Life and Thought of Bernard Eugene Meland, American Constructive Theologian, 1899–1993

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CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

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This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-2406-2, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2406-4

To

Everett J. and Lora “Nancy” Tarbox

friends and partners in developing the

Highlands Institute for

American Religious and Philosophical Thought

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PREFACE

Bernard E. Meland was one of the first professors I came to know at The University of Chicago and was thesis advisor for my M. A. Our association continued after I had left Chicago for the University of St. Andrews, Scotland where Meland, along with A. N. Whitehead and H. N. Wieman were subjects for my doctoral dissertation. When I gave my first paper at a national professional meeting it was on an aspect of Meland's thought. There were around seventy five persons gathered for the paper and as I began Dr. Meland entered the room. When the question time began, I recognized Meland and let him answer most of the questions. Our relationship continued through our establishing the *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* and later the Highlands Institute for American Religious and Philosophical Thought. As I serve as Meland's literary executor, his influence remains a vital part of my life.

I would like to express appreciation to Tyron Inbody for providing some of Meland's unpublished works and to recommend Inbody's *THE CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY OF BERNARD MELAND: Postliberal Empirical Realism* (1995). This work includes a complete bibliography of Meland's published writings.

Appreciation is also expressed to Karen Hawk for editing this work and to John Gaston for his computer assistance in so many ways.

BERNARD EUGENE MELAND'S *FIFTY YEARS OF RELIGIOUS INQUIRY* (1979)

I

Professionally my career in religious inquiry began in 1929, the year I received the degree of doctor of philosophy at The University of Chicago. To begin there, however, without first giving some account of what had preceded that event would be to suppress, naïve, groping, at times traumatic efforts which may have influenced what was to follow.

My first encounter with religious stimulus of any kind occurred at age four in a Norwegian Lutheran Church on the South Side of Chicago in a community called Roseland. Our entire neighborhood in those years consisted of Norwegians who had migrated to America during the eighteen eighties and nineties. Most of the men, including my father, were cabinet makers; which may account for the fact that they had settled in an area near The Pullman Car Works. I am sure that my recollections concerning that Norwegian Lutheran Church and of our Norwegian community life during those years have been romanticized to a degree; yet, what survives in memory is the festive character of its life and worship. That idyllic relationship was disrupted by some circumstance that led my grandfather, and the family with him, to leave The Lutheran Church and to become involved with a sect called "Millennial Dawn," or "Russellism," after its founder, Charles T. Russell. Although my mother and father felt ill at ease with that group, they went along with joining them out of loyalty to my grandfather.

In 1910 my family moved to Homewood, Illinois, a suburb twenty three miles south of the Chicago Loop. There were only two churches in that community: one a German Lutheran in which only German was preached and sung; the other a Presbyterian. By that turn of circumstances I became a Presbyterian, enrolled two years later in a Presbyterian college, Park College near Kansas City, Missouri, became an assistant to the Minister of the University Presbyterian Church, while doing graduate

work in the University of Illinois, and later an assistant in The Second Presbyterian Church of Chicago while studying at a Presbyterian seminar, McCormick Theological Seminary. Thus, what began as an accidental relationship continued throughout my youth. In the light of that fact there is a bit of irony in these words taken from a paper I presented to The American Theological Society (Midwest) in 1952: "To illustrate what I am saying, I should say that there lurks in the thinking of Professor Wieman the overtones of Calvinism and of Absolute Idealism, despite everything that he might do to assert his empirical method… In contrast, I have become increasingly aware of the persistence of a Lutheran heritage in my thought processes despite all the intellectual somersaulting I have gone through."[1]

College was an ambiguous experience so far as its influence upon my thinking was concerned. During the first year and a half I remained fairly insulated from critical winds of doctrine, and consequently continued in a modified form of evangelical fundamentalism. Almost imperceptibly, however, this evangelical enthusiasm underwent transformation by way of a transference from piety to a social passion engendered by a study of sociology in my senior year. Sociology, as it was conveyed to us in that course, and as it was addressed generally during that period through the literature of the field in this country, was largely an ethical study of society and social institutions. This fervor that had once found expression in pious testimony now became channeled into a social gospel. I should add that, along with this flare for sociology, I majored in English literature and writing, and, oddly enough, excelled in physics—sufficiently, that is, to be urged by the Chairman of the department to pursue graduate study in that field. In the years ahead both English literature and physics were to become as avocations for me.

