

J.A.T. ROBINSON AND NON-SUPRANATURALISM:

A CRITIQUE.

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INTRODUCTION

Part II of my Ph.D. thesis has two objectives. The first is to examine and assess J.A.T. Robinson's writing from Honest to God (1963) to the present day in order to give a clear indication of its value in clarifying and interpreting the notion of 'secular religion', particularly with regard to the concept of God as Ultimate Loving Concern. It is maintained that despite some confusion of thought, argument and style, Robinson's work nevertheless reveals insights which are vitally relevant to the process of education for, and the reality of life in, secular society today.

The second objective is to elucidate the notion of 'secular transcendence' and to present evidence which shows that a non-supranaturalistic analysis does not logically necessitate a loss of transcendence. The foundation premise of my thesis, of God as Ultimate Loving Concern, is thus shown to be representative of a contemporary approach which is located firmly within the Christian tradition, and which is grounded in valid educational practice.

SECTION A

A review of the response to J.A.T. Robinson's theological writing 1963-1975, and a contemporary assessment and critique.

'..... whether one uses man-language or God-language it comes to the same thing in the end'.

J.A.T. Robinson: Christian
Freedom in a Permissive
Society p. 136

SECTION A

J.A.T. ROBINSON'S THEOLOGY

I.

It is difficult in 1975 to think back over a twelve year period and try to call to mind the effect which the publication of Honest to God had upon oneself and upon the people in parishes at that time. I had just been ordained Deacon in a lively and very 'catholic' parish on the South coast of England, having arrived there fresh from the theological outlook and training of an Anglican monastic house. Life in the parish was ordered and disciplined, the clergy were well-liked and respected, the 'business' of the parish was conducted by an active and intelligent parish council, and services (always well-attended) were feasts of light, colour and ceremony. People were involved - sharing each others joys and sorrows, living and loving. It was a real 'family of God' in that place. Honest to God held no threat for me at that time. I remember being asked to conduct a seminar on the book, very soon after publication, for a Vith Form Christian Union group at the girls' grammar school which stood within the parish boundaries. It was I who initiated a discussion on its principal points of attack on traditional theological categories, and the occasion passed pleasantly enough. For the rest, the round of sermons, priestly duties, youth club and sunday school activities merged into a busy and rewarding parish existence.

Twelve years later I can look back upon that early Parish experience with delight tinged with sadness - for things are not now the same in that place, and in that twelve year period societal and ecclesiastical change has been such that it will never be the same again. When I look

back now and ask myself why it was that Honest to God and the subsequent furore had so little effect upon my own outlook, I can only conclude that I then saw no need for any change. I had been brought up all my life within the church's influence - trained at a church training college for teachers, teaching religious education as a specialist teacher, educated in theology in a university noted for its scholarship and rigour, and finally trained for the ministry at a monastic house. I do not recollect ever feeling the need to ask the sort of questions which Robinson then asked and which the present situation in theology, education and the Church demands be asked - questions which are focussed in ultimate concerns relating to the relevance of traditional theological formulations and ecclesiastical structure for man 'come of age'. Now in 1975, and from within a wholly secular teacher-training institution, I see the desperate need for a religious outlook which will offer guidelines to the many who look for spiritual significance in the secular world, but who see the Church and its traditional supranaturalistic theology not only failing to offer such help, but presenting a positive hindrance to any progress in this vital area in reinterpretation and rejuvenation⁽¹⁾. It cannot now be said of the 'new' theology as Gordon Phillips said of it in Prism (no. 98 June 1965):-

'For myself, when I hear of some "new Christians" talk of truth being "revealed in personal relations" or "in community" or of historic situations so new that the experience of the past is a useless encumbrance, or of the necessity for recasting Christianity in forms which can be accepted by modern secular man, I hear not, alas, the voice of God, but the voice of those I heard speak like this in Germany in 1936' (p. 8).

(1) My analysis of present day 'needs' within an educational spiritual and exegetical context is detailed and explored at several earlier points in Part I of my thesis, notably Chaps. 1, 9 and 10 passim, and in agreement with Robinson's views in Chapters 3-8 passim.

Nor is Phillips' 'solution' to the problem any more acceptable (and it is most significant that the present Archbishop of Canterbury's recent appeal to the Nation⁽¹⁾ couched in similar terms of a 'return to God' has met with a considerable weight of opposition both from outside and inside the Christian churches) viz:-

'In our time the Church has accepted the fashionable concepts of Democracy and Science. This has lost masses to the Church and has made the Creed untenable. There is no need to adapt the doctrine and disciplines of the Christian religion to the modern mind: it has already been done. The task is now to preach the gospel to people that are in great need of it and in a situation which calls for it. The trouble is not that the Christian message of life through death is outmoded, but that the nation - to speak plainly - is very wicked and - to use a well-worn image - "has turned its back on God"' (ibid).

I think that this sort of language would not now be intelligible to a very great number of people outside the Christian churches, nor to a growing number within them for whom 'God' is not merely 'dead' but to whom the very terminology 'turned its back upon God' is an utterly meaningless phrase in relation to their everyday life, experience and understanding.

II.

So we might ask then, what has been the response to Robinson's theology over the past twelve years? Is it possible to chart a course through the mass of literature from Honest to God (1963) to The Human Face of God (1973), the title of this most recent work of Robinson serving, incidentally, to indicate the essential focus and content of

(1) V. his Pastoral Letter (October 1975) and the subsequent and ongoing correspondence in the daily press and Christian journals.

his theology over this period.[?] The immediate response to Honest To God was phenomenal in respect of both its volume and the intense feeling which pervaded the reviews and articles which rapidly appeared. Indicative of the volume of the response is the fact that Robinson received over 1000 letters from readers within 3 months of the book's publication and a selection of these, together with some 23 reviews, was published (two impressions) later in 1963 under the title The Honest to God Debate⁽¹⁾. The letters are not of great relevance to this study, though they do indicate the varying response of their authors along a spectrum from complete shock and bewilderment to relieved acceptance of Robinson's attempt to articulate a 'non-supranaturalistic' approach to the Christian religion⁽²⁾. The academic reviews are important, for they were written for the most part by theologians with knowledge of the field. I have selected two which indicate the spectrum of response in this area, and which can also be seen as indicators of the more detailed critiques which were to follow within the next few years and which will be considered in the next section. The first selection, by Leslie Mitton, appeared in the Expository Times in June 1963 (pp. 273 ff) and, as can be seen, is commendatory in tone. Mitton wrote:-

'For many readers this has been, and will be, a disturbing book. But it is a timely book and an important one. This is no time for Christian people, with a deep concern for their Church, and for the masses of people who no longer attend church, to indulge in complacent self-congratulation or to take refuge in the conventional and familiar. The Church has for some time now been losing

(1) Edited by Robinson and David Edwards.

(2) An example of the first-mentioned approach is to be found in The Honest to God Debate p. 49, and of the latter approach on p. 75.

its hold on the people of Great Britain. Attendance at services of worship and the number of committed members have decreased noticeably during the years of this century. More than that, people today are not only casually turning from the Church, but openly rejecting its Faith. On radio programmes people of undoubted intellectual powers speak publicly of their rejection of all belief of God, let alone the other articles of the Christian Faith. Our Faith, in the forms in which it is usually expressed, has come increasingly to appear as something no longer intellectually respectable, perhaps not even honest⁽¹⁾.

In this situation no serious-minded Christian can be other than deeply concerned. Is this growing mood of unbelief just one of those recurring recessions of true religion, which will in time reach a low ebb and then begin to flow back - as has happened before? Or can we comfort ourselves with the explanation that people are rejecting God only because they want that freedom to do evil which a belief in God restricts? Or are there other, less comfortable, reasons for the rising tide of unbelief? May it not be that the "image of God" which we within the Church have grown used to and accept without much self-criticism is in fact so inadequate as a thought of God to be offered to non-Christians today, that they are even put off by it? Is it possible some are rejecting only God as we present him because we present him so misleadingly for people of our time? Is it that they are, in fact, rejecting not only God himself as he really is, but the inadequate thought of him we conventionally present?

(1) By curious coincidence in this very week of writing up this chapter (17th November 1975) the early morning radio programme 'Thought for Today' is carrying a debate between Sir Richard Acland and the Bishop of Winchester on this very topic of the honesty of Christian belief and practice in contemporary society. I see no 'flow back' of 'true religion' indicated here.

Do we need for this new and revolutionary day in which we live a new way of speaking of the God in whom we believe?

It is this urgent and uncomfortable question that the Bishop has dared to ask and seeks to answer. It is a question which needs a frank and radical answer. The Bishop's answer is offered out of a passionate concern, and an illness that kept him in bed for three months provided the leisure for it to be written. Passionate concerns dominate the book. It is as though something "boiled over" and had to be dealt with without delay. Had he laid it aside to be revised and then re-written and published say in 1965, no doubt some ambiguities might have been clarified and some expression softened a little. But the sense of urgency could brook no such delay, and so what we have is not the balanced presentation of a conciliator, but the uncompromising call of the prophet, characterized by an almost brutal frankness rather than polite discretion. (A summary followed).

There is much in the book which is provokingly unconventional; there is also much which is deeply moving. Many readers will have found in it not only new thoughts of God, but a new awareness of God, a new insight into the significance of Christ, and into the purpose of God in human life and the possibility of its attainment through the gift of God in Christ. Sometimes we wonder if the new emphasis for which he asks could not have been expressed as "this as well" rather than "this instead of that". Sometimes we wonder if his love of clarity of thought prevents him from taking refuge, as other theologians have done, in the paradox - "both this and that, though we cannot see how the two can be reconciled". He himself notes that his three mentors are all of

Teutonic race, which may mean that their solutions are not the solutions which the less logical British find easiest to assimilate. But however we meet this sharp challenge to both thought and heart, we should accept it for what it is meant to be - not a final definitive solution of pressing problems, but suggestions which the author describes as "tentative and exploratory". There may well be modifications to be made in some of these suggestions but that does not mean that they should be taken less than very seriously. Though what he says may sometimes seem startlingly radical and extreme, he himself adds a warning note: "I am fairly sure that, in retrospect, it will be seen to have erred in not being nearly radical enough". But the Bishop has written not merely for the sake of being radical and causing consternation, but with the purpose of discovering a way of effectively presenting the essential truth of the Christian gospel to this modern world in imminent danger of totally ignoring it - to its own deep and abiding hurt. The book is fundamentally not an essay in unorthodox theology, but a venture in evangelism⁽¹⁾.

The second selection, by Bishop Wand, suggests general approval but is decidedly cool in tone, and is, I think, typical of others of its kind. It comes from the Church Times of 22nd March 1963:-

'The key to this new and valuable book by the Bishop of Woolwich is probably to be found in an experience through which he passed at his theological college. He found that the periods set apart for prayer and the lessons given in the art of praying left him untouched. Special hours and forms of prayer were of no particular use to him: he prayed best in the midst of his ordinary occupations.

(1) Reprinted in op.cit. pp. 163 ff.

This adverse reaction to times and seasons has come to colour much of his thought. No one could feel more keenly "the scandal of the particular". All precise definitions, rules and regulations with which we have hedged about our spiritual lives he clubs together under the disparaging name "religion", and he dislikes religion as the enemy of true spirituality. He does not say that these elements of precision can never have been necessary. Indeed he thinks that the Chalcedonian Definition, for instance, may have been admirably suited to its age. But, now that we have arrived at the period of "adult man", we should be prepared to put away childish things.

If we ask what has marked man's coming of age, it is a little difficult to say. Unfortunately the Bishop's three heroes are Bonhoeffer, Bultmann and Tillich, the three theologians of the modern galaxy who are admittedly the most difficult to understand. Indeed a good proportion of the theological world is engaged in a wordy battle as to what they do mean. However, if we may rush in where angels fear to tread, the point of departure seems to be that man no longer believes in a three-storeyed universe. When Bishop Barnes used to insist that this demanded a revolution in theology, we used to laugh and say it did not matter. But to the present generation Dr. Robinson thinks it matters a great deal.

His argument is as follows: The Spacemen have searched the skies and have failed to find either the Christian heaven or the God who was supposed to dwell there. The result has been to make our traditional way of thinking of God as someone "out there" quite outmoded. If we wish to keep in line with modern scientific

thought we must think of God as someone "in here" at the root of our being, or, better still, not as a being at all but as the ground of all being. It is believed that this will involve a radical re-thinking not only of Christian doctrine but also of worship and ethics. Worship will belong not to some special department of life, but to all life: to work is to pray as to pray is to work. Conduct will be regulated not by a set of rules given from outside, but by the need of love as the very spring of all our actions. However, just as it is necessary to retain the name of God in spite of the erosion of the personal element in describing the divine existence, so the rules and regulations are maintained in spite of the blunting of their fine edges by emphasis on the exceptions.

