"Contemporary Continental Theology"

[13 September 1951–15 January 1952?]
[Boston, Mass.?]

Probably written during the first term of DeWolf's Seminar in Systematic Theology, this essay examines the theologies of Nicholas Berdiaev, Jacques Maritain, Gustaf Aulén, and Karl Barth. King also examines Anders Nygren's influential work on agape and eros. King's section on Maritain is similar to the contents of "Jacques Maritain," a short essay he wrote earlier in 1951 while at Crozer. Although the essay is largely appropriated from Walter Marshall Horton's Contemporary Continental Theology and an article by George W. Davis, his former professor at Crozer, DeWolf judged it "Superior."

The field to be explored in a study of contemporary continental theological thought is much vaster than I can even approximate in a paper of this length. Perhaps it is folly to attempt even a bird's eye view of Continental theology in so brief a compass. Conscious of many inevitable omissions, I have nevertheless decided to use the method of selective sampling rather than exhaustive portrayal. I have not limited this study to the well known Barthian thought, which is so influential on the continent, but I have attempted to set forth some light on all phases of continental thought. It should be made clear that there is by no means one theological system common to the whole

---

2. Walter Marshall Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology: An Interpretation for Anglo-Saxons (New York: Harper, 1958), p. xi: "Obviously, the field to be explored is much vaster than that which I undertook to survey in my other book; and to explore it by the same method, the method of selective sampling rather than exhaustive portrayal, will leave vast areas untouched. Perhaps it is folly to attempt even a bird's eye view of Continental theology in so brief a compass as four chapters. Conscious of many inevitable omissions, I have nevertheless decided that the method of sampling is the best way."
of continental thinking. No matter how influential Barthianism is on the continent, it is quite erroneous to think of all continental theologians as Barthians. In Norway, for example, which is split into a conservative pietistic and a liberal party, Barth is rejected with equal unanimity by both groups: by the liberals because of his reactionary tendencies, by the conservatives because of his freedom in Biblical criticism. In Sweden, Barth is sympathetically studied; but Swedish theology, having always held to the Lutheran ideas of the mysterious majesty of God, does not feel the need of reemphasizing it, and objects to Barth’s stating it in a way that seems to obscure the other pole of Lutheran thought, the Fatherly love of God. In Finland, apparently, Barth’s name is little known.3 So that the categorical assertion that Barthism covers the whole of continental thought is far from within the facts. But Barth is highly influential, no one can doubt that. For this reason we will deal more with his theology than that of any other continental theologian. No matter how much we disagree with Barth, we cannot dismiss him as “another fool”, for he is by all standards of measurement one of the most influential theologians in the world today and from an intellectual point of view he is well prepared. Before turning to Barth, however, we may delve into the thought of a few other continental theologians and see what essence can be brought forth.

A Lay Theologian:

Nicholas Berdyaev

It is not an easy job to set forth the theology of Nicholas Berdyaev mainly because of its abstruseness and obscurity. The average pragmatic-minded American looks askance at his speculative flights and his odd jargon. However when one reads Berdyaev seriously

---

3. Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, pp. 150–151: “In Norway, which is split into a conservative pietistic and a liberal party, Barth is rejected with equal unanimity by both groups: by the liberals on account of his reactionary tendencies, by the conservatives because of his freedom in Biblical criticism! In Sweden, Barth is sympathetically studied; but Swedish theology, having always held to the Lutheran ideas of the mysterious majesty of God, does not feel the need of reemphasizing it, and objects to Barth’s stating it in a way that seems to obscure the other pole of Lutheran thought, the Fatherly love of God. In Finland, apparently, Barth’s name is little known.”
and comes to grasp the essence of his thought, he finds a sincere Christian attempting to clarify the unsolved problem of conventional Christian thought. The basic philosophical and theological views of Berdyaev are set forth in his two most important works, The Destiny of Man and The Meaning of History. In the latter book the author looks backward over man's history toward its eternal source, in order to grasp the significance of the present crisis of modern humanistic culture; whereas in the former work he looks forward through the ethical duties and dangers of our era toward mankind's eternal end and goal.4

As Berdyaev ventures to set forth a philosophy of history we immediately see his religious views creeping out. In his diagnosis of our present transition from an age of true "culture" to an age of mere "civilization," concerned purely with power and technique, Berdyaev reminds us of Oswald Spengler—to whom, indeed, he makes explicit reference.5 Like Spengler, he is convinced that civilizations pass through life-cycles. Unlike Spengler, however, he teaches that civilization does not fatally revert to barbarism once this process of degeneration has begun; instead, it may pass through "religious transfiguration" and be reborn as a new culture at the very moment when its death is imminent. History, in other words, is not purely the process of rigid necessity; it is "made up of the complex interaction of the three principles of necessity, freedom, and transfiguring Grace;" and the deepest of these is Grace.5

According to Berdyaev the ultimate ground of the dialectic of history is to be found upon some divine or eternal plane. History begins with a mysterious "prologue in heaven," of which religion speaks in

---

* The Meaning of History, p. 207.

† Ibid., p. 61.

4. Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, p. 14: "In this earlier book, the author looks backward over man's history toward its eternal source, in order to grasp the significance of the present crisis of modern humanistic culture; whereas in The Destiny of Man he looks forward through the ethical duties and dangers of our era toward mankind's eternal end and goal."

5. Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, p. 15: "In his diagnosis of our present transition from an age of true 'culture' to an age of mere 'civilization,' concerned purely with power and technique, Berdyaev reminds us of Oswald Spengler—to whom, indeed, he makes explicit reference. Like Spengler, he is convinced that civilizations pass through life-cycles. . . . Unlike Spengler, however, he teaches that civilization does not fatally revert to barbarism once this process of degeneration has begun; instead, it may pass through 'religious transfiguration' and be reborn as a new culture at the very moment when its death is imminent. History, in other words, is not purely the product of rigid necessity; it is 'made up of the complex interaction of the three principles of necessity, freedom and transfiguring Grace; and the deepest of these is Grace.'"
mythological symbols, vague but profoundly true. We can read these symbols because they correspond to something deep within us, the history they interpret is our own history. There is an inner tie between God, the world and ourselves, which is found in Christ, the God-man. The motion of human history toward God and eternity is a response to an eternal motion of God toward man; in Christ the two motions merge, and the divine love for man finds its perfect response in "freely given" human love for God.6 Here we readily see that for Berdyaev Christ is the center of history.

Berdyaev talks a great deal about Jesus as the Messiah. He is convinced that both Judaism and Marxism contain a "false Messianism," which demands an abstract, universal justice on earth only to be realized by compulsion—and so, in practice, not realizable at all.* The true Messiah, when he came, delivered man not only from the pagan dominion of the cycle of nature, but also from the dominion of social compulsion, and from all-devouring time itself, by revealing the eternal worth and destiny of the individual soul.7

Berdyaev is a great critic of modern humanistic culture and he sees the collapse of humanistic culture in our day as the definitive disproof of the religion of progress, which for so many moderns has taken the place of Christianity—a rationalized, secularized version of the ancient Jewish hope of a Messianic Age. In all of its forms this hope assumes a false and illusory view of time, according to which the past and future have no inner, organic connection, and only at the end of the time-process is any meaning introduced. But thus to postpone meaning to the end of

---

6. Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, pp. 15–16: "The ultimate ground of the dialectic of history is not, then, to be found upon the human or temporal plane, but upon the divine or eternal plane. History begins with a mysterious 'prologue in heaven,' of which religion speaks in mythological symbols, vague but profoundly true. We can read these symbols because they correspond to something deep within us; the history they interpret is our own history. There is an inner tie between God, the world and ourselves, which is found in Christ, the God-man. The motion of human history toward God and eternity is a response to an eternal motion of God toward man; in Christ, the two motions merge, and the divine love for man finds its perfect response in 'freely given' human love for God."

7. Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, p. 17: "But he is now convinced that both Judaism and Marxism contain a 'false Messianism,' which demands an abstract, universal justice on earth only to be realized by compulsion—and so, in practice, not realizable at all. The true Messiah, when he came, delivered man not only from the pagan dominion of the cycle of nature, but also from the dominion of social compulsion, and from all-devouring time itself, by revealing the eternal worth and destiny of the individual soul."
history is to postpone it forever. A truer view of the
time process finds eternity penetrating it at every mo-
ment, binding the present to the past and future in
memory and hope; and time, conversely, penetrating
eternity "as a moment in the everlasting mystery of
Spirit."**

In *The Destiny of Man*, Berdyaev's masterpiece, the
scattered insights which gleam through these essays
are gathered up into one comprehensive vision: first,
of man's metaphysical origin and nature; second, of
his present duty; third, of his final destiny.9

It will be recalled that history, for Berdyaev, is a
product of three factors: human freedom, natural
necessity and divine Grace. Now the usual teaching of
"positive" Theology is that the first and second factors
are derived from the latter; i.e., God made nature
and man, giving to man the power to use nature's re-
sources and his faculties well or ill, as he chose. This
theology, thinks Berdyaev, is a prolific source of athe-
ism, for freedom is admitted to lead to sin and, for at
least a great proportion of mankind, to eternal pun-
ishment; and yet God, foreseeing these terrible con-
sequences, bestowed this fatal gift upon his ignorant
and unsuspecting creature! In contrast to this teach-
ing of "positive" theology is the "negative" or mystical
theology, according to which God the Creator himself
is eternally born out of a dark Abyss of deity or divine
Nothingness; and man and universe are then created
by God out of the same ultimate, indeterminate meta-
physical stuff from which he himself proceeds. Since
non-being is of the very essence of this primal stuff,
freedom is uncreated, coeternal with God, and man
may be described as the child of two parents: God,

---

8. Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, p. 20: "The collapse of humanistic culture in our
day is the definitive disproof of the religion of progress, which for so many moderns has taken
the place of Christianity—a rationalized, secularized version of the ancient Jewish hope of a
Messianic Age. In all its forms, ancient or modern, this hope provides no solution of the problem
of human destiny. It assumes a false and illusory view of time, according to which the past and
future have no inner, organic connection, and only at the end of the time-process is any meaning
introduced. But thus to postpone meaning to the end of history is to postpone it forever. A truer
view of the time-process finds eternity penetrating it at every moment, binding the present to the
past and future in memory and hope; and time, conversely, penetrating eternity 'as a moment in the
everlasting mystery of the Spirit.'"

9. Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, p. 23: "In *The Destiny of Man*, Berdyaev's master-
piece, the scattered insights which gleam through these essays are gathered up into one comprehen-
sive vision: first, of man's metaphysical origin and nature; second, of his present duty; third, of
his final destiny."
the formative agent in the process, and "meonic freedom," the passive stuff which simple "consented" to God's creative act. The element of uncreated freedom in man's nature is the source of his instinctive urges and creative powers; it is also the source of his ability to rebel against God and resolve himself back into the chaos of non-being.10

The story of man's fall belongs to the dim border between time and eternity, and can be narrated only in mythological symbols. "Paradise" stands for the original unconscious unity of God, man and nature after the Creation—a blissful state, and yet an imperfect one, since God was then "merely a sustaining power"* and his rich tri-unity was not yet revealed to his creatures. It was, in one sense, an advance to pass from this pre-conscious state to one of conscious "division, reflection, valuation, freedom of choice;"† and yet in the act of becoming conscious of his creative powers, and the divinity of choices open to him, man came under the sway of the chaotic element in his nature; indeed, it may have been the pain and loss of this revolt that made him conscious in the first place. After the Fall man's only way back to bliss was onward through conscious struggle and suffering, toward a new and higher level of existence, super-conscious and not merely pre-conscious. As man treads this long and tragic road, he is not alone; for when man falls away, God prepares a "second act" in the divine drama of destiny: as God the Son, he descends into the dark abyss of meonic freedom to struggle unarmed

* The Destiny of Man, p. 48.
† Ibid., p. 51.

---

10. Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, pp. 23–24: "It will be recalled that history, for Berdyaev, is a product of three factors: human freedom, natural necessity and divine Grace. Now, the usual teaching of rational or 'positive' theology is that the first and second factors are ultimately derived from the third; i.e., God made nature and man, giving to man the power to use nature's resources and his own faculties well or ill, as he chose. This theology, thinks Berdyaev, is a prolific source of atheism, for freedom is admitted to lead to sin and, for at least a great proportion of mankind, to eternal punishment; and yet God, foreseeing these terrible consequences, bestowed this fatal gift upon his ignorant and unsuspecting creature! In contrast to this teaching of 'positive' theology is the teaching of 'negative' or mystical theology (Boehme, Eckhart), according to which God the Creator himself is eternally born out of a dark Abyss of deity, the so-called Ungrund, or divine Nothingness; and man and universe are then created by God out of the same ultimate, indeterminate metaphysical stuff from which he himself proceeds. Since indeterminacy or non-being (μὴ οὖ) are of the very essence of this primal stuff, freedom is uncreated, coeternal with God, and man may be described as the child of two parents: God, the formative agent in the process, and 'meonic freedom,' the passive stuff which simply 'consented' to God's creative act. The element of uncreated freedom in man's nature is the source of his instinctive urges and creative powers; it is also the source of his ability to rebel against God and resolve himself back into the chaos of non-being."
(except by love and sacrifice) with his evil creation, to redeem it "by enlightening it from within without forcing."* Apart from such divine and gracious aid, man could never fulfil his destiny.** This is man’s only way to salvation.

A Catholic Critic:
Jacques Maritain

Jacques Maritain stands out as the foremost Catholic philosopher on the Continent. From his chair in the Institut Catholique in Paris, Maritain views the whole modern age with a critical eye, diagnoses its diseases, and prescribes "Integral Thomism" as the infallible antidote for all its ills.†

Maritain is far from Catholic in many of his political views. He has no desire to see the mediaeval supremacy of Church over state restored; he only hopes for a day when "and entirely moral and spiritual activity of the Church shall preside over the temporal order of a multitude of politically and culturally heterogeneous nations, whose religious differences are still not likely to disappear."† He deplores the social inertia and reaction which beset so many Catholics. Some years back he incurred considerable criticism by many of his fellow Catholics because he refused to see

† Essays in Order, pp. 28–29.

11. Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, pp. 24–25: "The story of man’s Fall belongs to the dim borderland between time and eternity, and can be narrated only in mythological symbols. 'Paradise' stands for the original unconscious unity of God, man and nature after the Creation—a blissful state, and yet an imperfect one, since God was then 'merely a sustaining power' and his rich tri-unity was not yet revealed to his creatures. It was, in one sense, an advance to pass from this pre-conscious state to one of conscious 'division, reflection, valuation, freedom of choice'; and yet in the act of becoming conscious of his creative powers, and the diversity of choices open to him, man came under the sway of the chaotic element in his nature; indeed, it may have been the pain and loss of this revolt that made him conscious in the first place. Man having thus fallen away from his original unity with God, the world fell away from its original unity with man; the gates of the first paradise were closed to him forever, and the only way back to bliss was onward through conscious struggle and suffering, toward a new and higher level of existence, super-conscious and not merely pre-conscious. As man treads this long and tragic road, he is not alone; for when man falls away, God prepares a 'second act' in the divine drama of destiny: as God the Son, he descends into the dark abyss of meonic freedom to struggle unarmed (except by love and sacrifice) with his evil creation, to redeem it 'by enlightening it from within without forcing.' Apart from such divine and gracious aid, man could not fulfil his destiny."

12. Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, pp. 48–49: "Jacques Maritain, who from his chair in the Institut Catholique in Paris views the whole modern age with a critical eye, diagnoses its diseases, and prescribes 'Integral Thomism' as the infallible antidote for all its ills."
in General Franco the perfect Christian knight-errant that the Vatican saw him to be.\textsuperscript{13}

If it be asked how a loyal Catholic can thus take sides against the interests of his own church, the answer is very clear. Maritain refuses to identify the interests of Catholics with the interest of the Church, or the Kingdom of God. The Invincible Armada was sent out by his Most Catholic Majesty, Philip II of Spain, with holy intent and with prayers upon the lips of the faithful; but in Maritain's candid opinion, God was against it.\textsuperscript{14}

As we turn to Maritain's critique of modern culture, we find him diagnosing its ills in intellectual terms. The disease of modernity began, according to Maritain in the realm of the mind. When modern philosophy abandoned its dependence on theology, it started a process of dissociation which could not be checked short of the very verge of dissolution. The three great symptoms of this state of dissociation, in its last stages, are (1) agnosticism, or the complete separation of the knowing mind from the object of knowledge; (2) naturalism, or the complete separation of the world from its divine Source and Ground, and (3) individualism, or the complete separation of the rebellious human will from any object of trust and obedience. Maritain now goes on to show that Thomism is the specific antidote for these three alarming symptoms, and for the disease that underlies them.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, pp. 49–50: "He has no desire to see the mediæval supremacy of Church over State restored; he only hopes for a day when 'an entirely moral and spiritual activity of the Church shall preside over the temporal order of a multitude of politically and culturally heterogeneous nations, whose religious differences are still not likely soon to disappear.' He deplores the social inertia and reaction which beset the Catholics. . . . He has lately incurred considerable opprobrium among his fellow Catholics by refusing to see in General Franco the perfect Christian knight-errant that the Spanish landed proprietors—yes, and the Vatican itself—seem to take him to be."

\textsuperscript{14} Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, p. 50: "If it be asked how a loyal Catholic can thus take sides against the interests of his own church, the answer is very clear. Maritain refuses to identify the interests of Catholics with the interest of the Church, or the Kingdom of God. The Invincible Armada was sent out by his Most Catholic Majesty, Philip II of Spain, with holy intent and with prayers upon the lips of the faithful; but in Maritain's candid opinion, God was against it."

\textsuperscript{15} Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, p. 55: "The disease of modernity began, according to Maritain, in the realm of the mind. When modern philosophy abandoned its dependence on theology, it started a process of dissociation which could not be checked short of the very verge of dissolution. . . . The three great symptoms of this state of dissociation, in its last stages,
In applying Thomism as the general solution to the various problems of the modern era, Maritain gives special attention to two closely related questions which we have seen to be central concerns of Berdyaev's system: the question of freedom, and the question of the destiny of man.16

In his book, Freedom in the Modern World, Maritain offers a rationalistic account of the origin of freedom. The world of freedom, he says, is not to be opposed to the world of nature, as in the Kantian philosophy; neither is it to be confused with it, as in the philosophy of Spinoza and Hegel; it is to be seen as grounded in the world of nature, but distinct from it. Maritain agrees with St. Thomas that “the whole root of freedom lies in reason.” Freedom arises in nature precisely where reason arises. Inanimate and irrational beings have no freedom; in this part of nature, God rules without an adversary. Freedom of choice arises in man, a rational yet corporeal creature, because on the one hand he is capable of envisaging the universal Good, and tending toward it, while on the other hand his sensitive faculties present to him all manner of concrete “goods,” which attract but do not permanently hold his will. The Infinite God is his chief end, and alone can satisfy him; but he is capable of being temporarily attracted by many specific ends that conflict with the chief end; and even when his speculative reason grasps the true good, his practical reason may fail to perform the act that chooses it. In this world of freedom, then, “God appears as legislator and as end of that special order which constitutes the moral order, and from this point of view He has adversaries, for He permits created spirits to resist His will, which is ideally manifest to them as the supreme rule or norm of Freedom... God has the power but does not will to prevent the creature (when

---

are (1) agnosticism, or the complete separation of the knowing mind from the object of knowledge; (2) naturalism, or the complete separation of the world from its divine Source and Ground, and (3) individualism, or the complete separation of the rebellious human will from any object of trust and obedience. Thomism is the specific antidote for these three alarming symptoms, and for the disease that underlies them.”

16. Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, pp. 56–57: “In applying this general solution to the various problems of the modern era, Maritain gives special attention to two closely related questions which we have already seen to be the central concerns of Berdyaev's system: the question of freedom, and the question of the destiny of man.”
Although Maritain and Berdyaev differ on the origin of freedom, they substantially agree about the practical solution of the problem it presents. Freedom of choice is not true freedom. True freedom consists in choosing the Good. When a man chooses the Good, he participates in that “freedom of antonomy” which God possesses in its perfection. God is so fixed upon the Good that he cannot choose otherwise; and the saints, who participate in God’s holiness, participate also in his fixity of character and will.18

Maritain’s views on the destiny of man are quite fascinating, and in many instances they remind one of Berdyaev’s historical writings. Like Berdyaev, Maritain feels that Christianity necessarily involves a very exalted view of man. The tragedy of modern humanism springs not from its having been “humanistic,” but from its having been man centered. Anthropocentrism is fatal both to the idea of man itself and to

---

17. Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, p. 57-58: “In Freedom in the Modern World, Maritain offers a more rationalistic account of the origin of freedom. The world of freedom, he says, is not to be *opposed* to the world of nature, as in Kant’s philosophy; neither is it to be *confused* with it, as in the philosophy of Spinoza and Hegel; it is to be seen as *grounded* in the world of nature, but *distinct* from it. ‘The whole root of freedom,’ as St. Thomas says, ‘lies in reason.’ Freedom arises in nature precisely where reason arises. Inanimate and irrational beings have no freedom; in this part of nature, God rules without an adversary. Freedom of choice arises in man, a rational yet corporeal creature, because on the one hand he is capable of envisaging the universal Good, and tending toward it, while on the other hand his sensitive faculties present to him all manner of concrete ‘goods,’ which *attract* but do not permanently *hold* his will. The Infinite God is his chief end, and alone can satisfy him; but he is capable of being temporarily attracted by many specific ends that conflict with his chief end; and even when his speculative reason *grasps* the true good, his practical reason may fail to perform the act that *chooses* it. In this world of freedom, then, ‘God appears as legislator and as end of that special order which constitutes the moral order, and from this point of view He has adversaries, for He permits created spirits to resist His will, which is ideally manifest to them as the supreme rule or norm of Freedom. . . . God has the power but does not will to prevent the creature (when it is so inclined) from interposing its refusal. For the hands of God are tied by the inscrutable designs of His love as were those of the Son of Man upon the Cross.’” Ellipses in original.

18. Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, p. 58: “If Berdyaev and Maritain differ on the *origin* of freedom, they substantially agree about the practical solution of the problem it presents. Freedom of choice is not true freedom. True freedom consists in choosing the Good. When a man chooses the Good, he participates in that ‘freedom of antonomy’ which God possesses in its perfection. God is so fixed upon the Good that he cannot choose otherwise; and the saints, who participate in God’s holiness, participate also in his fixity of character and will.”
the ideas of culture and God and God that are linked with it.19

Humanistic culture, beginning with a noble heritage from the Christian Middle Ages, passed into a second phase in the eighteenth century, when it began consciously to turn against its own historic sources, and into a third phase with the Russian Revolution, when it replaced all ideal ends by purely material ones. In the first of these three phases, God is still believed in as a real power, but becomes the guarantor of man's success (Bacon, Descartes) in dominating nature; in the second phase, when man begins to trust in his ability to dominate nature single-handed, by his own science and technology, God becomes a mere idea (Kant) or, with Hegel, the "ideal limit of the development of the world of humanity;" in the third phase, with the disappearance of the divine image in man, the death of God is announced.20

The attempt to revive pure Christianity in our day has two principle forms, according to Maritain: the "reactionary" attempt to turn humanism upside down by the "annihilation of man before God" (Barth), and the "progressive" attitude of Neo-Thomism, which aims to preserve the dignity of man and rescue the valuable elements in humanistic culture by incorporating them in a new Christian civilization. Maritain is not too hopeful about the possibility of a new Christian civilization in the future. He rejects with equal decisiveness the view that this world is simply the kingdom of Satan, and the view that the Kingdom of

19. Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, p. 59: "Maritain's views on the destiny of man are most clearly expressed in his Humanisme intégral, a book that reminds one frequently of Berdyaev's historical writings. . . Like Berdyaev, Maritain feels that Christianity necessarily involves a very exalted view of man. The tragedy of modern humanism springs not from its having been 'humanistic,' but from its having been man-centered. Anthropocentrism is fatal both to the idea of man itself and to the ideas of culture and God that are linked with it."

20. Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, pp. 59-60: "Humanistic culture, beginning with a noble heritage from the Christian Middle Ages, passed into a second phase in the eighteenth century, when it began consciously to turn against its own historic sources, and into a third phase with the Russian Revolution, when it replaced all ideal ends by purely material ones. In the first of these three phases, God is still believed in as a real power, but becomes the guarantor of man's success (Bacon, Descartes) in dominating nature; in the second phase, when man begins to trust in his ability to dominate nature single-handed, by his own science and technology, God becomes a mere idea (Kant), or, with Hegel, the 'ideal limit of the development of the world of humanity'; in the third phase, with the disappearance of the divine image in man, the death of God is announced."
God is ever fully to be realized in it. "The true Christian doctrine of the world and of the earthly city is that they are at once the kingdom of man, of God, and of the devil."* History is marching both toward the harvest of wheat and the harvest of tares. Just now, the age of humanism is marching toward its own "liquidation." The end of this age, however, does not mean the end of the world. History is not yet ripe to be swallowed up in eternity. God has yet to guide us through many acts of the human drama. So much for Maritain.

Scandinavian Theology: Nygren and Aulen

The prevailing trend of contemporary Swedish theology has been set by the "Ludensian" school, led by Gustof Aulen and his close associate, Anders Nygren. The work of these men has proceeded on quite original lines, and constitutes one of the most distinctive schools of Protestant thought in the world today.

It is interesting to note that the two books by which Aulen and Nygren are now known to the English-speaking world, Christus Victor (Aulen) and Agape and Eros (Nygren), are both historical studies. The history of doctrine has a special importance for them.

---

21. Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, pp. 60–61: "The attempt to revive pure Christianity in our day has two principle forms, according to Maritain: the 'reactionary' attempt to turn humanism upside down by the 'annihilation of man before God' (Karl Barth), and the 'integral' or 'progressive' attitude of Neo-Thomism, which aims to preserve the dignity of man and rescue the valuable elements in humanistic culture by incorporating them in a new Christian civilization. Maritain is not too hopeful about the possibility of a new Christian civilization in the near future. He rejects with equal decisiveness the view that this world is simply the kingdom of Satan, and the view that the kingdom of God is ever fully to be realized in it. 'The true Christian doctrine of the world and of the earthly city is that they are at once the kingdom of man, of God, and of the devil.' History is marching both toward the harvest of wheat and the harvest of tares. Just now, the age of humanism is marching toward its own 'liquidation.' . . . The end of this age, however, does not mean the end of the world. History is not yet ripe to be swallowed up in eternity. . . . The Providence of God has yet to guide us through many acts in the human drama."

22. Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, pp. 154–155: "The prevailing trend of contemporary Swedish theology has been set by the 'Lundensian' school, led by Gustaf Aulén and his close associate, Anders Nygren."

23. Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, p. 155: "The work of Aulén and his colleagues at Lund has proceeded on quite original lines, and constitutes one of the most distinctive schools of Protestant thought in the world today."
The task of theology, according to them is not to prove the truth of Christian Faith, or engage in metaphysical speculations, but rather to set forth this faith in its simplicity and unity, clearing it of all alien entanglements. The task of dogmatic theology is to define the unique and determinative motives of the Christian faith—which cannot be done in the abstract, without close attention to history.24 In their historical method, Aulen and Nygren set out to distinguish between fundamental religious motives and the concepts or figures of speech in which they are expressed. We may first turn to Aulen's Christus Victor and see how he attempts to disentangle motives from concepts.25

In the writings of the early Greek fathers, a view of the Work of Christ finds frequent expression which is usually dismissed by modern Western theologians as unworthy of serious consideration. It is commonly known as the “ransom to Satan theory”; and it makes use of some strange figures of speech.26 Aulen believes that this much maligned view, when stripped of its mythological language, and its underlying “religious motive” has thus been revealed, will prove to be far more than a historical curiosity. What are the religious “values” or “motives” inbedded in this theory.27 Before answering this question the conten-

24. Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, pp. 155—156: “It is no accident that the two books by which Aulén and Nygren are now known to the English-speaking world, Christus Victor (Aulén) and Agape and Eros (Nygren), are both historical studies. The history of doctrine has a special importance for them both. The task of theology, according to Aulén’s great work, The Common Christian Faith (Den allmännelega Kristna tron, 1920; 3rd edition 1931) is not to prove the truth of Christian faith, or engage in metaphysical speculations, but rather to set forth this faith in its simplicity and its unity, clearing it of all alien entanglements. According to Nygren, the task of dogmatic theology is to define the unique and determinative motives of the Christian faith—which cannot be done in the abstract, without close attention to history.”

25. Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, p. 157: “The historical method of . . . that of the Lundensians . . . endeavors to distinguish between fundamental religious motives and the concepts or figures of speech in which they are expressed. . . . The disentanglement of motives from concepts is best seen in Aulen’s Christus Victor.”

26. Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, p. 157: “In the writings of the early Greek fathers, a view of the Work of Christ finds frequent expression which is usually dismissed by modern Western theologians as unworthy of serious consideration. It is commonly known as ‘the ransom to Satan theory’; and it makes use of some very strange figures of speech.”

27. Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, p. 158: “Aulén believes that this much maligned view, when the mythological language in which it is clothed has been properly interpreted, and its underlying ‘religious motive’ has thus been revealed, will prove to be far more than a historical curiosity. . . . What are these religious ‘values’ or ‘motives’?”
tions of this theory must be set forth. The first contention is that the devil acquired rights over man when he fell into sin, and it is right that his Satanic Majesty should demand a "ransom" in exchange for man's deliverance. On the other hand it is contended that man belongs by nature to God, and the devil has brought him violently into captivity.\textsuperscript{28}

The religious motive behind the first of these contentions is "the desire to assert the guilt of mankind, and the judgment of God on human sin."\textsuperscript{*} The motive behind the second is the feeling that man's sin is only a part of a wider, cosmic apostasy from God's will, in which everything evil is included, and which forms a rival kingdom violently striving against God's.\textsuperscript{29}

Aulen never doubts that this "classic" view of the Greek fathers is superior to the mediaeval and modern views; "Its central theme is the idea of Atonement as a Divine conflict and victory: Christ—Christus Victor—fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the tyrants under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself."\textsuperscript{+} In comparison with all modern "subjective theories of the Atonement, from Abelard to Liberal Protestantism, the classic view is more truly "objective" than Anselm's, for "it describes a complete change in the relation between God and the world, and a change also in God's own attitude,"\textsuperscript{‡} due to the passing of a great crisis in the cosmic combat between the Creator and his apostate creation.\textsuperscript{31}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} Horton, \textit{Contemporary Continental Theology}, p. 159: "The devil acquired rights over man when he fell into sin, and it is right that his Satanic Majesty should demand a 'ransom' in exchange for man's deliverance. On the other hand, it is protested . . . that man belongs by nature to God, and the devil has brought him violently into captivity."
\item \textsuperscript{29} Horton, \textit{Contemporary Continental Theology}, p. 159: "The religious motive behind the first of these contentions is 'the desire to assert the guilt of mankind, and the judgment of God on human sin.' The motive behind the second is the feeling that man's sin is only a part of a wider, cosmic apostasy from God's will, in which everything evil is included, and which forms a rival kingdom violently striving against God's."
\item \textsuperscript{30} Horton, \textit{Contemporary Continental Theology}, p. 160: "He finds in this 'classic' view of the Greek fathers . . . a view of Christ's Work clearly distinguishable from the mediaeval and modern views, and much superior thereto. . . . 'Its central theme is the idea of Atonement as a Divine conflict and victory: Christ—Christus Victor—fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the "tyrants" under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself.'"
\item \textsuperscript{31} Horton, \textit{Contemporary Continental Theology}, pp. 160–161: "In comparison with all modern 'subjective' theories of the Atonement, from Abelard to Liberal Protestantism, the classic view is
When we turn to Professor Nygren we find him following Aulen in placing emphasis upon active, self imparting Divine love as the Ground-motive of Christian Faith. In his book, *Agape and Eros*, he is primarily concerned with the contrast between two kinds of love, easily confused in modern languages, but clearly distinguished in Greek: the “love” (Eros) of which Plato speaks in his Symposium and the “love” (Agape) of which St. Paul speaks in the 13th Chapter of I Corinthians. In these two words he finds the Ground-motives of Greek religion and original Christianity concretely expressed.

As Nygren set out to contrast these two Greek words he finds that Eros loves in proportion to the value of the object. By the pursuit of value in its objects, Platonic love is led up and away from the world, on wings of aspiration, beyond all transient things and persons to the realm of the Ideas. Agape as described in the Gospels and Epistles, is “spontaneous and uncaused,” indifferent to human merit,” and creates value in those upon whom it is bestowed out of pure generosity. It flows down from God into this transient, sinful world; those whom it touches become conscious of their own utter unworthiness; they are impelled to forgive and love their enemies, because the God of Grace imparts worth to them by the act of loving them.

---


---

32. Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, p. 163: “For the English-speaking public, this characteristic ‘Lundensian’ emphasis upon active, self-imparting Divine love as the Ground-motive of Christian faith is best expressed in Professor Nygren’s remarkable book, *Agape and Eros*. It is primarily concerned with the contrast between two kinds of love, easily confused in modern languages, but clearly distinguished in Greek: the ‘love’ (Eros) of which Plato speaks in his *Symposium*, and the ‘love’ (Agape) of which St. Paul speaks in the 13th Chapter of I Corinthians. In these two words he finds the Ground-motives of Greek religion and original Christianity concretely expressed.”

33. Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, p. 164: “It is Eros, not Agape, that loves in proportion to the value of its object. By the pursuit of value in its object, Platonic love is led up and away from the world, on wings of aspiration, beyond all transient things and persons to the realm of the Ideas. Agape, as described in the Gospels and Epistles, is ‘spontaneous and ‘uncaused,’” ‘indifferent to human merit,’ and ‘creates’ value in those upon whom it is bestowed out of pure generosity. It flows down from God into this transient, sinful world; those whom it touches become conscious of their own utter unworthiness; they are impelled to forgive and love their enemies, not because they are inherently lovable, but because the God of grace imparts worth to them by the act of loving them.”
The union of Eros with Agape began with St. Augustine. It was his Neo-Platonism, with its double motion, from God to man as well as from man to God that made it possible to unite Platonic love with Christian love in the new composite idea of charity. The union was carried to perfection in the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas; but his work was soon undone by Luther (who went back to primitive Christian Agape) and the Renaissance (which went back to Platonic Eros). Liberal Protestantism is not the heir of Luther, but of the Renaissance.\(^\text{34}\)

**The Crisis Theologians:**

Barth, Brunner and Heim

The most striking feature of the situation in the German world today is the almost complete collapse of liberal Protestantism. Throughout the nineteenth century, Protestant theological faculties in the German and Swiss universities enjoyed a degree of academic liberty (both from ecclesiastical and from political censorship) and a reputation for thorough scholarship and bold speculation which made them the world's greatest centers for theological study.\(^\text{35}\) Where we used to hear the liberal voices of Schleiermacher (1768–1834), Ritschl (1822–89), and Troeltsch (1865–1923), we now hear the Nep-Supernaturalistic voices of Barth, Brunner, and Heim. These men have been called the crisis theologians because they see all men under the judgment of God, and the beginning of religion is when God presents himself to man in the crisis situation. At this point we may turn to a discussion of God, Jesus, Man, and Revelation in crisis theology.

---

\(^{34}\) Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, p. 165: "The union of Eros with Agape began with St. Augustine. It was his Neo-Platonism, with its double motion, from God to man as well as from man to God . . . that made it possible to unite Platonic love with Christian love in the new composite idea of charity (caritas). The union (or confusion!) was carried to perfection in the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas; but his work was soon undone by Luther (who went back to primitive Christian Agape) and the Renaissance (which went back to Platonic Eros). Liberal Protestantism is not the heir of Luther, but of the Renaissance."

