lays down four[23] rules to govern the relation of philosophy and theology in the work of the theologian.

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22. ibid, p. 729.

23. Barth actually lists five. I have assimilated his second and fifth rules as the second point in my exposition.

1. The theologian has a responsibility to be aware of his presuppositions and of the way he is using them in his theological work. He must never lose sight of the distinction between his own presuppositions and the "determinative thought of Scripture".[24]

2. The theologian must regard his presuppositions as tentative - as a hypothesis which he brings to be tested by the Word of God rather than as a rule by which the Word of God is to be tested. The theologian is under no obligation to rid himself of his presuppositions. On the other hand, he cannot make his presuppositions the measure of all things. He confronts the Word of God and is judged by the Word of God as a whole man - which means as a man with his presuppositions.[25]

3. The philosophical presuppositions of a theologian are of no independent theological interest. The "object" of theology is solely the Word of God.[26]

4. There is no essential reason for the preference by theology of one conceptual scheme to

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24. cf. ibid, p. 730.

25. cf. ibid, pp. 730-731, 734-736.

26. cf. ibid, p. 731.

another.[27] The danger to theology, and therefore the opposition between philosophy and theology is not primarily the result of the nature of a given conceptual scheme but arises when the theologian treats his philosophy as an absolute, as a second god beside the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ, as a judge rather than as an interpreter of the Word of God.

> (The use of an imported mode of thought) becomes dangerous...when - even with the best intention, that of doing justice to Scripture - we posit it absolutely over against Scripture, expecting that by placing it, as it were, on the same high level as Scripture, we can use it to control Scripture.[28]

To understand how Barth's remarks apply to the relation of linguistic analysis to theology, it is necessary to return to the notion of language-games which was examined in Chapter Two. One of the points which was made in that discussion was that for any simple object - a book, for example - there are a number of different language-games that we can play in relation to it; a number of different ways in which it

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27. As, for example, phenomenology or existentialism as opposed to linguistic analysis.

28. ibid, p. 732.

can be analyzed. I can speak of a book in terms of its printing and binding or in terms of its literary content and structure. In the first case I am looking on the book as a manufactured article; in the second, as a work of scholarship.

The verb which I used in the last sentence is of great importance to the question under discussion: "to look on". D. D. Evans has drawn attention to what he calls "Onlooks". Onlooks are expressible by the formula "I look on x as y", e.g., "I look on life as a game".

The feature which Evans stresses in onlooks is their self-involving character. Onlooks are evaluative and generally involve a declaration of intention on the part of the speaker. "I look on life as a game" implies that the speaker values life lightly and intends to live accordingly.

> An onlook is not merely speculative, subjective or fanciful; in such cases we would not say 'I look on x as y', but 'I picture x as y', (for example, atoms as billiard balls), or 'I see x as y' (for example, the trick drawing as a rabbit, and then as a duck), or 'I imagine x as y' (for example, the clouds as warriors). Onlooks are practical, putatively-objective and serious. They are appraised in such terms as profound/superficial, reasonable/unreasonable,

true-to-reality/mistaken, adequate/inadequate, coherent/inconsistent.[29]

Evans' analysis works well for onlooks expressed in a tense which implies continuity, e.g. "I look...", "I used to look...". But what can be made of tenses which do not imply continuity, e.g. "I am looking..."?

We can say, for example, "I am looking on books as manufactured articles." This is a perfectly good way to specify what language-game we are playing in our analysis of a book. Like onlooks, such utterances are "practical, putatively-objective and serious." We would not say "I am picturing a book as a manufactured article", nor would we use the verbs "see" or "imagine".

However, if we compare statements which are identical in everything but tense, we note important differences. Consider, "I am looking on books as manufactured articles" in contrast to "I look on books as manufactured articles." Both statements carry the implication that they are meant to exclude other ways

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29. D.D. Evans, The Logic of Self-Involvement, pp. 128-129.

of looking on books, e.g. as works of scholarship. The first statement makes the exclusion provisionally. It implicitly makes the qualification that the speaker is looking on things this way "for the purposes of discussion" or "in this context" or "for the time being". The second statement lacks this provisional character. It expresses an ongoing attitude of the speaker towards books. It suggests that, for the speaker, there would be something wrong or inappropriate in looking on books in any other way.

Nevertheless, in all other respects, the form of utterance "I am looking on x as y" does behave as an onlook. They are practical and serious; they can be evaluated as reasonable/unreasonable, true-to-reality/mistaken, adequate/inadequate and coherent/inconsistent.[30] Within their limits, such statements share the self-involving characteristics of ordinary onlooks. Since the self-involving implications of these utterances are generally restricted to the context in

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30. I do not think that utterances like these would ordinarily be evaluated as profound/superficial. When we use such language, we are not particularly interested in being profound; the context does not generally call for profundity.

which they are uttered, I will call them "restricted onlooks".

In giving a talk on typography, someone might say "I am looking on books as an example of the typographer's art." The implication is that, within the context of his talk, any other way of looking at books will be put to one side. The utterance has evaluative implications, within this context. We should understand, in the talk, the phrase "a good book" to mean "a book with good typography."

