

The Eclipse of God

UNDER this title I would like to speak about certain epistemological issues that appear to lie behind a good deal of modern thought. I have taken the title itself from a remarkable little book by Martin Buber which arose out of lectures given in several American Universities in 1951, in which he diagnosed some of the basic problems that have since come out into the open, not only in the so-called "new theology" of John Robinson, Harry Williams, Paul Van Buren or Werner Pelz, but in the "God is dead" theology of Thomas Altizer and William Hamilton. An eclipse of the sun, Buber reminds us, is something that occurs between the sun and our eyes, not in the sun itself. So it is with the eclipse of God that is now taking place, for something has stepped between our existence and God to shut off the light of heaven, but that something is in fact *ourselves*, our own bloated selfhood. The root problem of the "new theologians" would seem to lie in the fact that they are unable to distinguish God from their own swollen subjectivity.

Let us begin by trying to get our historical bearings, so that we can plot some of the changes that have been taking place.

There have been three periods of vast cosmological change in our western history. The first of these took place between the second and fourth centuries when our outlook upon the world underwent a considerable mutation, that is from the primitive cosmology of the Greeks to what came to be known as Ptolemaic cosmology in which a new astronomical system was elaborated in conjunction with a theory of radical disjunction between the heavenly and the earthly realms. A vast shift in outlook took place to which there corresponded an equally great shift in meaning and in the reference of statements. In such a period of profound mutation the really basic epistemological questions come to the surface and decisions have to be taken.

This was the period of controversy and strife in the history of the Church. It emerged with the problems of Gnosticism and moved through Arianism to the great Christological debates when the fundamental grammar of the Christian faith had to be set out and knowledge of God in the revelation of Jesus Christ had to be secured. During these centuries of change there was a great deal of confusion in which one-sided interpretations of the Christian faith arose which attempted to entrench themselves in the Church through their appeal to the popular mind, but which turned out to be dangerous rationalisations in theological form of sub-Christian religion. Thus the period

in which Gnosticism and Arianism were rampant proved to be an interim stage of change in which people had not yet discerned the real implications of the Christian Gospel, but the Christian Church passed through those ages of struggle with heresy and emerged with its faith more firmly rooted and more rationally apprehended.

The second great mutation in cosmological outlook seems to have begun in the fourteenth century and to have reached its zenith in the seventeenth century, although from our point of view it is what took place in the sixteenth century that is particularly important. This was the change from the Ptolemaic cosmology to the post-Copernican or Newtonian cosmology. Once again the basic problems of knowledge emerged in the open, the same fundamental questions were raised, and a similar period of confusion, misunderstanding and error is to be found, immediately before and after the Reformation. But when the Church came through it, Christian faith was again more firmly established and more profoundly understood.

Today we are in the midst of the third great mutation in thought, in the change from a Newtonian to a post-Einsteinian cosmology, from classical physics to nuclear physics. Once again a vast shift in meaning and fundamental understanding is taking place in which the slant of our concepts and the reference of our statements are being affected. Today too we have the same sort of confusion that we find in the two earlier periods, although in many ways it is more like the first than the second. The real issues are basically the same as in the third and fourth centuries, while we have the same kind of popular theology that in Gnosticism and Arianism gripped the imagination of the popular mind but menaced the foundations of the Christian Church through a subtle form of atheism. This is the soil in which the "new theology" has sprung up, but it must be regarded as a symptom of change and confusion that will pass, for we shall find our faith more adequately grounded and our apprehension of God in Christ more clear and rational than before.

Our problems of course have a very different setting from those in the Early Church, for they go back to the great change that took place during the Reformation and are cast in a very different idiom and style of thought. In order to get at our problems from behind, as it were, let me discuss four major changes in thought that took place during the Reformation and have affected us all in the modern world, although I shall speak of them for the most part as they appear in the contribution of John Calvin because it is that aspect of them that I know best.

(1) At the very beginning of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* Calvin made it clear that there is a mutual relation between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves. That can be taken to mark the beginning of modern theology for it is within this orbit that all our theological thinking since has moved. We do not know God in the abstract as He is in Himself, but only in the recip-

cal relation which He has established through His revelation between God and us and us and God. The only God we know is the God who has made Himself known, the God of whom we human beings have experience, so that in the nature of the case we cannot construct a knowledge of God outside this God-man or man-God relationship. We know Him only as we ourselves are affected by that knowledge and acquire a deeper knowledge of ourselves before Him, so that there is inevitably a human coefficient in all *our* knowledge of God. For Calvin this involved also an acutely personal relation with God, for God addresses us personally in His Word and summons us to make a personal response in obedient love, and it is out of that obedience to God's self-revelation that our knowledge grows and deepens. Yet Calvin also insisted that while God's self-revelation demands of us personal reciprocity, nevertheless within this mutuality the emphasis is laid decidedly upon the objective pole of the relationship. We know God truly only as we are cast upon His own transcendent reality and as we think out of a centre in that reality and not out of a centre in ourselves. While we cannot know Him without knowing ourselves, we know Him truly only as we are able to distinguish Him in the dignity and majesty of His own Truth from ourselves.

Thus at the same time there took place in the Reformation a considerable change in understanding of the nature of truth, which we may speak of as a change from *cognitive truth* to the *truth of being*. This is extremely important, while it is highly instructive to see that the change came about along with the recovery of the place of the human subject in the knowledge of God. There cannot be any doubt that the great realist thought of St. Thomas Aquinas was concerned with the truth of being but when it was defined in terms of intellectual apprehensibility as the adequation between reality and mind the emphasis was inevitably laid upon cognitive truth. It was thus that mediaeval theology become engrossed with abstractive knowledge, theology in which truth and statement, being and concept, are bound up so closely together that they cannot be separated from each other. Mediaeval thought was always trying to bridge the gap between thought and being by thought alone, so that its theology and its science became abstract and rationalist.