To the Bishop all this comes home with the force of a new revelation. He will hardly expect the rest of us to be quite so moved. The few top-ranking scientists one has met would probably prefer the precision of traditional belief. Such theologians as do not yield to the general disparagement of mysticism would say that they already have the ground of being as well as the starry heavens within their purview. Historians faced with what purports to be an unusually liberal attitude on sex would remember that St. Augustine in a particular set of circumstances argued for a charitable judgement many centuries ago. The man in the pew might say that, in spite of the dangers of formalism, a few plain rules, and a few liturgical prayers, help to keep him on the upward path (if he may still use the term) when mind and body are alike too weary for independent effort.

Nevertheless, the Bishop's protest is valuable because it will

help us to recognise that we have not yet penetrated to the ultimate meaning of God. There is still much to be learned, and a humble agnosticism is the mark of the greatest Christian thinkers. It will help us also to exercise greater charity in our application of conventional rules.

One hopes, however, that the Bishop will not find it necessary to continue girding at religion. On his own showing, to be honest to God means to be honest to our fellow-men. For the man in the street, as well as for the man in the pew, the word "religion" stands for the best that he knows. Is it really honest to let him feel that he has got to get rid of it before he can come into vital contact with God? After all, Jesus, in spite of his revolutionary teaching, claimed that he came not to destroy the law but to fulfil it⁽¹⁾.

I do not think it necessary here to reproduce any of the articles from the 'popular press' of the day, articles which were roughly divided in their approval or disapproval, the latter sort invariably calling upon the Bishop to resign⁽²⁾. Finally, in this consideration of The Honest to God Debate, it is worth noting Robinson's additional chapter entitled 'The Debate Continues' in which he attempts, as he puts it, 'to bring the first round of the debate to a constructive close'⁽³⁾. In this chapter he reiterates and examines once again the main emphases of Honest to God as related to the then contemporary state of theological discussion. Such sub-headings as 'A Currency Crisis', 'The Significance of the Secular', 'Secularity and Metaphysics', 'Secularity and the

(1) Reprinted in op.cit. pp 85 ff.

(2) V. Robinson's comment on this suggestion in op.cit. pp. 240-1.

(3) Ibid. p. 232.

Supranatural', 'Secularity and the Mythological' and 'Secularity and the Religious' are self-explanatory as direction indicators to his overall approach.

III.

It is however, the later and more detailed academic critiques of Robinson's theology which give us a clearer insight into the areas of his thought which are seen to be open to question. I have presented two of these, written a number of years apart from each other, the one pinning in to the relatively contemporary atmosphere of Honest to God thought, the other a composite piece which gives a view of Robinson as far as some eight years on. The first critique is by E.L. Mascall and is to be found in his book The Secularization of Christianity (1965). Mascall considers Robinson's thought in a chapter entitled 'Emotion Recollected in Tranquility: A Reconsideration of Honest to God⁽¹⁾'. At the beginning of this chapter Mascall states his intention to scrutinise Robinson's arguments with the utmost care in order to 'discover what he wishes to tell us and to decide, if we can, whether it is true or false⁽²⁾'. After a brief passage in which he discounts the view that had been put forward by some of Robinson's supporters to the effect that Honest to God was not meant to be a learned theological work, rather a popular treatise and therefore ought not to be treated as if it was a presentation of technical scholarship in a learned journal, he moves on to suggest that Robinson is 'a very unclear thinker and that his heart is where his head ought to be⁽³⁾'. Further, an understanding of Robinson's avowed task of rephrasing traditional religious thought and radically questioning the established order of things within a religious framework, is complicated by the further avowal that 'with a large part of

(1) V. pp. 106 ff.

(2) V. p. 107.

(3) V. p. 109.

himself' he finds the traditional framework of metaphysics and morals entirely acceptable⁽¹⁾. Mascall therefore thinks it possible that Robinson 'believes contradictory propositions with different parts of his mind' and that if this is the case then it reveals a situation which is alarming⁽²⁾. He then accuses Robinson of failing to discriminate between the essential Christian Gospel and the forms in which it may be expressed at any particular epoch, difficult though this may be, and he maintains that Robinson has fallen into the trap of claiming to be Christian anyone who shows a serious and generous attitude to life. The principle criticism at this stage, is that Robinson certainly (in his own words) is not radical enough, for he has failed - unlike an absolutely thoroughgoing secularist such as van Buren, or an evolutionary humanist like C.H. Waddington - to get to grips with the roots of absolute secularism as an alternative to Christianity⁽³⁾. Indeed the phrase 'it does not get down to the roots' is repeated again as the final sentence of the chapter, and it reiterates Mascall's view that Robinson's analysis should be seen only as an attempt to interpret Christian truth to Western, industrialised, secularised man, and not as a paradigm of an analysis of world Christianity⁽⁴⁾.

It would be an impossible task to summarise the whole of Mascall's writing within the scope of this present chapter, let alone this particular section. I considered it worthwhile therefore to present Mascall's views on Robinson's categorisations which were outlined at the conclusion of the preceding section⁽⁵⁾. These categorisations taken from

(1) Ibid.

(2) V. p. 110.

(3) V. p. 112.

(4) V. p. 189.

(5) V. pp. 11-12 supra.

his chapter 'The Debate Continues' in The Honest to God Debate are in fact a summation in Robinson's own words of the theological debate some months beyond the publication of Honest to God, and are written in the light of all the varying responses to the book at that stage. They isolate very clearly the main areas of concern in Honest to God and thus present a useful schema to which Mascall's critique can be related.

a. A Currency Crisis.

Here Mascall considers Robinson's statement that we must be prepared to ask with vigorous honesty what is the real cash value of the statements we make and the forms we use in theology, and what sort of 'new currency' might be found which would be convertible in the modern, secular world⁽¹⁾, a world that most Christians must welcome and respond to as a God-given fact⁽²⁾. Mascall finds difficulty in seeing why a Christian should welcome secularism as a 'God-given fact' since it is by definition the belief that there is no God⁽³⁾. He thinks it extraordinary that Robinson should refer in this context to van Buren in an approving way, and he maintains that Robinson must have failed to notice that van Buren in The Secular Meaning of the Gospel concludes that there is no God (not even in the 'ground of being' sense) and that neither Jesus nor anyone else survives bodily death⁽⁴⁾.

b. Secularity and Metaphysics.

Here Mascall attacks Robinson's statement on the possibility of employing metaphysics as a meaningful enterprise, and his suggestion that he has left the matter open⁽⁵⁾. Mascall believes that this passage

(1) The Honest to God Debate pp. 247 ff.

(2) Ibid. p. 249.

(3) The Secularization of Christianity p. 183.

(4) Ibid. p. 185.

(5) V. Op. cit. p. 249.

not only reads like a confession of incompetence, but that the matter has clearly not been left open, for Robinson has opted for one particular metaphysical doctrine - 'ground of being' metaphysics⁽¹⁾.

c. Secularity and a Supranaturalistic World View.

Under this heading Mascall considers that Robinson has little to say which is new. As a result of his insistence that the phrase 'ground of being' is simply a possible and quite traditional way of indicating another projection (apart from supranaturalism and naturalism) in which all great biblical language about God may be cast⁽²⁾, Mascall concludes:-

'All that the great programme of 'radical recasting' and throwing everything into the melting has resulted in is the simple fact that modern man can now be told that, if and when he has brought himself to believe that the ground of all being is the personal loving Father who is revealed in Christ, he need not think of the Father as "up there" or "out there". This is something that might surely have been done with less fuss,⁽²⁾.

d. Secularity and the Mythological.

Again Mascall considers that little has been added to what has been said before in this respect, but that one thing seems plain, namely, that whilst Robinson does not deny the possibility of the miraculous events which the Gospels describe, he nevertheless considers that the question of their factuality is quite secondary; that what matters is their theological significance. Mascall asks whether in

(1) V. op. cit. p. 185.

(2) V. op. cit. p. 263.

(3) V. op. cit. p. 186.

some cases the theological significance will be the same if the factuality is denied, and he refers readers to a later chapter in his book entitled 'Fact and the Gospels',⁽¹⁾ for a lengthy consideration of this question. In this later chapter he refers again to Robinson's position in this respect⁽²⁾.

e. Secularity and the Religious.

Once more Mascall considers that there is little here which is new and that Robinson simply repeats the paradoxes of Bonhoeffer, e.g. 'God is teaching us that we must live as men who can get on very well without him'. Mascall believes that Robinson is suggesting that we can find God almost everywhere except in the sphere of religion, but that his use of the term 'religion' is so idiosyncratic that it is quite unclear what his exact meaning is. What is clear is that Robinson's statements and quotations⁽³⁾ reveal the assumption that the 'religious' and the 'secular' (or to use the traditional terms, the 'supranatural' and the 'natural') are radically opposed. Mascall sees this assumption as reflecting a type of Protestantism which has been extremely influential in the past and he stresses the opposing view which is enshrined in the Catholic doctrine and which justifies no such antithesis viz:-

'that grace both presupposes nature and supranaturalises it, making it not less but more natural in the process'⁽⁴⁾.

What in effect becomes clear in Mascall's chapter is that he believes Honest to God and the thought behind it to be deficient overall in consistency and logical attack. Indeed the author coined elsewhere⁽⁵⁾ a phrase which is itself indicative of the illusive nature of Robinson's

(1) V. op. cit. pp. 213 ff.

(2) Notably on pp. 266-70.

(3) V. op. cit. pp. 271-2 f.

(4) V. op. cit. pp. 188 ff.

(5) V. the Church Times 19th March 1965.

thought and argument. The phrase was 'The Case of the Lubricated Jellyfish⁽¹⁾!'

IV.

It is interesting to note that in 1968 in his book God and Secularity (Vol. 3 of the series 'New Directions in Theology Today'), John Macquarrie expresses the opinion that Honest to God was certainly a much better book than most of the things that Robinson has written since. He is particularly critical of The New Reformation? (1965) which he considers, in contrast to Honest to God to be 'a very incoherent piece of work that makes it harder than ever to know where the Bishop stands⁽²⁾,'.

This ascription of confusion is taken up yet again by H.P. Owen in his article 'The Later Theology of Dr. J.A.T. Robinson' in Theology Vol. LXXIII no. 604 (October 1970). The subject of the article is in fact Robinson's Christian Freedom in a Permissive Society (1970) and Owen, whilst in agreement with various aspects of the book, constantly stresses its ambiguity and lack of clarity. In relation to the theology of the book he writes:-

'Dr. Robinson's remarks on theology are so brief that they cannot furnish a basis for discussion. I can only say that

(1) V. p. 3 supra for a consideration of Gordon Phillips' article in Prism which uses this phrase as its title. It should be noted however, that there is general agreement amongst theologians that Mascall, whilst obviously presenting authentic points of criticism of Robinson's work, reveals in his own style and method a lack of sympathy with and understanding of the overall secular situation which is in itself reprehensible. See for example John Macquarrie's comments in this respect in God and Secularity p. 27.

(2) Op. cit. p. 31.

I find them baffling. Unless the passages⁽¹⁾ I have quoted are taken in a pantheistic sense they seem to me to be unintelligible. But in Honest to God⁽²⁾ he repudiated pantheism though in Exploration Into God⁽³⁾ he calls himself a panentheist. **his concept of God. But until he has clarified** Evidently he has still not clarified, it he is not in a position to deal with Christology (to which, so he tells us on p. 236 he is now turning his attention⁽⁴⁾).

Owen's conclusion is:-

' I find work of this kind very amateurish. Although Dr. Robinson is sensitive to the theological and moral problems that beset us, he fails to treat them with the thoroughness, lucidity, and detachment that they deserve. He is often provocative, sometimes interesting, and occasionally original; but he seems to be totally lacking in self-criticism⁽⁵⁾; and he scarcely ever comes within sight of completing his discussion of even one among the important topics on which he so confidently offers his opinions⁽⁶⁾.'

Finally as Owen has given a foretaste of how he would regard Robinson's treatment of Christology, it is appropriate to present a review of Robinson's latest book on this subject, entitled The Human Face of God (1974). It is particularly appropriate also that the reviewer is David Edwards, who as Editor of S.C.M. Press was initially responsible

- (1) These passages are to be found op. cit. p. 132; 135; 136; 134-5.
- (2) Pp. 53-4.
- (3) Pp. 83; 145.
- (4) Op. cit. p. 454.
- (5) In a footnote to this comment (ibid. p. 455) Owen writes - 'It is remarkable that he reprints ephemeral papers without replying to the criticisms that have been made of him by such a wide variety of people'.
- (6) Ibid. pp. 454-5.

for the publication of Honest to God. In a lengthy, and by and large, favourable review in the Church Times⁽¹⁾ under the heading 'Honest to Christ' Edwards puts forward his critique of a book which evolved from Robinson's 1970 Hulsean Lectures delivered in the University of Cambridge.

