

## *The Living God in the Living Word*

It is helpful to recall the circumstances which gave rise to the suggestion that the subject for this Institute should be "The Living God." I think it was during the 1966 World Methodist Conference in London that a group of theologians suggested that it was time something constructive was said about God. We were feeling the full force of the "God is dead" approach and, maybe with typical religious conservatism, reacted in the way that has produced our overall subject.

If we keep this in mind we shall more clearly see our objective. We came to this Institute on serious business—not to play games, linguistic or political, with a dead God, like medieval men playing football with a skull. While it was proper for us to consider problems raised by philosophy and science, while we had to take into account the contemporary world situation, in the end we were under obligation to help one another to confirm our faith. We are professionals, and it is right that we should pursue our own scholarly interests. We have as much right to do this as medical men or space explorers. But in the end the medical man must produce better health if he is to justify his work. The same is true of the space expert. Even if the end product is only the satisfaction of man's innate curiosity the enterprise will eventually be evaluated in terms of human progress, achievement, or satisfaction. And the same is true of theology. We must not forget the end product, which is faith; some clue about the meaning of life; some answer to the mystery of our existence. If theology is more than a game, if it is serious business, it must have an end product. I am not precluding the possibility that such faith may

### THE LIVING GOD IN THE LIVING WORD

not involve the "God" concept—or will use that concept in a radically altered form. But if faith, meaning, response, activity—these are the end products of theology—or similar effects are not produced through our discussions in a way that is comprehensible to ordinary people, then, I submit, we are wasting our time.

This point is all the more relevant today because theologians are in some danger of producing highly complicated answers to artificially abstruse questions of their own devising. I believe the great theologians have always been conscious of the ordinary man peeping over their shoulders as they write. We have some manifestations of biblical study as a dreadful warning here. When the expert exegetes go into more and more technical and remote details about the meaning of some quite ordinary word, there comes a point when the man in the pew (or the man in the street, who is the same man engaged in a different exercise) loses interest and concludes that the discussion is of no concern to him. And he is right. Unless there is an end product of faith, meaning, commitment, activity, to biblical study, it too is a waste of time. I am sure that all my colleagues who share in this volume can be absolved from this criticism. But I see many signs that theology is "losing contact with the pack"—it is hiving off into its own interesting and highly devious byways. And the end of that is more likely to be the death of theology than the death of God.

Having aroused the worst suspicions of the philosophical theologians, I had better make my own position clear. I am not any sort of a biblical fundamentalist—no, not even one of those who subjects the Bible to the most searching and destructive criticism with one hand, and with the other blandly insists on the absolute finality of certain biblical expressions like "justification by faith" or "no apostolic succession in the N.T." I believe the Bible must be subjected to every legitimate test and investigation, and that we must bear the consequences of whatever results appear to be well founded. We have not yet fully grasped the significance of the modern biblical studies which have been going on for one-hundred years and more. We have not yet realized the effect on belief in God of the total questioning of biblical evidence. We still have to come to terms with the status of the Bible in modern theology.

Our attitude is noticeably ambivalent. "The Bible says . . ." What does it say? And in any case does it matter what it says? If the Bible is a collection of ancient literature of varied origin,

and if with all our contemporaries we reject the notion of external authority, what exactly is the status of the Bible in our enquiry about the Living God?

If we approach the Bible still hoping to have God's existence proved and his nature fully described, we shall be disappointed. This is just as well, for what we are now convinced cannot be done—i.e., God's reality proved and the mystery of his nature set out in words of one or two syllables—the Bible never purports to do. Whatever authority is possessed by the Bible is not external or binding on all, irrespective of their attitude and response. Perhaps one of the great insights of theology is to distinguish valid questions from false ones. Modern theology, I would submit, has not abandoned the Bible, but it has made it clear that some of the old questions put to the Bible are "improper"—not inconvenient or embarrassing, but just pointless because there is no answer to them. Such questions as "Is there a God?" "What is he like?" "Demonstrate his being and we will believe." All such questions are ignored by the Bible, which is no doubt very inconvenient if we think of them as of paramount importance. Faced with such blank refusal of our questions we can either abandon the Bible as useless because it does not answer our questions, or patiently try to understand what the Bible does say about God.

For it is undeniable that God figures rather significantly in the Scriptures. The fourth word of the Bible is God. "In the beginning God . . ." No proof, no argument, no concession to doubt apparently. But if one may put it so without offense, this phrase is like one of those little flags you sometimes see stuck into a plate of sandwiches: "Ham" or "Tongue" or "Salmon." The Bible has on it the flag, "The people who believe in God." It is the story of what it is like to believe in God—what sort of people they are who believe, what happens to them, what God does with them. In the end perhaps the question is, "Do I want to be one of those people who believe in God, now that I know what they are like?" and "What happens to people who believe in God? Is this something that seems to make sense to me too?" These two insights into man's experience and God's activity seem to provide a clue which is worth pursuing.

