

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF NURSING

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Thornfield Conference Comments;

I'd like to take just a moment to say something personal about my being here, and that is that I'm happy to be here. I was here once before, for this very conference, just three years ago. I made some remarks on "the kinetic model in religion" and I remember that Stanley Hopper told me afterwards that my suggestions reminded him of someone who was riding a train, who got up, moved from car to car, went into the dining car, sampled the menu there, went into the dome car, spent some time there, but nevertheless was still riding the same train. I remember that I went home the same day, not by train, but by plane. Then, this time, in the very first paragraph of Van Harvey's paper, there are further references to travel and to modes of travel, ~~xxxxxx~~ one to which Californians are particularly sensitive. Van compares developments in theology to "tailgating automobiles on California freeways." He must have intended this somewhat critically, but I'm not quite sure what the moral is. At any rate, I infer from all of this that it took some courage on your part to invite me back. And I want to say that I appreciate it, and am enjoying my time here very much.

There are a couple of items in Van's papers which provoke comment. Both pertain to the introduction, to his account of the demise of Christian theology in the past decade -- a suggestion with which I respectfully and rather strongly disagree. The first item concerns the inappropriateness of the introduction to the intentions of Anders Nygren. After talking about what happened to theology when it was placed in the hands of rather ineffective collection of middle-class theological specialists, most of whom were (or are) responding to situations within the secular university, Van begins his analysis of Nygren's MEANING AND METHOD in the following way: "Nygren's latest book...may be understood as the work of both a churchman and a scholar who, in the presence of this intellectual chaos..." etc. I suggest that Nygren was really addressing "intellectual chaos" (if this is the proper description) of a very different sort. MEANING AND METHOD is not very much different from Nygren's works of almost 50 years ago, his Religios Apriori (of 1921) and his The difference is that he takes MEANING AND METHOD to be a kind of summary statement which is made in the light of linguistic philosophy, particularly the works of Ludwig Wittgenstein. The earlier works were not so informed. But the intention in both is to respond to positivism -- dreaded logical positivism -- by showing that there can be a valid religion without metaphysics, that is, religion without metaphysics without serious loss. It is really not the matter of theological specialisation that Nygren is worried about, nor does he address himself to the situation in American universities, where there has been a transition from theology to religious studies. His context is very different. And the critical reviews must read that Meaning and Method is a grand achievement, especially for someone in his middle 80's, but that what Nygren means by "contexts of meaning" and what Wittgenstein and the others mean by "contexts of meaning" are very dissimilar. Nygren's earlier works might have been taken seriously by positivistic thinkers -- on that I have no evidence -- but it is probably unlikely that Meaning and Method will be. I take it as evidence of the freshness and flexibility of an older man's mind, but more epoch-extending than epoch-making.

The other point concerns the Introduction itself, the piece on "What Happened to Theology?" in Christianity and Crisis. I guess I'd like to think

that a great deal is happening, and that tailgating is not the only happens on California freeways. But my chronicle would be sketched differently. Just ten years ago, or ~~xxxx~~ eleven years now, I walked onto campus at the University of California in Santa Barbara, introduced myself the first faculty prson I met (who was a political scientist), who, upon hearing that I had come to teach in religious studies, asked me, "What do you think of Karl Barth?" I told him that I thought Barth said some good things, but also a lot of other things with which I disagreed." He didn't say anything, but I sensed that he already knew me. I told Dick Comstock, my colleague, about this exchange, and Dick told me about the time, the year before, when he was asked by someone on campus, "What do you think of Paul Tillich?" Dick liked Tillich, and said so. But Dick and I agreed that in either form the question was the same. And asking about Barth and Tillich was like spotting Republicans and Democrats. As soon as it was known that one identified with either one or the other, a whole set of typifying categories and characteristics ~~was~~ ^{was} brought to mind, sort of unmasking one's deepest inclinations.

I refer to this account because it describes the situation of just ten years ago. Persons in religious studies tended to be Barthian or Tillichian. Many still are, of course. And programs in religious studies could be typified according to their Barthian or Tillichian leanings. Yale was more Barthian than Union, for example, while Harvard was doing form criticism and Chicago (as it still does today) was giving exams. ~~My~~ So it was in those days, just a few short years ago. But it's no longer that way, ~~at~~ and the change should be described as something than "chronic ill health."

