

~Conflicting Theological~ Models for God

In *The Act of Creation*, Arthur Koestler suggests that the creative imagination operates in science, art, and literature in ways that are not dissimilar. A frequent source of stimulation to the imagination in these disciplines, he says, arises from the tension produced by the comparison of two distinct and even contradictory conceptual frameworks or models which cover the same general range of experience but express it in seemingly contrary manners. The tension introduced by such a "bisociation" presses toward resolution in a new synthesis or a whole achieved by reordering the old elements in a new configuration.¹

Without guaranteeing that I shall be able to achieve either an adequate synthesis or a viable new configuration, if indeed one is desirable, I should like nonetheless to call attention to what seems to me to be a similar tension faced by the discipline of theology. In any attempt to arrive at new and more satisfying conceptual models for presenting the reality of God to our time, an internal contradiction which stems from the fact that we are the inheritors of not one but *two* models of the nature of divine reality must be recognized. Both models can claim considerable historical precedence, as we shall see. Both have served well in the past to illumine the Christian message. And both can justly claim adherents among those who stand in every shade of opinion along the contemporary theological spectrum. Yet they would appear to be almost mutually exclusive. And it is difficult to see how, if one is judged to be an adequate representation of the Christian gospel, the other would not by that very fact be re-

¹ Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), pp. 95-96, 229 ff., 320 ff.

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jected as a false and misleading rendering of the reality Christian thought seeks to explicate.

The type of model for God which is by far the older and more universal, dating from the origins of religion itself and which could therefore lay claim to the title of the religious model *per se*, can be described as *cosmic monism*. It views the divine as that which both empowers and comes to expression in the cosmos. The most universal of the primitive religions, animism, is perhaps the clearest example of this model. Animism is the belief that the world is permeated by spirits and powers, that nature is alive with divine *energeia* which can at times be friendly, at times hostile and threatening, to man's fragile existence. The cosmos is understood as constituting one overarching and divine whole within which everything has its being. The animist would find largely meaningless, therefore, modern distinctions between the sacred and the secular. How could he conceive of what "secular" might mean when he could scarcely conceive of a non-sacred world? For him anything that is, exists because of the sacred energy which empowers it. Every act of normal life—hunting, fishing, fire-building, planting and tending his crops—takes place in a religious context and is assisted and validated by the proper gestures and formulas which please and appease the appropriate gods. Ancient man's "constant endeavor is to establish communion with the elemental powers."² What we term the profane world is able to exist only because of its participation in the indwelling spiritual presence.³

Needless to say, the world of the animist has cohesion. "Pluralism" is no problem, for the cosmos is a seamless garment which encompasses all reality in one self-contained, spiritually completed monism. Nothing can be imagined as existing outside this cosmic womb. Even the gods have their existence within it, as is seen, for example, in a highly sophisticated version of the same basic pattern, Hinduism, where the gods usually are viewed as subordinate to the divine principle embodied in the cosmos itself. According to Hindu speculation, "311 billion years constitute the life cycle of Brahma. But even this duration does not exhaust time, for the gods are not eternal, and

² G. Rachel Levy, *Religious Conceptions of the Stone Age* (New York: Harper, 1963), p. 214.

³ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harper, 1959), p. 17.

the cosmic creations and destructions succeed one another forever." ⁴ Only the cosmos itself is eternal, and its spiritual power provides the ultimate category beyond which nothing can be imagined.

A similar pattern emerged with the pre-Socratics in the West. Speculation was born of the desire, says Levy, to discover the one divine principle lying behind all nature, "the ever present and pervading dynamic force." ⁵ By isolating theoretically this divine principle of animism the pre-Socratic philosopher, Thales, "interpreted the world as a unified psycho-physical whole, governed . . . by natural laws that man could hope to understand." ⁶ Thus the very origins not only of philosophy but of science as well are to be found in the rationalization of the theological world view of animism. And this was accomplished without fundamentally disrupting theological monism. Both disciplines appropriated largely without question the animistic assumptions about the nature of the unity of the world. Even Plato, in spite of his dialectical modifications, can be described by Eliade as "the outstanding philosopher of 'primitive mentality,' . . . the thinker who succeeded in giving philosophical currency and validity to the modes of life and behavior of archaic humanity [through the means which] the spirituality of his age made available to him." ⁷ To be sure, Plato represents a formidable reworking of the monistic model. He emphasizes the transcendence of the divine ideas which lie behind the visible world, and thus introduces a distinction between reality as apprehended by the senses and reality as it actually is. Yet what really is, is in the final analysis but a more sophisticated and rationalized form of the spiritual power which animism knew to be operative behind all appearances. Hence it would be difficult to claim that Plato broke radically with his religious past. Rather, he gave divine powers rational and therefore comprehensible form. He dissolved the mystery on one level while driving it deeper on another. Yet the final mystery is still

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁵ Levy, *Religious Conceptions of the Stone Age*, p. 301.

⁶ Henry B. Parkes, *Gods and Men* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), p. 80.

⁷ *Cosmos and History (The Myth of the Eternal Return)* (New York: Harper, 1959), pp. 34-35.

conceived on the animistic-monistic model as a mystery which is coextensive with the being of the cosmos.

What is generally characterized as the Greek heritage in the West ought, therefore, to be recognized as part and parcel of a larger, more universal religious heritage which, even in the dialectical complexity of some of its developed forms, might be said to rest finally on the assumption that *the cosmos is God*. That is, divinity is the ultimate principle of the cosmos and is in the end inseparable from it.

