

## IS RELIGION THE ENEMY OF FAITH?

JOHN THORNHILL, S.M.

*Catholic Theological Union, N.S.W.*

THE QUESTION we raise is one which presents very clearly in contemporary Catholicism. On the one hand, most Catholics would unhesitatingly speak of their Christian heritage as a "religion"; those educating young people in the following of Christ commonly speak of what they are doing as "religious education." On the other hand, many Catholics—those seeking genuine renewal through a healthy criticism of the historical forms Catholicism has assumed—will find attractive the thesis proposed in more than one recent publication: that genuine renewal will be found in the abolition of "religion" and the rediscovery of "faith." According to this thesis, "religion" is a man-made security, while "faith" is a response to the living God's invitation to step forth in a journey of discovery.

In 1972 John Baptist Walker wrote in *Christianity, An End to Magic*: "the religions of mankind developed by way of the myths of creation and fertility out of a response to the frightening facts of human existence that was basically, if not inevitably, neurotic, unrealistic and escapist"; and from this he confidently concluded that Jesus "opposed religion. That is to say, he fulfilled Judaism precisely by purging it of the religious elements it had inherited from its more primitive ancestry," and that religion "was outlawed by the gospel of Christ."<sup>1</sup> In 1976 Jon Sobrino wrote in his *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach*: "When and if the Christian faith takes on a religious structure, it ceases to be Christian, and becomes something else."<sup>2</sup> In 1981 Dick Westley took up the same thesis in *Redemptive Intimacy: A New Perspective for the Journey of Adult Faith*.<sup>3</sup> He wrote: "There is nothing in my life about which I am so absolutely certain as I am about the fact that Jews and Christians have been called to 'faith' not 'religion.'" "It is fear which is the origin of *religion*, and that is what it essentially remains whenever it occurs in human life, i.e., a response to human fear." "Throughout our history, his [God's] voice could always be heard sounding in the lives and experiences of his people, calling them to shun religion and to become a people of faith."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1972, 32 and 49.

<sup>2</sup> Eng. ed., London: SCM, 1978, 277.

<sup>3</sup> Mystic, Conn.: 23rd Publications, 1981.

<sup>4</sup> *Redemptive Intimacy* 47, 49, 50; see also 99, 129, 130. In an appendix Westley noted that it had been suggested to him that a distinction should be introduced between "authentic

There can be no doubt that the issue these authors raise is important. The response given to their suggestions could have far-reaching consequences in the life of the Church. I propose to explore it more thoroughly than they have been able to do. My principal concern will be to seek a theological understanding of "religion" and its relationship to Christian faith. Though "faith" itself is an incomparably greater subject of theological reflection, such a study is not undertaken in this article. It is generally agreed today that in the New Testament "faith" has a comprehensive meaning, expressing the existential response of man to God's saving initiative in Christ. Walter Kasper sums up the meaning of "faith" in the Gospel recollections of Jesus: "faith is open to something other, something new, something to come. . . . It is a description of the essence of faith to say: faith is participation in the omnipotence of God. . . . Faith is existence in receptivity and obedience."<sup>5</sup> Lucien Cerfaux describes the meaning of "faith" for Paul: "An intervention of God and his Son is accessible to us. . . . The righteousness of God is the divine principle of the Christian order, and faith is the corresponding human attitude, which is in this sense the foundation of the new order."<sup>6</sup>

Christian faith, therefore, implies an attitude of acceptance and receptivity to the initiative of God in Jesus Christ. Religion, on the other hand, concerns the initiatives of men and women as they give expression to their relationship to the divine. Are such initiatives to be judged, ultimately, as inimical to the receptivity and obedience which are the very essence of Christian faith?

#### THE PROBLEM IN PROTESTANT THEOLOGY

This question has a long history, to which the authors cited make no reference. It is not absent from the scriptural writings themselves, as we shall see. In the history of Christian thought, it is probably Luther who has raised it most dramatically. Bonhoeffer remarks that "Barth was the first theologian to begin the criticism of religion, and that remains his

---

religion" and "inauthentic religion"; but he does not take up the suggestion. The interpretation of the origins of religion proposed by Walker and Westley (cf. also Sobrino's definition of religion, *Christology* 275-76) finds no support in the findings of comparative religion (cf. J. Goetz, *NCE* 12, 241; E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* [Oxford: University Press, 1965] 4-5), and none in the work of sociologists of religion (cf. A. Greeley, "The Myths of Secularity," chap 1 of *The World in the Church*, ed. J. Aumann [Chicago: Priory, 1969]). Their interpretation contrasts with the judgment of Christopher Dawson: "Religion is the key of history. We cannot understand the inner form of a society unless we understand its religion. We cannot understand its cultural achievements unless we understand the religious beliefs that lie behind them. In all ages the first creative works of a culture are due to religious inspiration and dedicated to a religious end" (*Religion and Culture* [London: Sheed & Ward, 1949] 50).

<sup>5</sup> *Jesus the Christ* (London: Burns & Oates, 1977) 81-82.

<sup>6</sup> *The Spiritual Journey of St Paul* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1972) 124-25.

really great merit."<sup>7</sup> But this is only so because the term "religion" has assumed an emphasis and meaning in modern usage which it did not have in Luther's time. If Luther did not raise the question as one of "faith" versus "religion," the issue is at the heart of his theological enterprise; and Barth's criticism of "religion" is essentially an appeal to Reformation principles.

Luther's criticism of the medieval Church was that its emphasis upon justifying "works" prevented Christians from making the liberating discovery of justifying "faith." Looking back, Luther summarized his outlook before his break with the Catholic Church in these words: "What we were trying to do was to deserve God and win God with works of this kind and to acquire the forgiveness of sins."<sup>8</sup> Luther's theology of justifying faith is intimately associated, of course, with his personal experience of how the message of God's Word can liberate man from dependence upon such justifying works. He saw the "Law" as condemning man before God, and the "Gospel" as liberating him from this condemnation against all human expectation. Thomas McDonough summarizes Luther's position:

Justification begins when the sinner, moved by God, has a deep heartfelt awareness, accompanied by despair, of his moral impotence and depravity before God's Law; in this state, he feels unavoidably condemned by the Law and deserving of damnation; suddenly he escapes from this despair through "passive" faith in Christ's Word, which not only assures him of salvation but inwardly heals him, if not of sinfulness, at least of the damning consequences of his sins. . . . In short, God's Word, as Law and Gospel, effects in the Christian soul a threefold dynamic awareness of being, at one and the same time, morally impotent, passively justified, and imputatively righteous before God.<sup>9</sup>

The intrinsic logic of this understanding of justification through a "passive" faith leaves little place for the saving value of man's acts once he has been justified: "Good works are excluded from the economy of salvation precisely because human nature (that is, the moral self) is powerless to perform them . . . in a way which merits the forgiveness of sin and the beatitude of the soul."<sup>10</sup> But before this logic Luther hesitates. Peter Manns concludes that "in Luther's positive assessment of the role of good works under grace in justification there is not the theological clarity that characterizes his denial of works-righteousness. Instead, the

<sup>7</sup> *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. E. Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1972) 285.

