CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

In his film, *The Seventh Seal*, Ingmar Bergman, who has been doing with a movie camera what contemporary philosophers of religion are doing in page after page of learned treatises, tells the story of a knight who returns from the Crusades to find his native Denmark scarred by the black plague. He meets 'Death' in human form and engages him in a running game of chess while he searches for the meaning of his life and ponders the existence of God. In seeking to become certain that there is a God, the knight carries on an intellectual discussion with his squire who is just as certain that there is no God. The plague requires both knight and squire to perform various acts of compassion, but it is the squire who acts while the knight is too involved in philosophical speculations. He deviates from this task only very briefly to share a meal of strawberries and milk with their simplicity that he tries to hide them from the sight of death.

Towards the end of the film, Bergman's message becomes as clear as a bell. One of man's few certainties is his own mortality. His search for the 'one significant action', inspired by love of one's neighbour that would give his life a meaning must be performed within the context of his mortality and his search for God. Thus ultimate values must be placed in an act of benevolence, in appreciation of another person which may grow into a salvific and redemptive act of love. If the knight reaches any peace at all beyond death, it would be because of his love for the family, rather than as a result of his systematic and philosophic (and regrettably fruitless search) for certain knowledge of God.

The contemporary philosopher of religion finds himself in much the same sort of situation that Bergman's knight found himself. The problem of the philosopher of religion has become at once a problem of the existence, the nature, the knowledge as well as of the experience of God. The problem has become all the more complex in view of the many and varied issues which have arisen in the domain of theology, and which until not too long ago the philosopher of religion had almost taken for granted and the solutions to which he had questioned mainly for academic purposes. As a result, we are witnessing a universal search for a meaningful God. God has, as it were, suddenly become the object of research not
only among the leading philosophers and theologians of all faiths but as well among anthropologists, sociologists and not least among playwrights and film-makers.

An analysis of all the approaches to the problem of God is beyond the scope of this paper. I shall, however, submit a series of points marking some of the major trends in current thinking and belief and in the course of which make whatever specifications as may be necessary.

I - PRIMITIVE RELIGION

How the image or the idea of the 'divine' originated in our culture is not an easy task to determine. Looking back, however, one might possibly say that there have been, broadly speaking, three major streams which contributed towards the formation of the image.¹

The first stream is undoubtedly the bible which projected a creator, the one and only being responsible for law and order in the universe and who created all living and non-living things. Beyond the projection of a creator, however, what is of utmost importance about the bible is that it brought God down to earth and men of good will learnt that life is worthless unless they minister to their neighbour.

Then there is Greek metaphysics which conceived the universe as a hierarchical cosmos centred around the Platonic idea of the Good par excellence on the one hand, and the Aristotlean Pure Act or Substance, necessarily eternal and immutable and the object of human desire on the other. Despite the good intentions of Greek philosophy and the invaluable service it has performed throughout the centuries, God emerged from it as a Being placed so high up in the hierarchical order of creation that he became unreachable and, consequently, man today has lost contact with him and is now experiencing his absence in much the same way that a sick man experiences the absence of health.

There is yet another stream which has become the object of intensive and extensive research: primitive religion. Scholars, like Durkheim, Otto, Eliade, among many others, are discovering God and the very heart of religion in the primitive distinctions made in all ancient cultures between the sacred and the profane or between the holy and the secular.

Eliade, for one, argues that in the events that took place in pri-

mordial time (which, in passing, is what he means by 'myth'), primitive man all too soon became aware of the sacred and the profane. Through his experience of the sacred, primitive man understood his world to be a cosmos rather than a chaos and this discovery provided him with a 'fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation'. It provided him with his 'mecca' or 'temple' around which he began to organize the heterogeneous and seemingly scattered and shattered experiences that made up his existence into a meaningful *unum quid*, possessing order, integrity and coherence.²

All three streams, each in its own way and within its own framework, contributed towards the formation of the image of God in our culture: God is thus seen as the moral, metaphysical and sacred point of unity which gave man's world some meaning and value. But the currents and cross currents of the sixties, coming as they did with increasingly greater force, have demolished the traditional image of God. The role that the contemporary philosopher of religion is now assigning God is far different. It is not God who now gives man's world some value and meaning; on the contrary, it is man's existence and experience of life that today gives meaning to God.