During my senior year in college I planned to enroll in The Divinity School of The University of Chicago following graduation. In addition to being aware of Dean Shailer Mathews as an exponent of the social gospel, I had enrolled in a course (on Latin Hymnody, of all things) during the summer quarter of 1922 and had felt the lure of its Gothic Quadrangle. That plan was disrupted, however, by an invitation to become assistant to the minister of the University Presbyterian Church in Urbana, Illinois, adjoining the University of Illinois campus, along with the opportunity to do graduate study in the university. I enrolled in a seminar in Sociology under the eminent sociologist, E. H. Sutherland, who later joined the faculty of Indiana University at Bloomington, and a course in philosophy, where I was introduced to the writings of Josiah Royce and William James. At that time I preferred Royce to James. A reading of his *Religious*

Aspect of Philosophy provided me with a grounding in metaphysics at the time, sufficient, at least, to ease away doubts and misgivings that had crept into the corners of my minds.

During the mid-twenties the semblance of an American youth movement began to take form. *The Revolt of Youth* by Stanley High, relating mainly the revolt among German youth, was being widely read, especially among many of us in the churches. Youth revolts were breaking out among Protestants in several denominations. It fell my lot in 1924 to help organize a National Association of Presbyterian students and to become its first president. Needless to say I had frequent occasions to proclaim my cause and to decry the state of things, especially within the churches. Two themes in particular concerned me, namely, "War Is Sin!" and "Toward A Christian Social Order." I had preached on both themes in The University Presbyterian Church in Urbana. But our main thrust within our Association of Presbyterian Students, was at "the establishment" within the churches, as was true of Methodist youth. In fact they could be even more iconoclastic, and often were. Yet, in my role as president of our Association of Presbyterian Students, I delivered an address over a national radio broadcast, designed to stir Presbyterian youth of the country into action with such devastating effect that a speech I had been scheduled to give before The Presbyterian Club on The University of Chicago campus was cancelled. This is a bit difficult to imagine, now that the glands responsible for such spirited oratory are spent. My siege of barnstorming was to have come to a grand climax when I was invited to address the spring meeting of The General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church convening in Philadelphia in 1925. En route to New York some months earlier to confer with church leaders in preparation for the spring meeting, I was struck down with a virulent case of blood poisoning; in retrospect a just omen of rebuke. Hence my speech, written in bed at fever-heat, was read by proxy before the thousands who had gathered for the Spring Assembly. You can see that I have been living a life of anti-climax ever since.

A distaste for this exhibitionism had been gathering momentum in me for some time. It reached a climax while listening to a speech by one of my colleagues at The Interdenominational Student Conference in Evanston in 1925. My rejection of the role of bombast and shallow critic was complete. I announced to my associates that I was going to quit barking and give myself a chance to know what I was talking about.

I had enrolled in The Divinity School during the Autumn Quarter of that same year. Early in the Winter Quarter of 1926, Dean Shailer Mathews called me into his office. His first words were, "Meland, I like

what you're doing!" I immediately glowed with satisfaction and delight, thinking he was referring to my first quarter's work in The Divinity School; but as he went on I realized that what he liked was what I had just been doing as Program Chairman of The Interdenominational Student Conference which had just concluded. I didn't disclose my own disillusionment with that role at the time, and we talked on for some time, but my heart wasn't in it.