<sup>8</sup> Cited by Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther* (London: Collins, 1970) 35.

<sup>9</sup> *The Law and the Gospel in Luther: A Study of Martin Luther's Confessional Writings* (Oxford: University Press, 1963) 23-24; cf. also 3, 14, 46, 51. Ebeling judges that, for Luther, Christian righteousness is the very opposite of righteousness wrought by man: not of works but of faith; not active but a passive gift; not our own but from outside ourselves; "imputed," therefore not our own possession (*Luther* 118-22).

<sup>10</sup> McDonough, *The Law and the Gospel* 27.

relevant statements . . . are ambiguous, contradictory, in need of clarification, and therefore misleading."<sup>11</sup> Luther acknowledged, in fact, that his teaching concerning "passive righteousness" was not without its perplexing aspects:

The righteousness which derives from us is not Christian righteousness, and we are not justified by it. Christian righteousness is the direct opposite, the passive righteousness which we merely receive, in which we effect nothing, but through which we allow someone else to work within us, that is, God. This is not understood by the world . . . even Christians understand it with difficulty. . . . This distinction must be carefully considered. I am not yet master of it."<sup>12</sup>

Manns points out that there is an unresolved tension in Luther's thought between this principle of "passive righteousness" and his recognition that the justified man bears fruits which are the expression of his being justified.<sup>13</sup> He concludes: "Luther did not succeed in specifying good works in the sense of free cooperation in such a way that, without denying or limiting grace, they might be seen to have true causality and necessity for salvation. But it does not follow from this . . . that he denies all cooperation, or so radically asserts God's operation that all other activity is excluded."<sup>14</sup>

When the neo-orthodox movement within Protestantism set out to counter the positions which had been adopted by liberal Protestantism, it concentrated its attack upon the assumption that Christianity is a "religion." Bonhoeffer acknowledges Karl Barth as the leader in this attack: "Barth was the first to realize the mistake" those still following the path of liberal theology "were making in leaving clear a space for

<sup>11</sup> "Absolute and Incarnate Faith—Luther on Justification in the Galatians Commentary of 1531–1535," in *Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther*, ed. J. Wicks (Chicago: Loyola University, 1970) 125; cf. 121. In 1966 Manns took part in the Third International Congress for Luther Research, Helsinki, where he made important critical interventions on behalf of the "historical Luther" against modernizing interpretations of an existentialist tendency (cf. 119).

<sup>12</sup> Cited by Ebeling, *Luther* 122.

<sup>13</sup> Manns cites such passages as "Therefore faith always justifies and makes alive; and yet it does not remain alone, that is, idle. Not that it does not remain alone on its own level and in its own function, for it always justifies alone. But it is incarnate and becomes man; that is, it neither is nor remains idle or without love"; and "First, there must be a tree, then the fruit. For apples do not make a tree, but a tree makes apples. So faith first makes the person, who afterwards performs works" (130). Manns comments: "It is significant that Luther avoids the verse that closes the parable in Matthew: 'Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire' (7:19)" (130). Cf. McDonough, "The Transforming Power of Faith," *The Law and the Gospel* 45–52.

<sup>14</sup> Manns continues: "Therefore Luther's emphasis on *fides absoluta* attains only a negative theological clarity in the denial of any form of justification by works. In spite of the conflict of intentions we pointed out, Luther's positive portrayal remains open to realizing the intention of *fides incarnata*" (131).

religion in the world or against the world. He brought in against religion the God of Jesus Christ, *pneuma* against *sarx*."<sup>15</sup> For Barth, theology faces an alternative: either "what we think we know of the nature and incidence of religion must serve as a norm and principle by which to explain the revelation of God" or vice versa "we have to interpret the Christian religion and all other religions by what we are told by God's revelation."<sup>16</sup> He saw liberal Protestantism as having followed Schleiermacher along the first of these paths; he strove to recover the authentic principles of the tradition of the Reformation by resolutely setting out upon the latter path. He aimed to uphold "the religion of revelation" and denounced an interpretation of the Christian faith as "the revelation of religion."<sup>17</sup>

Barth initiated this criticism of "religion" in his *Epistle to the Romans*, though, as Bonhoeffer has observed, at this stage he was still hampered by "all the Kantian egg-shells"<sup>18</sup> through which he was finding his way. But it was in *Church Dogmatics* that he wrestled mightily with the whole question.<sup>19</sup> No one with theological sensitivity could read this text without being profoundly moved—by the breadth of his scholarship, by the depth to which he carries his discussion, and by the greatness of a theological synthesis which carries the Reformed tradition to the limits of its achievement.

Barth sees "the revelation of God as the abolition of religion." As a preliminary to the upholding of this thesis, he undertakes a far-reaching review of "the problem of religion in theology."<sup>20</sup> He notes that for Aquinas "the concept of religion as a general concept, to which the Christian religion must be subordinated as one with others, was obviously quite foreign." The problem "could not have any great importance until after the Renaissance."<sup>21</sup> For Barth, the discovery of "religion" was part of the "self-discovery of man" which took place between the Renaissance and the 19th century.<sup>22</sup> As he points out, "Calvin spoke of the *religio christiana* even in the title of his chef d'œuvre. But when he did so he was not conscious of making *christiana* the predicate of something human in a neutral and universal sense. What Calvin describes . . . is wholly a normative concept which he has derived from Holy Scripture, and in which the universal is sublimated in the particular, religion in revelation, and not *vice versa*."<sup>23</sup> Reviewing the literature of the Lutheran and the Reformed traditions, Barth finds that they remained within this perspective until "the movement of so-called rational orthodoxy at the

<sup>15</sup> *Letters and Papers* 328.

<sup>16</sup> *Church Dogmatics* 1/2, 284.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 1/2, 284.

<sup>18</sup> *Letters and Papers* 328.