Is God therefore no longer the one and only God, all-knowing, immutable, eternal, simple, infinite, perfect, omnipresent - the 'pure act' - that traditional philosophy had claimed he was? Has the new philosophy of religion reached the shattering conclusion that God is in fact no longer what traditionally we thought he was but something quite different and until we rediscover his nature he should be pronounced 'dead'?

II - THE DEATH OF GOD IN NIETZSCHE

Though the problem of God has, over the centuries, taken on different dimensions, the current trend may be said to have started with Nietzsche. Nietzsche may not have been the first philosopher to use the phrase 'God is dead', but he is clearly responsible for the concept today. For Nietzsche, God was a multifaced entity: with his death, as if with a single shot, many other related matters, as important for man as God himself, were dissolved into a dew.

Nietzsche was not after the death of God as such but with the rise of the 'higher man' in his philosophy he felt it necessary to

proclaim God’s death as an indispensable antecedent to the autonomy of ‘superman’. In syllogistic form, his argument would probably be difficult to construct. His major premise could just as well be: ‘If God is dead, then man is supreme’, as it could be: ‘If man is supreme, then God is dead’.

The God Nietzsche knew was incompatible with his philosophy. For one thing, it was a God essentially related to an ‘other world’, whether this ‘other world’ is construed metaphysically or supernaturally.

The eternal and unchangeable God he knew ran counter to his philosophy of progress and becoming: ‘... all this teaching of the one and the plenum and the unmoved and the permanent ... That is only a parable. It is of time and becoming that the best parables should speak. Let them be a praise and a justification for all impermanence’. 

The God he knew was a creator and as long as man held this concept of God man could never become ‘like unto him’. Man would be frozen, as it were, in the very same essence that God had originally given him.

The God he knew was the source of morality whose will determined good and evil: ‘To look upon nature as if it were a proof of the goodness and care of a god; to interpret history in honour of a divine reason, as a constant testimony to a moral order in the world and a moral final purpose ... all that is now past’.

The God he knew was a merciful God, the God of pity, which in Nietzsche’s opinion was an acknowledgement of weakness: ‘Pity stands opposed to the tonic emotions which heighten our vitality: it has a depressing effect ... Pity crossed the law of development, which is the law of selection’.

Finally, the God he knew was paradoxically unknown and unknowable. He was the God of mystery, unavailable to the scrutiny and analysis of human reason and he goes so far as to refer to him as ‘a conjecture’.3

Thus the God Nietzsche had been familiar with was the God ‘in whom man lived, moved and had his being’, but with his death all the functions that he performed for man faded out of existence, as did all that provided meaning, importance and ultimate value to man and his world.

For good or ill, Nietzsche’s philosophy freed man from religion, metaphysics and the sacred and God’s dogmatic reality became in his philosophy a myth. What becomes of man, now that Nietzsche

no longer allowed him to be the alpha and the omega of creation? Nietzsche unhesitatingly replies: "It is only since he lies in his tomb that you have been resurrected. Only now the great noon comes; only now the higher man becomes Lord*. God's death did not leave man an orphan; on the contrary, with his death God bequeathed to man what man had been looking for since time immemorial: unlimited freedom and unbounded creativity. With God's death, a transfer of powers has come into effect. Man has become like unto God not merely as in the days of Eden with the power to know good and evil but to make good and evil, to determine and decree what henceforth should constitute and enhance man's noble life. In a word, the Nietzschean man became the final arbiter of good and evil.

At this point, I must enter a caveat. The death of God for Nietzsche did not necessarily mean that something had intrinsically happened to God himself. It simply meant that something had happened and is happening in the history of human consciousness: man is not a static being whose nature and forms of apprehension are immutably fixed, frozen or crystallized by either God or nature itself. On the contrary, man is a dynamic historical consciousness who has found himself inescapably caught between two points in the period of transition: from having been a religious man to becoming a secular man.