Once more we find much of the book being commended. Then, almost inevitably, comes the criticism of Robinson's 'purple passages' - for instance, a speculative discussion of whether Jesus might have been sexually aroused when the woman wiped his feet with her hair⁽²⁾, or of a curiously possible reference in the Matthean genealogy⁽³⁾. Other provocative elements include the interpretation of familiar New Testament passages in quite different ways from those in which they have always been understood - many would think with insufficient argument. Far more important however, is the fact that in the final chapter⁽⁴⁾ Robinson's exposition seems to leave little of the traditional New Testament faith intact. Edwards quotes passages from the book:-

'The realisation is fitfully dawning that "God" now means, for us, not an invisible being with whom we can have direct communication as it were on the end of a telephone, but that by which he is represented, his surrogate - the power of a love that lives and suffers for others. If men are to believe in God, it can only be "a-theistically", that is, as he is represented - above all in the irreplaceability of man⁽⁵⁾.

and

'What Easter day showed is that the representative of God, the Christ, is not confined to the individual body of Jesus⁽⁶⁾.'

(1) 16th March 1973.

(2) The Human Face of God p. 64.

(3) Ibid. pp. 59-62.

(4) Ibid. pp. 212 ff.

(5) Ibid. pp. 218-9.

(6) Ibid. p. 215.

and again

'The Christ lives on in the lives of those who represent now the human face of God⁽¹⁾'.

Such passages if taken by themselves, Edwards maintains, would suggest a religion of humanity connected with a dead teacher. Coming from an interpreter of the New Testament he believes they show 'a failure of nerve'. He concludes:-

'Two common characteristics run through all these defects. First, Dr. Robinson likes to tease. Second, he takes his stand on the New Testament without ever clearly explaining why he stands at some length on parts (such as Matthew's genealogy) while appearing to ignore others (such as direct communication with God - and when one comes to think about it, there is astonishingly little in this book about the Synoptic Gospels). These are serious faults in a book which otherwise might have taken its place alongside, say, Donald Baillie's God Was in Christ (an essay "for the present time" when it was written in 1947). Some never achieve true greatness as theologians, and we journalists are among them; others throw it away. Yet essentially this is a book by one thoughtful Christian for others. Its heart, which is a heart of reasonable faith, deserves to be taken very seriously and very gratefully'.

V.

What then can be said in summary which accurately represents the values and deficiencies of Robinson's theology? Or, to phrase the question in another way, to what extent has Robinson expressed his position as a theologian and interpreter of 'secular religion' lucidly and

(1) Loc. cit.

correctly?

It is immediately apparent from a study of Robinson's many reviewers, that his style of presentation of his thought leaves much to be desired. A few examples will serve to make this persistently critical comment clear. Among the reviews of Honest to God included in The Honest to God Debate is one which is typical of this area of criticism. The writer is John Lawrence and the review was originally printed in the Christian quarterly Frontier (Summer 1963). Lawrence writes:-

'Dr. Robinson indicates that he is still in two minds. "The line runs right through the middle of myself". This makes the book hard to evaluate. Sometimes the author quotes with apparent approval, or expresses in his own words, views which, if consistently carried through, would reduce Christianity to an off-beat variety of humanism. At other times he speaks as one who believes in the living God. I have read the book twice, once with my critical faculties uppermost, and once in search of positive elements. It was like reading two books. Others have pointed out some of the astonishing inconsistencies in the book, and it would be easy to build up a picture of it as a piece of hopelessly muddled thinking, but that would serve no purpose⁽¹⁾.'

I have already quoted John Macquarrie's statement in which he said that he believed Honest to God to be a much better book than anything Robinson has written since⁽²⁾. He follows this statement with a reference to The New Reformation (1965) which he considers to be a very incoherent piece of work⁽³⁾. In the same passage he writes of this

(1) The Honest to God Debate p. 155.

(2) V. p. 17 supra though it is notable that other reviewers disagree. F.D. McEachran in the Hibbert Journal Vol. 62 p. 169 says that he regards Honest to God as needing a future presentation in a 'less confused' way.

(3) V. p. 17 supra.

latter book:-

'Here his (i.e. Dr. Robinson's) eclecticism has run riot. All kinds of different people are quoted and pressed into service. If Honest to God was also a conflation, it was nevertheless easier to see the main lines and the questions that were raised⁽¹⁾.

Exploration Into God (1967) proved to be a much more acceptable presentation of Robinson's ongoing theological analysis, most likely because it had its origins in the author's lectures to university students at Stanford University, California. Thus the Editor of the Expository Times is able to commend it as making available to the general reader:-

'..... in clear and urgent words, issues which were once the preserve of theological seminars⁽²⁾.

Such a positive commendation can certainly not be given to But That I Can't Believe!, also published in 1967. Robinson himself describes this book as an attempt 'to write at a much more popular level⁽³⁾, and it is impossible to disagree with that description when the content of the book is examined. It is only fair to say here, that for the most part, the material which makes up the book is a conflation of articles originally published in such sources as The Sunday Mirror, The Sunday Citizen, The T.V. Times, The Sun, Tit-Bits, New Knowledge and The New Christian. In the book's Preface, Robinson explains that he was not attempting to cover in any co-ordinated way the whole area of Christian belief, but that he suspects that the themes include most of the cardinal points of incredulity! An example of the undoubtedly racy style of the book is the following passage, taken from the second chapter entitled 'Adam and Eve'⁽⁴⁾. It is reproduced in the form in which it is actually printed:-

(1) Ibid. p. 31.

(2) Vol. 79 (1968) p. 130.

(3) Exploration Into God p. 10 footnote 1.

'After all, "Adam" is just the Hebrew for Man with a capital M. He's all of us. The Genesis story simply holds up a mirror to life, so that we can see ourselves in it.

How well I remember a scene in my own garden (no need to go to Eden) when my children were young. All the spring bulbs had been trodden under foot.

The character: the boy next door (also now a Bishop's son!), my Stephen, and the cat.

The conversation:

Myself: "??!!"

Christopher: "Ste'en done it!"

Stephen: "Mou done it!"

Adam and Eve and the serpent! And human nature doesn't change when we grow up and get into trousers'.

Finally there is The Human Face of God (1974), Robinson's latest book, the review of which by David Edwards, I have used at an earlier point in this chapter⁽¹⁾. That this book has disappointed many informed readers is undeniable, not least as a result of the fact that Robinson, as H.P. Owen complained⁽²⁾, has again taken little account of his critics' comment over the years, but has once more written a book containing masses of quotations and references which simply lead to a confusing burden of eclecticism about which Macquarrie, amongst others, has complained⁽³⁾. Robinson of course, has an answer to this criticism in advance - he has 'unashamedly' included the many quotations from

(1) V. pp. 18 ff. supra.

(2) V. p. 18 footnote 5 supra.

(3) V. p. 22 supra.

and references to the very great number of books in the field, so that 'if anyone does see a door or window opened for him he will know where to look further⁽¹⁾'. And what is the reader to make of a statement such as this:-

'But when all is said, this book makes no attempt to be a balanced survey of the doctrine or a New Testament study for its own sake Moreover there are great writers and thinkers in the field to whose position as a whole I am well aware that I have not been just. I have used, or abused, what they have said for my own purposes. For ultimately, if this book has any value, it will be for its faithfulness not to others' answers but to our questions⁽²⁾'.

This is indeed a telling statement and it is also no doubt the sort of thing David Edwards had in mind when in his review of The Human Face of God, he described Robinson as having exercised for nearly ten years the kind of knack:-

'..... of making his fellow Christians hopping mad. For he has now written a book which is so scholarly as to make tough going for sensation-seeking non-theologians, yet instead of being thoroughly scholarly - instead of making an authoritative study of the New Testament, for example, or of the Fathers, or of the issues raised in the recent Cambridge symposium Christ, Faith and History - he has sacrificed some of his space to matters more glittering than golden⁽³⁾'.

Yet Edwards is concerned, as I am myself, that this 'glittering' rather than 'golden' matter should not lead people to think of Robinson as

(1) The Human Face of God p.x.

(2) Ibid. p. xi.

(3) Church Times 16th March 1973.

anything other than deeply serious and deeply Christian. For who else could say as he does:-

'..... my concern - and it is an existential and not just an academic concern - is to a large extent with self-questioning - with how today one can truthfully and meaningfully say (in the words of the earliest and shortest Christian confession) "Jesus is Lord⁽¹⁾". I shall be writing as one who wants to make that confession. "For" as Paul said of himself, to those who have known it "the love of Christ leaves us no choice⁽²⁾" Yet the centre is thankfully given - but the edges are teasingly and liberatingly open⁽³⁾'.

Thus the Editor of the Expository Times can conclude his review of The Human Face of God by suggesting that the readers who will benefit most from the book are those who, like the author, wish to hold fast to the essentials of the full Christian belief about Christ but who cannot feel satisfied with some of the traditional formulae by which it has been expressed, and who are not willing on any account to treat the human life of Jesus as other than fully normal⁽⁴⁾. There is a clear question stemming from this survey which links Christology with Theology and directs me to the query with which I began this section, namely, has Robinson as a theologian and as an interpreter of 'secular religion' performed his task lucidly and correctly? The examples which have been given in the previous pages, of both Robinson's writing and the reactions of his reviewers, suggest that lucidity is not Robinson's strong

(1) 1 Cor. 12.13.

(2) 2 Cor. 5.14.

(3) The Human Face of God pp. xi-xii.

(4) Vol. 85 (1974) p. 34.

point. I would certainly want to reinforce this analysis as a result of my reading and of my experience in endeavouring to make a clear presentation of Robinson's interpretation of the six foundation areas of Christian doctrine which forms the core of this thesis⁽¹⁾.

A perusal of this section will show how necessary it was to sift through the whole of Robinson's published work to extrapolate the necessary information. Yet I do not believe that the reaction to his work outlined in this chapter is by any means wholly attributable to feelings of exasperation stemming from his apparent inability to present lucid arguments and absolutely clear analyses. The situation is much more complex than that, and it is to my own reasoned interpretation of the position that I shall now turn.

VI.

Some light can be shed on the matter if the question is asked why it is that Robinson, after many years of writing and lecturing, should be thought to be expressing his views inconsistently, unintelligibly and without any attempt to accommodate his critics⁽²⁾? In the Prologue to Exploration Into God (1967) Robinson states that prior to the publication of Honest to God (1963) it had not been his experience to find that what he had written was greeted by reviewers as confused, contradictory or merely badly written⁽³⁾. Why then are such comments still being made of his latest book The Human Face of God⁽⁴⁾? I think that in answer to these questions it can be maintained that Robinson's work does seem to evoke in his readers an almost violent response which may be wholly for or wholly against his theological interpretation.

(1) V. Part I Section B pp. 54-178.

(2) Examples of each of these criticisms can be found respectively on pp. 14, 17 and 18 footnote 5 supra.

(3) Op. cit. pp. 13-14.

(4) V. David Edwards' conclusions on p. 20 supra and compare the much more savage critique of Philip Toynbee in his review 'Out There or Down Here? - in The Observer 18th March 1973.

It is not an unusual occurrence for teachers to find this same sort of disparate response expressed towards themselves or their teaching by their students. Such responses are not always completely rational, and they may be equated outside teaching, with a whole range of responses which people make towards emotive writing, reporting and broadcasting in everyday life. By far the most significant element in any attempt to analyse a person's response in such situations, is the extent to which the person concerned views the matter in hand as reflecting or opposing his own views. Such views cannot always be articulated by the subject, for quite regardless of the argument involved, the person concerned instinctively feels a positive or negative response. In other words, the response made is an affective rather than a cognitive one, though it may of course, include both. I want to suggest that this is the way in which many people respond to Robinson's work - their response is polarised, not so much by the arguments which he puts forward in relation to theology and supranaturalism, but by their instinctive feeling about whether or not he speaks for them. Indeed, Robinson himself supports this analysis, for later in the Prologue to Exploration Into God, he writes of his failure to communicate with those who describe his work as 'confused, contradictory and badly written' viz:-

'..... I believe in retrospect that the real failure of communication, where it existed, was much more at the level of presupposition than of proposition⁽¹⁾.'