<sup>19</sup> *Church Dogmatics* 1/2, 280–358.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 280.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 284.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 293.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 284.

beginning of the 18th century"; after this, one witnessed the "dreaded results of the reversal of revelation and religion."<sup>24</sup> Revelation's "superiority which does not allow us even to consider religion except in the light of revelation" was lost sight of, and revelation and religion were put on the same level.<sup>25</sup>

Barth saw "religion" as having a twofold origin in man: (1) deriving from natural theology's attempt to grasp God in a conception measured by human truth, and (2) deriving from the dynamism of conscience as it seeks an interior security in the fulfilment of law.<sup>26</sup> Even the redeemed Christian, because he is a "justified sinner,"<sup>27</sup> is tempted to seek the human security of religion and to retranslate the message of the New Testament "into a document of religion." In truth, however, Barth sees both Testaments as condemning religion.<sup>28</sup> The message of revelation leaves no place for religion: "revelation is the truth beside which there is no other truth . . . only lying and wrong";<sup>29</sup> revelation judges all religion as an attempt to anticipate God's utterly new truth;<sup>30</sup> "by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ . . . we can characterize religion as idolatry and self-righteousness, and in this way show it to be unbelief."<sup>31</sup>

Barth's theological interpretation of the worship of the believer—his "religious" actions as a Christian—is grounded in his understanding of justification:

No religion is true . . . it can become true only in the way in which man is justified, from without; i.e. not of its own nature and being, but only in virtue of a reckoning and adopting and separating which are foreign to its own nature and being, which are quite inconceivable from its own standpoint, which come to it quite apart from any qualifications or merits. Like justified man religion is a creature of grace. But grace is the revelation of God. No religion can stand before it as true religion. No man is righteous in its presence. . . . The abolishing of religion by revelation need not mean only its negation: the judgment that religion is unbelief. Religion can just as well be exalted in revelation, even though the judgment still stands. It can be upheld by it and concealed in it, and—we must say—sanctified. Revelation can adopt religion and mark it off as true religion. . . . There is true religion: just as there are justified sinners. If we abide strictly by that analogy—and we are dealing not merely with an analogy, but in a comprehensive sense

<sup>24</sup>Ibid. 288 and 292.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid. 294.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid. 315. Cf. Jas. W. Woelfel, *Bonhoeffer's Theology* (New York: Abingdon, 1970) 105: "Both Barth and Bonhoeffer saw various forms of philosophical theology as bound up with an interest in 'religion,' either on the metaphysical level (as in Catholic natural theology) or in terms of analysis of the religious subject (as in liberal and existentialist Protestant 'religious a prioris' or 'anthropological preunderstanding')."

<sup>27</sup> *Church Dogmatics* 1/2, 325.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 300.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 328–29.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 314.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 325.

with the thing itself—we need have no hesitation in saying that the Christian religion is the true religion.<sup>32</sup>

At this point Barth is maintaining the consistency of his theological principles only with difficulty. One is reminded of the difficulty which Luther met at this same point. Barth acknowledges that the event of revelation eliminates neither man nor religion (as man's self-expression); but at the same time he declares that, in the order of justification, they have no other existence except as "the possession of Christ."<sup>33</sup> He seeks to explain this position further by applying his methodological "analogy of faith." He draws a parallel between the humanity of Christ, assumed into union with the divine Person of the Son, and man taken into an identification with Christ's righteousness. We shall return later to this analogy with the Incarnation, already found in Luther,<sup>34</sup> and discuss whether Barth has acknowledged all its implications.<sup>35</sup>

It is well known that Dietrich Bonhoeffer was preoccupied in the last months of his life with the "religionless Christianity" which he saw as appropriate in the contemporary world's climate of secularization.<sup>36</sup> Already in *No Rusty Swords* he wrote: "God's 'criticism' touches even religion. . . . God has founded his Church beyond religion and beyond ethics."<sup>37</sup> He acknowledged his indebtedness to Barth and, as we have seen, applauded his critique of religion, hailing it as an invocation of *pneuma* against *sarx*. But he considered that Barth's critique had not gone far enough, because "in the non-religious interpretation of theological concepts he gave no concrete guidance, either in dogmatics or in ethics."<sup>38</sup> Instead, in the place of the "religion" of liberal Protestantism, he put "a positivistic doctrine of revelation which says, in effect, 'Like it or lump it': Virgin birth, Trinity, or anything else."<sup>39</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 325–26.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 296.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Manns, "Absolute and Incarnate" 126.

<sup>35</sup> In his work *The Philosophy of Religion from the Standpoint of Protestant Theology* (London: Clarke, 1958), Emil Brunner adopts a position which has much in common with Barth's. For him, a "philosophy of religion" which is acceptable to Protestantism will have a sense radically different from that generally assumed: it must be ruled by faith and theology; it does not lead to faith as the most perfect expression of some human universal, nor is it a universal discipline with Christian theology as a subdivision, as the liberal theology of the 19th century conceived it (17).

<sup>36</sup> From prison Bonhoeffer wrote: "I've found that following Luther's instructions to 'make a sign of the cross' at our morning and evening prayers is in itself very helpful. There is something objective about it and that is what is particularly badly needed here. Don't be alarmed; I shall not come out of here a *homo religiosus*! On the contrary, my fear and distrust of 'religiosity' have become greater than ever here" (*Letters and Papers* 135).

<sup>37</sup> Cited, Woefel, *Bonhoeffer's Theology* 104.

<sup>38</sup> *Letters and Papers* 328.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 285.

Bonhoeffer was critical of Bultmann's attempt to remove a religious dimension no longer appropriate to contemporary man: "You can't, as Bultmann supposes, separate God and miracle, but you must be able to interpret and proclaim *both* in a 'non-religious' sense. Bultmann's approach is fundamentally still a liberal one (i.e. abridging the gospel), whereas I'm trying to think theologically."<sup>40</sup> Bonhoeffer found it difficult to formulate what he had in mind: "I'm only gradually working my way to the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts; the job is too big for me to finish yet."<sup>41</sup> But he outlined in a few lines a projected book which would take up this question, concluding: "Our relation to God is not a 'religious' relationship to the highest, most powerful, and best Being imaginable—that is not authentic transcendence—but our relation to God is a new life in 'existence for others,' through participation in the being of Jesus."<sup>42</sup>

#### MEANING OF "RELIGION": HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Before we continue this discussion, it is necessary to clarify further what we mean when we speak of "religion." A term means what it is intended to mean, and the meaning intended by the term has not been the same in different historical epochs.

William James's definition sums up in general terms what the term signifies in today's usage: "The feelings, acts, and experiences of men so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine." Attempts to formulate a more precise definition encounter no small difficulty, as the authors of modern encyclopedic articles acknowledge.<sup>43</sup> These scholars have recourse to a phenomenological description of "religion," as a particular sphere of human activity, and of its peculiar "object," the "divine" or "sacred." But such a description is too comprehensive to carry us far towards the solution of the theological problem we have raised. Religion in this sense takes in both faith and religion, which, according to the terms of our problem, we wish to compare and contrast.