With God's death, the Nietzschean man has become fully conscious of the world around him: his attention is now focussed on a 'this-worldly' existence. Man, Nietzsche claims, has become 'of age' and needs neither religion nor the provident hand of god to guide him through the vicissitudes of life and of history. He must pave and pay his own way.

In brief, the truth of the Nietzschean antecedent (whichever major premise is selected) involves the truth of his consequent.

It is precisely on Nietzsche's conclusion that various historical accounts of such philosophers as Hegel, Eliade, Bonhoeffer and the interpretations provided by such contemporary philosophers and theologians as Altizer, Cox, Hemilton, Vahanian and, definitely not least, the Bergman films, converge.

III - Bonhoeffer's Religionless Christianity

Indeed, time was when man's world of power, purpose, ultimate concern and dedication was divinely oriented. Now man's world is a profane landscape — like Bergman's bleak, black and white photography suggesting bareness and desolation — that can at no point reveal even the faintest presence of the sacred in its secular
existence. The man 'who once piled his thoughts to the sky in these stones' now turns to an earth in perpetual movement without design or purpose and without sacred orientation and direction.

Bonhoeffer speaks of the death of religion and of metaphysics in an age and a world now understood without reference to an 'other world' and tries to lay the foundations for a religionless Christianity. 'We are proceeding toward a time of no religion at all', he wrote from his prison cell in Nazi Germany. Like Nietzsche before him, he emphasizes the importance of secularism for modern thought: an age and a world without God and religion is essentially an age and a world of secularism, a process which, Bohhoeffer claims, has occurred in all the sciences. The hypothesis of God is just not required today to explain any of the facts of physics or biology:

God as a working hypothesis in morals, politics, or science, has been surmounted and abolished; and the same thing has happened in philosophy and religion. For the sake of intellectual honesty, that working hypothesis should be dropped, or as far as possible eliminated. A scientist or physician who sets out to edify is a hybrid.4

In its special issue on the Death of God, *Time* popularizes these reflections in the following terms:

The development of capitalism, for example, freed economics from church control and made it subject only to marketplace supply and demand. Political theorists of the Enlightenment proved that law and government were not institutions handed down from on high, but things that men had created themselves. The 18th century deists argues that man as a rational animal was capable of developing an ethical system that made as much sense as one based on revelation...

But the most important agent in the secularizing process was science. The Copernican revolution was a shattering blow to faith in a Bible that assumed the sun went round the earth and could be stopped in its tracks by divine intervention, as Joshua claimed. And while many of the pioneers of modern science - Newton and Descartes, for example - were devout men, they assiduously explained much of nature that previously seemed godly mysteries. Others saw no need for such reverential lip service.5

Bonhoeffer concedes, however, that man may still need God in

5 'Is God Dead?', *Time* (Canada Edition), April 8, 1966.
the realms of anxiety, fear and guilt but in almost the same breath he adds that even in these areas the process of secularization is taking place and man yet find that the resources within him are more than adequate to help him cope with these phenomena.

The death of religion in Bonhoeffer has basically the same meaning that the death of God has in Nietzsche: it is oriented towards the 'other world', as a result of which this world is represented as something to be saved from. But paradoxically as it may sound, through his rejection of religion, Bonhoeffer is genuinely searching for God—at what he calls 'the centre of life', Jesus Christ, through whom and by whom 'life has a meaning for us'.

Understood in terms of conformation to Christ, Bonhoeffer's religionless Christianity is redemptive and salvific. He is concerned above all both with the way in which Christ takes form within man's society as well as with his reconciliation to God through the person and the work of Christ. In a beautiful passage, he says:

Our coming of age leads us to a true recognition of our situation before God. God would have us know that we must live as man who manage our lives without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark: xv, 34). The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God and with God we live without God. God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. Matthew viii, 17, makes it quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering.⁶

I shall leave Bonhoeffer at that.