The theology of Calvin represents a radical revolt from this way of thinking. The Truth is God Himself in His own Being, God incarnate in Jesus Christ, not our statements about God, and not even Biblical statements about Him. They may be true but their truth resides in God and not in themselves. Their truth resides in Christ and not in us. Therefore when we really know God and speak about Him in His self-giving to us in Christ we are emancipated from ourselves and our own speaking. We are made free and open for God and are cast upon the sheer truth of the divine Being and His active self-revelation. Hence in testing our knowledge of God and our

speech about Him we must let ourselves be called into question lest we confound the Truth of God with our forms of thought and speech about it.

(2) The next great change we note in Calvin's thought is a change in scientific questioning. Aristotle had posited four fundamental questions in all scientific knowledge, but by Mediaeval times these had been reduced to three, *quid sit*, *an sit*, and *quale sit*, asked in that order. *Quid sit* is the question as to the "what" or the essence of a thing; *an sit* is the question as to the "how" or the possibility of a thing; while *quale sit* is the question as to the actual nature and character of a thing. Asked in that order they were questions that began with abstraction and possibility and then went on to actuality. But Calvin reversed the order of these questions and began with the last of them, *quale sit*, preferring to ask first of all, What is the actual nature of this thing that we know? In this way he allowed the nature of what we know to determine how we actually know it, without laying down any conception of it or prescribing how it must be known, apart from actual knowledge of it. Put first in this way *quale sit* becomes the primary question of modern science, "What have we here?" while the other questions when made to follow it become not abstract questions as to essence and possibility but testing and controlling questions designed to make sure that our actual knowledge rests properly upon the ground that is claimed for it. Of course the question *quale sit* when directed to a personal reality becomes *qualis sit*, that is, the question as to the "who". Thus in Christian theology the primary question becomes the question as to who God is in the actual knowledge of Him in which we are involved in the Church, followed by the other questions probing into the ground of this knowledge to make sure that it really does derive from God and repose upon Him as its given reality.

This is the way in which modern science has developed its questioning in sharp contrast to mediaeval and ancient science which began off with the abstract questions as to the quiddities and possibilities of things. But with the new method scientific questioning is liberated from philosophical preconceptions, and knowledge can be pursued empirically under the determination of the nature of what we seek to know, in progressive emancipation from extraneous assumptions. Thus we seek to know things as far as possible out of themselves unobstructed by external authorities or metaphysical prejudices or alien dogmatisms. So far as Reformation theology was concerned this meant a mode of theological inquiry in which we seek to know God more and more out of His own self-revealing Word, and not from the presuppositions lodged in the authoritative tradition of the Church, and so far as modern science was concerned this meant a mode of inquiry in which we break free from the situation in which final causes have been clamped down upon nature, in order to let nature disclose itself freely to us in untrammelled empirical inquiry.

At the same time there took place, and this is particularly clear in the work of Calvin, a radical change in the nature of the *question* itself. In Latin this represents a change from *quaestio* to *interrogatio*. *Quaestio* is the kind of question you ask in solving a problem in knowledge you already have, in order to move from confusion to clarity. Questions of this kind arise in a complex of relations of ideas where the answer is to be found by straightening out the logical connections. That was the kind of question pursued in mediaeval science, so that in mediaeval times a scientific theology had to be cast in the rigorous form of *quaestiones*. Problematic thinking of this kind has certainly an important and necessary place, but Calvin felt the kind of question it involves is not primary and is not finally a genuine question at all. A genuine question is one in which you interrogate something in order to let it disclose itself to you and so reveal to you what you do not and cannot know otherwise. It is the kind of question you ask in order to learn something *new*, which you cannot know by inferring it from what you already know.

It is interesting to note that this change in questioning took place first in the study of law and in the logic of "question and answer" that developed in the interrogation of documents and witnesses; it was then transferred into theology, e.g. by Calvin, and transferred again from law and theology into natural science, e.g. by Francis Bacon. Both Calvin and Bacon, of course, had been trained in the new Renaissance approach to law, Bacon being also influenced by Calvin. But it came into law through the work of Laurentius Valla who had studied the ancient lawyers, Cicero above all, and applied their method of interrogation to the scrutiny of historical documents including the Scriptures and even sought to develop a method of "logical discovery". This was the notion of *interrogation* that Calvin applied to the Holy Scriptures and to theology. We have to ask genuine questions of God in order to let Him disclose Himself to us. Theology is not the systematic manipulation of ideas we already have or find in the Church or the working of them up into problems which we set ourselves to answer. In proper theological inquiry we ask open questions in order to allow God to answer us, and to give us answers which we do not already know but which in so far as they are really new cut across what we already think we know. It was this kind of inquiry, *activa inquisitio*, that Calvin also applied to Biblical interpretation, that Bacon applied to the interpretation of "the books of nature", and then from Bacon it was applied back, although in a more rationalist manner, by Benedict Spinoza to the interpretation of the sacred Scriptures.

It is scientific questioning of this kind that has dominated the whole of the modern world, but right from the start Reformation theology and empirical science interacted in its development. Of course the mode of questioning and the nature of the question go together, in accordance with the nature of that into which inquiry is

being made, so that scientifically the kind of question and the way in which it is put will vary in accordance with the nature of the field of inquiry. In order to know God we do not "torment" Him as we do nature before it will disclose its secrets to us, but it nevertheless remains true that active interrogation and modern reformed theology belong together.

(3) The third main change that I wish to note is rather more subtle and difficult, although it can be stated in quite a simple form. It is about the relation of language to being and of signs to things signified, and the transition from the mediaeval to a modern way of thinking about this that concerns us.