He then adds a further sentence which I believe to be of considerable significance and which adds weight to my own understanding, expressed above, of the nature of people's response to his work. He says:-

'Where there was no failure, where, to use a distinction made

(1) Op. cit. p. 14.

by a Norwegian student at a public discussion, people felt
what I meant even when they did not understand what I said,
 it was because they stood where I stood: they shared a common
 presupposition and felt a common pinch⁽¹⁾, (my underlining).

It is perhaps then hardly surprising that those who not only do not understand what Robinson is saying but also do not 'feel' what he is saying either, should find themselves alienated from any possible understanding of, or sympathy towards, his theological exposition. Again it might be said that teachers are not unaware of this phenomenon either, in their work with students. There are situations in which no amount of careful explanation or assistance is able to bridge a 'communication gap' brought about by reason of the fact that those who read or listen are wholly out of sympathy with either the content of the material being put forward or the person actually involved in its transmission. My personal assessment of much of the negative response to Robinson's theological explorations is that it falls into this category, that is, alienation stemming from lack of sympathy with the content of his work. There is little doubt also, that there has been a noticeable sense of outrage in some quarters, that a Bishop should be responsible for the dissemination of theological ideas and interpretations which have seemed to many to challenge orthodoxy and destroy traditional foundations of belief. It is particularly significant in this context, that Dr. Michael Ramsey, who was Archbishop of Canterbury at the time of the publication of Honest to God, has recently stated that he made an 'unintelligent appraisal' of the Honest to God controversy. He has said:-

'Initially I was very irked by what I thought was irresponsible language and the caricaturing of Christian orthodoxy, and I was unintelligent in my appraisal of the situation⁽²⁾.'

(1) Loc. cit.

(2) In an interview reported in Frontier and quoted under the heading 'Lord Ramsey on "Mistakes" he made while Primate' - in the Church Times 12th December 1975.

He continued:-

'If I could live those weeks over again, I would probably not have said the cross things I did say, but "We must read this book and study it and mustn't get over-excited and, when we have had time to do that, then I'll give you a full critique of the matter⁽¹⁾".

It is pertinent to note that the response indicated was that of an Archbishop who had held distinguished appointments as a Professor of Divinity in the Universities of Durham and Cambridge! No doubt the Archbishop's short monograph Image Old and New, published a few weeks after Honest to God was intended to present a more balanced judgement, though a close reading of it will show that there is general acceptance of much of what Robinson had to say, the thrust of its contents being that the 'new' interpretations of Honest to God, whilst being helpful and stimulating exploration of traditional religious concepts in relation to secular society and its needs, and whilst even being true, are not necessarily the truth⁽²⁾. I can find no reference in Honest to God or in any of Robinson's published works, of such a claim. Indeed there is good reason to maintain that in the Preface to Honest to God, he not only makes it very clear that his treatment is exploratory, but anticipates and correctly assesses the idiosyncratic nature of much of the hostile criticism which has been made of his writing over the past fifteen years, viz:-

'My only concern here is to plead for the recognition that those who believe their share in the total apologetic task of the Church to be a radical questioning of the established "religious frame" should be accepted no less as genuine and, in the long run

(1) Ibid.

(2) Op. cit. p. 11.

equally necessary, defenders of the Faith I am not in the least accusing of dishonesty those who find the traditional framework of metaphysics and morals entirely acceptable (I do so with a large part of myself). What dismays me is the vehemence - and at the bottom the insecurity - of those who feel that the Faith can only be defended by branding as enemies within the camp those who do not What I have tried to say, in a tentative and exploratory way, may seem to be radical, and doubtless to many, heretical. The one thing of which I am fairly sure is that, in retrospect, it will be seen to have erred in not being nearly radical enough⁽¹⁾.

That Robinson is seen by many critics therefore, as presenting an 'Either-Or' choice, is reflected in much of the material included in this chapter and in assumptions such as that of Lord Ramsey in his 'Truth - Non-Truth' analysis. The examples that have been quoted from Robinson's own statements clearly show that he had no such dichotomy in mind, and did not maintain at any point that his 'new' explorations should be taken as the truth of the matter. I believe that the evidence brought forward in this section goes a long way towards clarifying the nature of much of the negative response towards his work - response which cannot always be shown to be based in articulate and rational criticism. The second part of the question with which I began this chapter - does Robinson perform his task correctly - goes beyond a consideration of the nature of the response of Robinson's critics. The point at issue here is one of logical truth. Is it possible for him to make the confession 'Jesus is Lord' outside the traditional theological categories of transcendentalism and supranaturalism? It is to this vital task of elucidating Robinson's position in this respect, and offering a defence of my own declared position is this thesis, that I now turn.

(1) Op. cit. pp. 9-10.

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1 Corinthians 12.13

p. 24 footnote

2 Corinthians 5.14

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SECTION B

An analysis of J.A.T. Robinson's 'non-supranaturalism' in terms of its significance for contemporary Christian belief, and an exploration of the concept of transcendence.

'It needs, therefore, to be said that there is no reason whatever to suppose that any one image will ever be so satisfactory for our speaking about God that we shall need no others. This is one of the points where "Either Or" is unfruitful, and "Both And" more likely to be illuminating'

John Huxtable - Praying
for Daylight: God Through
Modern Eyes p. 77.

SECTION B

J.A.T. ROBINSON'S NON-SUPRANATURALISM

I.

In a recent 'extra' in the Times Educational Supplement on Religious Education⁽¹⁾ in an article entitled 'Seeing the Pattern in a Puzzle Picture', Professor John Hick of the University of Birmingham's Department of Theology compares what he describes as two 'rival conceptions' which influence the way in which theology is taught in churches, schools, colleges and universities. The older view, which he categorises as a 'systematized presentation of revealed truths', is contrasted with a more contemporary one which is:-

'..... the human attempt to understand the meaning and implications of God's self-revelatory dealings with mankind. Theological doctrines are hypotheses designed to interpret the data of revelation and to relate them to our other knowledge. And because the tools with which, and the contexts within which, theology is produced are continually changing, its results have to be kept under continuous review. This makes theology a living and exciting subject, open like the sciences to new insights and new hypotheses. The work is always done within an existing tradition, but the active preserving of that tradition involves developing it within the new circumstances of a changing world⁽²⁾.'

It is clear that the directional trend of contemporary theological exploration expressed here is given operational substance in specific material designed for education in religion in schools, such as the new Birmingham

(1) Issue of 12th December 1975 p. 30.

(2) Loc. cit.

Agreed Syllabus and its accompanying Teachers' Handbook (1975), discussed and commended in the same Times Educational Supplement 'extra' by Dr. John Hull of the University of Birmingham's School of Education⁽¹⁾, or in analyses addressed more directly to educators in religious education such as Jean Holm's recent book Teaching Religion in School (1975).

Thus it would seem that so far as J.A.T. Robinson is concerned, his various exploratory works in theology would receive educational support from the kind of assessment of the nature and purpose of contemporary theological activity that Professor Hick makes above. That Robinson sees himself within this second category of theological writers rather than as a traditionalist emphasising the inviolability of revealed truth is self-evident - all that has been said about him and quoted of his work in this thesis points to that conclusion. There are specific indications nevertheless, which give strength to this assessment. In the Preface to Honest to God (1963) he writes:-

'At the same time, I believe we are being called, over the years ahead, to far more than a restating of traditional orthodoxy in modern terms A much more radical recasting, I would judge, is demanded, in the process of which the most fundamental categories of our theology - of God, of the supernatural, and of religion itself - must go into the melting⁽²⁾'.

Similarly in the Preface to Exploration Into God (1967), he states:-

'..... all one can do is to refuse to burke the difficult questions because they are difficult, to supply the references, not for armour plating (for one must be prepared to operate more like David than Goliath) but for new openings, and above all try to be humble in a field where the great have been before⁽³⁾'.

(1) In the article 'Birmingham Agreed Syllabus' p. 28.

(2) Op. cit. p. 7.

(3) Op. cit. p. 11.

Then in his chapter 'An Open Humanism' in the revised version of In The End God (1968), he maintains:-

'We cannot go on saying the same things in the same way - or they will not be the same things - the Christ who is the same yesterday, today, and for ever can only be so by becoming the contemporary of each generation - so that Bonhoeffer's questions "Who is Christ for us today?" has to be answered afresh in every age⁽¹⁾.'

Later on still in his chapter 'The End of the Stable State' (using a model based on Donald A. Schon's book of that title) in The Difference in Being a Christian Today (1972), he says:-

'But I would urge as strongly as I can, that instead of looking only to what can be salvaged from the old identities we must ask boldly whether distinctively Christian existence is likely in future to be characterised by this "in or out" model, by a body of doctrine, a code of behaviour, a pattern of spirituality, a religious organisation which is peculiar to Christians and marks them off by exclusion from others. What then is the mark of our identity today? Is it "absolute sameness" with the past? It can't be - or if it is I for one am convinced we haven't a future⁽²⁾.'

Finally, in the Preface to The Human Face of God (1973), he writes:-

'Perhaps one should have started all over again, laying aside the traditional questions of Christian theology. But I have not done this, partly no doubt because my own rootage is too deep, but partly because Christians must, as I see it, be prepared to work through and out the other side of the traditional

(1) Op. cit. p. 17.

(2) Op. cit. p. 17.

questions, if they are to be liberated to contribute Christologically to the secular debate - if they are not, that is, to be hung up with quite inadequate Christ-answers to the great human questions of our day. For if they are so hung up, they will not be able to be more than humanists or theists who insist on "bringing in Jesus", rather than men who see all things, political, aesthetic, scientific and the rest, in Christ and through Christ⁽¹⁾.

I think then, that these examples, covering the complete time-span of Robinson's theological writing since Honest to God, serve as an indication of the view already expressed, that he stands firmly within the company of those modern theologians, who, in Professor Hick's words see themselves making a 'human attempt to understand the meaning and implications of God's self-revelatory dealings with mankind⁽²⁾', and who believe that their theology should, indeed must, be 'open like the sciences to new insights and hypotheses⁽³⁾'.

II.

A noticeable element emphasised in Professor Hick's statement and reiterated in the various quotations from Robinson's work given in the preceding section is that of theology being constantly subject to review in the light of man's changing knowledge and his constantly changing religious consciousness stemming largely from a deepening awareness of himself in relation to others. This characterisation of the main thrust of present-day theology appears to be very similar to that body

(1) Op. cit. p. ix.

(2) V. p. 33 supra.

(3) Loc. cit.

of theological thought and interpretation known as 'process theology'. The body of knowledge so described has a distinguished ancestry, originating as it does in the work of numerous celebrated philosophers in the first half of the present century, notably Alfred North Whitehead. Professor Charles Hartshorne, a pupil of Whitehead when he was a student at Harvard, is perhaps the best known exponent of process theology⁽¹⁾, though the movement is seen to include other well-known theologians such as Teilhard de Chardin, Schubert Ogden and John Knox for example. A brief summary of the main tenets of process thought will indicate the essential points of similarity to the statements of Hick and Robinson quoted above.

Essentially process theology expounds the view that the world is evolutionary, dynamic and organic in nature and that God must also be seen in this way. Thus divine Reality is conceived of as:-

'..... a living, active, constantly creative, infinitely related, ceaselessly operative Reality; the universe at its core is movement, dynamism, activity, and not sheer and unrelated abstraction⁽²⁾'.

Modern man, therefore, is a part of such a world, a world that is changing, moving, living and active. He is concerned with events, rather than with things, and is conscious of the need to explicate divine Reality not in static, traditional formulations, but in terms of living, dynamic activity concerned with and related to the world. Norman Pittenger is able to speak of the concept of God in process thought in language which has a close affinity to that of Tillich (who he claims has often expressed his sympathy with process thought and who has used

- (1) V. his books Beyond Humanism, The Vision of God, Philosophy of Religion et al.
- (2) Pittenger N. - 'A Contemporary Trend in North American Theology: Process Thought and Christian Faith'. In Expository Times Vol. LXXVI p. 269.

much of it in his Systematic Theology Vol. III) viz:-

'..... the basic view is surely that the deepest Reality is not static but dynamic, that God is both concerned with and related to the cosmos, and that as righteous and loving He is involved with and ceaselessly active in the whole creation as its source, its continuing ground, and its final end. God as active love, as loving Activity has not always been central in Christian theology, but the Biblical view is taken by process theologians as the distinctive point of the whole Christian faith⁽¹⁾'.

Such a view of divine Reality as this clearly has ramifications in the Christological field. For process theologians Jesus Christ is the unique symbol of God's continuing activity in the world. Hence, as Pittenger states:-

'The Christian claim that in some profound sense the human life of Jesus is both expression and reflection of the depths of being, the ground, the divine Reality, or (as a process theologian would prefer to say) the divine Activity which through the creative process is at work, is not only truth about that particular historical figure, although it is that; it is also truth about God, the world and about every man⁽²⁾'.