IV - THE RADICAL THEOLOGIANS

It would seem that man, the common man-in-the-street, possibly under the weight of this philosophical onslaught, has gradually worked himself into the position where he can claim that he has surpassed God and recognizes nothing that does not have its origin in man himself and nothing that cannot find ultimate fulfilment in himself.

Much to this effect, Eliade writes:

Modern non-religious man assumes a new existential situation he regards himself solely as the subject and agent of history, and he refuses all appeal to transcendence. In other words, he accepts no model for humanity outside the human condition as it

⁶Bonhoeffer, op. cit., loc. cit.
can be seen in the various historical situations. Man makes himself, and he only makes himself completely as he desacralizes himself and the world. The sacred is the prime obstacle to his freedom. He will become himself only when he is totally de-mysticized..."  

William Hamilton, one of the prime movers of the death of God movement of the sixties, lists ten possible interpretations of the phrase 'God is dead' in relation to the thesis originally proposed by Nietzsche and propagated, among others, by Eliade. In summary form:

(i) It might mean that there is no God and that there never has been. This position is traditional atheism of the old-fashioned kind.

(ii) It might mean that there was once a God to whom adoration, praise and trust were appropriate, possible and even necessary, but that there is now no such God. This is the position of the death-of God or radical theology.

(iii) It might mean that the idea of God and the word of God itself both are in need of radical reformulation...a new treatment of the idea and the word can be expected, however unexpected and surprising it may turn out to be.

(iv) It might mean that our traditional liturgical and theological language needs a thorough overhaul; the reality abides, but classical modes of thought and forms of language may well have had it.

(v) It might mean that the Christian story is no longer a saving or healing story.

(vi) It might mean that certain concepts of God, often in the past confused with the classical Christian doctrine of God, must be destroyed.

(vii) It might mean that men do not today experience God except as hidden, absent, silent.

(viii) It might mean that the gods men make, in their thought and action..., must always die so that the true object of thought and action, the true God, might emerge, come to life, be born anew.

(ix) It might have a mystical meaning: God must die in the world so that he can be born in us. In many forms of mysticism the death of Jesus on the cross is the time of that worldly death.... and it is probably this complex of ideas that lies behind the German chorale God Himself Is Dead that may well be the historical source for our modern use of 'Death of God'.

7 Eliade, op. cit., p. 203. Emphasis is author's.
(x) Finally, it might mean that our language about God is always inadequate and imperfect.  

These positions or attitudes towards the problem of God today may, for our purposes, be grouped under the following headings:

(a) God’s Non-existence

There is at least one aspect of the problem of God with which philosophers of religion seem to be in agreement. That aspect is by no means concerned with God’s non-existence. In fact, the philosopher of religion finds the concept itself of the non-existence of God totally incompatible with his philosophical research in that it denies the very object of his search.

By following up Nietzsche’s philosophical excursions, the radical theologians did not mean to add more fuel to the fire which he initiated. On the contrary, it appears they tried to undo the Nietzschean knot and their concern was to search for newer ways to express God’s reality and to make him more meaningful and acceptable to contemporary society.

Indeed, the whole history of mankind, but more particularly the history of the 19th century, is being reinterpreted not from the standpoint of the non-existence of God (which may be said to be traditional atheism of the old-fashioned kind), but from the standpoint of the death-of-God as a necessary prelude to a new image of God. All significant events are, in fact, being reinterpreted as having been a preparation for man’s coming-of-age and adulthood. The 19th century, says Hamilton, lived the reality of the death of God and now instructs us to do the same. He continues:

A whole series of themes in the 19th century deals, directly or indirectly, with the collapse of God into the world, and thus with the death of God. Goethe and the romantics spoke of the movement from transcendence to nature, and even Protestants were invited by some of their spokesmen at the beginning of the century to fling themselves on the bosom of nature to recapture a lost divinity. William Blake is singing mysteriously of the death of the transcendent God at the close of the 18th century, and in the French Revolution itself we can perceive the close connection between regicide and deicide. Hegel, as early as 1807, speaks elliptically of God’s death, and the left-wing Hegelians like Strauss and Feuerbach make it much clearer — the attributes of God must be transmuted into concrete values. Karl Marx’s own

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Marxism is in one sense an attempt to recover for the human community the values previously ascribed to God.