A historical perspective of the changing sense in which "religion" has been used is already enlightening. The *Oxford English Dictionary* records an evolution of meaning in the usage of the English language.<sup>44</sup> Apart from reference to the vowed life, the earliest reference of the term is to

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 285. This text continues, echoing Barth's understanding of the origin of religion: "What does it mean 'to interpret in a religious sense'? I think it means to speak on the one hand metaphysically, and on the other hand individualistically. Neither of these is relevant to the biblical message or to the man of today" (285–86).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 359.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 381.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. H. R. Schlette, "Religion," *LTK* 8, 1164; J. Goetz, "Religion," *NCE* 12, 240.

<sup>44</sup> 1933 ed., 8:410.



cultic expression: "action or conduct indicating belief in, reverence for, and desire to please, a divine ruling power; the exercise or practice of rites or observances implying this" (from A.D. 1225). A more comprehensive meaning is found from the beginning of the 14th century; "a particular system of faith and worship." And from the mid-16th century a meaning is found which is similar to the definition of William James already cited: "Recognition on the part of man of some higher unseen power as having control of his destiny, and being entitled to obedience, reverence and worship; the general mental and moral attitude resulting from this belief, with reference to its effects upon the individual and the community etc." Thus English usage parallels the findings of Barth's review of theological literature in Europe: that the recognition of religion as a comprehensive category paralleled the emergence of modern man's critical awareness of himself after the Renaissance.

The meaning of the term for Aquinas parallels the earliest English usage: religion is the virtue which gives to God the cultic reverence which is his due (cf. *Sum. theol.* 2-2, q. 81, a. 3). This usage has a long history. The term *thrēskeia* is to be found in Wisdom 14:16-18 and James 1:26.<sup>45</sup> Together with this meaning emphasizing cultic expression and evidently derived from it, a more general meaning is found. When Paul says of himself "I followed the strictest party in our religion and lived as a Pharisee" (Acts 26:5), he is speaking in this comprehensive sense of the Jewish way of life; but this way of life is still seen as measured by cultic practice. In the same perspective Aquinas refers to the whole economy of the Christian life as "Christiana religio" (Prologue of *Sum. theol.*). Barth has already recalled for us that the same concept is found in the title of Calvin's work.

Until the end of the 18th century, however, religion in this broadest sense was identified with a whole culture or way of life. From the beginning of the 19th century, the term came to mean a particular sphere of human activity, among others. Joseph D. Bettis describes the emergence of this increased self-awareness on the part of the Western tradition:

The attempt to describe religion as a separate and independent sphere of individual and human activity did not appear until near the beginning of the 19th century, with the rise of social sciences. Schleiermacher's *On Religion* was

<sup>45</sup> This term is rendered by Liddell and Scott's *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: University Press, 1961) "religious worship, cult, ritual." It is against the background of this cultic emphasis that C. F. D. Moule can point out that the first Christians seemed irreligious to their contemporaries: "in the N.T. period itself, Christianity seemed, to outside observers, to be cut off from religion. . . . Christians refusing to join in the pagan imperial cult, yet possessing no tangible sacrifices, no priesthood, no place of worship of their own, seemed to be atheists" (*The Birth of the New Testament* [London: Black, 1966] 136).

one of the first books to regard it as an isolable subject. Prior to that a religious tradition was identified with the cultural tradition that provided the fundamental means of individual and social identification. Traditionally, religion referred to the basic guiding images and principles of an individual and a culture. Religion was identical with style of life.<sup>46</sup>

With this development—which brings us to the concept taken up in the contemporary encyclopedias we have referred to—came the systematic attempts to define and interpret this separate sphere of human life to which the term is applied. Bettis reviews these essays. Schleiermacher's interpretation was *subject-centered*; he saw religion as specified by the uniqueness of human psychic faculties; we give the name "God" to the correlate of a unique feeling of absolute dependence.<sup>47</sup> Paul Tillich also locates the essence of religion subjectively, but for him it is not a separate component of human life but an ultimate dimension of all human existence, influencing every segment of our human activity.<sup>48</sup> Other scholars have given emphasis to the *object* of the religious response. Rudolf Otto names this unique object "the numinous."<sup>49</sup> G. van der Leeuw characterizes this object as "power."<sup>50</sup>

Mircea Eliade proposes a dialectic or *relational* understanding of religion. He judges that religious activity is "best defined, not in terms of object (power, being etc.) or in terms of subjectivity (immanent self-awareness, depth dimension, need for social stability etc.) but in terms of the way in which men relate to the object of their attention . . . what makes a situation 'religious' is neither the subjective element nor the objective element, but the way in which these elements come in contact."<sup>51</sup> This insight seems to be of great importance for an understanding of how Christian theology may come to an understanding of the place of religion in a wholesome expression of the fulness of the Christian mystery, and I shall return to it below.

The emergence of awareness of the peculiarly "religious" dimension of human existence is a development which has importance for Christian

<sup>46</sup> *Phenomenology of Religion* (London: SCM, 1960) 170. Schleiermacher's *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* appeared in 1799. He addressed himself to the romantic movement, which he judged had neglected this area of human experience.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Bettis, *Phenomenology* 142.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 170-71.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Penguin, 1959).

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Bettis, *Phenomenology* 53.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 199 and 203: "The sacred is not, therefore, another world alongside the 'real world' of experience. The sacred world is the world of real events and things residing within the experienced world. The desire of the religious man to live 'in the sacred' is, as Eliade says, this desire to live in tune with 'real events' and 'not according to phoney or deceiving experiences.'" Martin Buber's understanding of religion has much in common with the understanding of Eliade (cf. Bettis, *Phenomenology* 233-34).

theology; it invites new reflections upon the manner in which the Christian mystery is realized in human history. These reflections were initiated with the essays of liberal Protestantism. But this work had serious shortcomings and merited Barth's criticism that the order of norms had been turned upside down: religion as a universal human experience became the measure against which the Christian mystery was understood. The reaction of Barth and Emil Brunner was grounded in the principles of the Reformation. We must now ask whether the Catholic tradition can make its contribution to the discussion, and whether this contribution calls for a modification of the position taken by Barth.

#### CONTRIBUTION OF CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

Bernard Lonergan's influential study *Method in Theology*<sup>52</sup> may well serve as a starting point. Lonergan's objective is to provide an explanation of theological method which is intelligible to any reasonable inquirer. To achieve this, he looks to "religion" (understood as a field of self-transcendent love) to provide the all-embracing framework of methodological analysis. He sees this love as expressed in a variety of traditions, Christian and otherwise. Thus he provides a foundation not only for tolerance but also for collaboration beyond the bounds of particular religious creeds.