What happens to people who believe in God? A full answer to this question embraces all the Bible and all the subsequent life of the church. My selections are not random—but they are

such experiences as seem to me significant. No doubt every person can have his own selection, with profit. And one value of continual study of the Bible is that as our circumstances change, new insights arise from the experiences of the people of God.

I begin with the picture of belief in God as a disturbing challenge. The story of the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3 is often said to be more tightly packed with theology than any other chapter in the Bible. In addition to the explanation of the nature of sin there may well be a dim folk-memory of that stage of evolution when our primitive ancestors came down from the trees, where their diet was fruit, and became carnivorous land-dwellers. Desmond Morris graphically describes this stage in *The Naked Ape* without relating it to the Genesis story. But what a disturbing situation! Perhaps the story is too emphatic about tilling the ground and so forth as a punishment for disobedience to make clear that this was a tremendous step forward for mankind, in which God is involved as demand and succor, as Professor Farmer of Cambridge used to say. The same situation, with clearer theistic motivation, is portrayed in Abram's migration from Ur of the Chaldees. To believe in God is suddenly to find yourself on the road to you do not know where. And if the skeptic says that Abram was in fact responding to a pressure aroused by food shortage or an inborn tendency to seek change, that does not invalidate the point about God. For the man of faith finds himself in the same situations as other men, but he interprets those situations differently—in relation to his total experience and to his responsibilities.

We have already noticed the fact of disobedience in the story of the people of God, in the Garden of Eden story. But this needs expansion. The people of God do not always obey—and obedience is the response required of a believer. Nothing would be further from the truth than the idea that the believing people are constant, reliable, undeviating. Indeed, a good deal of their story is about their deviations—toward other gods, toward the attitude of their neighbors, toward wealth and ease. The rough and ready conclusion of Judges is that disobedience leads to hardship, defeat, shame; and there is a truth in this that the people of God have learned from bitter experience. But it is too comprehensive; it does not always fit the facts, as the book of Job demonstrates in a remarkable fashion.

Here we have another facet of the people of God—they are

called to obedience, but not to blind obedience. The man who metaphorically shakes his fist at the heavens because this equation between doing right and being successful does not always work out—this man is one of those people who believe in God. To believe is not to be free from question or to have no doubt.

Nor is it to have no trouble or fear. The remarkable fact about many of the Psalms is that they exactly fit repeated human experience. Perhaps it is natural to suppose that belief in God is a sort of insurance against calamity. But the Bible gives no encouragement to this supposition. Those who believe in God do have enemies who often come out on top. God does seem far away from his most devoted worshipers.

If all this comes close to saying that anything can happen to the people of God, and does, I should not quarrel with that. The Bible, especially the Old Testament, is, after all, in one sense the story of a very ordinary people. The distinguishing mark of the people of God is not that different events occurred in their story. The difference is the way these events were interpreted. People who believe in God experience God in many different situations, and this experience is determinative of their values, their aims, and their general attitude. It is not the situation, it is the meaning of any situation which makes it a revelation. Unless we understand this we do apply wrong criteria to the Bible as the living word of God. The commonest assumption is that the test of historical reliability of the record is of paramount importance, and when we can be assured of historical accuracy we can be assured of revelational validity. The mistake here is to suppose that the event is of first importance, when, as we have argued, it is rather the interpretation that matters. I am not implying that there is no reliable history in the Bible, or that history does not matter. But if revelation is in interpretation, then historicity is not the sole criterion; some undoubted historical events are not revelational, because no one living through them had faith to find God in them.

It may be useful to remind ourselves of the significance of this discussion of the people of God. I am arguing that the Bible presents us with an account of the varied experiences of people who believe in God. During World War II there was a great problem of teaching men to fly airplanes in the dark. I remember an instructor once telling me that if a pilot thought he could see something—an enemy plane maybe—he could see it more clearly

if he concentrated on a point just beside it. In somewhat the same way, if we want to see God it is best not to try to look directly at him, but to look at the people of God. If the Bible is clear about anything, it is that God can be known not directly, but only obliquely.