Ibsen and Strindberg knew the death of God, as did Victorian England. George Eliot found God and immortality impossible, duty alone irresistible, while the young Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach* sang a song for a whole generation...

And on our side of the Atlantic, Hawthome rather quietly, and Melville with unforgettable force, laid the God of the Puritan tradition to rest. Perhaps the most unforgettable image of the dying God in our language is that of Ahab finally fixing his harpoon in Moby Dick's side, as the two of them sink together, both of them evil.  

As an immediate consequence of this historic event - Hamilton claims it happened in one sense with Jesus on the cross; in another sense in the Europe and America of the last century; and in a third sense, today, just now — the contemporary philosopher of religion has to strive, during this interim period of godlessness and religionless, to redefine and reexplain God's presence and reality. His task, therefore, is to formulate a new image and concept of God basing this image and concept on areas of human experience that indicate as clearly and unmistakeably as possible, the presence in life of something beyond and far superior to man.

To turn to Bergman for an illustration of these reflections: his characters move and live in an atmosphere of conscious absence of the divine and everything else around them. But however desolate, frustrated, alienated they may be, they seek nonetheless to become certain that there is something meaningful in this life and something fulfilling beyond death. And yet they go through their shattered journey of life with little communication with each other ('Why can't we be nice to each other?' says Eva to Jan in Bergman's film *Shame*), less with the surrounding world ('Our radio and telephone are broken down') and none with God. But it is perhaps in *The Silence*, rather than in any of his other films, that Bergman works out this idea more forcefully. *The Silence* is a brutal and oppressive commentary of hell on earth: the cold horror of human existence when God averts his face and there is no light at all. In this film, he portrays two sisters travelling in a strange country and are assigned to and confined in two adjoining rooms in a cavernous hotel in a strange city whose language is totally foreign. Displaced, alienated as they are, they cannot communicate with God or their neighbour and feel futile and lost, withdrawn into them.

selves. It is the tragic solitude of beings who have lost or never set out to seek what Bergman is trying to communicate to the viewer, namely, that man needs a God much closer to home, a God within himself.

(b) The Loss of the Experience of God

Are we, therefore, speaking of the loss of the experience of God? On the surface, it would seem so. But there is a difference. Apart from the obsession to affirm man's maturity, coming-of-age or independence, possibly even metaphysically speaking, a reaffirmation of God's reality and presence is precisely what the Death-of-God movement had set out to achieve today and, paradoxically, it has been trying to achieve it through the loss of the experience of God. Its *raison d'être* is precisely to force scholars to undertake a long overdue reexamination of the problem of God and to make every man ask himself and answer for himself the question of God means to him personally.

Though their doctrine has been termed atheistic or at least bordering on atheism, the radical theologians are no more atheists than were the early followers of Christ who were invariably called 'atheists' and 'Christians': the former because they stopped believing in the gods of pagan antiquity; the latter because they started believing in a new god: Christ.

The moral, social, political and psychological upheavals of World War II may indeed have alienated man from God and from his fellowmen as well but it does indeed seem that the anguish, despair, torment that man experienced in the aftermath of war have been instrumental in helping him evaluate himself and his potential and in the process re-discover God — not on Tabor (where Peter discovered him), nor on Calvary (where the centurion saw the light) but on the road to Damascus, in the kind of sepulchral oblivion of the 19th century where Nietzsche found him. 'No, I think there quite probably is a God', says the director of the technological utopia in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, 'But he manifests himself in different ways to different men. In pre-modern times he manifested himself as the being described in these books. Now.... he manifests himself as an absence, as though he weren't here at all....'

William Hamilton epitomizes Huxley's thought in the following words: 'We are not talking about the absence of the experience of God' — which is a negative position — 'but about the experience of the absence of God' — which is positive. It is the kind of experience of absence of God that Christ himself experienced on the
cross. Such absence, claims Hamilton, are we now experiencing.