Let me put the problem in this way. You cannot state in statements how statements are related to being: otherwise you convert the relation of statements to being into mere statements. To use Wittgensteinian language, you cannot picture in a picture how a picture pictures some reality, because if you did everything would become picture, with no reality. From one point of view this was the persistent problem of mediaeval thought. If you think you can reduce to statements how statements are related to the Truth of God you have resolved everything without remainder into statements alone. As I understand it, it is this same problem that is to be found both in mediaeval realism and in mediaeval nominalism, and it is at this point that they tended to pass over into each other, in the identification of statement with the truth. It is essentially the same difficulty that lies in the heart of rationalist fundamentalism, the identification of truth with statement about it. Let me put the matter in still another way that is taken from Plato in his discussion of the relation of the words or "names" to the realities they signify. If you think of words as somehow "imaging" realities, as the Greeks tended to do, then the more exact words are the more closely they imitate what they signify, but when the image is a perfect replica of the reality it signifies, how can you distinguish them? The image will inevitably tend to replace the reality in your thought. Similarly words come to act as substitutes for things and to oust them as the objects of our thought, so that we think words and statements and not things through them—this is especially easy where the "things" are invisible realities, and is therefore a particular danger for theology.

The relation between language and being that lies behind this began to come under severe attack before the Reformation, so that some new understanding had to develop. It came out of the notion of *intention*. When you make a statement you intend to refer to something of which you have some experience or idea in yourself. Here you have a subjective pole, the mind of the speaker, and an objective pole, the thing referred to. According to William of Occam we are more sure of the state of our own mind or soul than of the external existent or referent, that is, of what he called the *oblique intention* rather than the *direct intention*. Roughly speaking, two

different views diverged from this point, for which we can let Erasmus and Calvin stand as our representatives. What do we do when we interpret the Holy Scripture? How do we regard the relation between the words and the things they signify?

In answer to these questions Erasmus took up Occam's doctrine of intention but gave it a more psychological and ethical turn. He sought to interpret the Scriptures by penetrating into the subjective pole of their intention, that is, into their states of soul and to read what they wrote as expressions of their inner experiences. For Erasmus this meant to a large extent an interpretation of traditional biblical and theological teaching in terms of moral inwardness. Thus there began what has come to be known as "modernism", a reinterpretation of Christianity through redacting its direct statements about God and His saving acts in our world into statements expressing inward moral states or attitudes of soul.

Calvin, like Luther, took the opposite point of view in which he sought to interpret the Scriptures mainly in accordance with their direct intention, that is by following the intention of the biblical writers through to the realities they intended their statements to refer to. The principle that Calvin followed here is taken from Hilary of Poitiers who laid it down that we must not subordinate things to the words that indicate them but the words to the things they indicate, for it is of the things themselves that we think rather than the words used of them. This is particularly important, as Hilary insisted, when we come to speak of God, for we cannot describe Him in language or reduce His Truth to statements. Theological language is indicative, not descriptive, of God and it is to be understood only as we allow it to refer us beyond itself to God in His transcendent reality. It was by developing this view of the relation of language to being that Calvin became the father of modern biblical interpretation.

These two very different approaches can be characterised briefly by asking what we do when we interpret St. Mark's Gospel. Do we seek to find out what was going on in the soul of Mark and interpret what he has to say as an outward expression of his inward moral and spiritual attitudes? Or do we interpret him in accordance with his direct intention to bear witness to Jesus Christ and a series of historical events in which God Himself was interacting with human existence? Are we to go behind what Mark is actually saying to offer some oblique interpretation of his literary work or are we to allow Mark to direct us to Jesus Christ in such a way that the language that is used is subordinated to Jesus Christ Himself? In the former case our criterion for interpreting Mark's use of language can only be our own moral condition, but in the latter we must judge the adequacy of Mark's language in the light of the Reality to which it bears witness.

This distinction corresponds closely to that drawn by I. A.

Richards many years ago in his *Principles of Literary Criticism* between two uses of language, an *emotive* and a *scientific* use of language. In the former we use language for the sake of the effects, emotions or attitudes that it produces, which is characteristic of poetry, but in the latter we use language for the sake of the reference, true or false, which it promotes, which is characteristic of science. Of course we can never eliminate the first, for language after all is a symbolic medium of communication in which the subjective pole of human intention has an essential part to play. But we use language scientifically only when the primary intention is brought into play and its deliberate reference is taken seriously. We cannot eliminate the fact that St. Mark put something of himself into his witness and into his writing, yet his primary intention was to speak not of himself but of Jesus Christ. If we are to deal faithfully with St. Mark we must look at the reality to which he points and interpret what he has to say primarily in the light of it—otherwise we fall down badly in regard to basic scientific procedure.

(4) We have still to consider something quite fundamental, a change in the doctrine of God and His relation to nature. In the mediaeval theology it was very difficult to separate God from nature, for the knowledge of God and of the world were posited together. If we begin with nature and try to reach knowledge of God as the First Cause through a consideration of His effects in the world of created realities, we are unable to rise above those realities but can only construe God as necessarily related to them. If we begin with God as the eternal and changeless One and then think of all created realities as the objects of His eternal knowing and willing, then we develop a notion of nature as eternally co-existing with God or at least in His Mind. God and nature were correlative concepts, as it were, but this had a very damaging effect upon "nature" because it gave it a changeless character through a timeless relation to the divine causation—nature was in its heart impregnated with divine causes.