Several important conclusions regarding the reality of God arise from this. If revelation is in interpretation of particular events, it cannot be repeated by mere repetition of the events. A man or people can tell us how he or they found God in a specific situation. But he cannot say that we shall find God if we can reproduce the same situation. A mistake that is frequently made is the attempt to repeat the circumstances in which revelation first occurred. Because people found God in persecution, it is sometimes thought that a new wave of persecution would be good for the church. For the same sort of reason both episcopalians and others assume that a repetition of the form of the early church would be the way to unity—each of course assuming that their system would be verified by a proper reading of history. Fortunately it is impossible to say what was the form of the church in the first century—or rather that there was not one form—so our desire for repetition is bound to be abortive.

The Bible does not mediate the living God by describing situations of revelation and telling us to repeat them. The people of God cannot describe God to us, but they can tell us what belief in God meant to them. If belief is to mean anything to us it must be in our own situation, through our own experience. But does this mean that there are no cumulative insights, no established truths about God to be found? If this were the situation we should be wide open to the criticism that after all faith is merely subjective. The claim of the Christian faith is that through these varied experiences there are communicated truths about God which are authentic and reliable. One of the objects of this exercise is to clarify what God is known to be through the experience of revelation in the Bible and subsequently in the church. Especially I am concerned to discover if there is a view of God which maybe has been overlaid and obscured by medieval metaphysics. I am not hinting at a total rejection of metaphysics. Indeed, before I am finished I shall say something about a possible metaphysic to express the view of God found in the Bible. But we must first uncover and clarify

this biblical theism. Can we say what God is to the men of the Bible and Christian tradition?

A possible beginning is to say what God in the Bible is not. He is not metaphysical—not only because the Hebrews and Christians were not a philosophical people, but also because their awareness of God could never be put in substantial terms. They knew quite clearly that God was not to be equated with the world or with anything in the world. Nels Ferré puts this in an intriguing way in the title of his Peake Lecture, "The Living God of Nowhere and Nothing." God cannot be located, nor is he to be confused with any object whatsoever. God is not a person, as we normally understand this substantial term, although some uses of person in terms of active spirit, in no sense substantial, might apply. The basic difficulty here is twofold. Biblical language is more often mythical than realistic, but we have an apparently unavoidable tendency to literalize language. And faced with the problem of saying something about God, we inevitably use the only language we have, which is predominantly spatial and substantial. It is always necessary to look beneath the symbols to the reality. Demythologizing is necessary all through the Bible, not only in particularly difficult parts of the Gospels.

A deeper and much more persistent modern problem is whether it is possible to interpret the faith of the people of God without reference to God at all. This is not so outrageous a possibility as it looks. Certainly in some ways of understanding God, God does not exist for the people of God. For instance a god who is one among many does not exist. A god who can be portrayed as an idol does not exist. A god who is not affected by what happens to people does not exist. A god who cannot suffer does not exist. A god whose demands are a denial of human fulfillment does not exist. Yet I think we are bound to say that the distinctive quality of the Bible, perhaps in the end its only true distinction, is that God is. He is, although he cannot be defined, although he has never been seen. This is *the* fact of which the people of God are sure—not all the time, not without doubt and defeat and fear. But when they are truly and most fully God's people, this is their distinguishing mark. It may be highly inconvenient to assert God's reality when we have no empirical verification or philosophical certainty. It can plausibly be argued that quite often the concept of God is a barrier to

human understanding and progress. Men do in sober truth feel relieved if they can get rid of the God-hypothesis—at least for a time they feel liberated. But for good or ill, in spite of a multitude of misapprehensions, the people of God do believe in God.

They not only believe in activity conveniently summed up as of God. Certainly the emphasis on revelation as activity seems right. Not in propositions or theories, but in actions God is known. And this is the right way to put it. The activity of God—not just activity, however beneficial or benevolent. The conviction about God is not just a useful summary of forms of converging experience. God makes himself known in what he does—the actions, which significantly are within individual and corporate response, giving values and insight and energy, are actions of One who reveals his own person in what he does.

You will notice that nearly all that I have said so far is related to the Old Testament. Not quite all, in fact, and none without the assumed insight which comes through the Incarnation. This emphasis is deliberate. At the present time we stand in danger of thinking of everything as mini—from cars to skirts. And the greatest danger in this is to think of and try to worship a mini-God. I mean the tendency to simplify, to go for the essentials—so good a feature of modern theology—becomes misleading if we oversimplify God. One way of doing this is to think of God exclusively in terms of fatherhood. At one stage in late nineteenth-century Methodist theology this was a most welcome emphasis as it was in the general Enlightenment view. It replaced the concept of God as an all-wise Spirit. But it is a limitation if it becomes exclusive, and it should be recognized as such. A more prevalent modern oversimplification is to think of God exclusively in terms of Jesus or Christ. This is an expression of what Barth calls "theological favoritism," which he says is forbidden. It takes Barth to say this about Christomonism, for no one has made Christianity more Christocentric than Barth. Yet he realized that this is a wrong tendency. Without the full revelation of God which is portrayed in the Bible, God ceases to be central and relevant. Maybe this is a more effective way of disposing of God than a frontal attack on his viability!