The next years at The University of Chicago were the best years of my life up to that time. My reaction from the crusading of previous years was so intense that, in retrospect, I am inclined to feel that I swung too far in the opposite direction. I had entered a monastery! The walls of Goodspeed Hall and Harper Library (Swift Hall had not yet been built) separated me from the outside world as completely as any stony structure of medieval France or Italy. I was ravenous for the nourishing of books and reflection. I read everything that was given on reading lists, and then browsed long hours in the library discovering new works to read.

During the first phase of my graduate study in The Divinity School the experience of grappling with the socio-historical approach to understanding Christian history and doctrine, as Shirley Jackson Case and Shailer Mathews conveyed it, proved exciting beyond anything I had encountered up to that time. Indirectly they were propounding a prophetic cause; yet they did so with a clarity of argument and persuasion that seemed judicious and informed. I was to reassess that experience of grasping the socio-historical method, as well as Mathews' and Case's way of conveying it; but, at the time, it was restorative and illumining.

I reveled also in exploring "the growth of religion" as it was being conveyed in the literature of courses dealing with the psychology and history of religions as disclosed among primitive peoples and during the early stages of "culture."

The most singular influence on my thinking during my graduate school years was Gerald Birney Smith. My devotion to him was such that for years after his untimely death, I thought of my own work and writing as being a continuation of his labors which had been cut off so untimely. One series of seminars under him was of special interest to me at the time; and, in a certain respect contributed an enduring influence upon my thinking. In these seminars I was introduced to Bergson's *Creative Evolution* along with the literature on emergent evolution. It was in that course of study that I became aware of Henry Wieman's *Religious Experience and Scientific Method* and learned that Wieman was to join the faculty in the fall quarter of that year, 1927. I was to learn later that there was occurring in Professor Smith's own thinking at that time transitions which reflected

influences from the new vision of science impelled by relativity and the new realism; and by a concern to venture more boldly and imaginatively in trying to understand our relation to "this mysterious universe." In effect, Wieman's coming to the faculty was for Smith a promise of hope, anticipating the encouragement that Wieman might bring to his own more measured, yet wistful adventure.

Although I had virtually completed my residence work for the doctorate by the time Wieman joined the faculty, I enrolled in the first class he taught in The Divinity School, and audited others. The course focused on two books: William Ernest Hocking's *The Meaning of God in Human Experience* (Part IV) and Whitehead's *Religion in the Making*. Wieman's thinking during that time focused particularly on themes concerning individual religious living, as developed in certain chapters of *The Wrestle of Religion* (1927) and *Methods of Private Religious Living* (1929). The words from Whitehead's *Religion in the Making*: "Religion is what to do with your solitariness; and if you are never solitary, you are never religious," were as a beacon light in the path of inquiry which Wieman was then pursuing. This was in sharp contrast to the social idealism and social gospel for which the early Chicago School has become known, as well as the emphasis of Wieman's own thought less than a decade later.

In retrospect, one can see that the years during which I studied in The Divinity School of The University of Chicago (1925–1929) mark a significant period in Divinity School history in which culminations and transitions were occurring. Modernism, with its socio-historical method of inquiry, which had influenced every department of the school for a quarter century, seemed in these closing years of the twenties to have reached a period of fruition; which, in some ways signaled its culmination. This, one can now see, was accented by the appointment of Henry Nelson Wieman to the faculty in 1927; though, at the time, it was not felt to be a divergence from the Modernist legacy. For Wieman, too, was "empirical" in his method of thinking; and looked to "scientific method" to provide criteria of judgment, even with regard to so elusive a problem of inquiry as the existence of God. Nevertheless, for most of us working in the theological field, Wieman brought a new perspective to religious inquiry, stemming in part from the fact that he was a philosopher and philosopher of religion, not a theologian; but even more significantly from differences in the sources which informed his thinking on religious and philosophical problems.