Deep in the Middle Ages, however, mainly through Duns Scotus, there emerged again the doctrine of creation out of nothing in which God was thought of as creating the world by producing new ideas through which the world was given form and order as well as being. But it was with the Reformation that there was revived the biblical idea of God who creates the world out of nothing as something entirely distinct from Himself while yet dependent upon Him for its being and order. This at once emancipated the study of nature from philosophical preconceptions and led to the disenchantment of nature of its secret divinity. Men realised that they could understand nature only by looking at nature and not by looking at God. God means us to examine nature in itself, to learn about it out of itself, and not from the study of the Holy Scriptures or of theology. But it was the clear and unambiguous doctrine of God as the Creator of nature

out of nothing that emancipated nature in this way for the investigations of empirical science. We know God by looking at God, by attending to the steps He has taken in manifesting Himself to us and thinking of Him in accordance with His divine nature. But we know the world by looking at the world, by attending to the ways in which it becomes disclosed to us out of itself, and thinking of it in accordance with its creaturely nature. Thus scientific method began to take shape both in the field of natural science and in the field of divine science.

When we consider all these four points of change and set them together we can see how revolutionary was the mutation of thought that occurred at the Reformation and what an enormous advance the Western world took at that time in theology as in natural science, but we can also see how closely theology and natural science interacted in their development into modern times. What happened, then, to these four major points and what is happening to them in the world in which we live today? Let us consider them one by one.

(1) It was the first that constituted the biggest problem for it has worried us ever since. You cannot have a knowledge of God cut off from the fact that you know Him, but nor can you know anything cut off from the fact that you know it: the human subject has an ineradicable place in knowledge. The object of knowledge is always relative to a subject. How then can we get really objective knowledge unaffected by the human observer or thinker? So far as theology is concerned history has often taken the way of Erasmus rather than the way of Calvin—it was Erasmus, you remember, that first pointed out that when you study history you are really studying yourself. You see, in the polar relation of our human knowledge, it is the subjective pole that tends to get more and more masterful so that the human subject, the self, gets in the way of the object he is studying. Granted that all theology is personal, involves a personal relation between you and God, must this be pursued in such a way that you get in between yourself and God so that you cannot see God beyond yourself? In the book I mentioned earlier Martin Buber insists that when we interpret encounters with God as self-encounters, man's very structure is destroyed—and that, he says, is the portent of the present hour.

This is the problem with Gogarten who interprets history as a form of self-encounter, for history is what we men create; and this is the problem with Bultmann who argues that when we speak about God the only content our statements can have is the determination of our existence by the impact of His "Word" upon us, and so he reduces the content of revelation to our own "self-understanding". But is this not also a basic problem with John Robinson, that he is a theological solipsist, who cannot see finally outside of himself or distinguish a God "out there" in distinction from the ground of his own being, and who makes matters much worse by insisting on

thinking of God only "in pictorial images" for then he is unable even to conceive of a theism except in the obsolete forms of a Ptolemaic cosmology? Is it not the Bishop of Woolwich himself who requires, as it were, to be demythologised? But we are concerned here with a far deeper problem than that of a few notorious thinkers out on the flanks of historic Christianity: it is the problem of an ingrowing subjectivity, a sort of stuck-adolescence, that has come to effect multitudes of modern people, who are unable to break out of the teenage mentality in which they are engrossed with their own self-fulfilment, and are unable to reach the maturity of those who love their neighbours objectively for their own sakes because they cannot love God objectively for His sake. Their relations with God and with their neighbour are inverted upon themselves. Scientifically speaking, this is the loss of objectivity, a failure to understand things out of themselves in accordance with their natures. That is why we have to regard not a little of the "new theology" as an irrational flight from the exact thinking of science.

(2) What has happened to the change in the nature and mode of scientific questioning? In pure science itself steady headway continues to be made in the direction pointed out by Calvin and Bacon, but serious problems have arisen here also. When Bacon spoke about putting nature to the question and even tormenting it in order to force it to yield its secrets, he also insisted that tormented nature is still nature and that men inquiring into nature are part of nature, so that we can never get beyond nature, but he insisted above all that in order to know nature we must cast away from us the masterful idols of the mind, our prefabricated conceptions, and to seek to interpret nature humbly as its servant. This is certainly the way to dominion over the earth, for it gives us power, technical power, but we may enter into this kingdom only like little children, following the ways nature herself lays down for us. But when this idea of putting nature to the question was taken up by Kant a change began to set in. Nature after all is dumb; she cannot talk back to us. Hence we must not only frame the questions we put to nature but also put into the mouth of nature the answers she is to give back to us. Indeed in prescribing the kind of question we put to nature we prescribe and preform the kind of answers we get back from her. What this means then, it is sometimes argued, is that by our stipulations we impose our own pattern and mind upon nature; the only nature we know is the nature that is formed and shaped in our understanding of it.

Astonishing as it may seem, there are lots of people today who really believe this, who think, for example, that mathematics is a pure invention of the mind for it is not something forced upon us by the inherent nature of things, or who think that in the last resort science is about propositions not about realities in the world "out there" independent of us. But let us look at it quite simply. When

a scientist lays bare the anatomical and physiological structure of the human body he is not creating and imposing patterns upon it. When you yourself observe crystalline formations in the rocks you are not importing into them geometrical patterns of your own inventing, you think the geometrical patterns you find embedded in them already. That is why our basic scientific statements are formed by way of conceptual assent to what is there or by way of recognition of an intelligibility inherent in the nature of things. This is certainly the astonishing thing that keeps on striking the scientist with wonder and awe, as Einstein used to say, that there is already embedded in nature an inherent rationality which it is the task of science to bring to light and express. Apart from it there could be no science at all. Thus the mathematical equations and even the new geometries we construct are quite meaningless unless they are applicable to nature but if they are applicable to nature they are elaborated expressions of an objective rationality lying in nature itself. Of course our difficulty in all knowledge, in physics and even in pure mathematics, is to make sure that subjective elements do not obtrude into our theories and obscure and distort our knowledge, and so it is a necessary part of science that we devise methods of reaching and expressing knowledge of something in such a way that our understanding of it is really subordinated to the nature and rationality of the thing itself. But even this stringent self-correcting scientific method is only a rigorous extension of the basic rationality we employ in every act of right knowledge.