At one point in the ancient world, however, there was a variation in the otherwise almost universal pattern, a variation which would eventually prove to be of considerable significance, namely, the religion of the Hebrews. For the Hebrews provided an alternative model for describing the relation of the divine to the world. To be sure, there are indications that the remote origins of Hebrew faith may also lie in animism. And it is undeniable that animism in both its primitive and more developed forms was a constant temptation to the Hebrew peoples, especially after they settled in agricultural surroundings where identification with the local guarantors of fertility seemed a matter of economic necessity. Yet Israel's development away from whatever animism may have characterized the primeval origins of the Semitic peoples was distinctive enough to constitute a quite new type, a fundamentally different understanding of the relation of the sacred to the cosmos. In the prevailing Hebrew notion of God, as reflected in those literary sources which have been preserved, the ultimate sacred authority has an existence conceived as independent from the world. The relation is that of Creator to creation. Were this to be expressed ontologically, reality for the Hebrew would be finally dual: the reality of the world is different from the reality of the Creator. Yet such a definition would be misleading, for it is not that the Hebrew thinks in degrees of reality; he does not speculate about a hierarchy of being. For him the world and man are no less "real" than is God; they do not suffer from a deficient mode of existence.⁸ The term "dual" must be restricted therefore to designating the discreteness between God's existence and that of the universe, a discreteness which does not exclude the possibility of unity but which understands any such

⁸ Cf. Edmond Cherbonnier, "Is there a Biblical Metaphysic?" *Theology Today*, January, 1959, p. 459.

unity on the model of interpersonal relations in which the meeting of minds and wills does not mean the dissolving of independent personhood but rather its preservation and enhancement. It is especially important that Hebrew "duality" not be confused with Persian "dualism" or the mind-versus-matter dualism of idealism. The latter refer to conflicts that take place essentially within the cosmos between competing cosmic forces and thus represent variations on the basic monistic model.

The Hebrew break with cosmic monism was one of those great "leaps in being," as Eric Voegelin terms it, which was to portend a whole new direction of development in the history of mankind.⁹ Hitherto unimaginable possibilities were opened up, for by distinguishing God from the world the Hebrews prepared the way for the "secularization" of the animistic cosmos. Holiness was understood to reside in God alone, and any human attempts to gain control over this holiness by fashioning earthly images of it were forbidden. Nothing in the creation was to be allowed to supplant the claim upon man's life which belonged to Yahweh alone. Devotion to cosmic spirits was prohibited: "Behold, they are all a delusion; their works are nothing; their molten images are empty wind" (Is. 41:29 RSV). This is not to deny that Yahweh functioned as a nature god, for he insured the seasons and the crops, the fertility and the rain. Nevertheless he remained distinct from the world whose existence he undergirded and guaranteed. No immanent principle of divinity was necessary to enable the world to operate, and man was freed from the necessity of regarding the world as a divine body. Whereas he previously had understood himself and his society as an integral part of the cosmos and constructed the patterns of his life and institutions in such a way as to imitate the sacred law of the cosmos, he now understood himself as standing over against the world by virtue of his relationship to the Creator. Thus "man is not simply a piece of nature, however firmly interwoven his life is in the order of nature," but is called, as it were, to the side of the Creator and confronts the rest of creation from that vantage point.¹⁰ The discreteness of God from the world was therefore a chief means by which man gained his

⁹ Cf. *Israel and Revelation*, vol. I of *Order and History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), pp. 10, 50, 123.

¹⁰ Walter Eichrodt, *Man in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1951), p. 30.

independence from a religiously venerated cosmos to which his religious consciousness had previously held him in bondage.

How did this variant in the religious consciousness arise which was destined to open up such significant possibilities by providing an alternative model for the relationship of the divine to man and the world? Those who stand in the Hebrew-Christian tradition will be inclined to speak of "revelation" and "grace," but an empirically oriented age seeks a translation of theological explanations into a more public language. Is such a translation possible, and if so, can it do justice to the distinctive Hebrew-Christian contribution? It is to questions such as these that we now must turn.

Most of the peoples with whom the Hebrews came into contact during their crucial formative period had already developed agricultural economies. Animistic religion served within such communities not only as a way of coming to terms with the forces of nature upon which the survival of the community depended but as a means of giving a people identity with reference to the sacred place they occupied in the cosmos. The Hebrews, however, at the stage in which they came to their sense of tribal identity, were a nomadic people. As nomads who occupied no one place in terms of which they could identify themselves but were constantly on the move, an alternative source of group consciousness had to be found. Nature was not so much their problem but history. That is, if one natural environment did not suit them they could shift to another; yet they sought some kind of continuity in the midst of change, and this they found not in the recurrent cycles of nature but in the tribal memory of the unique events of their origins and development. The reality of Yahweh was to be seen through his acts in the life of his people. The god of the nomads was himself a nomad who was tied to no place but moved with his people, sharing their destiny with them while at the same time transcending it. To be sure, the Hebrews also had their sacred places, but these derived their authority not because they epitomized the spiritual powers of the cosmos but because they were where hierophanies of Yahweh had occurred, encounters which had made a difference to Israel's history and were remembered as occasions of judgment and faithfulness. Needless to say, the Hebrew's historical consciousness was not the same as that of modern man. Undoubtedly his tribal memories were as a genre

closer to nature myths than to present-day historiography. Yet they represent a significant enough departure from the cosmologically oriented religious setting to constitute a distinct type.

It could be argued, of course, that the God of the Hebrews is just a case of arrested religious development. Creation myths are legion in the world's religions, and usually the creation is achieved by a god or gods who must be in some sense higher than that which they create.¹¹ In the continuing religious evolution, however, creator gods and high gods are recognized to be an anthropomorphizing of the creative energy which is manifested in all that is. Hence most of the "higher" religions have followed the same path taken by Greek philosophy and identified the divine not with any one creator figure but with the power of being and creativity as such. The high god, Yahweh, developed in a cultural backwater, however, where this process of demythologizing did not prove necessary. He was able to continue as a kind of evolutionary lag, a case of religious and philosophical underdevelopment.