By virtue of being a Fellow in Systematic Theology and president of The Systematic Theology Club during the year 1928, I had occasion rather frequently to consult with Dean Mathews as well as Professors Smith and

Wieman. With Smith and Wieman the relationship developed more personally. Smith had been my advisor from 1926 on. Wieman and I, on discovering that we had both done our undergraduate work at Park College, felt a common bond between us. All this is by way of saying that, in the course of events, I became the man-in-between. Professor Smith would ask me at various intervals, "How is Wieman doing?" And Wieman, on the other hand, would ask me from time to time to prepare digests of Mathews', Smith's, or Case's thinking on this or that question, or how they would approach a problem. It was all done in the spirit of colleagues interested in one another's work; nevertheless I felt at times that I was acting in the role of an informer. Smith's interest in Wieman was genuine, even fatherly. He wanted him to succeed; and, since he had had a part in bringing Wieman to the attention of the Divinity School faculty, he undoubtedly was concerned that his judgment be vindicated. Wieman's concern to be informed about Mathews, Smith, and Case was clearly an effort to grasp the thrust of Modernism as it was being communicated through the socio-historical method, in a word, a short course in theological orientation concerning "The Chicago School."

Coming as I did under the spell of two quite different orientations of religious thinking, as a result of having plunged vigorously and deeply into each of them, the one during the early period of my graduate study, the other toward the latter phase of it, I could hardly escape the predicament of emerging from my Divinity School studies with some degree of double vision. But the intellectual shaping of my stance was to be further expanded, if not complicated, by a year of study in Marburg University in Germany. There I was to meet Rudolf Otto and to enroll in his final class before his retirement.

Rudolf Otto occupied a distinctive place among scholars in religious studies during that period. His book, *The Idea of The Holy,* translation of *Das Heilige* (1917), appeared in 1923. In isolation what is distinctive in religious awareness or apprehension, transcending both reason and moral good, Otto assumed that he was reasserting and fulfilling what Schleiermacher had re-discovered, namely, the *numinis*. Otto's word for it was "the Wholly Other," a word that was to resound in the writings of Barth and the Barthians. Yet Otto had no kind words for Barth or the Barthians; and Barth, would have nothing to do with Otto. Tillich, on the other hand, as he told me later, looked upon Otto as one of his mentors and closest allies.

When it was learned in The Divinity School that I was to go to Marburg and possibly to study with Otto, Mathews questioned the wisdom of it, and Wieman cautioned against it. Gerald Birney Smith, on the other

hand, urged me to look up Otto. I did seek out Otto, however; visited him in his home and enrolled in his class, as I have said.

Although I re-read much of Otto's *Idea of the Holy* and his *Religious Essays—A Supplement To The Idea of The Holy*, I gave more attention to his efforts in the liturgical movement that was evoking widespread attention at the time. A considerable portion of my first book, *Modern Man's Worship*, published in 1934, is devoted to relating and interpreting that movement, and of exploring particularly Otto's contribution to it.

I was not able at that time to assess my response to Rudolf Otto, or to understand the nature of his influence upon me; nor have I been able to do so to my full satisfaction to this day. On my retirement from The Divinity School in 1964 I recoiled from efforts in one of the papers to correlate my mode of religious inquiry directly, or in explicit ways, with Rudolf Otto's numinous theology. I have had second thoughts about it in recent years; yet, as I indicated in the Preface to my *Fallible Forms and Symbols*, the affinities are akin to those which may be noted in comparing numinous and emergent modes of reflecting; and are expressive of the same subtle distinctions that distinguish the one from the other. In both modes of inquiry, however, the elemental, creatural stance is basic. And that is characteristic of my thought as well.

As a postscript to what I have said, my study and travel in Europe during that year had been rewarding, yet disturbing in deeper, more cultural ways that can be distilled from my academic experience in Marburg. I think I sensed during that year in Europe that the American experience in itself is to an important degree, a truncation of the European experience. This became necessary by virtue of what was imperative in settling a wilderness. What began as a necessity was to become a pragmatic, cultural ethos, intent upon functional value as being both the lure and the end of life. This had been made explicit in a "work ethic" in the Calvinist bent of mind of the Puritan heritage that settled New England. It was to assume cruder form under enterprising and ruthless pioneering builders who had succeeded in wresting control of the ship of state from the more genteel rule of the Adamses (which is just a symbol of what had gone before) when the push Westward began in earnest. The social gospel of liberalism during the early years of the twentieth century was, in effect, an effort of restraint upon the crudities of that "robber-baron" mode of individual enterprise, hopefully to turn it to more humane ends, or to infect it with a social meliorism that could evolve into a social idealism.