It is in the realm of microphysics, however, that we come up against our biggest difficulties, for there, it is claimed, we are engaged in operations of measurement and "observation" which include the human subject in the theoretic constructions in such a way that there is an impassable gulf between the subject and the objective reality. And this, it is argued, means the collapse of the whole structure of scientific objectivity, and that the way into the future must be one in which we learn to transcend the subject-object relation altogether. This panic conclusion shatters itself upon one simple fact, that we are never concerned in any science, and certainly not in microphysics any more than in chemistry, with objects that are only relative to subjects, but with objects that are also relative to other objects. It is in that interrelatedness of objects to one another that we find means of controlling our own subjectivities over against them and of distinguishing what is objectively real from our own subjective projections. What is happening, however, is that the idealist presuppositions latent in much of our thinking are being forced out into the open where we least expected to find them, in the realm of pure physics, but this has served to clear the air, for now nuclear physicists and mathematicians are at work in different parts of the world working out the objective nature of our knowledge in the microphysical realms in ways that do full justice to the fact that the discoveries in these areas

of existence are not inventions of our minds but correspond to the nature of things, even though we are unable to describe them but can only produce cognitive instruments through which they come to be known. This means that modern science is moving on a massive front away from any transcending of the subject-object relationship into a profounder and a more massively grounded objectivity.

There is a remarkable parallel here between the difficulties of modern natural science and those of modern theology, for both are faced with the inordinate claims of human subjectivity in their own realms, and are struggling for the purity and genuineness of knowledge against the assertion that we can know only what we invent and fashion for ourselves. Let me put the problem quite sharply by pointing to the immense tension that exists in the universities between "pure science" and "technology". By "pure science" is meant here the kind of knowledge we reach in any field when we know realities out of themselves and in accordance with their own interior principles and not in terms of external authorities or imposed patterns of thought. This is what was called "dogmatic science" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a term that was applied to physics before it was applied to theology. By "technology" is meant here, not applied science, but the way of knowing by inventing in which we are more concerned to use nature than know it and claim to know only what we can create and accept as true only what bears the imprint of our own minds. It is a similar kind of tension that we find in theology today, between "pure theology" and "new theology", between knowledge that is objectively determined by the nature of God in His self-revelation, and knowledge which we develop out of our own formative thought and expression. Think again of John Robinson in this connection. He is not a technologist but he is something of an artist in theology. He is not a scientific thinker who proceeds only by disciplined submission of his mind to the nature of things, but one who thinks in pictures and symbolic forms and imposes them upon reality, accepting them as valid in so far as they serve the purpose he has in mind. What is at stake here is the objectivity and genuineness of knowledge in which we distinguish what we know from our knowing of it. Again and again in recent years I have found scientists who insist that in the tension between pure science and the new technology they share with us the same basic problem that faces us between pure theology and the "new theology". I am sure they are right. This is not to say, of course, that there is no room for technology in the proper sense as applied science, or for creative artistry in the realm of religion, but to insist that what is at stake here is the fundamental basis of rational knowledge.

(3) We turn now to the problems in the relation between language and being, and here we find ourselves engaged today in a set of linguistic and logical questions very like those that engaged some of

the sharpest minds in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—which we cannot go into here. Of special importance in our own day is the distinction drawn long ago by Butler and Hume between relations of things or matters of fact and relations of ideas. Scientific language is concerned basically with reference to matters of fact, but it is also and inevitably concerned with the relations of ideas if only because scientific statements must be brought into a truthful coherence with one another in order to do their job properly. Since scientific statements refer to realities beyond themselves they are not susceptible of “demonstrative reasoning” in ideas alone, but they do offer compelling proof of their own by bringing our minds under the compulsion of the realities they “map out”. Thus whenever a cluster of statements refers to a reality in such a way that there is disclosed an objective rationality in things that far outruns what can be specified of it at the moment and so manifests an indefinite range of enlightenment within which other problems and difficulties come to be simplified and solved, we are convinced that we have a true theory. This is the way that Michael Polanyi has taught us to understand the verifying processes of scientific thought and formulation.

It is essentially a similar movement of thought that engages us in theology, although here we are up against a different kind of rationality, not *Number* but *Logos*. But if in the scientific investigation of the world we consider that our thought has made contact with the real nature of things when we can bring our knowledge to a consistent and enlightening mathematical representation through which the inherent rationality of the world imposes itself upon us, so in scientific inquiry into the ways and works of God we consider that our thought has made genuine contact with the divine Reality when we can bring our knowledge to an intelligible and enlightening unity through which the *Logos* of God Himself presses itself convincingly upon our minds. We direct our questions to the self-giving of God in Jesus Christ and allow our minds to fall under the power of the divine rationality that becomes revealed in Him. It is a rationality inherent in the reality of the incarnate Word before it takes shape in our apprehension of it, but as we allow it to become disclosed to us under our questions and find that it is opened out before us in an objective depth that far transcends what we can specify of it in our formulations and yet is infinitely fertile in its illuminating power, we become caught up in a compulsive affirmation of it that is rational through and through. This is what we mean by scientific *theological* thinking, from an objective centre in the givenness of God, rather than popular *mythological* thinking, from a subjective centre in ourselves, in which we project our fabricated patterns and ideas upon the divine Reality and will accept only what we can conceive in terms of what we already know or what fits in with our own prior self-understanding.