Our discussion to this point alerts us to the inherent difficulties the Christian theologian will meet working within such a perspective. What is the relationship between religion thus conceived and Christian faith?<sup>53</sup> How does it escape the criticism Barth leveled against the presuppositions of liberal Protestantism?<sup>54</sup> Anthony J. Kelly makes a valuable critique of Lonergan's work by discussing it in the light of the distinction between religion and faith.<sup>55</sup> He finds Lonergan's *Method* "a quite beautiful treatment of religion," but he points out that a specifically Christian theology must "take faith in Christ into its inner vitality"; on this issue he finds Lonergan "notably elusive."<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, Kelly argues, the

<sup>52</sup> London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1972.

<sup>53</sup> One finds that "Faith" is discussed in a brief subsection of a chapter entitled "Religion" (chap. 4, no. 7, 115-18).

<sup>54</sup> Lonergan does not seem to acknowledge any need to forestall such criticism. He initiates his brief section entitled "Faith": "Faith is the knowledge born of religious love"; and on the previous page he writes: "Western religion cultivated the realm of transcendence through its churches and liturgies, its celibate clergy, its religious orders, congregations, confraternities. It moved into the realm of theory by its dogmas, its theology, its juridical structures and enactments" (114-15).

<sup>55</sup> "Is Lonergan's *Method* Adequate to Christian Mystery?" *Thomist* 39 (1975) 437-70 (summarized in *TD* 24 [1976] 173-78).

<sup>56</sup> "Is Lonergan's *Method* Adequate?" 440-41. Kelly painstakingly follows Lonergan's text, bringing out the manner in which his chosen framework constricts his efforts to give the Christian mystery its rightful place in the theological method he is describing—particularly in his treatment of "prior word" and "outward word."

religious perspective adopted by Lonergan must be complemented by the unique perspectives deriving from Christian faith: "Theology treats of a datum, a 'donum,' before it considers 'data.' Such a datum is God's self-communication in Christ. . . . The divine self-communication precedes and provokes the human."<sup>57</sup>

Kelly sees Karl Rahner as providing more effectively than Lonergan the perspectives of Christian faith. He cites Rahner's remark at a symposium on methodology held in Montreal in 1969:

In the long run theological methodology will only be convincing when it brings man into immediate contact with the subject matter itself, and in the last analysis this is, once and for all, not faith and the theology that goes with it, but that which is the object of faith, because faith itself is only itself when it surrenders itself to that which it itself is not, even while the man of faith is convinced that this greater entity which he cannot comprehend can become an event in this faith of his.<sup>58</sup>

Kelly judges that the sensitivities echoed in this passage make Rahner critical of an approach to Lonergan's work which would see it as providing a total theological methodology.<sup>59</sup> For Rahner,

mystery, not method, is fundamental . . . the notion of mystery . . . really enters into the inner vitality of his transcendental method . . . a rather powerful notion, and in considerable contrast to such a category as *Method* describes, where it is more a surplus notion, almost to the discomfort of theology, as a source of problems. Because Rahner would view mystery as the incomprehensible nearness of God to man mediated to us through Christ and his Spirit, theology must be considered as the "science of mystery." He recognizes that this may be a hard saying for the modern scientific mentality, but, at least this is where its distinction lies.<sup>60</sup>

Our problem is one, therefore, which is not far from the preoccupations of contemporary Catholic scholarship. At least one writer has taken it up in explicit terms. M. D. Chenu suggests that the key to its resolution is to be found in "the classical distinction between faith and religion—between faith the 'theological' virtue, and religion, the 'moral' virtue."<sup>61</sup>

And one may well ask whether the complex question we are facing can be dealt with adequately without recourse to the analytical considerations

<sup>57</sup> "Is Lonergan's *Method* Adequate?" 442.

<sup>58</sup> "Reflections on Methodology in Theology," *Theological Investigations* 11 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974) 84.

<sup>59</sup> "Is Lonergan's *Method* Adequate?" 462.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 462–63. See also 465: "More than anything else I know of, the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar challenges Lonergan's approach, although I have not discovered either of these thinkers offering any comment on the other's work" (cf. 464–68 *passim*). The influence of Barth on Balthasar is beyond question.

<sup>61</sup> "The Need for a Theology of the World," in *The Great Ideas Today* (1967), ed. R. Hutchins and M. Adler (Chicago: Britannica) 65–66; cf. 57.

of the kind we associate with scholasticism. Quite rightly, contemporary theology emphasizes a *comprehensive* understanding which contrasts with the *analysis* of scholasticism. Meeting the exigencies of a historical moment which calls for the recovery of a *total vision*, today's theology stresses the intelligibility of the existential totality, of the situation, of "the story," of "the message"; the scholastic approach, on the other hand, sought to analyze the intelligibility of particular elements and dimensions of the reality of the Christian mystery. We are at present in the midst of a reaction against the inadequacies of a theology which made almost exclusive use of the scholastic method. But these two approaches are not exclusive of one another; they are complementary; and if one is to explore basic theological issues satisfactorily, they must both be made use of.

The analysis of Aquinas proposes an explanation of the "classical distinction" to which Chenu refers. For St. Thomas, religion is a "virtue." According to his Aristotelian analysis, he assigns virtue to the genus of "quality";<sup>62</sup> this does not imply for him a static reality—he views virtue in a dynamic fashion, as a perfection added to a power.<sup>63</sup> In seeking to differentiate the complex realities embraced by the generic term "virtue," Thomas looks to the specification coming from the intentionality of different virtuous qualities. "Virtue" in general is a dynamic confirmation towards "the good," superadded to the human person's basic inclinations; this confirmation is diversified according to the specific goods to which various virtues are directed.<sup>64</sup>

The most fundamental distinction to be recognized among virtues arises from the fact that their qualitative intentionality may be directed, on the one hand, towards a good which "does not exceed the connatural capacity of man," or, on the other hand, towards a good which is "supernatural." The former are "natural" virtues; the latter are "supernatural," insofar as their qualitative intentionality "cannot be acquired by human acts but is 'infused' by God."<sup>65</sup> It is clear that the theological problem we are discussing concerns virtues which are of the "supernatural" order. One agrees with Luther that "works-righteousness" which is independent of God's grace can have no salutary effect; the real problem concerns the acts of a human person realized through God's grace.

Aquinas' analytical comparison of the virtues which are the principles of such acts leads him to recognize that they must be radically differentiated into two kinds: again by reason of the good to which their intentionality is directed. The "theological virtues" (faith, hope, and charity) bring a supernatural intentionality which is concerned immedi-

<sup>62</sup> *Sum. theol.* 1-2, q. 49, a. 2; q. 55, a. 2.      <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* q. 55, a. 2.

<sup>64</sup> *Cf. Ethic.* 2, 62; *Quaest. disp. de virtutibus*, a. 12.