He continues:-

'But Jesus is not an isolated "entrance" or "intervention" of God into a world which otherwise is without His presence and action. Rather He is, as a Man, a climactic and definitive point for God's presence and action among men in a world in which God is always present and ceaselessly active. Jesus

(1) Ibid. p. 270.

(2) Ibid. p. 271.

is not the supreme anomaly; He is the classic instance
 Furthermore because in Him the potential and partially actu-
 alized is found expressly realized - that is, vividly made real -
 and thus fulfilled, Jesus makes sense of and gives sense to the
 existence of any and every man. Not that we have here a matter
 of human achievement alone; on the contrary this like all fulfil-
 ment and actualization, is the reaction of man to the prior and
 incessant divine Action⁽¹⁾.

This brief summary of the tenets of process theology does, I think,
 help to place Robinson firmly within the loosely-knit group of theolo-
 gians who might be said to belong to this school of thought. The move-
 ment has developed and become more widely known over the same ten year
 period in which Robinson's own work has developed and become more
 widely known. In a section entitled 'Emergent humanity and expressive
 deity' in The Human Face of God (1973), Robinson specifically commends
 'process philosophy' as he calls it, as making an attempt to answer
 the question 'of how we may today see the functional language of the
 Bible as part of a theology of the evolutionary and historical process
 which does justice to modern insights⁽²⁾', along lines which he himself
 would favour - though he is careful to warn that he does not pretend
 to follow all that the process theologians have to say. He further
 commends Pittenger's work in this field, and as an indication of his
 familiarity with the area, gives a whole list of writers and works
 relating to process thought in a footnote⁽³⁾. Later in the section
 he refers to his own process thought in Exploration Into God (1967),
 and follows this with a detailed treatment of Christology in a projec-
 tion which is to help us see:-

(1) Loc. cit.

(2) Op. cit. p. 202.

(3) Loc. cit. footnote 91.

'..... how the ultimate meaning of the process - the clue to the universe as personal - could be embodied in a man born and bred and evolved from within it, a product of it rather than an invader of it⁽¹⁾,'.

Finally, in summary of the whole chapter, he uses a quotation of John Knox, namely:-

'We do well to speak of the humanity and the divinity of Jesus. But by his "humanity" we mean the whole nature of him who was "made like his brethren in every respect" (Heb. 2.17). The "divinity" was not half of his nature or a second nature, but was that purpose and activity of God which made the event which happened around him, but also in him and through him, the saving event it was. The divinity of Jesus was the absolute uniqueness of what God did in him⁽²⁾,'.

There is a very close parallel here in both Robinson's own words and in those of Knox that he chooses as the summary for the chapter, with Pittenger's Christological summary which I have used on pp. 37-8 above.

This short excursion into process theology does I believe serve to show that Robinson, rather than being an isolated protagonist of subjective theological views, is to be seen as occupying an important place amongst a group of distinguished theological writers (given educational support by Professor Hick as has been indicated earlier)⁽³⁾ who are attempting to present and interpret theology as a dynamic, living activity thoroughly attuned to and responsive to man's expanding knowledge and his changing and developing world.

(1) Ibid. p. 203.

(2) Ibid. p. 211. The quotation is from The Death of Christ p. 125.

(3) V. p. 33 supra.

III.

One of the most penetrating philosophical critiques of process theology is that of Colin Gunton in his article 'Process Theology's Concept of God: an outline and assessment⁽¹⁾'. Gunton's conclusion is that whilst process theology has much to offer in the realm of contemporary theological interpretation, the Christian gospel cannot bear the changes which it demands and remain the Christian gospel. He has in mind here two principal tenets of process thought - that of the supreme relativity (and thus dipolarity) of God⁽²⁾, and that of the deprivation of the doctrine of free grace in that God is conceived of within a system which is necessitarian. Gunton does make a further striking point which is specially significant in assessing the merits of the interpretation of God as *δυστην* which is central to the arguments and interpretation of my own thesis, namely, that his critique does not mean that process theology is necessarily wrong, rather that a choice is presented between a contemporary 'secular' reformulation which can be presented to modern man, and the traditional theological interpretations of the past. In so far as the basic argument^{against} process theology is concerned, I think this is handled most effectively by J.D. Neil in his unpublished Ph.D. thesis Panentheism: a Gospel for Today⁽³⁾. Mention has been made at numerous stages in my own thesis of Robinson's declaration of belief in panentheism.⁽⁴⁾ Neil also notes

- (1) In Expository Times Vol. LXXXIV (1973) pp. 292 ff.
- (2) A tenet which thus denies the traditional Christian doctrines of creation and incarnation, as well as the whole of its eschatological schema.
- (3) University of Exeter 1973.
- (4) e.g. Part I pps. 89, 125-6, 155 et al. Cf. also the large number of references to panentheism in the Index of Exploration Into God itself and many other references which are not indexed in Honest to God et al.

Robinson's position in this respect⁽¹⁾ in a work which aims to discover:-

'..... whether panentheism as set out by its principal modern exponents, amounts to a way of thinking about God which will make it easier for men and women in the late twentieth century to adopt in general a religious view to life, and in particular the teachings of the Christian religion⁽²⁾'.

In a very lucid manner, Neil defines and codifies panentheistic doctrine⁽³⁾ and examines its philosophy and logic within process theology and the specific work of Hartshorne⁽⁴⁾. It is in his analysis of panentheism as related to Christian credal statements, and particularly in his section entitled 'The Question of God⁽⁵⁾', that Neil gives a good deal of attention to Robinson's panentheism, the Bishop being described at the outset as:-

'..... the first prominent user of the term panentheism in this country'

and one

'to whom the uninstructed English reader tends to look for his introduction to modern theology⁽⁶⁾'.

In a critically evaluative account of the argument in Honest to God, Neil goes on to trace the development of Robinson's thought about God in relation to the dipolar conception of Hartshorne, in an attempt to clarify what he calls 'Robinson's conflicting doctrines⁽⁷⁾'. The out-

(1) e.g. pps. 2, 5 ff. 15 ff., and constant references passim.

(2) Op. cit. p.v.

(3) Ibid. pps. 1-17.

(4) Ibid. pps. 18-57.

(5) Ibid. pp. 58 ff.

(6) Ibid. p. 59.

(7) Ibid. pp. 74 ff.

come of this analysis is that he considers Robinson to stand quite clearly amongst other process theologians who espouse the doctrine of panentheism, which:-

'..... fully accepts the reality of a God to whom men are accountable, who makes a total demand upon them, the demand of a Person which reaches men as a "Thou". This God confronts men in all the occasions of encounter, with people and with things, and offers them the Eternal Companionship of Authentic Existence if they respond to his challenge. They find God in their own natures in the form of love and trust, a pale reflection of the perfect love and trust which constitutes God's nature⁽¹⁾,'.

It would be difficult to find a more suitable quotation to express the meaning and reality of the concept of God as *ὁ θεός* which has been argued and explored in this thesis. Neil finds Robinson's true position concisely represented in the following quotation from Exploration Into God:-

'On more and more occasions it is positively imperative to sit loose to the image - or even to discard it - if the truth it is intended to represent is to be maintained. And I am profoundly convinced that the truth does remain. For this reason I believe it is more important to insist on the continuity of belief in God as personal - and to retain the word "God" however loaded - than to give it up⁽²⁾,'.

Accepting then, that God is 'real' for panentheists in this sense, Neil considers that it must be possible to state simply how he displays

(1) Ibid. p. 77.

(2) Loc. cit. V. Exploration Into God p. 136.

himself, how he is experienced - and for this he turns towards the profound and spiritually challenging novel of Petru Dumitriu, Incognito⁽¹⁾ - which Robinson makes much of and declares in Exploration Into God to be part of his attempt to:-

'..... bring panentheism out of the world of theological "isms" into that of real life⁽²⁾,'.

In sum and in particular for Dumitriu, Neil states:-

'God is love; and God is experienced when we pour ourselves out in love to the world around us. Such is the panentheistic doctrine of God as expounded by a novelist⁽³⁾,'.

Neil then goes on to consider the philosophical, religious and moral objection to panentheism⁽⁴⁾, concluding that the doctrine does not suffer any serious challenge from these quarters, and finally, in a striking section which examines the need of men for a twentieth century gospel, argues that panentheism overcomes the failure of traditional theism to meet modern man's intellectual needs by providing a scientifically acceptable cosmology, and through its reinterpretation of Christian doctrines, enables man to surmount the religious, moral and social barriers to the Christian faith which traditional theism also creates⁽⁵⁾. It is particularly significant that Robinson's thought features in this final analysis⁽⁶⁾.

(1) I have also referred to this book and Robinson's use of it in Part I of this thesis p. 125.

(2) Exploration Into God p. 87 and following.

(3) Panentheism: a Gospel for Today p. 79.

(4) Op. cit. pp. 242 ff.

(5) Ibid. pp. 321 ff.

(6) e.g. pps. 323 and 331 refer to Exploration Into God, pps. 326 and 333 refer to Christian Freedom in a Permissive Society.

Neil's thesis then, concentrating in a very specific way on the exploration of the doctrine of panentheism, itself a central tenet of process theology and a doctrine explicitly espoused by J.A.T. Robinson, makes it abundantly clear that whilst more radical theologians such as Herbert Braun⁽¹⁾, T.J.J. Altizer⁽²⁾ and Alistair Kee⁽³⁾ have challenged the view that God is a necessary ingredient of Christianity, the resolution of the question of God for modern man does not necessarily demand or force the choice 'God - or no God'. Indeed in this coherent and able study, Neil has convincingly shown that the doctrine of panentheism does provide a concept of God, which although it is one which excludes supranaturalism, nevertheless is able to stand firmly against philosophical, religious and moral objections and to retain an essential conceptual validity as a 'Christian Gospel for Today'.

IV.

I would want to suggest at this point therefore, that nothing has been presented in this chapter thus far, that might in any way be considered treatment other than valid exploration of projections of God which are different from the supranaturalistic projection. I cannot believe that it would be possible to regard any view expressed as idiosyncratic or sensational, nor any author of the views expressed as standing completely outside the Christian tradition. That there is a difference between these views and the traditional concept of God, is

- (1) V. 'The Problem of N.T. Theology'. In Zeitschr. f. Theol. u. Kirche Vol. 58 (1961) Supp.2.
- (2) V. The Gospel of Christian Atheism et al.
- (3) V. The Way of Transcendence: Christian Faith without belief in God.

obvious, and here I would agree with Kenneth Hamilton, that a choice is presented by Hartshorne, Ogden, Robinson and other process theologians between an interpretation of the Gospel which acknowledges 'supranatural and one which takes its stand on a 'theory of meaning' (1). revelation' What I have been at pains to illustrate, is that this choice is not one of which the resultant decision might be said to be 'right' or 'wrong', or to put it even more starkly, to involve an outcome which is either Christian or non-Christian. It seems to me that any final evaluation which does attempt to present such categories of judgement, is misconceived, for it could only be based on the assumption that in the Bible and in Christian doctrine we possess definitive statements of interpretation of belief the meanings of which are absolutely clear and understood by all and for all time. Certainly I myself have not met any theologian who would wish to make such a claim, and I think it unlikely that there are many who would be prepared to do so. Even the most casual reference to the work that has been done in the fields of biblical⁽²⁾ and doctrinal⁽³⁾ analysis and criticism will serve to reinforce this view and it has been given definitive expression in a book entitled Christian Believing (1976)⁽⁴⁾, a report by the Doctrinal Commission of the Church of England. The Commission, initially under the Chairmanship of the late Bishop Ian Ramsey, and latterly with Professor M.F. Wiles as Chairman, had as its brief a consideration of

- (1) Revolt Against Heaven (1965). See particularly his chapter entitled 'The Theology of Meaningfulness' op. cit. pp. 13 ff.
- (2) e.g. Käsemann E. Essays on N.T. Themes; N.T. Questions of Today and Kümmel W.G. The N.T. - The History of the Investigations of its Problems amongst other. Note also J.A.T. Robinson's forthcoming book (June 1976) Redating the N.T.
- (3) e.g. Wiles M. The Remaking of Christian Doctrine, and note his forthcoming book (May 1976) Working Papers in Christian Doctrine amongst others.
- (4) S.P.C.K. February 1976.

the nature of the Christian Faith and its expression in Holy Scripture and Creeds. The Report itself conveys the overall view that full personal acceptance of all the statements in the Bible and in the Creeds is not expected of members of the Church, and that difficult points of interpretation of belief can no longer be settled simply by making an appeal to Scripture or to traditional credal formulae. The content of the Report is of very considerable significance, not only because it changes the emphasis from the content of belief to the 'character of believing', but because it presents one of the first authoritative attempts to come to grips with the problems of belief modern Christians face, particularly as these problems relate to the interpretation of traditional theological concepts and to the frequently canvassed opinion that committed Christians are essentially committed to belief in all biblical and doctrinal statements with some sort of 'blanket assent'. It is clearly stated that the Bible cannot be used simply to corroborate ideas of Christian doctrine, nor as a source of doctrine by taking it in its plain and ordinary meaning. Thus, to speak of the Bible as the 'Word of God' is a judgement of faith, not a proposition that can be proved. The same can be said of speaking of an historical event as 'an act of God⁽¹⁾'. The significance of the Creeds is largely their contribution to what was regarded historically as the essentials of Christian faith. Now they can be discussed freely and seriously, and their content and significance questioned critically⁽²⁾.