All this is by way of saying that the European experience of 1928–29 affected my thinking in ways other than in its theological or philosophical

influences. The stimulus and lure in the language of the arts became for me for the first time an alternative to the moral way of expressing value, sensibility, and fulfillment of human experience. The limiting effect of the stark, moralistic flavor of American Protestantism, even as conveyed in The Divinity School of The University of Chicago in the twenties; or I should say, particularly as it was conveyed at Chicago during the Modernist era, surfaced in my thinking with disturbing effect. For the pragmatic orientation of ethical insight and activity seemed but a sociological reformulation of the Calvinist work ethic, with its accompanying distrust of the aesthetic, symbolic, poetic, or whatever might evoke the sense of wonder in expressing or challenging belief or the structures of belief.

II

During a memorable morning in Marburg in the spring of 1929 I received a cablegram from Dean Shailer Mathews which read: "HAVE FINE OFFER CENTRAL COLLEGE MISSOURI RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY URGE YOU ACCEPT." I cabled back, "I ACCEPT." Thus began my professional career as Professor of Religion and Philosophy. The perspective which I brought to my initial years of teaching was, to say the least, multiform. Modernism, with its socio-historical method and its socio-ethical idealism, in juxtaposition with a new realism with its themes of emergence and mystical naturalism formed at best a troubled alliance; yet this formed the core of what I brought to my teaching as "professional learning." My encounter with Rudolf Otto and his *mysterium tremendum* along with observations of the new liturgical movement that was astir in Germany, and hints of the "theology of crisis" that were then only emerging on the horizon of my thinking, had intruded disturbing, yet alluring, or at least arresting counter-themes of inquiry. Yet this intermingling of theological strands was but a phase of a larger reorientation of thinking and feeling that was occurring, and to some degree taking definite form, within me. That reorientation had to do with reassessing the moralistic bent of our cultural elan, and of awakening to the promise and efficacy of aesthetic sensibilities in shaping communal life and in enlarging as well as enhancing our conceptions of human fulfillment. This concern with the interplay of moralistic and aesthetic values has persisted throughout my intellectual and religious groping since that time. In subsequent writings I was to substitute the words "human fulfillment" for more explicitly ethical terms; and, on those grounds, my thought has at times been judged to be deficient in ethical awareness or sensibility. As I interpret my efforts, however, they have never been dissociated from the ethical concern or with moral value; but they have sought to reinterpret moral concerns within what I have called an appreciative consciousness, which takes into account relational and developmental considerations, thus making of the notion of a good a creative occurrence. John Spencer's characterization of my effort in this area as "an aesthetic-ethic" is therefore accurate, and possibly the best one can devise.

My concern with the aesthetic legacy, following my European experience, led me during those early years of teaching to explore a wide range of literature dealing with that idiom. In addition to works on aesthetics I read extensively in European and American literature, especially poetry, works on aesthetics, including the aesthetics of myth as cultural

anthropologists conveyed it. While at Chicago I had dealt only minimally with this area; but during my early years of teaching it became a resource which I was to pursue seriously and continuously. At the same time the writings of R. R. Marett, the British anthropologist, were most formative of my thinking: works such as *Faith, Hope and Charity in Primitive Religion, Sacraments of Simple Folk,* and *Head, Heart, and Hands in Human Evolution.*

Eventually I was to pursue "the aesthetic-ethic" theme more explicitly within the philosophical idiom, employing what I called "the appreciative consciousness." In this effort, the mode of thinking exemplified in the writings of William James and Alfred North Whitehead were found to be instructive and provocative.