It is not easy to disengage scientific thinking from popular thinking in any field of knowledge. This becomes evident, as Thomas Kuhn has shown us once again, whenever we are engaged in making some notable scientific advance, for the struggle to break free from preconceptions reveals how deeply conditioned even our scientific concepts can be by psychological and sociological factors at work in the community in which we live and work, or, following Frege, to put it the other way round, how easy it is for scientific achievements and discoveries to be corroded or even lost through the obtrusion into them of popular notions and mental pictures with which our ordinary language in any cultural context is impregnated. How frequently it is the half-baked scientist or the cheap populariser who does irreparable damage to the onward advance of objective, scientific work. This is one of the most insidious problems we have to face in modern theology, where "pop-theologians" compete with one another in the clamour for demotic adulation and notoriety.

Let us reflect a little more about the relation of language to culture which is so important to us all if only because of the enjoyment we derive from the great artistic and symbolic creations in literature. Good science or good theology will never disparage cultural development for they are part of it with much to contribute to it as well as much to learn from it. This is what makes so objectionable the new barbarism initiated by James Barr in his bitter disjunction of language from culture, evident, for example, in his denigration of von Humboldt. But it is the other extreme that concerns us here in which language is treated almost entirely as the self-expression of the soul or of the community and therefore as the precipitate of cultural development. Now when religious language is regarded and interpreted in this way, theological statements become filled with a content taken from contemporary culture. Then when we reach one of those critical junctures in human history, such as the First World War, when historic Christianity and the prevailing national culture are forced apart, theological statements appear to a great many people to be empty of real content, and they begin to wonder what has become of "God". After the crisis desperate attempts may be made to reintegrate Christianity and culture, such as we see in Germany after both world wars, if only to heal the traumatic rift in ethnic consciousness. And so language about God is substantiated from the consciousness of the community and its cultural creations. But matters cannot rest there, for the more rapidly our culture advances the sharper the contrast between the one Christian Gospel which is the same for all ages and nations and our contemporary situation. Either historic Christianity must be completely remodelled as the religious expression of our culture or the cry goes up that "God is dead", for theological statements cannot be given a "meaning" in terms of the community's self-fulfilment. Then a show-down is inevitable and the Christian Church finds itself again in a missionary situation.

Theologically the basic problem here is that language about God has become detached from the Reality of God, and a conceptuality arising out of our own consciousness has been substituted for a conceptuality forced upon us from the side of God Himself. This is the disaster which Martin Buber, to refer to the book already mentioned once more, has called "the conceptual letting go of God". Let us take our example of this from Paul Tillich, who has declared in a number of his works that faith-knowledge is symbolic and non-conceptual so that if we are to pursue theology we must borrow conceptualities from philosophy or science in order to rationalise faith. That is to say, ultimately Tillich worked with a romantic, non-conceptual approach to God. The rationality with which he was concerned in his theology had become detached from God, for he took it from his cultural involvement. Tillich played a very important part in providing the rapid development of religion in the United States after the Second World War with a rational structure and respectability, but the way in which he did it involves him in some responsibility for the "God is dead" way of thinking taken up by the small men. If the question as to God is correlated with the question as to man, and the question that man puts to God is finally himself, the questioner, it is difficult to see how the way of "God" can avoid the way taken by man. And so the question as to God has become very acute in the United States as the Christian Church and American culture have tended to draw apart over the segregation issue. Whenever people prefer to follow a certain cultural way of life rather than the way of the Gospel that detaches us from our naturalistic existence, it is not surprising that they should find language about God rather empty and meaningless. All this lets us see how necessary a scientific theology is for the on-going life and mission of the Christian Church, for theology of this kind is the disciplined repentance to which the Church must constantly submit if its mind is not to be schematised to the patterns of this world but to be renewed and transformed and grounded in the objective rationality of God in Jesus Christ.

(4) What happened to the change in the doctrine of God and nature that took place in the sixteenth century? As we saw the old Stoic-Latin conception of God as *Deus sive natura* gave place to a more dynamic conception of Him as the living Creator actively at work in the world He has made. Nature was regarded as created out of nothing, utterly distinct from God but utterly dependent on Him for its being and order. Men learned to think differently of the world, in terms of its contingency and creatureliness, and learned to know it out of its natural processes. But more and more as men began to understand nature out of nature, they detached it from their thought of God and His creative activity, and regarded it as an independent source of knowledge and as the sphere of man's own creative activity. But as soon as nature was cut adrift in this way,

there opened out an ever-widening gulf between God and the world, and an extensive process of secularisation set in that affected the whole life and thought of man.

This means that the doctrine of God has moved from one extreme to the other, from such a juxtaposition of God and nature that one cannot be thought without the other, to such a complete disjunction between God and nature that God's activity is banished from the world He has made and nature is sealed off from any meaning beyond itself in God.

This cannot but have disastrous consequences for Christian theology for it cuts away from it any thought of the interaction of God with the world that makes impossible not only a doctrine of providence but any doctrine of Incarnation, and it cuts away likewise any interaction between the revealing and saving activity of God and human historical existence so that God is made dumb, no real Word from Him breaking through to us, and made otiose, no saving Act from Him actualising itself in our condition of need. It is this radical dualism that has come to infect the so-called "new theology" very deeply, that is, something like the old pagan dichotomy between the intelligible and sensible realms, or the old deistic disjunction between an idle God and a mechanistic universe. No doubt the idiom has changed and the context is different, but the basic issues are essentially the same. Now all this means that when you make any statements about God they do not derive from any real Word that has come to us from the side of God but are interpretations of our own existence in the over-againstness of God to it so that "God" becomes only a cipher for our relations with Him. Thus when we speak about God our statements do not really refer to Him for they come up against the hiatus between us and God, and so bend back again to have their meaning within this world alone, in ourselves. Their actual content is our own "self-understanding". You do not understand God out of Himself, but out of your own self. That was the fatal step taken by Bultmann in his famous essay of 1925 about the sense in which we can speak of God. But once you have taken that step you cannot stop there; the next is forced on you, when "God" becomes not so much a cipher of your relations with God but a cipher of your relations with your fellow human beings. And so there emerges the completely secularised man, the man of "religionless Christianity", who does not resort to prayer because he does not want a "daddy God" that comes to his help when he is in trouble, for after all he is now a "mature" human being flung upon his own resources; nor does he need "the hypothesis of God" or a "God of the gaps" to help him over the mysterious places in life for all that is only an "occult" way of thinking that is primitive.