In both parts of this thesis I have been primarily concerned with the problem of giving meaningfulness to the concept of God, in an analysis that will stand contemporary analytical criticism. I have

(1) Op. cit. p. 31.

(2) Ibid. pp. 41 ff.

shown that J.A.T. Robinson, amongst many other theologians of the present day notably those whose work falls under the aegis of 'process thought', have been concerned to retain a concept of God though discarding the traditional supranaturalistic elements of that concept. An approach such as this is in sharp contrast for instance, to the work of Alistair Kee who, in his book The Way of Transcendence: Christian Faith Without Belief in God, has attempted to further a secular faith, but by a process which completely removes and eliminates God as a reality of transcendence for man. An earlier attempt at a very similar exercise was that of R.B. Braithwaite⁽¹⁾, and it would be reasonable to include in such accounts R.M. Hare's notion of the religious 'blik'⁽²⁾. The question at issue is, are such far-reaching attempts to resolve the problem of the concept of God by doing away with ^{the} concept altogether, so necessary as to render all other attempts to retain the concept in reinterpreted form inevitably misconceived and bound to fail? The answer to this question, the question of transcendence - or to put it in sharper form, the question of the possible merits of an analysis of transcendence different from the traditional concept, will now be examined. For as Leslie Paul has written in his article 'The New Theology and the Idea of Transcendence':-

'The finite world, Tillich says, points beyond itself. But if there is only the finite world, then it points at nothing. If it points to an infinite world then Christian dualism is back again and God with us again as the external judge or saviour. If it does not point to Him then Tillich's views - and the views of most of the new theologians - are simply a smokescreen put up

- (1) 'An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief'. In Mitchell B. (Ed) The Philosophy of Religion pp. 72 ff. See also **part I** of my Ph.D. Thesis pp.34 ff. and for a criticism of Braithwaite, Pratt V. Religion and Secularization pp. 25 ff. and Bartley W.W. III Morality and Religion pp. 17 ff.
- (2) V. Flew A. and MacIntyre A. (eds) New Essays in Philosophical Theology pp. 99 ff.

to cover the defeat of Christian doctrines at the hands of secular philosophies and critiques. Without a doctrine of transcendence - indeed without a "felt sense of transcendence" - I cannot conceive how it is possible for Christianity to survive in a form which will command intellectual respect or spiritual devotion⁽¹⁾.

V.

One of the most definitive analyses of the whole spectrum of studies in transcendence has just been published under the title Historical Transcendence and the Reality of God⁽²⁾. This book, written by Ray Sherman Anderson, the product of the author's Ph.D. research at the University of Edinburgh under the supervision of Professor T.F. Torrance, is an examination of the central problem of how to assert the absolute difference of God from everything else, but simultaneously to assert his relation to everything else - or in terms of modern secular thought, how to understand the utter profaneness of the world as pointing to the reality of God. In building up his own analysis, Anderson has a good deal to say of value about contemporary theological attempts to give meaning to the concept of God. In a series of three powerful questions related to contemporary discussion, he states what he considers to be the essence of the enquiry viz:-

1. How can we continue to speak of the objective reality of God 'wholly other' to man in the sense of 'out-and-out' transcendence?
2. Can we continue to speak of the transcendence of God at all if the concept is being used as a regulative model to give psychological guarantees to existential truths?

(1) In Expository Times Vol. LXXIX (1968) pp. 72 ff.

(2) Geoffrey Chapman (1975).

3. In the last analysis, does not the greater share of the talk of God's transcendence in contemporary theology collapse into 'immanent transcendence'⁽¹⁾?

Question 1, Anderson maintains, is the fundamental question to which the whole of his book is the answer, and I shall pursue his arguments in this respect at a later point. In answer to Question 2, he takes as an example of an author who has not experienced a failure of theological nerve when meeting this question head-on, Alistair Kee. Kee's dismissal of the arguments of many contemporary theologians such as Heidegger, Tillich, Macquarrie, Robinson, Cox, van Buren and Bonhoeffer are noted⁽²⁾, that is, in so far as their value in answering this second question is concerned. However Anderson regards Kee's arguments as 'confusing and at points absurd'⁽³⁾, though there is some value in the exercise in that:-

'While Kee's position cannot really be taken seriously as a viable alternative in the discussion on the crisis of transcendence, it is highly significant for two reasons: (1) It exposes the inconsistency of a certain type of contemporary theologian who can neither face up to the demands of out-and-out transcendence, nor relinquish the use of transcendence as a regulative image to guarantee the reality of existential truths. In a certain sense, Kee's thought represents the reductio ad absurdum of a theology without the transcendence of God. (2) Kee has brought the crisis of transcendence into clearer focus by sharpening up the alternatives⁽⁴⁾.

It is particularly significant that Anderson considers Kee's dismissal of Bonhoeffer 'because of his unreserved commitment to the transcendence

(1) Op. cit. p. 25.

(2) Ibid. p. 37 footnotes 129 and 130.

(3) Ibid. p. 35.

(4) Ibid. p. 37.

of God', to be indicative of the fact that:-

'..... the considerable usage of Bonhoeffer to advance a secular theology without a transcendent God, was in fact a misuse⁽¹⁾'.

The answer to Question 3 is that this assertion is generally valid, though Anderson stresses his condensation of 'the greater share of the talk' to some general examples which prove the truth of the assertion. As evidence he takes Hartshorne, Ogden and Stevenson amongst process theologians, as attempting to maintain both the transcendence and immanence of God in terms of the dipolar nature of process theology. However the transcendence is by no means out-and-out transcendence, but rather:-

'..... it is the least common denominator of divine subjectivity inherent in all subjectivity as such⁽²⁾'.

He quotes Hartshorne, to make the point absolutely clear and to indicate what he maintains is an actual position of 'immanent transcendence', viz:-

'In this aspect, God is not pure being but total actual being for a given moment, with all achieved determinations. Thus God is being in both its opposite aspects: abstract least common denominator and concrete de facto maximal achieved totality⁽³⁾'.

Thus, having presented a powerful critique of much modern theology in the guise of questions 2 and 3 on pps. 49 and 50 supra, Anderson moves on to offer his own analysis of the problem of the concept of God as objective reality as in Question 1 on p. 49 supra. This is the real problematic of historical transcendence in his estimation. At this point it is vital that the meaning of [∞]paradox and a problematic is made clear:-

(1) Loc. cit.

(2) Ibid. p. 26.

(3) The Divine Relativity p. 87.

(a) If the absolute difference of God is an assertion that is made on the basis of the modality of the relation itself, a paradox results that can only be mediated by asserting the truth of both as a faith assertion without reducing the paradox to one or other of the terms⁽¹⁾.

(b) A problematic, on the other hand, is a correspondence which has an intrinsic rationality which is given to the relation by a reality which is not inferred from the relation itself. Thus God is absolute in his difference from man in that he is Spirit. Correspondingly then, that which is not God but wholly other (utter profaneness) - exists in a rationality of correspondence given to it by the freedom of God⁽²⁾.

In summary therefore:-

'Rather than an irrational chasm existing between God and the world, there was discovered the possibility of a rationale in the assertion that Spirit transcends its own otherness with act, and in that act, gives reality and meaning to the correspondence. The Spirit-act is the problematic of historical transcendence. Which means that the reality of God is problematical to human knowledge apart from the concretion of Spirit in historical form⁽³⁾.

This analysis is fundamental to Anderson's whole argument and will be expanded upon as this section progresses.

VI.

I have mentioned earlier⁽⁴⁾ Anderson's comment on Bonhoeffer's

(1) Cf. Gollwitzer's 'Objectivity conceived as encounter' and Gregor Smith's notion of 'Spirit-Act'. The essence of the matter is the subjectivity of the assertions indicated.

(2) Historical Transcendence and the Reality of God pp. 68 ff.

(3) Ibid. p. 71.

(4) V. pps. 50-51 supra.

commitment to a concept of God's out-and-out transcendence. He now takes up⁽¹⁾ a lengthy examination of Bonhoeffer's thought in order to show that essential aspects of his theological explorations have either been missed entirely or misinterpreted - and it is these very aspects which do in fact provide the foundation for an attempt to justify a concept of transcendence which is not 'immanent transcendence' but one which can be explicated within the terms of the problematic of historical transcendence. Noting Bonhoeffer's explication of the power and reality of a suffering God as a 'stroke of brilliance as profoundly theological as it was powerfully dramatic', Anderson proceeds to pinpoint his main contribution to contemporary discussion of the concept of the reality of God. There are three important propositions in this respect:-

1. The intrinsic coherence of the reality of Creator and creation is concretized in community⁽²⁾. Thus Bonhoeffer writes:-

'We shall show that man, as spirit, is necessarily created in a community, and that his general spirituality is woven into the net of sociality⁽³⁾'.

The problematic of social relation at the concrete level is that of spirit and the extent to which spirit transcends the other as spirit within this relation - 'the other man presents us with the same problem of cognition as does God himself⁽⁴⁾'.

2. The normative character of basic ontic relationships. That is, one's being is placed 'in truth', not by the person himself, but by his being confronted with the limit of his being in concrete social

(1) In Ibid. Chapter III pp. 72 ff.

(2) Ibid. pp. 77 f.

(3) Ibid. p. 78. The quotation is from Sanctorum Communio p. 27.

(4) Bonhoeffer *ibid.* p. 37.

relations⁽¹⁾.

3. God is identical with himself in his revelation. That is, the divine word - Christ - is identical with the historical community⁽²⁾.

Anderson reports Bonhoeffer's resultant theological syllogism: Christ is the revelation of God existing concretely as community; God is identical with himself in his revelation; therefore, man is up against God himself in the Church as the community of revelation⁽³⁾.

As a result of his examination of Bonhoeffer's grasp of the notion and problematic of historical transcendence, Anderson concludes that Bonhoeffer does indeed offer a theology of historical transcendence and that he was able to explicate his theology without reducing the problematic or destroying its inner logic⁽⁴⁾. So then:-

'Confronting the world with God is an ontic relationship for Bonhoeffer, and this must mean that the Christian closes the circle of historical transcendence by moving out of his "secret place", where he knows Christ as community, and becomes Christ in the world. It is this movement which exposes the intrinsically non-religious character of Christianity, for the "secret discipline" must complete itself in worldliness, not by becoming worldly, nor merely "non-religious", but by taking the place of Christ in the world⁽⁵⁾.'

Thus Bonhoeffer's notions of 'sharing in the suffering of God', and 'only a suffering God can help', are notions through which it is possible

(1) Anderson *ibid.* pp. 79 ff.

(2) *Ibid.* pp. 83 ff.

(3) *Ibid.* p. 83.

(4) *Ibid.* p. 95.

(5) *Ibid.* p. 97.

to close the circle of transcendence, not simply open-ended notions of men reaching out for transcendence through suffering. Anderson states:-

'It is only in the exposure of oneself to the world in this "suffering way" that one can transcend the world in a way in which Christ transcended it, through the confrontation of its "anti-logos" with the logos of Christ⁽¹⁾'.

In conclusion of his arguments at this point, Anderson restates the now fundamental propositions of his analysis of historical transcendence viz:-

1. The transcendence of God is his act upon us and with us, and this is what we mean when we say it is always historical transcendence.

2. The reality which binds God and the world together is the same reality which binds spirit and act together, it is the reality of spirit which enters into the concrete situation and becomes the act this means that there is no "relation" between God and the world which is a separate entity - a thing (die Sache) which can be an object of thought - but the relation is always the concrete knowledge of God himself which is constitutive for that which is thought out of the act.

3. The theology of historical transcendence is the explication of the incarnating and incarnate Word The Incarnation cannot be merely an alternative way of articulating a world-view, but is itself the inner logic of historical transcendence coming to complete utterance in Jesus Christ⁽²⁾.