Granting this interpretation for the sake of argument, is it not possible nevertheless to show, using the insights of evolutionary thinking, that the Hebrew understanding of the divine, precisely because it did not go through a process of abstraction which reduced it to identity with a sophisticated version of cosmic monism, was in a position to make a unique contribution to man's development? If the Hebrew faith did not complete the evolution of the cosmological religions but remained stranded on an evolutionary plateau, it may nonetheless have proved to be that model of the divine which was "fittest" for a new complex of circumstances, and thus a new evolutionary situation. As Teilhard de Chardin observes, evolution is not a smooth causal process in which that which was given in the beginning simply unfolds in one continuous and uninterrupted line of development. Rather it moves along by fits and starts through a process of testing, trying, shifting, and launching out only to be rebuffed and forced to begin all over again, a process which Teilhard calls *groping*.¹² Through a series of false starts a corridor is finally found through which the process can move onward to greater "complexification." The historical develop-

¹¹ Cf. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 165; Parkes, *Gods and Men*, pp. 158 ff.

¹² *The Phenomenon of Man* (London: Collins; Fontana, 1959), p. 121.

ment of evolution is therefore full of blind alleys, paths which were right for a time but were beset by a combination of circumstances which could not be mastered, at which point the "leading edge" of evolution shifted to another seemingly more primitive phylum better able to adapt to the new configuration and survive.

Could not the Hebrew development, especially with the advent of Christianity grafted onto the Hebrew root, be seen as just such a shift in the evolutionary process? More urbane thinking, attempting to reduce whimsical and unpredictable gods to some kind of order, realized that the gods were only less dependable manifestations of an ultimately dependable cosmic order, an order immediately knowable by the mind of man because human reason participates in the divine logos which underlies the order of nature. As long as the vision of the cosmos as a stable and dependable order remained, demythologized animism provided an admirably suitable model which drew all reality into a rationally comprehensible whole. However, when political events began to dissolve the unity of the Greek world and the chaos around the edges penetrated nearer and nearer the center, the tensions introduced into the monistic model became more and more insufferable. Deeper probing into the nature of being brought not greater assurance of order but, reflecting the Hellenistic mood, the suspicion that a fundamental ambiguity underlies everything. A split within the monism became inevitable if thought were to reflect reality as it was experienced. Thus the classic dialectic between mind or spirit and matter became radicalized into a split between good and evil, thereby abandoning the classic Greek assumption concerning the basic perfection, beauty, and goodness of the cosmos. Religion became a means of rising above the ambiguity in a temporary ecstasy which was the foretaste of an ultimate translation that spelled release from this acorn and a return to the less ambiguous center of the cosmos. In a time of breakdown, therefore, the cosmic-monistic model was not able to offer the vision of unity which it initially promised.

Into this situation came an unlikely combination, the more primitive Hebrew God, who was distinct from the cosmos though ultimately Lord over it, and his Son, who was the means by which the victory over the evil rulers of this present age was to be achieved. In Christ the world was invaded by the

life-affirming, transcendent Yahweh, who claimed the world again for his own, achieving a major preliminary breakthrough in the resurrection, which served as a sign of the redemption to be accomplished in the whole creation. By coming from "outside," this God was able to represent a new possibility over against existence as it was given, an Archimedean point from which the world could be seen from a new perspective. At the same time, through his Son, he was involved in the world, struggling with the powers of disorder to actualize his lordship and overcome chaos. Thus, while not denying the evil of the present age, the Hebrew-Christian model was able to place the problematic of human existence on a historical plane and give assurance that the present confusion would be overcome in a historical process, the consummation of which already could be participated in through faith and hope. By introducing a model inconceivable within the monistic framework, the Hebrew-Christian combination opened up a developmental vision of the world, thus enabling thought and belief to move around the impasse which at that point had blocked the further advance of the animistic, cosmological model. Hence the process continued with the Hebrew-Christian branch now serving as the "evolutionary axis."

Within a brief span of years the Greek tradition reasserted itself, however, for its monistic vision of the cosmos retained its appeal for those minds seeking the perfection of one all-encompassing whole. Greek thought was grafted onto the Hebrew-Christian stem, producing a new plant which for several centuries bore fruit abundant and varied enough to meet the needs of what became known as "Christendom." The Hebrew-Christian historical vision was to a certain extent modified in the direction of cosmological oneness by sacramentalism and the church's preempting of the eschatological kingdom. At the same time, however, the animistic model was fundamentally abrogated by the transcendent God who never could be entirely equated with his creation, though repeated attempts were made to identify him with being.

Hence the two models lived together in a somewhat uneasy truce, the tension between them the source of most of the metaphysical embarrassments and semantic difficulties of the Middle Ages. The reintroduction of Aristotelian thought into the West threatened to intensify this internal tension until

Thomas Aquinas, in a superb feat of synthetic reason, superimposed the Hebrew-Christian, Creator-creature model on Aristotle's dialectical monism by identifying the Aristotelian essentially internal causal agent with the transcendent God who operates in the process from without.

Perhaps the most extraordinary triumph of self-contradiction, among many such triumphs in the history of human thought, was the fusion of this conception of a self-absorbed and self-contained Perfection—of that Eternal Introvert who is the God of Aristotle—at once with the Jewish conception of a temporal Creator and busy interposing Power making for righteousness through the hurly-burly of history, and with primitive Christianity's conception of a God whose essence is forthcoming love and who shares in all the griefs of his creatures.¹³

Aristotelianism proved in time to be fate-laden for the Christian model, for it reintroduced the classic Greek optimism regarding the knowability of the world and its laws (i.e., the demythologized animistic gods), which not only captured the imagination with its aesthetically satisfying monistic perfection but soon demonstrated its efficiency in unlocking the secrets of the natural world. Defections from the Hebrew model were not so much intentional as a result of the obvious success to be gained by employing its alternative. To be sure, there were continuing efforts to combine the two traditions, and John Locke's deistic solution was to serve for more than a century. Yet, as the perfectly balanced cosmic watch loomed ever larger in importance, the watchmaker receded into the background where eventually, the victim of the law of parsimony, he was no longer needed. Laplace's reply to the question concerning where God was to be found in his system illustrates the end of the deist road: "I have no need for that hypothesis."