<sup>65</sup> *Sum. theol.* 1-2, 65, a. 2. *Cf. Quaest. disp. de virt.*, a. 10.

ately with *the ultimate good which is God Himself*, acting on man's behalf in Jesus Christ. "These three" which "abide" (1 Cor 13:13) are the heart of the Christian destiny, which is nothing less than the self-communication of a loving and merciful God. Other virtues are concerned immediately with those *created goods* which man must embrace as he pursues the possession of the ultimate good.<sup>66</sup> These latter Thomas calls "moral virtues"; and among them he recognizes four families of virtues—prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance—which he calls "cardinal virtues."<sup>67</sup>

Whereas faith belongs to the theological virtues, religion, for Aquinas, belongs to the family of the moral virtue of justice. The generic good to which the intentionality of the virtue of justice is directed is *what is owing to another by right*; the specific good to which the intentionality of the virtue of religion is directed is *the cult which is owing to God*.<sup>68</sup>

Chenu, in the article to which I have referred, gives a phenomenology of religion which makes clear the importance of the distinction Aquinas has made. Religion has its origins in the recognition by human beings—usually in no more than a "prereflexive way"—that the concrete realities of their lives and experiences find their ultimate significance in the lived acknowledgment of their being grounded in the transcendent order. In referring them to God, they "sacralize" these realities and experiences. Enshrining them in ritual, they tend to withdraw them from the profane order. The meeting of this fundamental need finds many forms, giving rise to various types of religion and sacralization recognized by sociologists of religion: a useful religion, aimed at reaching mysterious forces; a religion of fear, guaranteeing a measure of security; a religion of homage towards the greatness of the divine absolute; and a religion of communion, which is the highest, because through it the absolute comes to fulfil man's aspirations and raise him above himself. "The common denominator of these needs and religions," Chenu concludes, "is the fact that they ascend from man to the divinity."<sup>69</sup>

Chenu contrasts with his description of religion a phenomenological description of Christian faith:

<sup>66</sup> Cf. *Quaest. disp. de virt.*, a. 12.

<sup>67</sup> *Sum. theol.* 1-2, q. 61, a. 2; 2-2, q. 58, a. 8, ad 2. Aquinas recognizes a great complexity among these families of virtues, distinguishing "integral parts" (qualities which are presupposed for the perfect act of virtue), "subjective parts" (which are species of the one generic virtue), and "potential parts" (which are virtues associated with the principal cardinal virtue as having something in common with it, but which are not properly species of it). Religion is a "potential part" of the virtue of justice (cf. 2-2, q. 80, a. 1).

<sup>68</sup> Aquinas notes that "religion" cannot be assigned to the family of justice except with qualification (*Sum. theol.* 2-2, q. 80, a. 1).

<sup>69</sup> Cf. "The Need for a Theology" 57-58.

Faith, as such, proceeds in exactly the opposite way. Considered phenomenologically, the act of a believer has a totally different inspiration from the religious act just described. . . . Faith is not the action of a man ascending toward the Divine. It is the act of response to and of communion with a personal God, who on his own initiative enters into conversation with man and establishes a communion in love. In accordance with the logic of love, this God enters into the life of the "other" and makes himself man in order to bring this act to its full reality. Divinization thus comes by means of a humanization. All this may seem to the unbeliever nothing but myth or illusion, but it is the very object of faith and governs its design and structure. . . . In faith we are dealing with an event. We are no longer in nature but in history. . . . To be Christian is to be in relation to a fact—the fact of Christ—to a history, and not to a morality, a law, a theory, or a cult.<sup>70</sup>

We are now in a position to undertake, from the point of view of Catholic theology, a dialogue with the Protestant critique of "religion." We must agree immediately with the basic assertion of this critique, against liberal Protestantism, that the truth of revelation must stand as the measure of religion in the life of human persons. What, then, does the message of revelation have to say concerning man's religious self-expression once he has been justified? Luther declares: "The righteousness which derives from us is not Christian righteousness, and we are not justified by it."<sup>71</sup> One must distinguish: the righteous works which, in terms of Aquinas' analysis, belong to the order of natural virtue can, as such, have no saving significance;<sup>72</sup> but what of those works which human persons perform as the fruits and expression of their being taken into Christ's own righteousness? It is these which constitute the essence of our problem.

As we have seen, Luther's position in regard to this question has been judged "ambiguous, contradictory, in need of clarification, and therefore misleading."<sup>73</sup> In dealing with this question, Barth resorts to the rhetoric

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 58. He adds: "The Gospel suggests this [contrast] to the Christian. The N.T. rarely speaks of 'religion' and then seemingly only with great caution. The early Christians were sharply aware of the difference that the Christian faith had introduced into the world of religion."

<sup>71</sup> Cited by Ebeling, *Luther* 122.

<sup>72</sup> It should be noted that the scholasticism familiar to Luther included the theory held by some nominalists that "by virtue of a decree of the divine will, *de potentia ordinata*" man "obtained the gifts of Christ's redeeming grace the moment he became morally perfect according to the norms of human reason; if he failed in this respect grace was denied him" (McDonough, *The Law and the Gospel* 11). While this opinion is not, strictly speaking, Pelagian, it undermines the order of grace as revealed in the Christian mystery, and may well have contributed to Luther's taking of position (cf. McDonough, *ibid.* 35). It is not without significance that Article 13 of the *39 Articles of Religion* of the Church of England (1562) is consciously reacting to such a scholastic opinion.

<sup>73</sup> Manns, cited n. 11 above.

of paradox. Of course, in criticizing Barth we must recognize the method he had adopted, whereby he chose to formulate his theological statements in terms of existential and comprehensive "events" rather than through an ontological analysis of the kind found in Aquinas; Barth saw such analysis as a submitting of the truth of revelation to the measures of human wisdom. Catholic theology must face up squarely to the challenge of Barth's criticism, both concerning the theological project in general and concerning this particular question. The two issues are profoundly linked. But in the end it is only such an analysis which can rescue the position Barth is upholding from being dismissed as contradictory.

By virtue of the distinction he had made, Chenu has carried his discussion far beyond the point to which Barth's theological method could carry him.<sup>74</sup> Chenu's measured incarnational perspective allows him to derive important insights from contemporary sociological studies, and thus to take seriously the ambiguities of the human struggle. This perspective provides the basis for a profound theological defense of the truth Barth was determined to uphold against liberal Protestantism; it also provides, as we shall see, the ultimate basis for a satisfactory criticism of the deviant tendencies which are apt to develop within Christian ritual and practice.