This brings the issue squarely to the Incarnation. It is no denial of the continuity of revelation to say that for a Christian the being and activity of God must be interpreted through Jesus Christ. Here we immediately face the traditional questions about

the divinity of Christ and the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity. There are several pitfalls waiting for unwary feet hereabouts. If we approach the question of Christ's divinity with the assumption that we know what divinity is, and all we have to decide is whether Jesus of Nazareth meets the specifications of divinity, we are making large and quite unfounded presuppositions. If at the other extreme we say that there is no knowledge of God apart from Jesus, many of us would have to put in some sort of plea for natural theology. Certainly we must beware of the fallacy of thinking that we can best revere the name of Jesus by equating him with God. This is the basic error of Thomas Altizer in *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*—a book which has nevertheless many valuable contributions to make. And a further assumption that can easily lead to wrong conclusions is that the Holy Spirit is, so to speak, a little bit extra which is not really essential added on to the basic specification of God—a sort of deluxe fitting which is really an embarrassment in these days of theological austerity.

But the real questions about the Incarnation are absolutely pivotal. For when full weight has been given to the insight of the Old Testament, which I have briefly referred to, it must be admitted that the Incarnation is new, it is discontinuous with preceding revelation in one sense, yet in another equally valid sense it is the completion of the old. One most significant element of continuity is the place of the people of God. We can answer the direct question "Who is God?" only by describing what men have experienced who have believed in God—so equally it may be impossible to say what is the truth about the divinity of Jesus—was he divine, the Son of God, or not? Perhaps all we can do is to describe what it is like to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, which certainly the New Testament does most persuasively. This clearly means reading the Gospels in the light of the faith which produced them. It means avoiding every attempt to isolate the figure of Jesus and then determine his status as divine.

Karl Barth is surely right in saying that the question we have to answer is not "Is there a God?" but "Who is God?" One great weakness of modern theology is that it has not taken seriously the biblical answer to the question "Who is God?" Altizer uses the dialectical method of Hegel to produce the notion that God is the process of absolute self-negation. Consequently God be-

comes Jesus. The alleged transcendent other of primitive religion, which includes Hebraic religion, dies in order that God may appear as Jesus. So with some satisfaction Nietzsche is seen to be right. God, i.e., the transcendent-other-God, is dead. His death frees man from the burden of guilt and releases to him the possibilities of fulfillment in freedom.

The difficulty with this approach is its misunderstanding of the nature of revelation. It regards revelation as propositional instead of existential and thus fails to comprehend the nature of the divine impartation. It is based far too much on a particular philosophical theory, namely Hegelian dialectic, and I suspect too, it seeks to gain significance by the use of apparently shocking and outrageous terms like "the smell of a decomposing God"—borrowed of course from Nietzsche.

But there is more to this than a mere perverted desire for notoriety. This view of God would not have gained any support at all unless it at least appeared to speak to the human condition. Modern man has lost the sense of God, partly because God was the great standby or reserve, and we have devised methods which make such safeguards unnecessary. If "God" is merely a remote answer to questions which we have grown tired of asking, then we shall eagerly respond to the invitation to clear away the useless debris which remains from a former age of dependence. Later I want to suggest that we can only answer Barth's question if we take seriously the needs of the present human situation. A God who does not relate to human need is indeed better dead.

Another inadequate approach to the God question is in what has already been referred to as Christomonism. Those who take this line seem to me to have learned from Barth that Christology is the center of the Christian faith. But they have not learned from the same source that "Who God is" is answered christologically in terms of the Trinity. Again, more of that later. But for the moment we need to notice what is happening in this "Jesus-only" approach to God. In an attempt to answer the question what is it that persuades us that Jesus is God, or divine or the Son of God, a great deal is said about our Lord's humanity. This accords with the very proper modern view of the depth and significance of human nature. And also it relates directly to our modern insistence that faith must be immediately concerned with living—not with dry theories about life. In the life of Jesus

we see the possibilities and potentialities of real, rich humanity, or so we hope. We therefore tend to read into this first-century man all the fullness of life as we have come to know it. And some, including even Barth himself, thus assert that when this full humanity is openly displayed in Jesus, stripped of theological assertions like omniscience and supernaturalism, we are in fact seeing God. God and man meet in Jesus. When we really understand these categories we realize that they are really the same. We move toward an answer to the question about God when we move nearer to an understanding of human nature.