Absolutizing the universe and its law carried with it its own difficulties, however. If order is completely self-contained and mechanistic, what of human freedom? The Romanticists protested as vigorously as they could against the foreclosure of human creativity and freedom implicit in the mechanistic scheme of things. By this time, however, the Creator had been so thoroughly identified with the cosmic watchmaker that the Romanticists' protests had to be directed against the Creator as

¹³ Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (New York: Harper, 1936), p. 157.

well as his world. Moreover, they were themselves so fully under the spell of the monistic model that they assumed that the only way out of the locked-in world of the rationalists was by plunging themselves into the nonrational vitalities of nature, thus seeking to prove that the monistic world has its chaotic and free aspects as well as its rational order. Prometheus was their hero because he had opposed the order of the gods in the name of human self-realization.¹⁴ Dissatisfied with mechanistic monism, the Romanticists were nevertheless unable to appropriate the possibilities for freedom and creativity implicit in duality because the Christian God had become identified with a deterministic scheme of things.

Rationalistic determinism was to fall, however, with the rise in the nineteenth century of evolutionary thinking, which can be traced in part at least to the recovery of Christian impulses regarding the importance of history in the process of salvation, notably in Hegel. What Hegel really succeeded in doing, however, was to introduce a dynamic element into monism. By injecting historical tension into being he reinterpreted the divine cosmos as a divine history. What may yet prove to be a more radical undermining of determinism came, however, from another side, from the research of one who began as an apologist for an enlightened deism. The impact of Charles Darwin's thinking on the traditional Christian world view is well known; what is less obvious is the impact of evolutionary thought on deterministic monism, which may in the end prove at least as far-reaching.

Darwin was one of those theological students who, after com-

¹⁴ A good indication of the very real changes effected by the Hebrew-Christian orientation—in spite of the Romanticists' unawareness of it—can be seen in the change in the response of theatergoers and readers to this classic Greek tragic figure. Prometheus also aroused sympathy from his Greek viewers, who were not always inclined to accept without protest the actions of capricious gods. But they never doubted that Prometheus' punishment was deserved, for his sin was against the order of things. In his hubris he had overstepped his bounds, and punishment was the only way to redress the balance within the cosmos. The Romanticists, however, not only applauded Prometheus' deed but thought his punishment unjust. Without realizing it, they presupposed a transcendent Creator independent enough from the cosmos and its law to be able to redress the balance without having to accomplish it through intra-worldly expiation. Cf. Prosser Hall Frye, *Romance and Tragedy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), pp. 133 ff.

pleting his degree, opted for a specialized ministry. He had intended to settle down somewhere as a country curate. During his studies, however, he was influenced by the English divine, William Paley, whose *Natural Theology* fascinated him. Paley was by avocation an anatomist of no mean stature, who used his meticulous research into the intricacies of nature (e.g., his study of the human eye) to reinforce his theological points, seeking to show that an empirical investigation of the natural world would inevitably demonstrate the beneficence of an almighty Creator. Extending his studies to ecology (the adaptation of organisms to their environment), Paley argued that the immense variety of organisms which inhabit a given environment can only be explained by reference to a beneficent Creator who by this differentiation made it possible for more creatures to exist side by side in a limited space. "If all animals coveted the same element, shelter or food, it is evident how much fewer could be supplied and accommodated than what at present live conveniently together. . . . What one rejects another delights in."¹⁵ Paley assumed, of course, that this variety had existed since the original creation and had been maintained by seminal identity. The complexity of organisms and their social inter-relatedness thus point to the biblical God of order and love who wills the good of all his creatures.

After his theological examinations in 1831, young Darwin, who had also pursued the avocation of naturalist, was persuaded to join an expedition setting out on the good ship "Beagle" to study the western coast of South America. As the ship's naturalist he would have an excellent opportunity to gather further evidence to support Paley's claims. His studies of fossils and living species up and down the coast of South America and in the Galapagos Islands soon convinced Darwin, however, that there were basic fallacies in Paley's notion of special creation, and he returned to England with his deist faith badly shaken. He had gone out assuming a supernaturally established order in the Aristotelian, Thomistic, Lockean pattern, and had found instead an immense variety of seemingly random variations. A different model had to be found to make sense out of the data. The model which finally emerged, under the influence of

¹⁵ William Paley, *Natural Theology, The Works of William Paley* (London, 1824), p. 485. Quoted in Günter Altner, *Charles Darwin und Ernst Haeckel, Theologische Studien*, No. 85 (Zürich: EVZ-Verlag, 1966), p. 22.

the geologist Lyell, and Malthus' studies on populations, was what Darwin termed "natural selection," which took into account random variations and the survival of the "fittest" of these variations.

The effect of Darwin's theory of natural selection was to eliminate the whole traditional notion of divine causality and teleology. That happy combination of a supernatural Director of an Aristotelian world which St. Thomas put together had finally come unglued. Not a benevolent, purposeful Providence but a blind, uncaring Chance ruled the world—or so it seemed to many in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

If Darwinism proved traumatic for deist theology, however, it was at least partially because it undermined the monistic-deterministic half of the assumptions of that theology. The notion of a closed, mechanistic universe, so prominent in the classical period of Western scientific development, came under attack with repercussions which continue down to the present. The ideas of indeterminacy and chance opened up new possibilities for cognitive models. Indeed, much of the scientific progress made in the last seventy-five years would have been impossible had not the notion of a rounded-off, complete, and perfected universe, deriving ultimately from cosmic monism by way of the Greeks, been called into question. As yet, however, there is little recognition that what is involved is basically a theological crisis in science itself, and scientists still continue for the most part to operate with what is essentially an animistic theological assumption, *viz.*, that the universe is self-contained and includes within itself all the reality there is. This theological dogma is the more pervasive because it is so hidden and unrecognized. It is to be found, for instance, in the common assumption that in spite of all the irregularities in the world as it is experienced there is a final order which underlies everything and that all "chance" occurrences will ultimately be explained as consistent with this larger order.