Meanwhile a rising tide of interest was appearing among American clergy and theologians in what was then called "the theology of crisis," taken from the title of a book by Emil Brunner which appeared toward the close of 1929. In retrospect it seems a bit shocking to me that I could be so little aware of Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Paul Tillich during my year of study in Germany. Actually, however, their names were not to the fore in the University of Marburg among those who were attentive to theological interests. Rudolf Otto, though about to retire, was still their most eminent spokesman in religious studies. Next to him were two younger professors, Rudolf Bultmann and Friedrich Heiler. Bultmann's prominence at that time stemmed, not from his "demythologizing" project, but from his writing on *Formgeschichte* (form criticism); Heiler's from the fact that he had recently converted to Lutheranism from Catholicism, and like Otto, was actively participating in the liturgical movement in Germany.

Prior to Brunner's *Theology of Crisis*, the only book in English on the theology had been Karl Barth's *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (*Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie*), which had appeared in 1928. Tillich was to appear in English translation for the first time with the publication of *The Religious Situation* in 1932. By the time I was writing the manuscript for *Modern Man's Worship* which was published in 1934, I had become attentive to all three men. As I recall, I looked upon their "crisis theology" as an important perspective countering the exaggerated subjective tone of much of latter-day liberalism. In *Modern Man's Worship* I wrote:

> The Barthian Movement in Germany represents another attempt to restore the objective mood in current culture. The fact that so many in our day have responded, almost wistfully, to Karl Barth and his group suggests, not so much that they have pointed the way, but that they have voiced a

> yearning which is deeply felt by many thoughtful men and women through the world.

Faint praise, exhibiting a meager grasp of what the movement was about and what it portended for the years ahead.

Restoring *the objective mood* was the central concern of my own *Modern Man's Worship*; and, in the sense that the theology of crisis affirmed that mood I felt a kinship with them. Yet I saw their mode of objectivity and the emerging enthusiasm for it as being a real peril. "For," I wrote:

> as Tillich and Wieman have both pointed out, the disparagement of knowledge and of all rational instruments for apprehending religious reality in the universe, implied in the Barthian approach, breaks down the only dependable means we have been able to achieve, through long years of disciplined study, for acquiring insight into this profound mystery.

And later I observed,

> The metaphysical implications of Tillich's concept of the *Unconditioned* have not, as yet, become sufficiently clear to be evaluated as an effort to recover objectivity in religion; but the temper of thought, as well as his approach, is more agreeable and promising than any religious philosophy that has come from European scholarship in recent years.

Brunner was soon to become regarded by many in the American theological community as being "the clearest and most systematic thinker of the school of Dialectical theology." And when, in 1938, he was appointed guest professor in Princeton Theological Seminary, he became for a time the chief spokesman for the movement in this country.

Meanwhile Reinhold Niebuhr was emerging as the American counterpart of the dialectical movement in theology. This was not as evident in his first book, *Does Civilization Need Religion*, published in 1927; but with the publication of his *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932), *Reflections on the End of an Era* (1934), *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (1935) and *Beyond Tragedy* (1947), Niebuhr became a commanding voice, not only among theologians, but among political scientists, economists, and social scientists generally. Some of us had acknowledged this esteem of him during our student years. In 1925, while Niebuhr was still a minister in Detroit, we had prevailed upon him to be our principal speaker at The Interdenominational Student Conference in Evanston, Illinois. Throughout my teaching years in the thirties and beyond, my esteem of him as a social critic and as an eloquent and perceptive interpreter of our human foibles persisted. I recall using his *Moral Man and Immoral Society* as a basic text in a course in Ethics the year the book was published (1932).