And here it is not difficult to see how religion may have less and less to do with the God question. For religion does not seem to illuminate the human question very clearly. If we want to know about man, we had better go to the psychologist, sociologist, and zoologist. We have become so impressed with the scope and accuracy of scientific views of man that we hesitate to put theological affirmations alongside them. Perhaps after all the proper, and only valuable, study of man is mankind!

Equally with the sense of the remoteness of God, which as we have seen gives respectability to the death of God, this concern with man has real substance. It has taken us a long time to realize the significance of the Incarnation as a taking hold of the seed of Abraham—not of angels. We cannot avoid looking at man if we look at God in Jesus, for the two are inextricably joined together. And for too long many expressions of religion have been openly anti-human. We now realize that we are right to be concerned with man, and any religion which gets in the way of this concern must perish.

Yet this attitude leaves great questions unanswered. Pursued to its logical conclusion it makes Christianity into a highly developed humanism, and I should take a lot of persuading that this is right. More seriously perhaps, it seems to me to isolate Jesus from his religious tradition, which he seemed to accept and build upon. And it also isolates him from the faith of the church. Behind the near-pathological desire to extend the area of historical trustworthiness in the Gospels is the hope that then we should not have to rely so much upon the faith of the few early Christians, who do not really look like twentieth-century sophisticated scientific men—and therefore cannot be relied upon. But even when we find the new revolutionary in the Gospels, however forward-looking his humanity is seen to be (and

I wonder whether the evidence can really support the edifice of fulfilled humanity which is being built upon it)—humanity is not divinity. God became man in Jesus. But this does not equate God and man. The message of Christianity is not that God and man are the same. It is that for us men and for our salvation God became man in Christ Jesus. This is what faith in God revealed in Jesus meant to the first Christians. Not that they had at last come across perfect humanity and that was enough, but that in a unique reality God had appeared in the form of a man. God still cannot be defined—he can only be known through faith in this man and in association with his faithful people.

A further defect in much modern theology is neglect and misunderstanding of the Holy Spirit. When John Robinson's *Honest to God* appeared a revolution in theology began which is still going on. It is no carping criticism of that breakthrough in modern apologetics to say that the essential insight which is missing is the doctrine of the Spirit. For too long the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has been regarded as an oddity attached to an otherwise straightforward belief. I can best answer that by beginning here and now to say something about Barth's question "Who is God?" For in one sense the Holy Spirit should be the first aspect of God to consider, insofar as the Holy Spirit is God in action—in direct relation with people. Pannenberg asserts that the first awareness of the presence of God for the early Christians was in terms of Spirit. We do not have to advocate an exclusive pneumatology to see this. Certainly the Spirit is given on the basis of the revelation of God in Christ. I have yet to find an exposition of the Spirit in the New Testament which to my satisfaction emphasizes the intimate relation between the Spirit and Christ. Be that as it may, the work of the Spirit, not confined to personal individual experiences, but creating unity and life in the fellowship of believers, is an integral part of the Christian doctrine of God. If God is to be more than a supposition, and is to become a significant reality in our lives and in the life of the world, this requires an awareness of the activity of God in the world now. This activity was of unquestioned veracity to the first Christians and has remained so wherever Christians have taken seriously their belief in the Holy Spirit. The church at the moment needs much more attentive awareness to the activity of God, to balance our highly developed and valuable questioning of the meaning of theological terminology.

When we turn to the doctrine of the Person of Christ we are immediately reminded that according to Christian orthodoxy, no person of the Trinity is "before" or "after" any other. We have to start somewhere, but priority of treatment must never imply anything other than complete equality and complete interaction of all the Persons of the Godhead.

What are the contemporary questions about Jesus? Foremost surely is the question about his nature and his relation to God and to us. Was he divine? How can we tell, and what do we mean? We are rightly concerned to understand the meaning of Christ for us today, but I am sure an essential preliminary to this is to understand, as far as possible, these traditional theological questions. It is good to realize the personal experiential nature of the question about Christ's divinity. We are not to expect some demonstration that Jesus is the Son of God, of the nature of a mathematical or chemical formula—if the square on the hypotenuse, and so on . . . then this is always true whenever a right-angled triangle is under consideration. The position or attitude of the observer is irrelevant to the demonstration. But with an affirmation of faith the position is almost entirely reversed. The statement "Jesus is divine" properly goes with "I believe," not with "It is a fact that." This does not mean that the statement is of dubious value. It means that the person making the statement is immediately and directly involved in it.