The final justification for Catholic theology's recourse to the kind of rational and ontological analysis employed by St. Thomas is the fact that God's revelation has been given by way of the *Incarnation*. Both Luther and Barth see the importance of the Incarnation for the theology of the condition of the justified human person. But in Luther's case, according to the judgment of Peter Manns, a "polemical captivation with the assertion of justification by faith alone . . . moves Luther to propose a Christological justification of his doctrine. This *ad hoc* Christological construction is obviously forced and too strongly contradicts Luther's other Christological statements to qualify as a valid theological expression of his thought."<sup>75</sup> Turning to Barth, we find, as we have already observed, that he too grounds his interpretation of the religion of the justified human person in an analogy with the assuming of humanity by the Son. He writes:

If we are to maintain the *analogia fidei* and not fall into untheological thinking, we must be guided by the christological consideration of the incarnation of the Word as the *assumptio carnis*. The unity of God and man in Jesus Christ is the unity of a completed event. Similarly, the unity of divine revelation and human

<sup>74</sup> Chenu criticizes "the tragic pessimism of Bonhoeffer" and others that, in the name of faith as an "evangelical absolute," would do away with religion as "the cancer of faith" ("The Need for a Theology" 65).

<sup>75</sup> "Absolute and Incarnate Faith" 127-28.



religion is that of an event—although in this case it still has to be completed. As God is the subject of the one event, so, too, He is of the other. The man Jesus has no prior or abstract existence in the one event but exists only in the unity of God himself: very God and very man. Similarly in the other, man and his religion is to be considered only as the one who follows God because God has preceded the man who bears him, because he is addressed by God.<sup>76</sup>

The Catholic tradition would take issue with Barth for not being prepared to accept the full implications of the analogy. While he accepts the implications as far as the unity of the believer with God in Christ is concerned, he is not prepared to accept the implication that in this unity *what is essentially and authentically human is saved and owned* by God's intervention in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.<sup>77</sup>

That our human reality has been saved and owned by God in Christ is the basis of the incarnational and sacramental genius of the Catholic tradition's interpretation of the Christian mystery. For this tradition, God's justifying grace brings a union, in Christ, with God (the Uncreated Grace) which is only possible through a radical new creation of the humanity of the believer. This transformation in no way compromises our humanity but carries it beyond the limits of its innate capacities, to a response of the whole person to God's presence and invitation. This communion will be consummated in the eschatological life, but it is already initiated in the pilgrim believer's life "in Christ." It is this incarnational faith which is the basis of St. Thomas' teaching concerning the infused virtues and their qualitative intentionality to the divine realities. Within the complexity of this regenerated life, one must acknowledge the response of "faith" as belonging to an absolutely paramount order, that of the theological virtues (bringing an immediate relationship with the living God Himself and His saving act on man's

<sup>76</sup> *Church Dogmatics* 1/2, 297.

<sup>77</sup> Barth, in the passage just cited, makes his own the profession of Chalcedon, "in the unity of God Himself: very God and very man." He has not carried further, in the context of this question, enquiry as to how the Son's being "very man" is the carrying of humanness into a new manner of being alive to God. One could contrast the position of Newman, echoing the vast literature upon this question to be found in the Catholic tradition since patristic times. For Newman, this presence, because it is realized through the personal presence of Christ in the believer—important common ground with the outlook of the Reformation—is a real indwelling which is accomplished through a mystical union with the manhood of Christ. By this relationship with Christ's manhood, which is united to the divinity as a "conjoined instrument"—as the later Fathers said—man is brought to share in the divine nature. As a result, humanness undergoes such a profound change that Newman could describe it by saying that it stops short only of loss of identity, limited by the "incommunicable majesty" of God (cf. Roderick Strange, "The Presence of Christ in the Believer," in *Shadows and Images: The Newman Centenary Symposium*, ed. L. Cross [Melbourne: Polding, 1981] 42–58).

behalf). It also involves the response of "religion" (whereby the believer's life in Christ finds expression in worship and cult which is acceptable to the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ). This religion belongs to the order of moral virtues (concerned with created goods insofar as they must enter into the life of the Christian).<sup>78</sup>

#### CONSEQUENCES FOR AN ERA OF RENEWAL AND ECUMENISM

Barth's position, when it is understood according to the methodological assumptions he has made, is incomplete rather than erroneous. And there seems every reason for a further exploration of the dialectic between his point of view and that of the Catholic tradition. In commenting upon the Second Vatican Council's undertaking of a renewal of Catholic worship, Barth himself made a similar observation: "Catholic worship is too florid, too loaded. And our worship . . . has become too reminiscent of the synagogue. One might say that the great temptation of Protestantism is Judaism, whereas the great temptation of the Catholic Church would be paganism."<sup>79</sup>

If Protestantism has undertaken a radical criticism of religion, so severe that it is in danger of leaving no adequate place for an authentic Christian worship, Catholicism has given little attention to the self-criticism which is called for by what Barth sees as a temptation to become contaminated with the religious forms of paganism. It is to this critical reflection that I briefly turn our attention.

A balanced criticism of religious expression in the life of God's people requires a recognition, on the one hand, that authentic religious expression is indispensable to the full Christian life, and, on the other hand, that religious expression has often degenerated into an inauthentic "religiosity"<sup>80</sup> which is the enemy of a genuine Christian life. Gregory Baum observes that Catholics have neglected to give sufficient attention to the "pathology" of religion to be found in the biblical literature.<sup>81</sup> This pathology warns against inauthentic religiosity of various kinds. It warns

<sup>78</sup> Chenu writes in the article already cited: "Christianity is not purely a faith as is shown by the fact that, as a humanization of God, it lives by faith under a human regime. The whole economy of the man-God, which a moment ago led us to differentiate faith from religion, leads us now to admit the normal coherence of faith and religion. There is no question of arbitrarily juxtaposing faith and religion by means of a sociological notion of the 'sacred.' Faith has a religious dimension just because it is a human action. It calls for objective values of representation and intellectual formation, for symbols, rites and institutional realization" (65-66).

<sup>79</sup> Reported in the *Tablet* (London), March 2, 1963, 236.