\(^{35}\) Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, p. 85: "The most striking feature of the situation in the German Protestant world today is the almost complete collapse of liberal Protestantism. Throughout the nineteenth century, Protestant theological faculties in the German and Swiss universities enjoyed a degree of academic liberty (both from ecclesiastical and from political censorship) and a reputation for thorough scholarship and bold speculation which made them the world's greatest centers for theological study."
Concerning God, the crisis theologians are always true to their conviction that the infinite God is forever unknowable and indescribable. Even when we say we know him our knowledge is of an incomprehensible Reality. He is the Wholly Other. Consider, for example, the personality of God. Barth writes: “God is personal, but personal in an incomprehensible way, in so far as the conception of His personality surpasses all our views of personality. This is so just because He and He alone is a true, real and genuine person.”

Barth goes on to argue that even through the knowledge which comes by faith, than which "no more objective and strict form of knowledge can exist, and (that which) no type of knowledge can lay claim more definitely to universal validity," no full knowledge of God comes to us. Even when God reveals himself to the man of faith, still that man with faith will confess God as the God of majesty and therefore as the God unknown to us.”

As Dr. Davis says, “In Barth’s thought we have the majestic, hidden incomprehensible, though personal God, who is made known to us, mediated to us, in his Word made flesh in Jesus Christ.”

We immediately see the affinity of this view with the Greek philosophical conception of God. Influenced by the Platonic tradition of a transcendental deity lifted high above the corruptness of phenomenality, they introduced the same emphasis into the stream of Christian thought. Their God was also a high God, far removed from earth, transcendent, indescribable,

* Karl Barth, The Knowledge of God, p. 21.

† Ibid, p. 25.

‡ Ibid., p. 28.


36. Davis, “Some Theological Continuities,” pp. 208–209: “Concerning God, Barth is always true to his conviction that the infinite God is always unknowable and indescribable. . . . He is the Wholly Other. Even when we say we know him our knowledge is of an incomprehensible Reality. Consider, for instance, the personality of God. Barth writes: ‘God is personal, but personal in an incomprehensible way, in so far as the conception of His personality surpasses all our views of personality. This is so just because He and He alone is a true, real and genuine person.’”

37. Davis, “Some Theological Continuities,” p. 209: “Barth also contends that even through the knowledge which comes by faith, than which ‘no more objective and strict form of knowledge can exist, and [than which] no type of knowledge can lay claim more definitely to universal validity,’ no full knowledge of God comes to us. Even when God reveals himself to the man of faith, . . . still that man with faith ‘will confess God as the God of majesty and therefore as the God unknown to us.’ To put it in brief conclusion, in Barth’s thought we have the majestic, hidden, incomprehensible, though personal God, who is made known to us, mediated to us, in his Word made flesh in Jesus Christ.”
unknowable, hidden, coming into touch with men only through an intermediary, who, for most of them, was found in the Logos who was Christ. It is clear that in the early Christian centuries thinkers thought of God as the "Wholly Other," just as Rudolf Otto and Karl Barth are doing in contemporary times. As many of the early Christians proclaimed the utter separation of the high God and the world, so now does Barth. The two are totally unlike and exclusive. At no point does God touch the external world with its corrupted nature and evil matter. No part of the world is, therefore, a manifestation of God. Here "otherness" implies "exclusive separation." Through no experience of ours can we find God, nor through any effort of our minds can we comprehend him. We are complete aliens until he wills to give himself to us. As Barth puts it: "If we do not wish to end by really defining ourselves, when we think that we are defining God, we can only take the second way and therefore hold fast to the incomprehensible majesty in which God meets us in His revelation, the majesty of His as Father, Son and Holy Spirit."*39

We find Karl Heim placing a great deal of emphasis on the Transcendence of God. In the preface to his book entitled, God Transcendent, Heim has this to say: "In the dispute concerning the relation between God and racial distinctions, the old question of the transcendence of God has again become prominent.

---

38. Davis, "Some Theological Continuities," p. 209: "To the student of Christian thought Barth's transcendentalism is essentially a philosophical conception of God. . . . Influenced by the Platonic tradition of a transcendental deity lifted high above the corruptness of phenomenality, they introduced this same emphasis into the stream of Christian thought. Their God was also a high God, far removed from earth, transcendent, indescribable, unknowable, hidden, coming into touch with men only through an intermediary, who, for most of them, was found in the Logos who was Christ."

39. Davis, "Some Theological Continuities," pp. 210–211: "Such statements from Origen, Clement, Minucius Felix, as well as Justin Martyr, make it clear that in the early Christian centuries thinkers thought of God as the 'Wholly Other,' just as Rudolph Otto and Karl Barth are doing in contemporary times. As many of the early Christians proclaimed the utter separation of the high God and the world, so now does Barth. The two are totally unlike and exclusive. At no point does God touch the external world with its corrupted nature and evil matter. No part of the world is, therefore, a manifestation or revelation of the infinite, majestic Deity. Here 'otherness' implies 'exclusive separation.' . . . Through no experience of ours can we find God, nor through any effort of our minds can we comprehend him. We are complete aliens until he wills to give himself to us. As Barth puts it pointedly: 'If we do not wish to end by really defining ourselves, when we think that we are defining God, we can only take the second way and therefore hold fast to the incomprehensible majesty in which God meets us in His revelation, the majesty of His person as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'"
The question has emerged, This power enclosing me, this world of concrete reality, is it the Divine? Or is there, between the highest which this world can show and God Himself, always a deep gulf, across which we can throw no bridge from our side, which must be bridged, if at all, by God Himself, without our aid? . . . What is the truth about the transcendence of God, and how is this transcendence different from any transcendence within the sphere of this world?  

Heim feels that God is so transcendent that no earthly analogy can adequately convey his being. Heim makes no attempt to prove that such a God exists; for he has demonstrated that such a procedure would be fruitless. A God so transcendent as the God of the Bible can only be known as he reveals himself, as he speaks his Word.

**Jesus**

Concerning Jesus, the crisis theologians are always true to the conviction that Jesus was God entering human flesh. Jesus is held to be the reconciler between God and man. Jesus is God stepping in the place of mere man so that man can step in the place of God. He changes the majesty of the Godhead to come into human life. This is what Barth calls a change of parts between God and man. According to this view there is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ. The very title of Brunner's book, *The Mediator*, reveals the exalted position to which these men raise Jesus. He is the Mediator between God and man. As Brunner says, "Jesus was eternity entering into time in order that time may become eternal."  

When we turn to the positive teaching of Heim, we

---

* Heim, *God Transcendent*, p. 185.

† Brunner, *The Mediator*, p. 13

40. Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, p. 130: "The connection of ideas is real, and is indicated in the author's preface: 'In the dispute concerning the relation between God and racial distinctions, the old question of the transcendence of God has again become prominent. The question has emerged, This power enclosing me, this world of concrete reality, is it the Divine? Or is there, between the highest which this world can show and God Himself, always a deep gulf, across which we can throw no bridge from our side, which must be bridged, if at all, by God Himself, without our aid? . . . What is the truth about the transcendence of God, and how is this transcendence different from any transcendence within the sphere of this world?'"

41. Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, p. 133: "Heim makes no attempt to prove that such a God exists; for he has demonstrated that such a procedure would be fruitless. A God so transcendent as the God of the Bible can only be known as he reveals himself, as he speaks his Word."
find that his message centers in three epithets describing the work of Christ: Jesus as Lord and Leader (Fuehrer), Jesus as Savior from sin (Versoehner), and Jesus as Deliverer of the world from the powers of darkness and death (Weltvollender). Heim places a great deal of emphasis on these three aspects of the work of Christ, and like the other crisis theologians he sees Christ as the center of history.

Man

In the thinking of the crisis theologians there is a basic pessimism about man. They argue that man lost his likeness of God in the fall. In his present condition man is absolutely hopeless and helpless. Barth goes so far as to say that the image of God was totally effaced in the fall. Brunner, being less radical, sees a bit of the image of God left in man. But they both agree that man in his fallen state has had both his reason and will corrupted. He cannot will anything good without the help of God. All of his thinking ends in contradictions. So far is he in the valley of depravity that only God can pull him out. “Man is suspended between heaven and hell and can only wait on God to move him up or down.”

Although reason may be helpful to man in his everyday round of existence, it is totally incapable of helping him reach ultimate reality. “The reason sees the small and the larger but not the large. It sees the preliminary but not the final, the derived but not the original, the complex but not the simple.”* Christianity is a religion set apart from all other religions and rests upon what God does for man, including self-disclosure in a supernatural way and not upon man’s searching. The anguish is still there until the complete surrender is made. The “Word of God” must take possession. The Word is in essence the same as Luther proclaimed in his Christological emphasis. Thus, again, the reaffirmation of a long tradition: man the sinner, man a derelict, who is bedeviled by his thoughts and ever helpless until he becomes pos-


---

42. Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, p. 134: “The message centers in three epithets describing the work of Christ: Jesus as Lord and Leader (Fuehrer), Jesus as Savior from sin (Versoehner), and Jesus as Deliverer of the world from the powers of darkness and death (Weltvollender)."
sessed by a transrational experience of otherness. Here we can see the direct influence of existentialism on the thinking of the crisis theologians. It seems the Kierkegaard has arisen from the grave. For these men Biblicism takes the place of even the most exalted type of ordinary reason and experience. Philosophers and theologians are mere playboys sporting with the fad of reason. A Christian builds on faith not reason, faith is higher than reason. All of this is said to substantiate the view of the impotence of man. As Barth so often says: “God is in Heaven and man is on earth.” As Kierkegaard said long before, “there is a qualitative difference between God and man.”

Revelation

For the crisis theologians revelation is the elemental and indispensable condition of any saving work in man. Moreover it is the indispensable avenue of knowledge of God. Revelation for these thinkers means God himself coming to man. It is always a movement from God to man rather than from man to God. These thinkers place so much emphasis on revelation that their theology is often referred to as the “theology of the word of God.” We only think, seek and know God by his word. The Word is directly God’s work. In it “Deus dixit”; “God speaks.” In it God gives or reveals himself to man.43

The Word of revelation, from the Barthian point of view has three principle forms: the spoken word of the preacher; the written word of the Scripture from which the preacher’s word is derived and by which it is controlled; and finally, the revealed Word of God to which the spoken and written word are only human testimonies. Concretely, this revealed Word is Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, in whom the majesty of God took on the form of a servant, and so remained veiled in the very act of revelation.

In his early days Brunner agreed absolutely with Barth on the question of revelation. But in a later

43. Davis, “Some Theological Continuities,” p. 213: “Suffice it to say here that whatever else the Word of God is to him [Barth], it is the elemental and indispensable condition of any saving work in man. The Word is directly God’s work. In it ‘Deus dixit’; ‘God speaks.’ In it God gives or reveals himself to man.”
book he shows that it is at the point of natural revelation that he breaks with Barth. While passing we may list the points at which Brunner breaks with Barth. Brunner seeks to make it clear in his pamphlet, *Nature and Grace*, why he could no longer follow Barth all the way. It seemed to him that Barth was drawing, from six fundamental truths a series of unwarranted logical deductions, which plunged him into absurdity: (1) From the truth that man is a sinner, who can only be saved by divine grace, he was deducing that the image of God in man is completely obliterated by the Fall. (2) From the truth that Scriptural revelation is the sole norm of our knowledge of God and the sole source of our salvation, he was deducing that there was no general revelation of God in nature, conscience and history. (3) From the truth that we must acknowledge the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only saving grace, he was deducing that there was no expression of God's grace in the creation and preservation of the world. From the same truth he was deducing (4) that there was no expression of the divine will in the so-called "law of nature" embodied in the basic social institutions; (5) no Anknüpfungspunkt (point of contact) or "divine image" in human nature to which divine grace could make its appeal; and (6) no developmental relations between nature and grace, the natural man and the new man in Christ, but only one of "substitution." 44

More than anything else Brunner was pleading for natural revelation, that which Barth was unwilling to accept. He saw that without natural revelation there

44 Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, p. 112: "Brunner then proceeded to make clear, in the aforesaid pamphlet, *Nature and Grace*, why he could no longer follow Barth all the way. It seemed to him that Barth was drawing, from six fundamental truths . . . a series of unwarranted logical deductions, which plunged him into absurdity: (1) From the truth that man is a sinner, who can only be saved by divine grace, he was deducing that the image of God in man is completely obliterated by the Fall. (2) From the truth that Scriptural revelation is the sole norm of our knowledge of God and the sole source of our salvation, he was deducing that there was no general revelation of God in nature, conscience and history. (3) From the truth that we must acknowledge the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only saving grace, he was deducing that there was no expression of God's grace in the creation and preservation of the world. From the same truth he was deducing (4) that there was no expression of the divine will in the so-called 'law of nature' embodied in the basic social institutions; (5) no Anknüpfungspunkt (point of contact) or 'divine image' in human nature to which divine grace could make its appeal; and (6) no developmental relations between nature and grace, the natural man and the new man in Christ, but only one of 'substitution' (Ersetzung)."
could be no responsibility. Even the unbeliever has some connection with God, and is therefore responsible. In other words Brunner makes some room for the "I." There is something that man can do. However all crisis theologians agree that revelation is a movement from God to man and never man to God.

**Conclusion**

From our foregoing survey we have seen that there is no single continental theology. It would be as fallacious to set forth such an assumption as it would be to speak of a single political system on the continent. What is most commonly meant by the "Continental" point of view is the Barthian point of view; or else, more broadly, the new Protestant orthodoxy which Brunner, Heim, Aulen, and Lecerf all share with Barth in spite of their differences. But if we take this new uncompromising Protestantism as the one clear expression of the "Continental" point of view, it becomes necessary to classify all Orthodox and Catholic theology as un-Continental. We must see that the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches of the Continent have made sufficiently vital contributions to contemporary Christian thought to be included in any concept of "contemporary Continental theology."

Let it be stated that there is a great deal that we as westerners can learn through a sympathetic study of Continental theology. Experience has shown that some of the richest insights into religious truth came when two groups of Christians with contrasting backgrounds wrestle with one another over some funda-

---

45. Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, p. 215: "It needs no argument, after our survey . . . to prove that there is no such thing as a single 'Continental theology.' . . . What is most commonly meant by the 'Continental' point of view is the Barthian point of view; or else, more broadly, the new Protestant orthodoxy which Brunner, Heim, Aulen, and Lecerf all share with Barth in spite of their differences."

46. Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, pp. 216–217: "But if we take this new uncompromising Protestantism as the one clear expression of the 'Continental' point of view, it becomes necessary to classify all Orthodox and Catholic theology as un-Continental. . . . I believe that the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches of the Continent have made sufficiently vital contributions to contemporary Christian thought so that our concept of 'contemporary Continental theology' should include Orthodox and Catholic theology."
mental issue, candidly but respectfully, listening for the word God may be seeking to convey to them through their theological adversaries. I am sure that Continental theology has something to contribute to Anglo-American theology, just because it cuts across our accustomed ways of thinking, and because it refuses to be drawn over into our system of thought or comprehended in terms of our categories. I am convinced, moreover, that the sympathetic study of Continental theology will tend to deepen, correct and steady our faith: At the point where we face the mystery of the future, the mystery of human destiny. We in the Anglo-Saxon world, securely relying upon our vast natural resources, our highly developed science and technology, and our fairly stable social institutions, have been thinking and talking far too glibly about the Kingdom of God as of something that we might hope to “bring in” by our own human efforts. Half unconsciously, we have been confusing the ancient hope of the coming of God’s Kingdom with the modern doctrine of progress. Have not we depended too much on man and too little on God?

On every hand our Continental brothers are calling up back to the depths of the Christian faith. They warn us that we too easily capitulated to modern culture. Is that not true? Somehow we must rethink many of our so-called liberal theological concepts. Take the doctrine of man. There is a strong tendency in liberal Protestantism toward sentimentality about man. Man who has come so far in wisdom and dexterity may be expected to go much further as his methods of attaining and applying knowledge are im-

47. Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, pp. xiv–xv: “Experience has shown that some of the richest insights into religious truth come when two groups of Christians with contrasting backgrounds wrestle with one another over some fundamental issue, candidly but respectfully, listening for the word that God may be seeking to convey to them through their theological adversaries. . . . I am sure that Continental theology has something to contribute to Anglo-American theology, just because it cuts across our accustomed ways of thinking, because it refuses to be drawn over into our system of thought or comprehended in terms of our categories.”

48. Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, pp. xv–xvi: “I am convinced that the sympathetic study of Continental theology will tend to deepen, correct and steady our faith: at the point where we face the mystery of the future, the mystery of human destiny. We in the Anglo-Saxon world, securely relying upon our vast natural resources, our highly developed science and technology, our relatively sheltered military situation, and our still fairly stable social institutions, have been thinking and talking far too glibly about the Kingdom of God as of something that we might hope to "bring in" by our own human efforts. Half unconsciously, we have been confusing the ancient Christian hope of the coming of God's Kingdom with the modern doctrine of progress.”
proved. This conviction was put into a phrase by an outstanding Humanist: “The supreme value and self perfectibility of man.” Although such ethical religion is humane and its vision a lofty one, it has obvious shortcomings. This particular sort of optimism has been discredited by the brutal logic of events. Instead of assured progress in wisdom and decency man faces the ever present possibility of swift relapse not merely to animalism but into such calculated cruelty as no other animal can practice.

Maybe man is more of a sinner than liberals are willing to admit. I realize that the sinfulness of man is often over-emphasized by some continental theologians, but at least we must admit that many of the ills of the world are due to plain sin. The tendency on the part of some liberal theologians to see sin as a mere “lay of nature” which will be progressively eliminated as man climbs the evolutionary ladder seems to me quite perilous. I will readily agree that many of man’s shortcomings are due to natural necessities, but ignorance and finiteness and hampering circumstances, and the pressure of animal impulse, are all insufficient to account for many of man’s shortcomings. We have to recognize that man has misused his kingly prerogative as a social animal by making others bear the burden of his selfishness. Only the one who sits on the peak of his intellectual ivory tower looking unrealistically with his rosey colored glasses on the scene of life can fail to see this fact. The word sin must come back into our vocabulary.

Again the continental theologians call us back to the dimension of depth in the Bible. This is not to say that the critical approach to the study of Scripture must be disregarded. But it does mean that Biblical criticism must remain a means, not an end. Too many liberals have been so involved in “higher Criticism” that they failed to see the vital issues of the Christian faith. After one has gone through the whole process of Biblical criticism, he must be able to answer the question, “what then?” We must see the Bible as both the Word of God and the Word of Man. The Bible is more than a piece of historical literature, as many liberals would reduce it to; it is a personal word from a living God. We may wish to supplement Barth’s exclusive emphasis upon God’s self revelation in Scripture with a corrective emphasis upon tradition, reason or Christian experience, but we must agree that the Biblical revelation is classic and normative for Christian
thought; it is the central pillar on which the whole structure of Christian theology must rest.

Does this mean that we must all go Barthian? No, no that. I have studied Barth quite sympathetically; but I am as far as ever from being a Barthian. What I wish to commend to you is that there is a great corrective and great challenge in this theology of crisis. It calls us back to the depths of the Christian faith. Of course we are not to accept all of their conclusions, for many of them are one-sided generalizations, but at least we can accept the good that they have to offer. "They do insist that religion begins with God and that men cannot have faith apart from him. They do stress the fact that faith is not a rational achievement, but a passionate belief that divine Reality is such as we find in Jesus Christ. They do suggest that man is not sufficient into himself for life, but is dependent upon the proclamation of God's living Word, through which, by means of Bible, preacher, and revealed Word, God himself comes to the consciences of men. They do proclaim that apart from God our human efforts turn to ashes and our sunrises into darkest night." Much of this is good, may we not accept it.

Bibliography


49. Horton, Contemporary Continental Theology, p. xix: "So you think we must all go Barthian, after all? No, not that. I have met Karl Barth personally ... but I am as far as ever from being a Barthian. What I wish to commend to the ... Anglo-Saxon world is not just Barth's 'Theology of Crisis,' but the great, multiform movement of Christian thought which has emerged simultaneously within the various Continental churches ... and which bears the general character of a theology of crisis."

50. This quotation is from Davis, "Some Theological Continuities," pp. 217–218.

THDS. MLKP-MBU: Box 112.

"Reinhold Niebuhr"

[2 April 1952]
[Boston, Mass.]

King prepared this outline for an oral report in DeWolf's Seminar in Systematic Theology. Although King agrees with Niebuhr's assessment of the "inevitable sterility of the humanistic emphasis," he criticizes Niebuhr's agnosticism as "unchristian." King expanded these ideas in a later essay for the Dialectical Society.

1. Biographical Sketch:

1. Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) was one of the most influential figures in American religious and political thought in the twentieth century. He received his B.D. (1914) and M.A. (1915) from Yale Divinity School. After pastoring a church in a working-class section of Detroit for thirteen years, Niebuhr began teaching at Union Theological Seminary in 1928, where he remained for the rest of his life. A politically active socialist during the 1920s and 1930s, he was editor of The World Tomorrow, the journal of the Socialist party. As a founder of the journal Christianity and Crisis and of the political group Americans for Democratic Action, he was an influential proponent of Christian or liberal realism. Among his voluminous writings are Does Civilization Need Religion? (1927), Moral Man and Immoral Society (1932), Reflections on the End of an Era (1934), An Interpretation of Christian Ethics (1935), The Nature and Destiny of Man (1941-1943), and Faith and History (1949). For more information, see Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought, ed. Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (New York: Macmillan, 1956); and Richard Wrightman Fox, Reinhold Niebuhr (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).