If I may conclude this point with one of Altizer's key themes: the ultimate reconciliation of opposites. Altizer argues that man has lost the sense of the sacred which was so much alive in the medieval world. Instead of restoring all things in God, the Christian should in the present circumstances be favourable towards this 'secularization' because, Altizer argues, it is only in the midst of the radically profane that man will again be able to recapture an understanding of the sacred. The death of God and all that is sacred is a necessary prelude to a rediscovery of the sacred and the glorious resurrection of Christ, possibly the kind of awareness of who Christ really is that Schillebeeckx speaks of. To many scholars, in fact, the emergence of this new movement is a sign of spiritual health, a harbinger of renewal.

Like the biblical seed, perhaps even God must die before he can spring forth into life again. Must not grapes be crushed before they can produce wine?

(c) The Lack of Adequate Language to Express the Reality God:

Hardly any philosopher of religion today describes God in same vein as the mediaeval scholastics did nor can he attempt to demonstrate God's existence by pure reason alone, else he would have to use the old familiar but now obsolete terminology, involving Prime Mover, Prime Cause and so on – terminology which tends to make God more remote and more detached from this world than ever and which places God's attributes in philosophical compartments. Regrettably, traditional philosophy had overexposed God and it has now lost its character as a response to the problem of God as man sees it today. It is for reasons briefly outlined here that the philosopher of religion's first step has been to accept a complete, radical break from the traditional image of a transcendent creator 'way out there somewhere' and man 'way down here' and like East and West 'the twain shall never meet' – an image that broadly emerged from the Greek and Scholastic dualism of act and potency.

After dehellenizing God, i.e., abandoning or at least shelving all concepts of God derived from Greek and Mediaeval philosophy that are out of accord with the contemporary experience of man, the philosopher of religion now finds himself burdened with the task of providing precise meanings to the vocabulary employed in the study

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of God, possibly guided and enlightened by the principles of analytic philosophy. This task aims at transmitting a concept of God and defining him in terms that can touch men’s emotions and engage men’s minds, from down here, immanently, not from way up there, transcendentally. It is probably this task that is capable of developing a vigorous philosophy of religion, the central theme and goal of which would be the existence and operations of a personal God making God-man relationships closer than they have ever been and committing man not merely to accept religion and faith blindly but to become a witness of God’s love and providence.

With a theistic commitment of this kind, man can then proceed to eradicate the evil and injustice that plague our world: in other words, turn this world from the hell that hate and injustice have made it into the heaven that it should be. God’s message will thus come to man not in what now appears to be the meaningless, obsolete, over-worked and bankrupt language of act and potency, but straight to one’s heart, where the Kingdom of God is.

(d) The Loss of the Existence of God in Christianity

Hamilton, probably the most ethics-minded of the radical theologians, concentrates his efforts not so much on God as on Christ. He argues the awareness of God’s death summons man more forcefully to follow Christ as the exemplar of conduct, which, in our day and age, means total commitment to the love and service of one’s fellowmen. It was Christ who in the first place demanded this total commitment which cannot be separated from faith in Christ.

It is in this sense that Hamilton defines Christ not as a person or an object but as a place to be’. ‘In the time of the death of God, we have a place to be’, he writes, ‘It is not before an altar; it is in the world, in the city, with both the needy neighbour and the enemy, in the midst of the negro’s struggle for equality as well as in the emerging forms of technological society and not least in the arts and sciences of the secular world’.

Christ’s own words, ‘the kingdom of God is in thy heart’, find here their fullest expression and deepest meaning. Hence man finds God not so much in his own daily struggle for survival and existence as in assisting his fellowmen’s struggles for survival and existence. The knight, in Bergman’s The Seventh Seal, delays implacable death long enough to accomplish ‘one single meaningful action’ towards his fellowman. ‘The meaning of life’, says Bergman, ‘is life itself’.