Bonhoeffer's vulnerability, Anderson concludes, was that whilst showing a firm grasp of the concept of historical transcendence, he did not offer a rationale of how the circle of transcendence was closed by

(1) Ibid. p. 98.

(2) Ibid. p. 99.

the notion of Christians sharing in the suffering of God in a godless world. It is to this task, one of explicating the structure of reality which lies in the Incarnation, an exploration into the inner logic of the incarnating and incarnate Word, that Anderson now turns.

VII.

The detailed study then of the nature of the organic connection between God's act in Jesus and God's act in Israel, becomes Anderson's main concern, his attention being focussed not on a methodology by which a structure of reality is imposed upon these areas, but on one which allows the inherent structure of the reality to confront us⁽¹⁾. This task, which might be expressed as an attempt to offer a proper theology of the Old and New Testaments, has as its core an explication of the coherence of God's history with man. But:-

'Because axiomatic assumption of an organic connection between Jesus and Israel emerges from a consideration of God's action with Israel as a redeemed community and his act in Jesus as the redeemer, the proper subject of the recorded testimonies concerning this history is not the religion of Israel nor the faith of Israel, and not even a history of 'revelation', but the living Word of Jahweh - the God who names himself in his actions with and for his people⁽²⁾'.

The section headings of Anderson's approach to his declared task indicate quite clearly the direction of his argument, viz:-

The Humanity of God in His Self-Communication⁽³⁾

The Temporality of God in His Self-Revelation⁽⁴⁾

The Hiddenness of God in His Self-Condensation⁽⁵⁾.

(1) Ibid. p. 109.

(2) Ibid. p. 108.

(3) Ibid. pp. 110 ff.

(4) Ibid. pp. 118 ff.

(5) Ibid. pp. 127 ff.

Then finally, in a section entitled 'The Problematic of Covenant Response⁽¹⁾', Anderson shows how the inner structure of the Incarnation is to be understood. He writes:-

'We observed how the transcendence of God progressively penetrated the "flesh" of Israel, until finally Israel became the "logos of God" - the suffering servant of Jahweh. This is to be understood as the working of the limit by which God transcends the world into an utterly human form so that man is confronted with the reality of God without the need of "interposing an anthropology" before the reality of God; without the kind of subjectivizing of God which says "God gives himself to us according to our attitude towards him". It is this strand of the inner logic of the Incarnation which prepares us to understand the transcendence of God in the humanity of Christ without coming to grief over the metaphysical problems of the relation of divine nature to human nature.

The second strand of the inner logic which has emerged in this chapter is found in the affirmation which man is enabled to give to his life precisely because of this limiting transcendence of God. One could say that it is the transcendence of God in the form of the concrete limit which makes possible the transcendence of man in the form of the concrete response. The rational continuity and the coherence of this relation has its source in the divine Logos which gives to the created logos in man the intelligibility, and thus, the actuality of response. This covenant response from the "human side" is problematical to man in that he cannot possess the rationality of response in any autonomous act

(1) Ibid. pp. 132 ff.

which transgresses the transcendence of God in the form of the limit.

We observed how the covenant response from the human side was progressively worked into the humanity of Israel with the promise of a new heart and a new Spirit. In Israel, the transcending limit and the covenant response were brought closer and closer, so that the particularization of both limit and response could be prepared to break out in a true universality, so that the "one man" Israel, in becoming the "one man" Jesus Christ, could unite both transcendence and response in a total and final way.

It is this union of both the transcendent limit, which is the reality of God for man, and the covenant response, which is the reality of man's perfect love for that limit, in the one man Jesus Christ which comprises the inner structure of the Incarnation. This is the centre which Israel lacked to give coherence to her own existence. It is the way in which the inner logic of Israel's relation to God points towards this centre, and the way in which the centre can only be understood in terms of God's dealing with Israel which constitutes the organic unity between Israel and Christ. It is this reality which permits the primitive Christian community to use the language of the Old Testament without tension or doubt. And it is this inner logic, which provides the structure of thought as well as the content, for our explication of the Incarnation.

There is no Logos of God apart from the Logos of flesh. So then kenosis is not empty of meaning, and in this logos we are not far from the transcendence and reality of God⁽¹⁾.

It is clear that Anderson, having reached this point in his analysis,

(1) Ibid. pp. 144-5

must now explicate the vital notion of kenosis, so that it can be shown that through this self-emptying the real transcendence of God as the Eternal Subject acting through the logos and the genuine historicity, and thus, the authentic humanity of Jesus Christ, is sustained⁽¹⁾. However, traditional kenotic Christological analysis is not Anderson's concern - his methodology is to show that the kenosis of Christ is a way into the inner logic of the Incarnation, and that it is directly relative to the problem of historical transcendence. Common forms of kenotic theory have resulted in an analysis which set transcendence over against immanence - for Anderson transcendence is the reality of God in his action whatever the form it takes. Bonhoeffer pertinently remarked that the question "Who?" is the question of transcendence, whereas the question "How?" is the question of immanence⁽²⁾. Hence, the inner logic of the Incarnation demands that attention be concentrated on this one who exists for man. Anderson considers that the domination of Greek concepts of transcendence ^{has} have bedevilled theological exploration from the time of Chalcedon up to and beyond the Reformation, and the result has been the obscuring of the original Hebrew concept of transcendence as a God who acted within and through history. Christological definitions thus restricted and concealed the very thing which the Incarnation revealed. To the question then, 'Can the act of kenosis be understood as the transcendence of God?' Anderson answers:-

'Yes it can. Jesus is the God who is for man. He embodies the transcendent limit of the reality of God. In fact it is in the unpretentious and even powerless way in which the being (ousia) of Jesus confronted men that the Kingdom of God impinged most directly, and even most dramatically and violently, upon his contemporaries. It was the authority (exousia) of Jesus' person

(1) Ibid. p. 149.

(2) Christology pp. 30-31.

that roused the forces of evil against him, drove out unclean spirits, healed the sick, confounded the wise and liberated the sinner. His birth, lowly as it was, brought a sword, not peace. He renounced all worldly power, rejected the power (exousia) of Satan, and exposed the thoughts and motives of men's hearts, forcing a division between those who "believed" and those who did not⁽¹⁾.

Thus, in terms of the argument itself:-

'It is precisely here that we are forced to see that the enfleshment of the divine Logos is neither a renunciation of the divinity nor a concealing of it, but a particularly total revealing of it which could only occur as the Son of God, existing as the form of God, also takes on the form of servant. This kenosis is the act of God as Subject who transcends his own immanent existence and becomes man, thereby placing himself transcendentally in relation to man at the most intimate and most absolute level. The form of the servant is thus, first of all, the God who is for man. When one comes up against the form of the servant in Christ, one is up against God himself. There is no Logos of God apart from the Logos of Flesh. It is the transcendence of God which makes it possible to say this. It is God, who places himself into transcendent relation with us, and who thus becomes the limit at the centre of our existence; it is this God who has taken the form of a servant, who has become our brother, who makes it possible for us to love our limit and to affirm the core of reality at the centre of our life in affirming him⁽²⁾.

So then, Jesus is the 'God who is for man' - but he is also the 'Man who is for God'⁽³⁾. In a searching account, Anderson now examines

(1) Anderson *ibid.* p. 164.

(2) *Ibid.* pp. 168-9.

(3) *Ibid.* pp. 170.

the life and work of Jesus⁽¹⁾ in the light of kenosis, concluding that:-

'The kenotic way which is intrinsic to the nature of God, and thus is the way of intra-divine transcendence, is no special way which the Son of God took so that man could go "another-way" - the way which leads to individualism. But it is the way of unity with God, it is the way of freedom, it is the way of life, it is the way of the Spirit, and as such, it is the way of lived transcendence. This is the transcendence of the "Man who is for God"⁽²⁾.'

The basic grammar of the transcendence of God is thus given to us in the inner structure of the Incarnation, the inner structure of the intra-divine communion of God himself. That is, from the depths of our humanity, the Son meets himself in the Father through the Spirit. In sum:-

'The reality of God comes to us as an activity of transcendence in which God acts as the divine personal agent whose own nature is to inter-act with creation and with his creature. The argument for the basic thesis that transcendence is the act of a personal agent, who is concretely embodied in the act and the inter-action, can now be brought to its conclusion. But the conclusion is not the end. For establishing a rationale for historical transcendence carries with it the imperative of a continuing action⁽³⁾.'

VIII.

The penultimate section of Anderson's treatment of historical

(1) Ibid. pp. 170 ff.

(2) Ibid. p. 185.

(3) Ibid. loc. cit.

transcendence is concerned with the notion of 'lived transcendence'⁽¹⁾. That is, the life of the new man in Christ who lives out the transcendence of the Spirit. This 'lived transcendence' is in fact the real closing of the circle of transcendence by which the world is 'transcended' by the reality of God at the point of its utter worldliness. So then, what does it mean to speak of 'living in the Spirit'? What is the life-form of the Spirit⁽²⁾?. To these questions Anderson answers:-

'This life-form of the Spirit in the world has its transcendent ground in the life-form of the Incarnate Word - Jesus Christ - and its concrete ground in the historical existence of the "new man" who lives in the spirit. Therefore the transcendence of God is a reality of Spirit in which the historical existence of the man in whom the Spirit dwells is re-formed according to the form of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, who is at once the image of the invisible God and the image in which man is created. This reality of Spirit cannot be called the historical transcendence of God, for that belongs uniquely to the life of the Incarnate Word, but should rather be called a lived transcendence by which the reality of God impinges upon the world through the historical existence of the man who lives in the Spirit of God⁽³⁾'.

This position leads to a consideration of three of its implications which show how historical transcendence is completed in lived transcendence, or to put it in another form, how Christology flows into Ecclesiology. These implications are:-

1. Lived transcendence is a community of life in the Spirit which takes the form of both a kenotic and ek-static community.

(1) Ibid. pp. 187 ff.

(2) Ibid. p. 228.

(3) Ibid. pp. 228-9.

Such a notion implies that the kenotic community is formed of actual people who have their place in the community, not by virtue of their capacity to love or their maturity of spirit, but by virtue of their common humanity with Christ and the reality of the Holy Spirit which comes as a gift. Following from this, the kenotic community offers to each person, an actual growth into the reality of their own personhood, which is the capacity to live in love⁽¹⁾.

Thus, for the kenotic community:-

'..... poverty is not that which it gives away, but that which it receives; powerlessness is not in the abandonment of a place in the world, but in refusing to let go of the weak for the sake of the strong; humility is not in taking less than the world, but in receiving more than the world can give. The kenotic community has no Presence other than its own existence, or rather, God's presence to himself in his existence. It has no sacristy to be profaned, no temple to be destroyed, no Prince to be exiled - or ignored; and it has no answer to the question put at the beginning of this chapter⁽²⁾. For such as it is, it is the transcendence of God⁽³⁾'.

The kenotic community is also the ek-static community, Word and Spirit being inseparable:-

'..... the ek-static community reveals to the community of man its incapacity which it can only experience as a capacity for community. Therefore the Spirit of God does not produce a qualitatively better human community, and enter with the claim that

(1) Ibid. p. 234.

(2) The question is in the form of a quotation from Gregor Smith - 'But how is the Presence known? How tested? And what is this life with which man is then dowered? In the midst of a world constantly, sullenly, wilfully, despairingly denying this life of persons as the one historical reality, where is this community of which you speak?'

(3) Ibid. p. 238.

only in the Spirit is there community at all, but on the contrary the Spirit speaks from the incapacity of community to complete itself, and speaks to God for community on the basis of the community of humanity with the Incarnate Word⁽¹⁾.

2. Lived transcendence is a reality of life in solidarity with the world which has both an incarnational and evangelical existence among men.

The question is then raised - 'How can a member of the kenotic community share with his fellowmen in community, the common humanity of Jesus Christ?'⁽²⁾. This is a difficult question, especially when seen in the light of such New Testament passages as 1 Corinthians 12.12-13; 10.17 which appear to restrict membership of the 'body of Christ' only to those who have received the Spirit. Nevertheless (and the difficulties are examined in detail by Anderson⁽³⁾), the church cannot be an entity which distinguishes itself from the world by breaking solidarity with humanity - if it does so it no longer makes a difference to men in the world. So then:-

'The solidarity of the Christian with the world is not simply a fact of his existence in kenotic community with Christ in the humanity of all men, but it is the "place" where God transcends the world in love. For God's transcendence is the difference which love makes in solidarity. Again it is not that the world needs the Christian, and thus is incomplete without that love (though that is true), but it is that the Christian is incomplete without the world, without closing the circle of transcendence by loving the world that God loves (John 3.16). This is why I have shown that the kenotic community is not just the church

(1) Ibid. p. 250.