From this it is reasonable to say that the question about the divinity of Christ is addressed to a person. The answer equally can only be a personal one. And like many significant questions it is perhaps impossible to give a complete explanation of the answer. Why did Peter say, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"? Not, I think, because Peter had carefully considered the qualities of Christ's life, weighed them against a standard measure and drawn the conclusion that they added up to divinity. No, Peter made a response to a person whom he knew in part—a response of faith. He probably did not fully realize what he meant, and he certainly did not always act in the way required by the affirmation. And we need to notice, he apparently did not think the conclusion about Christ's divinity in any way jeopardized his humanity. It is easy to read too much into the story of Peter's confession, and no doubt the presentation of the incident owes a good deal to the experience of the first Chris-

tians. But the quality of personal commitment shines through unmistakably.

A clearer view of our own position is gained when we consider the faith of those who had not seen and yet had believed, as the Fourth Gospel puts it. What brought people to faith? Declaration of the facts by those who already accepted the faith seems to have been instrumental. But again it is apparently a positive response to a living person which constitutes faith. And this immediately brings the Resurrection into the picture. Not that the Resurrection is the final irrefutable proof of Christ's divinity. I have already argued that there never is such proof. In any case the Resurrection was not the sort of empirical event which could prove anything to disinterested neutrals. Rather, the reality of his presence required the reality of the Resurrection—he was alive. This was known in the encounter of faith. The one who was alive was identical with the one who had died on the Cross, for Christian faith is not a general conviction about the nature of things—it is a realization of the presence of Christ.

I think Pannenberg is right in laying so much stress upon the Resurrection and applying its significance to the pre-Resurrection story through its meaning as a "retroactive force." This means that the Gospel records were written and have to be read in the light of the Resurrection. The one whose teaching and mighty acts are recorded is the one who is known as the Risen One, and no doubt some Gospel incidents, such as the Transfiguration, are really post-Resurrection incidents. But more significantly, the whole story is under the influence of the Resurrection and must be read in the light of it. This insight radically affects the attempt to find the prototype human being portrayed in the Gospels. Always we have to remember that the story of Jesus of Nazareth is the story of the Lord of the church. This does not nullify his humanity, but reminds us that there is no merely human figure, however wonderful, to be extracted from the Christ of faith.

In many modern expositions of the person of Christ I detect an agnostic or even atheistic view of divinity. Too often we try to categorize Jesus in terms of our own experience of humanity. But no valid picture of him can leave out this aspect of transcendence. Let us by all means see the fullness of his human nature. Let us see this as an example and guide. Let us recognize his revolutionary qualities and refuse to limit him to our own pre-

conceived notions of gradual progress. But let us not forget that along with all this there goes inseparably the truth of his otherness. The old liberals are often fairly accused of creating Jesus in their own human image as the epitome of hard work, family virtues, and the value of sweet reason. But we stand in equal danger of creating a Jesus in the image of Che Guevara, Karl Marx, or a civil rights leader. Many people are these things because of him. He is still not just one of them. He is the Lord—the one with uncompromising demands, strangely appealing in his authority to an age which thinks it is rid of authority altogether.

If then we take seriously the transcendence of Jesus, as I would not hesitate to call it, we must also take equally seriously his own witness to the transcendence of the Father. When Jesus said his prayers he was not merely talking to himself. When he spoke of God as his father he was not evidencing a split personality. When he recognized the will of God as his supreme guide and standard, he was not using self-hypnosis. It may be extreme to assert that there is no knowledge of God at all apart from Jesus. But it is certainly true that in Jesus is a wealth of insight into the nature of the Father. This insight is wonderfully self-authenticating. Anyone who asks on what authority Jesus spoke so definitely about the Father can only be answered in terms of the intrinsic authenticity of what he said. Of course it is possible to dismiss it all as the naïve credulity of a Galilean peasant—a poor unfortunate visionary who would be completely lost in modern technology. But for me faith means accepting Jesus as the authentic voice of God. What he represents is for me as near reality as I am ever likely to get. When his views and standards are even very dimly understood and inadequately practiced, they do make sense of life. For this reason I must take seriously the tradition that Jesus was aware of the Father; to him there was a transcendent Reality which he did not hesitate to address in personal terms. Thus the center and core of faith in a personal God is the witness of Jesus who is Lord. And this is not an isolated conviction, for it is the culmination of a very long process through which God has made himself known to his people. As I have already argued the people who believe in God have left for us the fascinating record of their experiences—experiences which are so close to our own, and which find meaning only through faith in God. So to depend on Jesus as I do is not to ignore all other manifestations of God; it is to see in him the

completion and full flowering of that which grows in the long story of the people of faith.