It might happen, in contrast, that a typographer and an author disagreed over the method to produce a book. The author might be concerned that his book should be produced in the cheapest feasible way so that it could reach the widest possible circle of readers. The typographer might say "I look on books as examples of a typographer's art. If we cannot produce a good book, let's not produce one at all." Here the typographer has uttered an unrestricted onlook. The evaluative implications are no longer restricted to the context in which the utterance is made. Typographic excellence has now become the standard of quality in a book.

The analysis of language involves having onlooks. One can look on language, for example, as a way of picturing reality or as a complex phenomenon consisting of different kinds of speech-acts. Normally the onlook of the analyst will be a restricted one. For a particular purpose and in a particular context, the analyst chooses to look on language in a particular way. Sometimes, however, the onlook of the analyst is unrestricted. It takes on a normative role in analysis and its evaluative implications take on an absolute character. Wittgenstein in particular was guilty of this. In his early work, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, he looked on language as a picture of reality. The result was that many areas of discourse - ethics as well as theology - were pronounced meaningless by him and by subsequent positivism.

The theologian who approaches his task with the tools of linguistic analysis can perform a great service to theology - even if it is only to aid in the clarification of theological language. This task may be carried out freely providing due regard is paid to the warning signs that Barth has erected. Barth's discussion of the relation between philosophy and theology

is not that of an irrationalist. They express the concern that should belong to any scholar for the integrity of the object of his study.

In this connection, it is worth noting that at least two of Barth's four rules could, with suitable alterations, be read as rules to guide the philosopher of language in his own work. Of the task of the theologian, it will be recalled, Barth said:

1. The theologian has a responsibility to be aware of his presuppositions and of the way he is using them in his theological work.

2. The theologian must regard his presuppositions as tentative - as a hypothesis which he brings to be tested by the Word of God rather than as a rule by which the Word of God is to be tested.

With suitable alterations to adjust the rules for another discipline, we find that the result is very similar to Wittgenstein's later view of the task of the philosopher:

1. The philosopher has a responsibility to be aware of his presuppositions and of the way he is using them in his analysis of language.

2. The philosopher must regard his

presuppositions as tentative - as a hypothesis which he brings to be tested by language rather than as a rule by which language is to be tested.

b. Theology and Logic

In a recent article, Jerry Gill[31] has used the term "autonomist" to refer to philosophers who deny the possibility of a logical analysis of theological language. One of the philosophers cited by Gill as falling into this class is Willem Zuurdeeg. Zuurdeeg holds that, in common with all "convictional" languages, theology is non-rational. It will be instructive to examine Zuurdeeg's argument.

Zuurdeeg bases his position on the premise that logic deals only with indicative language.

> We can say that both indicative language and its metalanguage - namely, the language of the philosophical analysis of indicative language - possess a "logical" structure. That is to say, indicative language conforms to the structure of logic, and therefore it makes sense to discuss this language with the help of a language which possesses the same structure.[32]

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31. Jerry H. Gill, "Talk about Religious Talk", Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol. 19 (1966-67), pp. 1-22

32. Willem F. Zuurdeeg, An Analytical Philosophy of Religion (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1959) pp. 62-63.

Convictional language[33], on the other hand, does not possess the same structure.

> We should admit that convictional language does not possess this "logical" structure, and that therefore logic cannot serve as its metalanguage. That is to say that the metalanguage of convictional language must possess a nonlogical structure.[34]

Zuurdeeg's understanding of the nature of logic is a little puzzling. It is true that, until comparatively recently, empiricists and analysts have been almost exclusively concerned with indicative propositions. In view of the obsession of philosophers with the indicative, it is not surprising that they have spoken of propositions in terms of their relation to "states of affairs". This concentration of philosophers on "factual" language seems to have led Zuurdeeg to his conclusion that "logic" has the structure of the indicative.

If Zuurdeeg wishes to <u>define</u> "logic" as "the metalanguage of the indicative", then there is not much

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33. Zuurdeeg's distinction between "indicative" and "convictional" language is similar to the distinction I have argued for between the "descriptive" use of language and the self-involving use of language as it is found in theology.

34. <u>ibid</u>, p. 63.

room for argument. Indeed, it seems that this is Zuurdeeg's intention. When he calls theology "non-logical" he does not mean to imply that it cannot be analysed, but that it cannot be analysed logically. Rather, he claims, when we are dealing with "convictional" language we must resort to "situational analysis". Zuurdeeg's notion of situational analysis is not too different from Austin's understanding of the task of the analytic philosopher:

> The total speech act in the total speech situation is the only actual phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating.[35]

Insofar as Zuurdeeg, in rejecting "logical" analysis, is simply denying that fact-stating discourse can provide an adequate model for the analysis of theological propositions, his point is well taken. There are traps, however, for the philosopher of religion or the theologian who denies the applicability of logic to theology. If theology is non-logical, is it permitted to contradict itself? Is theological language above intelligent descriptive analysis? Zuurdeeg falls into the trap by implying that both these questions can be

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35. J. L. Austin How to Do Things with Words, p.147.

answered affirmatively.