We need not stop to show the vast confusion there is involved in this way of thinking of the relation between theology and natural science, which is just as pathetic in regard to science as it is in regard

to theology. It will be sufficient for our purpose at the moment to make clear the implications of this reductionist view of historic Christianity.

(a) It converts theological statements into anthropological statements and indeed into autobiographical statements. If language about God does not really repose upon an objective revelation of God and is not grounded in an objective reality beyond us, it must be deflected to have only an oblique meaning in ourselves and is to be interpreted only as a symbolic form of human self-expression. Actually this not only cuts man off from God but cuts him off from his neighbour by engrossing him in the depths of his own being. It becomes essentially egotistical. How vastly different is the question of John Robinson, "How can *I* get a gracious neighbour?", from the question of Jesus, "*Who was neighbour* to him that fell among thieves?"!

(b) It entirely alters the meaning of "act of God". This becomes very clear in Bultmann's view of the "paradoxical" relation between God and the world in which the act of God is found "at the end of the world", that is, where this world ceases to be, or at the frontier between being and non-being. This is what he means by "eschatological". And so Bultmann rejects the fact that the act of God is an objective event *within* our world and is bold and consistent enough therefore to say that the love of God is not a fact within our cosmic existence. Hence the "act of God" in the death of Christ is no different from the "act of God" in a fatal accident on the street. Thus with one stroke he eliminates atonement as "hodge-podge".

(c) It divides "Jesus" from "the Christ" and lets each man substitute himself in the place of Jesus. The radical dualism that lies behind this way of thinking in its Cartesian form led eventually to the fateful disjunction between two kinds of history, which Bultmann and his friends call "*Historie*" and "*Geschichte*", that is, a scientific reconstruction of historical events operating with the principle of a closed continuum of cause and effect, which eliminates the actual historical Jesus almost completely and certainly makes Him of no account for faith; and an interpretative account of history in which Christ stands for the way the Early Church creatively expressed its orientation to "other-worldly" reality, and so becomes the point at which we in our generation may through "faith" gain an authentic relation to existence. The idiom in the thought of Paul Tillich is different, but he makes it equally clear that we have to "sacrifice Jesus" in order to get "the Christ", but when "the Christ" is detached altogether from the historical Jesus He becomes a symbol which *we* have to fill with content from ourselves. And so historic Christianity is reduced to a pietistic individualism in which each man fills the symbol of "Christ" with his own "self-understanding".

We have now come to the point where we must not only take stock of these problems that have emerged in modern theology but indicate

the way ahead. It must be made clear, however, that while the aberrations we have been discussing have certainly caught the public eye and are being given wide-spread discussion, they by no means represent what is going on in the central march of Christian theology through the centuries. Just as so often it is only the sensational material about marriage and divorce that finds its way into the headlines in the popular press, but little is said about the vast host of happy and successful marriages in the lives of our people, so here concentration upon the more outrageous stuff that appears on the outer edges of Christian thought can give a false impression of what has been happening in the steady progress of scientific theology.

It is worthwhile reminding ourselves again of the profound interaction between theological and scientific method that is to be found at the beginning of our modern era in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for whether we like it or not the whole of the future will be dominated by empirical science and anything that fails to stand up to its rigorous discipline will fall away. It is just at this point that the gravamen of our charge against the so-called "new theology" lies, that at all the four points of scientific reorientation and advance we have noted, it has failed in method and retreated from the truth. It is characterised by a romantic naturalism that is the antithesis of a philosophy of order and design; it represents a flight from hard, exact thinking into the irrational confusion of the "double-think"; and it registers a reactionary revolt against science into the incoherent flux of existentialism. But in and behind it all one can hear the old demonic whisper, "Ye shall be as gods", that is, the original sin of the human subject in projecting himself into the place of ultimate reality, thus rejecting God by eclipsing Him from himself. But in so doing man deprives himself of the light in which to see his own mistakes, and so becomes incarcerated in the darkness of his own self-deception.

What, then, of the way ahead? Whatever else we do we must think out more carefully and stringently the interrelation of object and subject and build into our thinking remedies for the inveterate preoccupation with ourselves from which we all suffer. Here it may serve our purpose to concentrate upon one or two basic simplicities.

You know something only in accordance with its nature, and you develop your knowledge of it as you allow its nature to prescribe for you the mode of rationality appropriate to it. That is the kind of objectivity we adopt in all rational behaviour whatsoever. Thus I adopt toward another person quite a different mode of rationality from that which I adopt toward my desk, because his nature is different from that of a desk. Hence it would be quite irrational or unscientific to treat him like a block of wood or to treat the desk as if it were a human being. That is simple enough, yet its implications are profound and far-reaching. Thus it would be utter nonsense for me to try to know God in the mode in which I know

a creature or to treat Him as if He were a star. To know God I must enter into the mode of rationality prescribed by the nature of God. But it also follows that if we are to know some object in accordance with its nature, it is that same nature that must prescribe the mode of its verification. You cannot demonstrate something in the realm of the mind by chemical analysis, or appreciate the weight of an argument by a machine that weighs things, any more than you can smell with your ear or determine the sound of something by your eyes. Thus the only kind of evidence for God that will satisfy us is one appropriate to divine nature, appropriate to one who is the ground of His own Being and the Source of all other being, to one whose Being is Spirit and whose nature is love.