Gabriel Vahanian, a sociologist of religion and a cultural historian with a primary interest in analyzing man’s perception of God,
argues that God is known to man only in terms of man’s own culture. To this effect, he declares, God is dead and will remain so until we become secular enough in structure and thought to proclaim him anew in ways that will fulfill the cultural needs of the times the spirit of which is irretrievably secular with all notions of transcendence and other worldliness rejected.\(^{11}\)

Secularized, scientific, empirical as man has become, he finds himself more at home with visible facts than with unseen realities, so much so that he would more readily consider God as a total attitude of oneself — a personal commitment — than talk of him in terms of transcendence and the beyond.

Harvey Cox reexplains the notion of the transcendence of God in the following manner: the one area where empirical man is open to transcendence is the future: man can be defined as the creature who hopes, who has taken responsibility for the world. Cox’s theology is based on the premise that God is the source and ground of this hope: a God ‘ahead’ of man in history rather than ‘out there’ in space.\(^{12}\) In Cox’s view, among others, God operates in time and not, as it were, in space.

Again, this form of immanence which generates a theistic commitment is not without biblical foundation. The thought that ‘the kingdom fo God is within you’ and that one works out his heaven and his hell in the context of his life is quite in line with the gospel account of the last judgment: ‘As long as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’. And in fact we are witnessing today the rise of what is being termed an ‘anonymous Christianity’ or as Karl Rahner calls it an ‘anonymous presence’. It is in the midst of such neighbouring activity that man discovers Christ and ultimately God. On the basis of this universal theistic brotherhood, man becomes all too soon aware of unity and relationships in the visible universe. A pattern is perceptible, an evolutionary pattern of growth and development not only in the physical order but as well in the order of consciousness. There is an indelible mark of order in the universe and a throbbing of eternal energy. Briefly, there’s the mark of a Maker. How the making is done — by prime motion, causality, participation or otherwise — is of course another matter, but in this context the words of Teilhard


de Chardin make profound sense if we could only understand their true meaning: 'God makes things make themselves'.

V - Conclusion

In their efforts, genuine though they be, to rediscover God and make him acceptable to contemporary society, the approach of the contemporary philosophers of religion have nonetheless disturbed not a few scholars who feel that the current trends are destroying what has taken over 2,000 years to establish, namely tradition, the lifeblood of the faithful, that body of doctrinal beliefs which one generation has handed down to another and which generation after generation have accepted, lived by and died for. It is a commitment to the authentic source of Western man's beliefs and culture.

There was a time when man found comfort in belonging to a predominantly Christian society in which the existence of an omnipotent and provident God gave meaning and hope to his life. In today's secular-minded culture which suggests the demise rather than the presence of God, or a peculiar presence through his absence, no such security exists.

In view of this, many scholars have become very much concerned about this matter, so concerned that it has prompted among others the British novelist, Graham Greene, to state that he would refuse to believe in a God whom he could understand. Karl Barth had long warned the faithful of this trend. "God is a 'wholly other' being", 'whom man can only know by God's self revelation in the person of Christ, as witnessed by Scripture. Any search for God that starts with human experience is a vain quest that will discover only an idol, not the true God at all'.

In my opinion, the Dutch Catechism, a philosophical-theological work, has the right approach towards the problem of religion and God and has provided thoughtful guidelines and directions. Starting with the fact of existence in which all men share and the meaning of life which all men seek, the Catechism leads the search through a comparative survey of the great religions of the past to discover Christ and his message. Through Christ, then, the search goes on towards the afterlife and God.

Notwithstanding these currents and cross currents, it is undeniable that the debate over God's death, over his absence or his presence through his absence, has brought a new vitality within religious thought and man is recovering a sense of faith in facing the future, inspiring him to participate more actively and more constructively, in shaping his destiny. Indeed God and religion have become determining factors in the 20th century.
It is an ill wind that blows no one any good and it may have been necessary, therefore, for the traditional image of God to give way to Nietzsche’s and the Radical Theologians’ image of a dead God to make the final synthesis possible, the emergence of God through Christ.

Indeed, the cry of Nietzsche’s madman in *The Gay Science* ‘I seek God! I seek God!’ has ironically never been as true as it is today.

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