First, in his rejection of "logical analysis", Zuurdeeg implies that theology is free from the requirement of consistency. In arguing that theology is "non-logical", Zuurdeeg appeals to Biblical language:

> The Bible is full of language which clearly possesses a non-logical structure. Matt.25: 31-46 relates a vision of Christ coming to judge the nations on the day of judgment. He addresses the righteous and says: "Come, O blessed of my Father ...; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink" (R.S.V.). The "I" who was hungry was "one of the least of these my brethren" but it was also Christ.[36]

What is non-logical about this example? Presumably Zuurdeeg wants to say that it applies incompatible predicates ("Christ", "my brethren") to the subject "I". However, the mere presence of two predicates which, on the surface, are incompatible, does not make a statement "non-logical". If we are asked whether the door is open, for example, we can reply "It is and it isn't", meaning "It is ajar". What "logic" requires is that incompatible predicates must not be applied to the same thing in the same way.[37] The

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36. Willem Zuurdeeg, op.cit., p. 63.

37. cf. P.F. Strawson, Introduction to Logical Theory (London: Methuen, 1963) pp. 2-5.

Christian, in his interpretation of the parable of the Last Judgment does not, I suggest, ignore this rule. He may speak of "encountering Christ" in suffering humanity or he may speak of Christ as reckoning service to suffering humanity as service to Him. The Christian does not, however, assert that his neighbour is "John Brown" and "Jesus Christ" in the same sense and in the same way. Such an assertion would not be merely non-logical. It would be unintelligible.

Elsewhere Zuurdeeg puts his argument in even a more outrageous form:

> I protest vehemently against the notion that language of Christian faith consists of propositions which can be analyzed by means of logic. If it does not make sense to a philosopher to attempt a logical analysis of persons, how much sense will it make to a theologian to try to do so with the Lord God? ... Can we offer a logical analysis of the Creator of Heaven and Earth?[38]

Here Zuurdeeg has made what Ryle calls a "category-mistake"[39] and an obvious one at that. Of course we can't offer a logical analysis of the Creator

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38. Willem Zuurdeeg, "Implications of Analytical Philosophy for Theology" The Journal of Bible and Religion, July 1961, p. 208.

39. cf. Gilbert Ryle, The Concept of Mind, pp. 17-20.

of Heaven and Earth. Neither can we offer a logical analysis of tables and chairs. Logic isn't concerned with things but with language and its structure. Tables are not subject to logical analysis. Language about tables is. God is not subject to logical analysis. What about language about God?

Insofar as any language-game can be played, it must have a structure. It must have rules which govern the use of its terms and - insofar as rational argument is possible within the language-game - it must have some standards of what constitutes valid inference . The structure of a language-game is its logic. The rigour of the logic of mathematics may not be applicable to theology. It may be difficult to articulate with any precision the rules and criteria which govern theological language. Nevertheless, the alternative is plain. Either theology is subject to logical analysis or it has no rules and criteria of validity. In the latter case, all theological propositions are legitimate because there are no rules to break. "God is emphlig" is as intelligible a proposition as "God is omnipotent". "God is wicked" is as valid a theological assertion as "God is love".

Either logical analysis of theology is legitimate or theology isn't worth the effort. If the autonomy of theology means the independence of the truth of theology from the truths of logic, then theology is not autonomous.

5. Conclusion

The relation of theology to other intellectual disciplines is a complex one, as I have tried to show in the course of this study. If we are to ask about the starting point of theology, then we must say that theology is not an inference from some "non-theological" aspect of experience. Theology is not a descriptive science which deals with a world beyond the world of sense. Rather it is an evaluative science which is intimately and profoundly connected with man's life in the world.

At the same time, I want to deny the dichotomy which some philosophers of religion have tried to make between the "factual" and the "evaluative". Theology is not faced with an either/or. Theology qua theology is possible only as a both/and: both evaluative and cognitive. The fact that theology is irreducibly the

language of faith, trust, loyalty and commitment does not mean that it can dispense with its object and become "non-cognitive". Theology is not faith in faith but faith in God. The fact that this object of theology, God, is not available as the object of a purely descriptive language-game is, I hope I have shown, beside the point. Even if we could prove a First Cause, on what grounds could we conclude that we owed our loyalty to it? Christian theology has its own criteria for speaking about God, even if God is not given in or derived from the evidence of our senses.

To say that God is known only to faith can be misleading. It suggests that Christians think that they can substantiate their propositions simply by believing them. If by faith, however, we understand a relation of trust and commitment rather than a mental act of accepting a proposition on insufficient evidence, then it is quite true that God cannot be known apart from faith. To know God through faith is not a poor substitute for better evidence. It is part and parcel of the meaning of the word "God".

Is theology autonomous? No simple answer

can be given. Whether and to what extent theology is autonomous depends very much on what kind of language-game theologians understand themselves to be playing and on how they identify God. Even when these questions are answered, we can only say that in some of its statements and in certain respects, theology is autonomous. But to be able to say that, is to have accomplished <u>something</u>.

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