Thus the average scientist finds it as difficult as did his animist ancestors to imagine any reality not reducible to cosmic order. When he turns to the theologian for some help in adjusting his private beliefs (the realm to which an otherwise irrelevant religion is relegated) he is most often searching for a god who will function within the framework of his basic, unquestioned theological assumption. Yet his scientific working assumptions

are likely to be much less deistic and much more probabilistic and open-ended, and do not actually require—indeed, are in conflict with—the kind of God he assumes he needs. Our attempts to deal with his situation apologetically are not made easier by the fact that practically all the technical language of theology has been mediated to us by the Greek tradition and comes already tainted with monist presuppositions. This language is understandably hard put to describe the reality of a God who is not a dimension of the cosmos. The alternative available to us, biblical language, may be more satisfactory in terms of "the existence it enshrines" (Bultmann), but it is so archaic as to make reception of its meaning more a matter of mystical intuition and the gift of the Holy Spirit than rational formulation and logical discourse. Thus at the crucial point we are left practically speechless.

How have others sought to move around the impasse posed by the two contradictory models which form the inheritance of the West? We turn briefly to three contemporary figures, each of whom has made a concerted effort to resolve the problem: Paul Tillich, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and Jürgen Moltmann.

Perhaps more than any other theologian of our time, Paul Tillich has sought to deal with the issues posed by the two models. "The problem of the two absolutes," he calls it in an essay entitled, "The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion," claiming that Western thought was placed in an intolerable situation when final categories emerged from two directions in the ancient world.

In two developments Western humanity has overcome its age-old bondage under the "powers." . . . These "powers" were conquered *religiously* by their subjection to one of them, the god of the prophets of Israel; his quality as the god of justice enabled him to become the universal God. The "powers" were conquered *philosophically* by their subjection to a principle more real than all of them [*viz.*, being]; its quality as embracing all qualities enabled it to become the universal principle. . . . The problem created by the subjection of the "powers" to the absolute God and to the absolute principle is "the problem of the two Absolutes." How are they related to each other? . . . *Deus* and *esse* cannot be unconnected!¹⁶

¹⁶ *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 11-12.

The solution, suggests Tillich, is to be found in the simple statement in which the two absolutes are joined: "God is." For the question of the two absolutes can be answered only by identifying that fundamental awareness out of which the questions of both being and God arise, that "immediate awareness of the Unconditioned" which is implicit whenever being is sought as the answer to the problem of nonbeing, or whenever the term "God" presupposes that essential power which undergirds everything that is.¹⁷ "God is being-itself" becomes the basic formula of Tillich's philosophical theology by means of which he hopes to overcome the fatal rifts in Western thought and bring values into one coherent whole through a correlation based on a recognition of the essential identity of all cultural manifestations in one ultimate source of meaning and being.

Tillich's remarkable attempt to achieve a mutually enriching and empowering synthesis of the two traditions by identifying their mutual source is one of the great theological contributions of our time. If the analysis of the origins of the notion of being given above is accurate, however, the very concept of being has its home in the rationalization of animism. Being is the animating principle of the cosmos without which nothing that is can exist. When this cosmological divine principle is merged with Yahweh, what is the result? Rather than resolving the problem of the two absolutes, has not Tillich in effect undone the Hebrew contribution and dissolved the Hebrew model of the God who transcends the cosmos? We are left with only one Absolute, to be sure, but it is the absolute cosmos. The cosmic principle is the final reality from which there is no appeal, because in a monism nothing can transcend the ultimate category. Of course it should be noted that Tillich's ontological absolute is no "dead identity." There is movement within being, as being separates itself from itself (in the Son) and reunites with itself (in the Spirit). But this activity all takes place—as in the case of Hegel—within the monistic model. Thus, in spite of the stress which Tillich lays upon the category of "history" in his system, the historically accidental is judged to be meaningful only insofar as it embodies and expresses the awareness of being, the ontological depth, which is the religious dimension of all historical experience. The question may legitimately be raised, therefore, as to whether Tillich's approach is capable of doing justice to

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

history in its sheer happening without first reducing it to ontological categories on the basis of which it can be "interpreted." Is a method which must reduce history to being in order to deal with it able to cope with the "random variations" which constitute history as evolutionary man understands it? If not, we may be forced to look elsewhere for the answer to the problem of the two absolutes.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the French paleontologist-theologian, has sought to construct a total view of the world which would take into account the absence of causality in the traditional Aristotelian sense in the evolutionary process. Teilhard's "vision" of the cosmos is that of a giant organism which is developing in a process of "complexification" toward the fullest possible realization of its potentialities. Just at the point of complete realization, however, there will be a breakthrough to the *Pleroma*, to the transcendent realm in which God shall be all in all and the "divine milieu" will be complete.¹⁸

Teilhard resists easy classification. Much of his language would seem to place him squarely in the animistic tradition. God would appear to be identical with the "radial energy" which guides the process of development. The world itself is being transformed into the divine body of Christ in a pattern which gains its inspiration from the doctrine of transubstantiation.¹⁹ Yet Teilhard protests against those who would label him a classical pantheist and insists that he is merely spelling out what was implicit in St. Paul's description of that eschatological fulfillment in which God would become *ta panta en pasin*. "Classical pantheism," says Teilhard, "seduces us by its vistas of perfect universal union," which could result only in fusion and unconsciousness. In that case the end of the evolutionary process would be an absorption of the world by God.

Our God, on the contrary, pushes to its furthest possible limit the differentiation among the creatures he concentrates within himself. At the peak of their adherence to him, the elect also discover in him the consummation of their individual fulfillment. Christianity alone therefore saves . . . the essential aspiration of all mysticism: *to be united* (that is, to become the other) *while remaining oneself*. More attractive than any world-gods, whose eternal seduction it embraces, transcends and purifies . . . our divine *milieu* is at the antipodes of

¹⁸ *The Phenomenon of Man*, p. 322.