<sup>80</sup> This term, suggested by Bonhoeffer (*Letters and Papers* 135), seems a useful one in differentiating the degenerations of religion from religion as such.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. "The Ambiguity of Religion: A Biblical Account," chap. 6 of *Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology* (New York: Paulist, 1975).

particularly against *idolatry* in the broad New Testament sense of that word: self-interest easily erodes the unconditional loyalty which belongs only to God, and begins to set up in His place some other reality or institution.<sup>82</sup> *Superstition*, which seeks an illusory protection in ritual forms, is frequently denounced in the Scriptures; but Catholics have too frequently heard these warnings as applying to the people of the old dispensation rather than to themselves.<sup>83</sup> Religious practices, the Scriptures also warn, can become an occasion of *hypocrisy*, when externals give the lie to what is in the heart;<sup>84</sup> they can degenerate into *legalism*, in which observance is no longer the expression of genuine fidelity and commitment;<sup>85</sup> they can lead to *blindness* and hardness of heart, in which groups cling to flattering illusions and privileges associated with the exercise of office.<sup>86</sup>

Chenu's analysis of the development of religious institutions points to a criterion whereby one can distinguish authentic religion from inauthentic religiosity. The former is ruled by the human person's genuine need to relate the reality of human life to the transcendent ground of all being; the latter has become, to a greater or lesser degree, an illusory means of meeting other ends, which are essentially psychological and sociological (the need for intelligible order, for security, etc.).<sup>87</sup>

Within the Christian mystery, as Chenu points out,<sup>88</sup> faith challenges and purifies the forms assumed by religion. Faith introduces a "radical novelty" into the universe of religion. There is a certain pathos in the community and individual life of the Christian believer, as "faith saves religion, by constantly criticizing its mental, cultural and social behaviour":

Always at issue with "religion," faith is ever inventing new relationships with religion and with the world and nature. The psychological, cultural, social, and national conditions of religion provide it with a ground to grow in, but they also threaten to suffocate it. One can without injustice ascribe to it the deviations of

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 63-64. Baum praises Protestantism for its greater sensitivity to this message.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 65-66. St. Paul warns against enslavement to ritual: Gal 4:9-11; Col 2:20-2:2. On this see J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Becoming Human Together* (Dublin, 1978) 109-11. He writes: "Obviously what concerns Paul is not these practices in themselves, but the importance that the Colossians attached to them."

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Baum, "The Ambiguity" 66-67. <sup>85</sup> Ibid. 67-80.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 71-72. Baum notes that Karl Marx's criticism of the "false consciousness" engendered by group interest has its place here. Using Karl Mannheim's analysis of the function of ideology in human society, he points out that in the measure in which a religion has begun to express itself as an "ideology," it will be in danger of serving as a legitimation of particular social forms (102). See, in the context, Henri Bergson's *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1935) 129, 216, etc.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Bergson and Mannheim as cited in n. 86 above.

<sup>88</sup> "The Need for a Theology" 65-66.

superstition and magic, the ritualistic clear conscience, search for the marvellous, "absenteeism" from the world, and "alienation."<sup>88</sup>

Insofar as faith has tended to be looked upon as a "purified religion, a higher religion of homage and communion, freed of its alienations and the elements that weigh it down," the radical challenge coming to religious forms from the essential message of the Christian gospel has tended to disappear.<sup>90</sup> There can be little doubt that it was such a situation which confronted Luther, and that it was a similar tendency which Barth characterized as Catholicism's temptation to "paganism." The new spirit of evangelism characterizing many movements in today's Church confronts Catholics with the same issue, as is evidenced by the authors I cited at the beginning.

It is in the sacraments especially that the incarnational event of a meeting of the God of faith and man's religious expression is realized. Since a distrust of "religion" as such represents a tendency which is contrary to the incarnational economy of the sacraments, it is important, in this moment of a profound reshaping of the ritual life of the Catholic Church, that confusion with regard to this question not undermine appreciation of the sacraments or distort their indispensable place in the Church's life. It is important, on the other hand, that the critique of what is authentic in religious expression preserve the ritual moment of the sacrament from a degeneration into an inauthentic religiosity. It must be, above all, a moment of faith in the saving action of God as He gives Himself to His people in Christ.

As Chenu points out,<sup>91</sup> since the people of faith constitute Christ's "body," the sacraments, which provide its "structure," borrow from religion "its elementary nature rites." But they do so only that the people may express in an authentically human fashion their relationship to the object of faith, the "mystery" of God's action on behalf of His people.

Chenu has pointed out the "sacralizing" tendency which has often set up a radical differentiation between the spheres of the sacred and the profane. Protestant distrust of religious "cult" is not infrequently associated with this tendency, which it judges alien to the new order established in Christ.<sup>92</sup> We have here an issue which is fundamental and which

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 66.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 66.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 65.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. C. H. Talbert: "Recent scholars, e.g. Hans Conzelmann (*An Outline of the Theol. of the N.T.* [New York: Harper and Row, 1969] 46) and Ferdinand Hahn (*The Worship of the Early Church* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973] 35, 38-39; R. Bultmann, *Theology of the N.T.* [New York: Scribner's 1951] 1:121 takes exactly the same position as that taken by Hahn and Conzelmann) are hostile to any use of the term 'cult' for early Christianity's worship. The reason seems to be that today the word is identified with the sacralization of a special defined area (place, time, personnel). Hostility toward the use of cult for early

calls for careful attention. Mircea Eliade's insight into man's religious experience as essentially relational,<sup>93</sup> so that it has its specificity not from a sacred object absolutely considered but from the manner in which the human person finds that object in the reality which confronts him in his day-to-day life, seems of great moment for Christian theology as it takes up this problem. Eliade's proposal suggests that the setting up of a sacred sphere in the midst of an alien, profane world is not a consequence of authentic religion; rather, it constitutes a deviation from religion's most authentic expression.

This principle may provide the basis for a rapprochement between the views which have predominated in Protestantism and in Catholicism. Among Protestants a distrust of any sacred sphere distinct from the profane runs the danger of undermining the place of religion in the Christian life. Among Catholics there has been a strong tendency to allow religious cult and institutions to develop in such a way that hard and fast boundaries have been set up between the profane order and the sacred sphere to which certain persons, places, and instruments belong.

Faith deals with an event, not nature; its proper dimension is a history in which God acts on behalf of His people in the midst of their ordinary lives. The sacraments are the divinely effective "recalling" of this event. Eliade's insight makes it possible for religious worship of the object of faith to be given its proper place within Christian life without the need for any gross materialization of the sacred. This is a question to which Catholicism has as yet given insufficient attention. While there has been a widespread reaction at the popular level against highly sacralized liturgical and devotional forms, Catholic theologians and liturgists must give the matter further critical reflection.

#### CONCLUSION

Our investigations have shown that the question we have raised is one which is very close to the central concerns of Protestantism. Luther and later Barth have reflected profoundly upon this problem; they did not succeed, however, in formulating a complete solution. The emergence of the problem within Catholic thought is more recent. While it does not lie far below the surface of contemporary theology, and the Catholic tradition has the resources necessary for a profound discussion of the problem, few thinkers have considered it. Moreover, Catholics have been slow to undertake the critical reflection upon religious and ritual forms within the life of the Church which the question invites. The issue seems ripe for a more extensive ecumenical dialogue.

---

Christianity is, therefore, linked to the rejection of a distinction between the realms of the sacred and the secular. In the sense of a sacred order separate from the secular, Christianity, it is argued, knows no cult at all" (*What Is a Gospel?* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977] 92).

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Bettis, *Phenomenology* 199, already cited.