It is this profoundly simple fact, that knowledge of something and the demonstration of its reality must be in accordance with its nature, that lies behind the formation and deployment of the supreme instrument in all scientific knowledge, *the appropriate question*. If you ask only biological questions you will get only biological answers. If you ask only psychological or anthropological questions, you will only get answers that correspond to them. If you are to get theological answers you must ask theological questions. What is demanded of us in every science, and not least in theology, is strict and accurate thinking in which we learn to ask our questions with unswerving appropriateness and exactitude. It is not easy to ask true questions of God because no question that we can frame is adequate to Him, yet it is not a wrong question because it falls short of Him. But there can be little doubt that many of the difficulties that have been injected into modern theology are due to a real failure to ask the right questions. False questions only falsify the issues, and so no answers to false questions can be given except false ones. That was the point of Immanuel Kant's warning long ago, that we cannot extrapolate modes of thought developed in one science into the operations of another without distortion and falsification. It is often at this point that the "new theologians" are so strikingly amateurish in the way they mix things up and create pseudo-problems. We must ask them to think scientifically, and to learn to be mature and self-critical in the way they ask their questions.

The progress of our science is the progress we achieve in asking questions. Genuinely scientific questions are questions that lead to new knowledge, questions that are open to the disclosure of what has not been known before. That kind of question needs to be quite open, but to be open it must let itself be called in question in case it is closed from behind by the presuppositions from which it started. Thus the art of asking scientific questions is to ask them in such a way that the question lets itself be questioned in order that it may be reframed in a way more appropriate to the nature of what is being investigated. Our greatest difficulty, however, lies in the fact that we cannot divorce our questions from ourselves who ask them, for we are

part of the questions we ask. Hence to ask scientific questions we ourselves must come into question along with our questions, that means, we with all our preconceptions and our prior self-understanding. To learn what is new we have to learn how to forget; to take a step forward in discovery we have to renounce ourselves. The more rigorously and ruthlessly we pursue our inquiry scientifically the more we ourselves are brought under control. Thus the eclipse of the object by the interposition of ourselves, the obscuring of God through our own subjectivity, is called into question. We become emancipated from imprisonment in ourselves and learn to distinguish the reality of God from our own subjective states and conditions.

It is part of the Christian message that this is possible only through following Jesus Christ, for He alone can put to us the true questions that make us free for the truth. Through His forgiveness He sets us free from ourselves; through taking our place where we are questioned by God He enables us to renounce ourselves and take up the Cross in following Him; by making us share in His life and what He has done with our human nature in Himself, He turns us away from the false habits of mind in which we are stuck, transforms us through a renewal of mind that enables us to look away from ourselves to love God with all our heart and mind and our neighbour as ourselves. But it is only through this encounter with Jesus Christ in His implacable objectivity in which we become crucified to the world and to ourselves that we are enabled to know objectively as we are known by Him and so to think appropriately of God in accordance with His nature, and not out of a centre in ourselves in which we impose our own patterns of thought upon Him and then fail to distinguish Him in His reality from our own subjective states and conditions. It is only in and through Jesus Christ that man's eclipse of God can come to an end and he can emerge again out of darkness into light.

Looked at in this way, it appears again that the supreme difficulty with the "new theology" is its axiomatic assumption of a radical dualism between God and the world in which (a) it rejects from the outset any notion of God Himself in His own Being as present and active in our human existence in space and time, so that incarnation, atonement, and resurrection have to be entirely reinterpreted in some oblique symbolic way; and (b) it throws the religious subject back upon himself, so that all his thinking is poised upon his own *sacro egoismo*, while the content of divine revelation is reduced to the conceptions and artefacts that are creatively produced out of his own self-understanding. This is a condition from which he is unable to extricate himself, since it is precisely from himself that he requires to be delivered. It is only Jesus Christ who can do that, for He is the one point in our human and historical existence where we may be lifted out of ourselves and escape the self-incarcerating processes of human subjectivism. But if someone here claims in any way to be a theologian, we may surely ask of him, in a scientific age, to leave adolescent

preoccupation with self-exploration and self-fulfilment behind, and to become man enough to engage in the unrelenting processes of scientific questioning in which he himself will be questioned down to the very roots of his existence and is so made open at least to listen for something beyond the echo of his own thought, if not actually to hear a Word coming to him from beyond which he could never tell to himself.

THOMAS F. TORRANCE

Rev. George Brookes of Bewdley, born 9th October, 1767; resigned pastorate February, 1842. The following papers were given to Dr. E. A. Payne by Mr. Quayle, of Bowcastle Farm, and deposited in the Baptist Union Library, February 1967.

I. Notes of sermons by the Rev. Mr. Gentleman and the Rev. Mr. Taylor, at New Meeting, Kidderminster

(1) October, 1786-February, 1787.

(2) June, 1787-May, 1788.

while George Brookes was an apprentice.

II. Sermon Notes and list of preachers.

III. Notes on Mixt Communion.

IV. Notebook entitled "On experience":—

(1) 1st January, 1799-13th July, 1800.

(2) 20th July, 1800-22nd August, 1802.

(3) 5th May, 1805-31st July, 1806 (with heads of sermons 1796-97).

(4) 10th August, 1806-29th October, 1809.

(5) 5th November, 1809-28th February, 1813.

(6) 4th May, 1823-31st December, 1828.

V. Incidental Accounts 1840-1844.