¹⁹ *Le Milieu Divin* (London: Collins; Fontana edition, 1960), pp. 123 ff.

false pantheism. The Christian can plunge himself into it wholeheartedly without the risk of finding himself one day a monist.²⁰

In spite of these claims, however, Teilhard could still be accused of an internally differentiated monism similar to that of Tillich were it not that his espousal of evolution throws the whole process onto the plane of historical accident. He rejects the *illuminati*, the mystical visionaries who in their eagerness to stress the divine substance do away with the "exacting but salutary reality" of historical accidents, imagining divine action without relation to the "systems of material order in their complex inter-relationships."²¹ As a result divine action must be seen by the *illuminati* as supernatural intervention in the natural order that essentially destroys the latter and leaves as residue only the suprahistorical reality clothed in the disguise of what are now essentially disconnected historical events. Teilhard wants to insist that it is precisely in the historical accidents that the world is moving toward God, so that the Christian is not under obligation to abandon the perceptible, accidental and material but rather to "prolong" them along their "common axis, which links them to God."²² In this way the possibility of a holistic view is opened up for the Christian, without stopping the normal historical process. The cosmos is unified, but this unity will be fully actualized only at the final consummation.

The link between the historical accidents of the process and the final consummation is what Teilhard calls *radial energy*, which operates in combination with and contrast to the other key force in the evolutionary process, *tangential energy*. The latter is that type of energy familiar to us. It is empirically measurable and is subject to the second law of thermodynamics, entropy. It will continue until finally expended. This is the main drive which is operative in the expansion of the universe (Teilhard appears to presuppose the "big bang" theory of cosmic genesis) and in the evolutionary process on this planet. It appears to operate randomly, pushing forward until it meets resistance and then veering in the direction of least resistance. Tangential energy pushes the evolutionary process from behind, as it were. However, the other force, radial energy,

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 119.

operates in a quite different way. It attracts the evolutionary process toward a goal, toward that which still lies ahead of the process, toward the Omega Point, the consummation. It is not subject to entropy since its source of power is the magnetic attraction of a goal toward which it is drawing ever nearer. If tangential energy operates in the empirically observable, the *without*, radial energy operates in the *within* of things on every level from the inner mystery of the atom to the mind of man, where the evolutionary process achieves consciousness of itself. Radial energy is not discernible by empirical investigation, and its results can only be seen as one looks backward over the history of evolution. Only then does it become apparent that the process has an overall direction, a purposefulness given to it not by an original cause which in the deist sense predetermined the course of events, but by the goal, the *telos*, which is luring it on. In past developments of the phylum Teilhard can discern a pattern which has given rise to man as the leading edge of the evolutionary movement. Following the trajectory of this pattern into the future he is able to predict the developments which still lie ahead, though the path toward the future is not predetermined and the process itself will appear to be completely random. Nevertheless the goal is fixed and will continue to exercise its attracting power on the unfolding history of evolution until, by whatever devious routes are necessary due to the accidents of history, the *telos* will finally be reached.

While undeniably under the influence of the monistic model, Teilhard nevertheless transcends it, at least preliminarily, in his eschatology. Here a comparison with Tillich is instructive. Eschatology for Tillich is the "prolongation into the absolute" of those realities in history which have most profoundly exhibited ontological power.²³ The "eschatological imagination" projects an ideal age which is the absolute form of those moments of ontological awareness which occur only fragmentarily in history. Thus the eschaton is not part of the historical process as such but rather the rudimentary ontological consciousness cast into the form of a historical myth by the imagination. The eschatological horizon of being is a projection forward from the ontological center, and is therefore, in the first instance, not so much concerned with an actual evolutionary process as it is

²³ "Redemption in Cosmic and Social History," *The Journal of Religious Thought*, Vol. III, No. 1 (Autumn-Winter, 1946), p. 19.

the expression of an ontological state. Naturally, as the basis of the possibility of history, ontology will inevitably be reflected in the actual course of history. But that course will only actualize what is already given. The radically new is not possible. The "end" of history can only be the realization on the historical plane of that which already *is* ontologically. Thus Tillich's system is locked in the confines of pre-Darwinian German Idealism and is not able to treat the historically new and accidental with seriousness insofar as it cannot be reduced to ontologically essential elements.

Teilhard, on the other hand, sees each new stage in the evolutionary movement as a realization of the unique on the way to the radically new, the Omega Point. The cosmos is an unfinished organism which will remain incomplete until it is brought to fulfillment through historical development. The real lies not in the depths, therefore, but in the future.

There is one aspect of Teilhard's thought, however, which causes his scientifically oriented readers grave difficulties, and that is the seemingly ideological element which is introduced by his concept of radial energy. For Teilhard it is not too much to say that this concept illuminates the whole; it is the means by which he is able to give the evolutionary movement theological significance. Yet his detractors find it an unnecessary addition backed by no empirical evidence and no demonstrable advantages as a scientific model. A question could be raised from the side of the Hebrew orientation as well, for radial energy would appear to be the point at which, for Teilhard, the divine and the cosmos are identical, a fact which has subjected him continuously to charges of pantheism. The charge is partially false, because radial energy is not simply identical with the world but is rather that force which is at work "within," not satisfied with the world in its present form but transforming it in the light of its telos.²⁴ But the charge is also partially true in that the eschatological expectation is for the universalization of the within in a Christic diaphany in which God becomes all in all. Teilhard can defend himself by insisting that at that point the world will have been taken up into God and completely spiritualized, so that God will be all there is. Such a vision may save him from the technical charge of pantheism, but it only serves to reinforce the suspicion that his ultimate

²⁴ Cf. *Le Milieu Divin*, p. 152.

eschatological model is monistic. Hence, like Tillich, Teilhard is unable to offer us an orientation which finally does justice to the biblical distinction between God and the world, a distinction which the eschaton serves not to dissolve but to reestablish and fulfill.