(2) Ibid. pp. 252 ff.

(3) Ibid. p. 257 f.

assuming a posture of humility and poverty, nor is it just the world; it is Christ in solidarity with the world, but in such a way that there is tension also⁽¹⁾.

But are believers and non-believers to be distinguished in any way?

Anderson believes that if the term 'Christian' is to have any significance at all it should have a transcendent significance and not a relative one. That is, Christian and non-Christian are one in their human solidarity and membership of the same kenotic community, but there is a 'difference' between one who is living a life of lived transcendence in the Spirit and one who is not⁽²⁾. A Christian is therefore incarnational and evangelical, he lives a life of utter solidarity with other men in their weakness and humanity, but his faith is evangelical - he receives Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour through a direct response to the Word in the power of the Spirit⁽³⁾.

3. Lived transcendence is an eschatological life in God in which history and faith are bound up in the relation of the penultimate to the ultimate.

As an historical creature man does not possess his true selfhood in a teleological sense but rather he discovers it eschatologically. The eschaton of creation is the transcendence of God which is given to creation as its life and the source of its reality. God meets himself in his creation through the transcendence of Spirit, but in such a way that creation is given its own 'space' of transcendence over against God in which to work out its perfection (telos). Anderson explicates this notion by reference to Barth, who stated that the future exists first and then the present, for the future is the eschaton which gives

(1) Ibid. pp. 263-4.

(2) Ibid. pp. 264-5.

(3) Ibid. pp. 266-7.

the present its own telos. However the solidarity of the eternal Logos with humanity brought the eschaton into the world in such a way that all creation can be said to have its completion in Christ - Christ was the eschaton,⁽¹⁾ and thus the future has come upon man, but in such a way that the tension remains, and historical existence continues as the context within which the kenotic community prefigures the eschaton of creation through its ek-static life in the Spirit. It is thus, says Anderson, that lived transcendence is eschatological transcendence⁽²⁾.

When we speak then, of the reality of God as life in the Spirit, we are called back to that solidarity of God with man which is constituted in the historical life of the Incarnate Word. This solidarity not only constitutes the historical transcendence of God, it binds men in their historical existence to the life of God. Thus:-

'Lived transcendence therefore, is eschatological life because, through the Spirit, man is redeemed from historical existence without an eschaton, and given historical existence with an eschaton⁽³⁾'.

Our present historical existence then, is the penultimate, not in a temporal sense, for apart from the ultimate, historical existence has no final meaning, but as a 'judgement which the ultimate passes upon that which has preceded it⁽⁴⁾'. As the eschaton, Anderson maintains, the ultimate does radicalize historical existence and thus gives it a true significance as the penultimate⁽⁵⁾.

- (1) Cf. this notion with Tillich's similar notion of Christ as *καταρα* - v. Part I of this thesis p. 31, footnote 4.
- (2) Ibid. p. 279.
- (3) Ibid. p. 281 and Cf. Romans 6.2-4 - the resurrection of Jesus is the eschaton of all historical existence. Anderson gives a detailed account of the significance of the resurrection ibid. pp. 284 ff.
- (4) Bonhoeffer Ethics p. 133.
- (5) Anderson ibid. p. 295.

There are then, various thresholds which can be seen in the kenotic community upon which the ek-static community stands in eschaton. They are:-

1. The enemy that is also the friend. In the hostile, violent, alienated and often hopeless conditions of modern life, Christians are faced with evil and they must accept that their action must necessarily be tragic if the situation is to be 'transcended'. If action against evil is not tragic then it is simply expressing solidarity with other men but without transcendence, and thus it makes no ultimate 'difference'. Lived transcendence must include the recognition that action or non-action towards the criminal in prison, the sick, the poor, the starving and the homeless, is bound up with our relation to Jesus, the eschaton⁽¹⁾:-

'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me' (Matthew 25.40).

2. The flesh that is also the spirit. The body has its ek-stasis in acts of love which acknowledge the reality and presence of other persons through all of the physical senses. But it is not in 'Christian' flesh that the Spirit transcends the world, but in human flesh. The flesh of the other is also the spirit of another:-

'And so lived transcendence radicalizes the conditions under which humanity exists, and demands that we love others "as we love our own bodies". Spirit comes in many colours, sizes and shapes. It can shiver with the cold, wilt with the heat, become weary with work, and needs to be fed, and caressed, with regularity. These are ways in which the resurrection makes a "difference" when it is considered as the eschaton of historical existence⁽²⁾'.

There is a key text from James which sets this whole discussion in context:-

(1) Ibid. p. 298.

(2) Ibid. p. 300.

'If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled", without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?' (James 2.15-16).

3. The sickness that is also the hope. Human existence is often experienced as a negation of the normal or the good. This may be seen in physical, mental or emotional illness, but it is also deeply connected with man's sinfulness. Lived transcendence must struggle in solidarity with a humanity which does not know that it has been forgiven, and cannot bear to know it - that is, cannot bear to die in order that the life which God gives might be received. Anderson states:-

'If one should call this struggle of lived transcendence with mortality "intercession", let it be understood that intercession is not a movement made from God's side, but from the side of man, and in solidarity with man. This eschatological life which the Spirit gives carries with it the audacity of a Moses who said, "if you will forgive their sin - and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of the book which thou hast written", as well as the compassion of Paul who cried out, "I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race". Here too is why there can exist no boundary between the church and the world - and yet the difference is radical because it is eschatological⁽¹⁾.

The implied negation in the relation itself, experienced by Moses and Paul, is expressly clarified of Jesus, moving in the very threshold of solidarity between God and man:-

'That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all

(1) Ibid. p. 302.

who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases"
(Matthew 8.17).

4. The place that is also the presence. Being in the same place is fundamental to the reality of historical existence. The solidarity of God with man must therefore be a solidarity of place if it is to be a reality of presence. Mysticism results from any concept of the transcendence of God which has no threshold of place within the historical dimension. Thus:-

'The reality of God as "presence" is the ek-static dimension of "place", that is to say, in the solidarity of God with man established through historical transcendence (Incarnation), God became known to us in our place and in our own time. His presence is the eschaton of place, for God is the reality of creaturehood. The reality of creation finds its fulfilment (its eschaton) in being ek-static towards (present to) the Creator. The resurrection of Christ becomes the true ek-stasis of creation, for in the living Christ man is present to God and God is present to man⁽¹⁾'.

Even the 'presence' of Christ to the 'place' of man is possessed now as absence, but this is necessary, for in this way the absence of Christ ensures our 'place' with God eternally. But it also makes possible the 'presence' of Christ to our 'place' in historical existence⁽²⁾.
So then:-

'..... the Church (the body of Christ), a refugee with the refugees, with no outer wall to separate saint from sinner, with no inner sanctuary to be guarded against profanation, is nonetheless the place which is also the presence of the living

(1) Ibid. p. 303.

(2) Ibid. p. 304.

God. But here too, the church is radicalized by the very fact that it has no place of its own, for its place is bound up with the humanity of Christ and is therefore the place of the kenotic community. Whatever structures the church erects will be no more than "disposable containers", for disposability is the test of eschatological reality. Wherever "two or three" gather in the name of Christ is the place where we will find the absence of Christ celebrated as his Parousia - his presence to God in which we have our life, and his presence to the world in which we have our hope. And so the church discovers within the kenotic community the shape of its own reality, - a stone, a leaf, a door; and suddenly there is the place, the lost lane into heaven⁽¹⁾.

IX.

Part II of this thesis, has then, provided further source material and extended rationale in two directions which give the initial argument strong support. On the **one** hand, J.A.T. Robinson's work since 1963 has been examined in the first section, to highlight the positive and negative criticism which it has received. This examination proceeded from a general account of the reaction to Honest to God⁽²⁾ to a more detailed critique of Robinson's overall theological and philosophical position⁽³⁾, followed by a critical survey of the problems which his general style and occasional lack of clarity present⁽⁴⁾. Then an

(1) Ibid. pp. 304-5.

(2) V. pp. 4 ff. supra.

(3) V. pp. 12 ff. supra.

(4) V. pp. 20 ff. supra.

analysis of the critical response to his work was undertaken in which I have sought to show that his critics themselves have not always provided an articulate response, and indeed, that there are clear examples in this area in which some imbalance is evident of affective as against cognitive response⁽¹⁾. In sum, I maintain that Robinson's work, whilst presenting some opportunities for critical attack on the grounds of confusion of style, ambiguity and lack of clarity⁽²⁾, has nevertheless made available over some thirteen years, useful and widely-appreciated studies of contemporary theological issues (particularly with regard to understanding and interpreting the concept of God in secular society), which have had considerable educational value and which have stood firmly within the Christian tradition. I have no reason whatever to doubt that Robinson's work as a whole, and particularly his examination and elucidation of the notion of God as Ultimate Loving Concern, has great contemporary significance. On the one hand it reveals insights vitally relevant to present-day educational practice with its increasing emphasis upon the importance of harmonious personal relationships, an emphasis which is to be found also in most accounts of the roles of those persons who belong to the 'helping professions'⁽³⁾. On the other hand, it also offers guidelines for exploring the educational process itself, that is, how people might be enabled to understand and improve their personal relations, both within educational institutions and in the wider social context of contemporary life⁽⁴⁾. Not least, it offers an initial analysis for further exploration of the content and practice of love in education, which is itself a bridging

(1) V. pp. 25 ff. supra.

(2) V. pp. 17 ff. supra.

(3) V. Halmos P. The Personal Service Society.

(4) V. Part 1 pp. 215 ff. for my detailed analysis and recommendations in this respect.

notion between theology and education and which thus offers scope for attempts to resolve the dilemmas which 'traditional' religious education in schools has been seen to create at the present time⁽¹⁾.

What I have set out to do in the second section, is to bring forward for scrutiny some powerful examples from the extensive range of contemporary theological writing available which have explored and analysed the concept of the reality of God in the light of the new insights and new hypotheses of our changing world, but within an existing theological tradition. I have given arguments and evidence for placing J.A.T. Robinson's work firmly within a field of exploration which has received educational support from distinguished academics⁽²⁾, and I have placed him clearly within a group of 'process' theologians⁽³⁾ who have had as their objective that same examination and analysis of the concept of the reality of God referred to above. This categorisation seemed to me to demand some explication of process thought and its critique⁽⁴⁾, and this in turn led to a consideration of the most fundamental concept in process thought (and one which is essential to Robinson's theological exposition), that of panentheism⁽⁵⁾. The intention here, was to show that whilst panentheism is essentially non-supranaturalistic, the doctrine is able to withstand philosophical, religious and moral objections and to retain its conceptual validity. In the light of the most recent doctrinal statement of the Church of England, which has given approval to contemporary theological exploration as a means of establishing the significance and value of focussing upon the process of believing as against the content of belief⁽⁶⁾, a

(1) This situation was thoroughly examined in my M.Ed. thesis passim.

(2) V. pp. 33 ff. supra.

(3) V. pp. 36 f. supra.

(4) V. pp. 37 ff. supra.

(5) V. pp. 41 ff. supra.

(6) V. pp. 45 ff. supra.

detailed study was then presented of one of the most recent research accounts of the concept of transcendence⁽¹⁾. This study, by Professor R.S. Anderson, was shown to offer a comprehensive account of the attempts of numerous modern theologians to explicate the logic of the concept itself in a form that meets the general critique that such explications generally lapse into 'immanent transcendence', that is, where man is the subject and God the object of his thought. Particularly valuable in this account, is Anderson's extensive use of Bonhoeffer, and his attempt to show that Bonhoeffer had a profound grasp of historical transcendence and its inner logic⁽²⁾. The purpose of presenting Anderson's thesis in detail, was to show that a logical argument for the retention of the notion of transcendence can in fact be adduced within the non-supranaturalistic interpretation of modern theological argument, and thus that a view which maintains that non-supranaturalism necessarily denies transcendence, is incorrect.

I believe then, that this detailed explication of the concepts of supranaturalism and transcendence, as met both in Robinson's work and in the wider context of general theological exegesis, gives considerable strength and support to the explorations in Part I of this thesis of a contemporary understanding of the concept of God, and to the account given there of the significance of these explorations for future education in religion in modern society. 'Love as a guide to life', remains the golden thread which binds together and enhances all our theological and education concerns.

(1) V. pp. 49 ff. supra.

(2) V. pp. 52 ff. supra. Cf. the significance of Bonhoeffer to my thesis exposition in Part I Chapter 1 pp. 1 ff. passim.

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