When one looks carefully at the issue on which Barth and Tillich divided, one discovers that it concerned the status of culture, perhaps even the status of western culture. But this is to say that the issue concerned what counted as authentic religion. Barth advocated a narrowing of the scope while Tillich called for expansion. Barth could sanction religion in a specific sense, while Tillich found significance in the cultural manifestations of a more widely and pervasively represented religious spirit.

Historians of the era will probably record that the issue was ~~never~~ never really resolved. But somehow we got over it, or perhaps beyond it. And the reason, I believe, was the World War II sensitivities of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer's proclamations about a world come of age, followed by Harvey Cox' grand celebration of secularity, in association with the full-scale turn toward immanence (over against transcendence), were part of the fresh winds which overcame the dominance of the Barth-Tillich controversy. Indeed, Tillich and Barth were upstaged by the contention that the modern world, with all of its diversity, ~~xxxx~~ can be perceived as being sacred.

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Why I'm substituted in tradition. - 2nd. ed.

ing of the question gives evidence of a positive answer.

To here I believe I am on fairly firm ground. To proceed further is to court danger, but I'll go on -- and you can tell me shortly where I got off. The reason the issue is not resolvable quickly is that, while theology is more like art than like philosophy, there are some notable givens. Theology doesn't occur in a vacuum. It isn't concocted ex nihilo. The theologian cannot proclaim whatever is his fancy to proclaim. There are some givens, and by givens I ~~refer~~ have reference to the components of Christian identity: the creeds, the body of shared belief, the interpretation and appropriation of the life of Christ, the traditions of the Church, the cultivated ~~xxx~~ patterns and methods of piety and spirituality, ~~religious experience~~ and so on. The theologian doesn't create out of nothing, but rather resonates with the corporate historical religious experience of the Christian community. Furthermore, the context within which the theologian works -- called now the larger religious context -- is not made up ex nihilo either, but has a certain character and structure and disposition as well as specific components. Thus, the synthesizing work that occurs must be cognizant of these ingredients in addition to giving itself over to the freedoms of a creative spirit.

But there is one very significant shift. It used to be thought that one approached matters religious ~~xxxxxxx~~ somewhat dialectically, that is, according to progressive stages or states of insight. The first stage was usually defined as a time of uncritical or precritical acceptance -- the time of first innocence, perhaps the time of wonderful ~~xxxxxx~~ naivete. This was followed by a time of critical evaluation: ~~xxx~~ questioning, critically assessing, with suspicions, skepticism -- that is, critical apprehension. And the third stage was the period of harmonization -- ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxxxxxx~~ a recovery of the confidence of first naivete in full recognition of the value and necessity of critical reflection. Even the role of teacher has been understood in this light, as it is put so often: to ~~xxxx~~ assist the student through the ~~xxxxxx~~ process, to translate religious sensitivity into the categories of self-conscious critical reflection.

Can
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It may be that the situation is very different now. ~~Pxxxxx~~ Perhaps the goal is more initiation and exposure than ~~xxxxxxxxxxx~~ conformity to a very particular dialectical process. Again, I'm talking about something of which I have no firm grasp, but I'm relatively certain that the distinction between religion and religious studies is neither as clear nor ~~asxxx~~ necessary as we in the ~~xxx~~ profession once thought. I also find myself thinking that studying religion and studying about religion are not very dissimilar. And I guess I find myself -- for religious, theological, pedagogic, and even intellectual reasons -- wondering are not very dissimilar. And I guess I find myself wondering about the true intellectual respectability of what we used to call the application of "the scientific method" to the study of religion. As something of a theologian, I think I'm searching for a way to do theology in a religious ~~xxxxx~~ vein. And as something of a scholar in the field of religious studies, I find myself becoming less and less tolerant of the sterility of academic exercises. From both sides, I sense that the groundrules have or are shifting dramatically. It's an age of profound transition. It's a time of ferment. And there is as yet no telling what the results will be. We are as men and women who have come far enough to begin ~~xxxxxxx~~ dimly to see what lies ahead. And it's like Petrarch ~~xxxxxxxx~~ who exclaimed from the top of Mt. Ventoux, "Oh God, what a world I see ~~xxxx~~ dawning."

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This is how the situation looks to me when one views it from within Christian theology -- a turn, a ~~whitewash~~ colossal turn toward immanence and this-worldliness, followed by a more current attempt to recover other-worldly losses.