Jürgen Moltmann is a third contemporary thinker who has focused attention on the conflict between the traditions which have informed the life and thought of the West. He draws a contrast between "epiphany religions," on the one hand, and "faith rooted in promise" (*Verheissungsglaube*), on the other. The former is similar to what I have termed the animistic-monistic tradition, while the latter designates the Hebraic type of faith. Epiphany religions are preoccupied with repeating the sacred past through cultic celebrations of the appearances of the gods in order that the gods might again draw near and effect the renewal of the cosmos. Epiphanic man lives as closely as possible to the gods in order to avoid the threats of historical meaninglessness by dwelling in that which is eternal.²⁵ The appearance of Yahweh to the Hebrews, however, is "linked up with the uttering of a word of divine promise," a promise which points to a future fulfillment in time and space. Israelite faith is thus not so much an escape from history but a turning toward future history as the place where the problems of history will be resolved by means of history.

Moltmann seeks to do theology from an eschatological perspective, so that eschatology is not just an appendix to an otherwise complete system but a perspective which qualifies the whole enterprise. In his analysis of various theological alternatives Moltmann casts his net wide and manages to catch most of the big theological fish playing in epiphany territory, though many of them (Karl Barth, for instance) would heartily resent his classification. Relying on Ernst Bloch's analysis of the phenomenon of hope and his "ontology of the not yet," Moltmann attempts to show how both Barthian theological positivism and Bultmannian existentialism have abandoned the dimension of future fulfillment in favor of a type of immediacy which he claims parallels that of the epiphany religions. In opting for Bloch, Moltmann has chosen a philosophical orientation which opens up the possibility of appropriating evolutionary

²⁵ Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM Press, 1967), p. 98.

thinking, but without the necessity of an ideological concept, such as radial energy, to achieve some ontological continuity between traditional theological notions of causation and the random variation which operates in evolution. The connection between the present and the future is in terms not of a cryptic principle at work in the cosmos but simply the drive toward realization in the cosmos itself, i.e., Teilhard's tangential energy. The evolutionary process is essentially goal-less; it cannot anticipate the future but can only react to the possibilities available in the present situation, moving in the direction of least resistance. Nevertheless, evolution is a constant transcending of what has been, a constant adjusting to new environmental conditions in terms of which various aspects of single or societal organisms can come into their own, aspects which were previously only tendencies. Moltmann describes the process in this way:

The stringency of the causality of natural science is renounced and the transition in historic movements is described not as a transition from *causa* to *effectus*, but from possibility to reality. What stands between possibilities and realized realities is not a causal necessity, but tendency, impulse, inclination, trend, specific leanings toward something, which can become real in certain historic constellations.²⁶

This means that the evolutionary process is itself open to being influenced. Indeed, what we experience today is no longer pure natural evolution but "cultural evolution," the selection and encouragement by man of those tendencies and trends which he deems advantageous to his own development. The meaning and purpose in the evolutionary process is therefore introduced by man, which is not to say that meaning and purpose are completely subjective, for both man and his decisions are part of the "objective" process, responding to tendencies and making possible new trends. Man is the place where the process transcends itself and becomes aware of itself.²⁷ Man is therefore that creature who can hope and plan, who can transcend the present movement in the awareness of new possibilities which are never fully realized. He remains dissatisfied with every present achieved by the process and pushes on toward the new.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

²⁷ Cf. Julian Huxley's definition of man as "evolution become conscious of itself," Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, p. 243.

Accepting Bloch's analysis and description of man as that creature who hopes, Moltmann is nevertheless concerned that hope, if it is to provide the genuinely teleological element in the historical process, be not just the transcending of every given—which evolution would accomplish in any case—but directional. This is the point at which he must modify Bloch's general phenomenology of hope with the specific content of the Christian promise. Christianity gives man not just self-transcendence—which after all would be meaningless were it infinite but undirected—but a promise, not just hope in hope but a goal in terms of which the process can be evaluated and judged at any stage along the way. Eschatological hope overcomes historical relativism by means of a destination to be reached through the historical process.

Is this promised kingdom not just as mythological and ideological as Teilhard's radial energy? Is it not an "illusion"? To be sure, it is no more subject to empirical verification because presently it does not exist; yet it cannot be classified as illusory because it functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy, having its effect upon the shape which the future takes. If man indeed operates as the director of cultural evolution, then his hopes, his aspirations, his plans are the agency which selects out for cultivation those tendencies that are congruent with his own desires for the future. Far from being illusory, hope is the greater "realism," for it alone "takes seriously the possibilities with which all reality is fraught. It does not take things as they happen to stand or to lie, but as progressing, moving things with possibilities of change."²⁸ Hope makes possible that which shall be! Thus it provides an analogy to the creativity of the God "who calls that which is not, that it might be" (Rom. 4:17).

In his theology of hope Moltmann has provided a concept of God which at least partially satisfies the demands of evolutionary thinking without merging God in some way with his creation. The reality of the world and of history is not abrogated by being reduced to an ontological essence or by being deified. Moltmann grants the world the independence it has as creation, without the necessity to transform it finally into something other than world. At the same time, the reality of God is not neglected but conceptualized in analogy to the future. Like the future, God

²⁸ *Theology of Hope*, p. 25.

is real and is constantly influencing the form which our present takes, but is nonetheless always beyond our grasp, never fully realizable in any present actuality. What is less clear in Moltmann's treatment is the nature of the promises themselves. He insists that the promises are the only form in which we "have" God in the present, yet he refuses to speculate about supernatural intervention in the course of history to effect events such as exodus and resurrection that give rise to these promises, leaving one to conclude that the promissory events are in some sense *historical accidents* and in that regard the same as all other events in history. Is it possible, however, to be fully conscious of the historical relativity of revelatory events and at the same time receive them as acts of God? If the promises are explicable on the level of historical accidents is not their divine authority undermined? Or, to put it in the form of a challenge to Christian faith, are we willing to allow the accidents of history (an underdeveloped Hebrew deity, a strong wind across a marsh, the execution of a nonconformist, an empty tomb, and a few visions) to mediate to us our understanding of what is to be trusted in the present and hoped for in the future? Is an evolutionary variation, an ancient semitic high god whose memory happened to survive because he was fittest to speak to the configuration of that particular historical moment, to be the norm by which the whole of history is measured and judged? To these nagging questions of historical relativism Moltmann provides no clear answer, and we are forced to press on alone.