So in the Bible we have God revealed as Father, Son, and Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity, which is not part of biblical revelation but a necessary and inevitable development from revelation, is therefore the heart of the Christian proclamation of God. As Barth says extensively in *Church Dogmatics* (I, 2:346) "The doctrine of the Trinity fundamentally distinguishes the Christian doctrine of God as Christian." "In the doctrine of the Trinity there beats the heart of the whole revelation of God for the redemption of mankind" (H. Bavinck).

This is not the place to attempt any sort of extended discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity, but there are two points which seem to me to be of such basic importance that I want just to state them and then briefly expound them.

1. The doctrine of the Trinity is firmly based on revelation alone.
2. Such a reality of God alone meets man's need.
  1. The doctrine of the Trinity is not revealed in Scripture, but the basis of it is that God has shown himself in revelation, which only comes to particular men in particular situations, to be Creator, Savior, and Sanctifier. Such a concept of God could never be found out by reason, and consequently it can never be confirmed or denied by reason. I agree with any who say that especially in his early work Barth was far too critical of philosophy, and all his work suffers from this deficiency. This by the way, is why communication is so great a problem to Barthianism, for communication depends upon community of ideas, which means some sort of accepted philosophy. But surely Barth was right about the Christian concept of the Triune God. This can never be conceived or formulated through reason. It is given, given in the continuing process of revelation. This is how God has made himself known: the "raw materials" are not of our contriving—no doubt the formulation of the doctrine can never be entirely adequate—and each generation has to reformulate its doctrine according to its own situations. I think that our need at present is to see in this doctrine a concept of God far richer than we often try to make do with. Belief in God will not be more relevant in an age of increasing understanding of the physical universe if it is truncated and oversimplified. Nothing less than the Christian view of the Holy Trinity will be adequate for



our age. When all due respect has been paid to the values of non-Christian faiths, it remains true that in Christianity alone is there a view of God of such magnitude and mystery. And I think the mystery is important. A notion of God which has no otherness and no mystery is no use to modern man, who is daily coming face to face with a universe more mysterious and complicated than he had ever imagined. Can God be less mysterious than his Creation? But notice the word is mystery—not incomprehensibility. In past generations the doctrine of the Trinity was scoffed at by many because it made God so incomprehensible. If it is intended to apply to the first days of faith, of course it is too complicated. But this is not its function. Rather it is an attempt to say as well as possible what really cannot be said at all, that God has shown himself to be three in one—not three gods; not one static unity; but Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

2. Provided we are clear about the foundation of the doctrine—the divine activity—we can go on to insist that nothing less than this concept of God meets man's need. Now it is often insisted by modern theology that religion must have something to say to man in his strength, not only in his weakness. "Need" seems to relate to weakness; is need therefore to be discounted in our evaluation of faith? But in our strength we still have needs. The strong man perhaps does not need to be rescued from drowning, but he needs guidance about where to swim—how indeed to use his strength. And it is still true that modern man knows what it is to be weak, to suffer, to fail, to despair, and in the end to die. So I maintain the category of need is still usable, even though it is not always appropriate to talk in "rescue" terms.

Now the doctrine of the Trinity meets our needs in a remarkable fashion. We need meaning. A faith which has nothing to say about the meaning of life—not just my own life, but human life as a whole—such a faith is worthless. Maybe we are not continuously asking, How did things begin? But every person asks it sometime in his life, and usually many times over. What is the relation between things we can experience with the senses and this hoped-for meaning? Is the world of sense itself nonsensical? Who or what are we? A tiny speck on an accidental collocation of atoms, or what? The questions are numberless—the answers exceedingly difficult. Let no one suppose that faith in God as Creator gives easy replies to difficult questions. But it gives some replies. It tells us that God is, before the world of

sense; the world of sense is dependent, as he is not. It tells us that we, who belong to the world of sense, also belong to God—"made in the image of God." Faith therefore asserts a two-way relationship for men—with the world of sense and with God. Now I submit this is something we need to know if we are to make sense of life. The doctrine of God the Father, who created us, tells us what we need to know.

Then we need a Savior. True, the concept of salvation no longer fits our situation with the appropriateness of former years. Healing, fulfillment, direction are possible alternatives. But no one surely can deny that we do need something—whatever we call it. Bertrand Russell, an unrepentant atheist, recently put the point of view of those who say man should keep away from the moon. His real theme is that until man has solved his terrestrial problems, he has no right to export his "worthless competition," his "silly cleverness," his "savage hatred," to celestial bodies. Unless the nations repent and reform we have no ground for rejoicing in the prospect of man arriving on other planets. The atheist preaching a Christian sermon! Preachers are often decried as prophets of doom, men who always exaggerate the dark side of the human story. But this note has now been taken over by the philosophers, the dramatists, the scientists. The tragic difference is that with very few exceptions these modern prophets have no suggested remedy; only unrelieved disaster faces us. This is why I say we need a Savior. Not to talk about in pious language. Not just to make us feel secure—for if we are insecure it is better if we admit it. But we need a Savior to make us better men, to make our world a better world. God's revelation of himself as Savior meets our need.