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But when one steps outside theology, narrowly defined, he discovers other factors which seem even more intriguing. Here I only need mention the effect of religious studies upon religion, that is, the ~~max~~ deep way in which religious and theological sensitivities have been affected by exposure to religions east and west, the history of religion, or, better put, the history and theory of religion. It doesn't take much perceptiveness to recognize that this is new. Previous theologians had theological categories for treating non-Christian religions, but the same categories ~~which~~ aren't very persuasive any longer. Even previous historians of religions -- Rudolf Otto, van der Leeuw, Joachim Wach, Nathan Söderblom, included -- could engage in the history and theory of religion ~~which~~ without questioning that Christianity was the superior, pre-eminent religion, but one finds much less of this confidence in contemporary studies (many of which try to skirt the issue altogether). Myriad examples can be cited to support the contention that it is no longer possible effectively to engage in Christian theological reflection except within the context of humanity's larger corporate religious history. And this fact has left Christian theology reeling. It's in a state of shock -- ~~temporary~~ paralysis, temporary paralysis, perhaps, but shock and paralysis nonetheless.

Barth +
Tillich
Eliade
For example, in both Barth and Tillich, Christianity always stood over against other religions in some sort of dialogical relationship. For Barth it was a dialogue in which the participants were regarded as adversaries, in the main; for Tillich the dialogue was friendlier, because the area of common ground was understood to be larger. But even for Tillich the two parties were indeed two parties whose relationship with one another was stipulated by an and (if not, in the Barthian sense, by an or). In fact, it was always and for Tillich: religion and society; religion and literature; religion and science; religion and the humanities, etc. (The full panoply of "and relationships" reads very much like the roster of exams given doctoral candidates ~~at~~ in ~~the~~ religious studies in the University of Chicago.)

The Jesus +
the Bible
But it isn't and any more, and it probably isn't even dialogical. And the sign of this is that the figure of most significant theological influence during the past ten to fifteen years is neither Barth nor Tillich, and not even Rahner and Moltmann, but Mircea Eliade, who teaches, unfortunately, at the University of Chicago. Eliade is the one who has made both religious and theological sense to the students who are the successors to those of us who were brought up on Tillich's Dynamics of Faith. And when I say Eliade, I mean Eliade in a ~~an~~ somewhat collective sense, for I really believe it was Huston Smith's very readable little book, The Religions of Man, which helped create a situation of preparedness for Eliade in American universities in this country.

This is the new fact, and the outcome is not yet in full view. We have the early returns, by which I refer to the work of Jacob Needleman, R. C. Zaehner, Raimundo Panikkar, John Dunne, Fritjoff Schuon, R. R. McGregor, etc. but I have a hunch that the discussion is just beginning. It seems impossible to me that, given this shift of context, anyone can settle for, say, the ~~theological~~ position of Rudolf Bultmann again. At the same time, I want to add that we're not looking at full achievement yet. ~~The~~ But the question is clear: can ~~the~~ theology be undertaken within a religious context? Is it possible to do theology in terms of religion -- not church theology over against philosophical criticism, but theology according to a religious mode? This is the dominant question of our era. And the very

the New Situation of Religion in the Challenging Context ↘

Challenge - to treat religions in a religious context.

- added: to treat them as a religious context.

Religion in the new challenging context -

Search for a New Model: ↙

Implications:

Naivete → Critical Reflection →

a) No longer to quite - -

Distinction between Religion & Religion Studies
no longer held as strictly - -

Strong: Church/State - -

Naivete | Critical Reflection

Revisiting the Model

Fukler: Religious Studies has contributed
to the formation of religion -
but not all religious phenomena
fit into religion studies - -

Analogy: → Change the manner of seeing something
+ everything changes -

the manner of ~~doing~~

Naireto → Critical Investigation

- knowis something - then asking yourself how you know that you know -
- transferring to head what we know in heart -
- hypothesis to Logic
- Start to Conceptual Scheme

Notice - the intentions defined by the contextual challenge
religion in a scientific

In this case, the challenge is scientific method -

a critical reflection

the goal: to treat religion in a scientific way -

to approach religion through critical reflection

We knew a lot about academic scientific method -

+ even theol. -

- and we learned

how to do theol. in an academic setting -

then in a secular academic setting -

→ then we learned something more about religion

The (New Context) →

something to understand

religious topics -

= method's critical reflection

the challenge →

→ then we learned something more about religion



Christianity and Crisis

Whatever Happened to Theology?

Reflections by

Wallace M. Alston Jr. John Cobb
Van A. Harvey Roger L. Shinn
Rosemary Ruether Harvey Cox
Carol Christ Gordon D. Kaufman
José Miguez Bonino David Tracy
Tom F. Driver Frederick Herzog