Historical accidents, in themselves quite explicable in immanent terms, become nevertheless the means by which we are taught to trust history and even to hope in anticipation of the realization of the possibilities inherent in the accidental. How does this come to pass?

The first point to be made is a general one: every new event has the effect of undermining the absoluteness of past events, which no longer can be understood simply in terms of themselves or their previous context but are now drawn into relativity to the new moment which transcends them and throws them into a new light. Thus it is possible to say of such a moment that in it the power of "transcendence" is felt, i.e., the past is thrown into question, relativized, placed in a new context. While this may explain how events can transcend the past, it does not clarify how they can transcend the future. Would not every

new moment in history as such he a transcending of the past, as is assumed for instance by process philosophy? If every moment is in turn subject to being transcended, how can any final claim be made for those historical occasions which have been decisive for Christian faith? The very experience of transcendence in the form of historical relativity would seem to be a denial of Christian claims.

Transcendence as described thus far is an experience within the historical process which in many respects parallels transcendence as experienced by primitive man. Indeed, in a variety of ways contemporary man is caught up in a *historical monism* which resembles cosmic monism. He understands himself as part of a historical process in which every moment transcends the last, and yet the process as such has no discernible goal. This is the form the monistic model takes as it emerges from evolutionary thinking. It differs from previous monisms in that it views the cosmos not as a closed, completed, perfected reality but as an ongoing process in which new possibilities are constantly opening up. Yet it parallels the cultic situation of primitive religion in that life is renewed only as it joins with the vitalistic forces of the cosmos, which are now located, of course, on the ever-advancing frontier of progress. Thus contemporary devotees are obligated to rush from one new doctrine to the next, drawing from each whatever dynamism is available to sustain life until the next moment and the next new wind of doctrine come along. One lives close to the gods by living breathlessly on the evolutionary edge. But such a life is inevitably directionless, for evolution as such can have no goal because natural selection operates only in terms of the circumstances given in the present and has no way of anticipating what circumstances may obtain in the next moment. An evolutionary model is clearly not enough unless it is basically modified by the Hebrew-Christian insight.

Just as the Hebraic understanding of the distinction between Creator and creation made a strategic contribution to the release of man from his bondage to cosmic monism, so the same distinction as it recurs in Christianity—expressed on the historical plane as eschatology—may well offer an alternative to the progressive, yet in basic respects still locked-in, world of historical monism. The Hebrew-Christian model explains how the promises which have come to expression in historic events

transcend not only the past but the future, and why these decisive events are therefore themselves in principle unsurpassable. The historical accidents of exodus and crucifixion-resurrection are not just moments of transcendence in the sense already described. They do not just throw the past into a new light, they are also understood as establishing a continuing relationship between man and one who is the Lord of history, i.e., one who already stands at the end or goal of the process. By the very nature of their content, moreover, the historical accidents preserved by the Christian memory make it possible to grasp ultimate reality as both transcendent and personal, both discrete and related. This personal factor makes it possible, in turn, to conceive of the relationship as extended in time while preserving the independence of the partners. Thus transcendence is experienced not just as momentary inspiration destined to be dissipated and made obsolete by the next historical moment, but as *covenant*, as a relationship created in the present but signifying a commitment into the future to one who from his side maintains the bond with man in history while at the same time standing at the goal of history. This kind of experience of transcendence, which might be termed *covenantal-eschatological*, becomes a "promontory" jutting out into the flux of history to provide a vantage point from which the goal of history can be glimpsed. Such promontories are themselves historical, made of the same stuff, so to speak, as the rest of history; yet, as signs of a covenant with that which stands over against the historical process as well as standing in it, they provide that essential Archimedian point necessary to gain leverage on history, both critically and teleologically. The covenantal promise, since it comes from the goal of history, proves inexhaustible in history. No earthly kingdom is able fully to actualize it, so that those living under the promise are never satisfied with the status quo and press forward toward the eschaton. At the same time, the promise serves as the principle of cultural selection whereby evolution is guided, new history shaped, and the creativity of God comes to bear on history through the people of the promise.

Now it should be apparent that the Hebrew-Christian orientation is not necessarily in conflict with evolutionary modes of thought and may indeed serve to modify the latter in such a way as to overcome the historical monism implicit in a point

of view which strictly speaking operates willy-nilly and cannot anticipate the future. In proposing such a new alignment, however, one is only too conscious of the continuing problems which plague biblical and theological language, problems which are in part endemic to any attempt to conceptualize a reality which transcends history and which bursts historical categories as well as spatial, and which will therefore always partially elude us—as does the future. Thus the temptation to absolutize any model, including the Hebrew-Christian, should be obviated in the awareness (negatively) of the limitations of all models and (positively) of the advantages to be gained from the continuing dialectic between those models which have in the past proved so resourceful in the development of thought. The theologian's task in any case is to keep the options clear, lest, in the effort to overcome the tension between the "two Absolutes," the continuing contribution of the one or the other be lost. A pluralistic age will not only demand alternatives but will profit from the dialectic between them.

If the "historical accidents" of the Christian memory do provide, however, the promontory which enables contemporary man to trust and to hope, as have his fathers in the past, the Christian faith will have demonstrated its "fitness" and "truth" in the form most readily acknowledged by the pragmatic mood of our time.