And we need God the Holy Spirit. One of the greatest problems of modern man is lethargy. Perhaps this is inevitable after the long, long struggle for existence, which in one way or another continues for us all either in the jungle of modern industry or in the struggle for the basic necessities in "backward" countries. There is a natural tendency to ease off when the objectives have been achieved. If comfort is our main aim and we have found it to some degree, let's sink back and relax! So sophisticated modern man loses energy and zest. "I couldn't care less" becomes the accepted attitude. Energy and enthusiasm seem to drain away. No doubt this is partly because too much modern striving is after things which do not profit. Within the church this leth-

argy is found too—especially noticeable in the way the enlightened attitude to the Bible fails to produce the enthusiasms of the old fundamentalism.

Now this is dangerous, because whatever standard of comfort or wisdom we may have attained has to be maintained. We do not remain static in our satisfactions. We quickly lose the ground we have gained, and we relapse. So we need energy, drive, enthusiasm, idealism, and hope. These are precisely the proper activities of the Holy Spirit. One who is really convinced of the truth of Jesus receives the power of the Holy Spirit. God is in action, not only in believers, but in all the affairs of men. So I say that three persons in one God is not just a complication we need not be concerned with. It is a truth about God which shows us how God does meet our need.

Having argued for the comprehensive totality of God as revealed in the Bible and known in Christian experience. I want to end by suggesting that there are ways in which this old truth is being presented in new forms. The arguments about process theology range very widely. Some see this as the new hope for Christian theology and pin all their faith to it. Others reject it completely, either because it is a theory which has not in fact made much impression on science or philosophy, or because it savors more of Buddhism than Christianity (Nels Ferré).

But there are valuable contributions to the doctrine of God being made by process theology. Two such contributions seem to me to stand out. The emphasis on truth as continually a becoming, rather than something static and final, accords very well with the biblical notion of the Living God. If we can rid ourselves of the last vestiges of the substantial view of God and think of God in personal and spirit terms, we shall see how the ideas of development, interaction, and personal existence apply to deity. Karl Rahner has emphasized that modern views require that our model of reality should be a person rather than a thing. This means that personal categories are better than substance categories to apply to God. I think it also means that a "person" view opens the way to a new form of natural theology—not to present a nonrevelational proof of God, but perhaps to suggest that our understanding of God is more likely to derive from deeper knowledge of personal existence than from thing-existence. This dynamic view of God is nearer to biblical ideas than the metaphysical speculations of much Western orthodoxy.

The other emphasis of the thought of Whitehead which is specially valuable for Christian theism is on love. Whitehead insisted that this is the outstanding characteristic of Christianity. Not only is love portrayed in the life of Jesus and recommended as the key to human existence. Love is the truth about things. I find it hard to understand how Christians have frequently tried to apply the principles of love to human conduct, without realizing so clearly that it is also the truth about reality. Why is it that the Johannine "God is love" has so often been buried beneath the layers of substance philosophy? When we seriously consider love as a statement about reality we begin to see that God cannot be known in himself, for it is the nature of love to communicate with others. Nor can we think of God being remote from us, untouched by our affairs. Love is by definition reciprocal. If we know anything at all about it from our own inadequate experience, we know that love suffers with the person loved. One who claims to love but remains indifferent to others is a sham. So if God is love he must be involved in all our affairs; he must suffer in our suffering and equally rejoice in our joy.

If "God is love" is a reality that we begin to appreciate much more clearly, we shall not make the mistake of turning God into a remote explanation—for love does not explain, it initiates. We shall not make God substantial, for love is not a substance. We shall not expect to prove love by intellectual means. We shall know that love is embodied in Christ and can be operative through those who believe in Christ. And after all we shall not be so far from evangelical catholic orthodoxy as expressed by Charles Wesley:

Speak, or thou never hence shalt move,  
And tell me if thy name be Love,  
'Tis Love! 'tis Love! thou diedst for me!  
I hear thy whisper in my heart;  
The morning breaks, the shadows flee;  
Pure, universal love thou art.  
To me, to all, thy mercies move;  
Thy nature and thy name is Love.