In the autumn of 1936, I joined the faculty of Pomona College in Claremont, California. There I continued to offer courses in history and philosophy of religion. I was to give fuller attention at that time to what, in anthropological literature is referred to as "culture religions," implying religions of an advanced societal structure. I spent many hours reading the full text of Sacred Writing of Religions of the East, and those of the Near East which I had not previously encountered. Here the theme "religion and culture," supplementing "myth" was more in dominance. That mode of study was supplemented by courses in philosophy of religion, and a series designed to explore aesthetic and cultural formulations of the religious outreach in Western history. This took the form of centering upon specific creative people in art, literature, science and music who had contributed to, even shaped religious sentiment and belief in Western history through their particular art form.

Since I was directly responsible for the College Chapel which convened once a week, I employed the aesthetic-ethical medium in reflective and evocative ways in which poetry, drama, symphony and choral music, and occasionally the dance, were the principal mediums of expression. Occasionally chapel talks were integrated with one or more of these media. This is a risky effort unless there is sufficient talent available in a school or community to create and to sustain such a mode of disciplined expression and reflection within the aesthetic-ethical idiom. I was fortunate during that eight year experiment to have exceptional talent among the students to call upon, and the full cooperation of faculty people in the departments of music, literature, art, drama, speech, philosophy, physics and astronomy. The social scientists were a bit dubious about the venture; yet the response of the college community as a whole was such that this resistance created no obstacle to the effort. During the early years of the experiment, Robert Shaw, who was later to organize and conduct The Robert Shaw Chorale, was a student in my courses and president of the student body. During one year he conducted the chapel choir, which gives some hint of the kind of support I was given in the project. The experience of seeing this "aesthetic-ethical" mode of religious reflection and awareness actually implemented, if only in the mood of worship, was reassuring; though it was too limited a venture to warrant generalizations concerning wider usage or implications.

During the first few years of my teaching in Pomona College, roughly 1937 through 1939, I was writing a series of papers expressive of the mystical naturalism I had come to embrace as a religious perspective. These papers, in effect, were a fruition of efforts referred to earlier in exploring the literature of cultural anthropology, especially the literature of

myth; simultaneously with that of modern poetry. Some of the titles, which give some hint of the turn of thought implied in mystical naturalism as I conveyed it, were: "Attachment to Life," "Man's Religious Outreach," "Primary Religion," "Praise and Relinquishment," "Religion Rooted in Nature," "When Religion Uproots Life," "Mysticism in Modern Terms," etc. Simultaneously with writing these essays I was engaged in assembling an anthology of modern poetry expressive of such themes. I had hoped to publish the essays under the title, "In Praise of Life," and the anthology of verse with the title, "Modern American Psalms." Both manuscripts were generously praised by publishers; but were not accepted for publication; hence they lie on my shelves to this day under the caption, "Rare Documents." This was also a period during which I wrote considerable poetry; though little of it was published. A portion of a lengthy poem retelling the biblical story of Creation as it might have occurred on the shores of Laguna Beach, entitled, "God and the Morning," was published in my *Seeds of Redemption* (1947). The imagery employed in this rendering of the Creation story is obliquely reminiscent of primitive myths I had encountered in the literature on primitive religions.[2]

III

For many years after I had joined the faculty of The Divinity School of The University of Chicago (1945) I looked back upon that preoccupation with mystical naturalism as but an episode in my career of religious inquiry; one which, in large measure, I had outgrown. In recent years, on examining and reflecting upon what I have come to affirm as *empirical realism*, I have begun to see that what emerges as a theological rendering of our creatural stance bears marked affinities with that earlier orientation of mystical naturalism. There were reasons, however, for the earlier judgment or interpretation. The trauma of the Second World War, which had been made intimate and sobering through reported losses of young men who had but recently been students in my classes; and later ghastly and overwhelming with reports of the dropping of bombs that destroyed instantly two cities and most of their population; along with intimations of what was to burgeon as the holocaust, settled like an impenetrable mist of anguish and despair over the whole of our existence. I voiced this note of anguish and despair in an address at a Spring Conference in Swift Hall in 1954 in words like these:

> One glaring fact which stares out from the events of recent years is that man has become a casualty. And this affects every other aspect of the situation, aggravating the present crisis. For one thing, the human psyche has been shaken to its core by the actual brutalities of man to man which have occurred in the civilized West within the memory of the youngest among us today. The dead have been buried. The chambers of horror have been emptied, possibly obliterated; many of them; yet the scars of these inhumanities will not be obliterated so long as men dream dreams and the haunting memories pall upon the unadjusted millions clinging to survival. This is an echo out of our recent past that will not be readily stilled. In these perverse acts of twentieth century torture, or of necessary measures of defense, however we justify them, the incredible depravity of man became an empirical fact; not in one gang that had run amuck but in the tolerance of evil among a whole people.

After commenting on the psychical changes within the structure of experience of our Western culture following from this trauma I commented:

> What this means to me theologically is that we are a generation that has been thrust back on the most elemental level of spiritual need. The sophistications of good and evil which, in other generations have yielded remarkable discriminations of taste, judgment and discernment in liturgy, religious art, doctrine, or ethical sensitivity, not to speak of the cultural arts generally, are really not relevant to our age, if in fact they are even

> available to us. The need that is paramount by reason of this far-reaching psychical dislocation is for forgiveness and judgment, and in that order. The deeps of our nature cry out for release from inescapable guilt, for acceptance as over against the rejection we ourselves impose upon ourselves as human beings.
>
> Yet we are astute enough in our distraught state to resist an easy acceptance. Consciously or unconsciously, we invite judgment, just so long as it proceeds from an impassive righteousness that summons us to have faith in a good not our own. This readiness to be judged by the God of grace is, I am convinced, our nearest approximation to a serious concern with standards in this age. Actually it is our *alternative* to standards.

It was in this troubled state of mind that I had written *Seeds of Redemption* (1947) and *The Reawakening of Christian Faith.* To a marked degree it influenced the way I conceived of my role as Professor of Constructive Theology during the first decade of teaching in Chicago. And while a more seasoned consideration of theological themes was managed in *Faith and Culture* (1953) overtones of trauma and urgency expressive of the period persist. *Faith and Culture*, however, was more than reflections upon troublesome turns within the cultural experiences of the West during the forties and fifties; it implied a reassessment of the liberal legacy, with hints of proposals for its reconstruction. From this meager beginning there emerged the project concerning "The History of Liberalism in Religious Thought"—(a project which has yet to come to fruition). The stimulus of my effort in *Faith and Culture*, however, resulted in my offering a sequence of courses on "The History of Liberal Theology," beginning the autumn quarter of 1958.

Plans for pursuing the project were interrupted for a time by my being appointed to give The Barrows Lectures in India in 1957–58. What emerged intellectually from that experience was a vivid sense of the degree to which people within a given culture "live and move and have their being" within an *orbit of meaning* that is distinctive and expressive of their own historical structure of experience. Having already acquired appreciation of various religious cultures through my concern with cultural anthropology and the history of religion, the import of what was implied in "orbit of meaning" was not new to me; however, until that experience in South-east Asia, I had not formulated it as a concept to take seriously in pursuing religious inquiry in its various aspects. How it became a sharpened tool of thought along with "structure of experience," which had emerged sharply in my mind while writing *Faith and Culture.* The import of the words "orbit of meaning" emerged from a series of conversations I had with Hindu philosophers and historians during those months in India. Invariably, when I had stated an opinion or judgment, one or more of my

Hindu friends would nod and say, "Of course you would think that way being from America;" or sometimes it was, "from the Christian West." Yet I had had no sense of speaking out of that legacy, for the conversation did not turn upon issues within that context. Yet what impressed me even more about these frequent observations by my Hindu friends was their similarity to impressions I had been having concerning their comments. "Being Hindu," I said to myself, "they would think that way!" Yet nothing in our conversation has been explicitly religious or theological. It had been directed to cultural issues that had become sharpened in my mind as I traveled about in India from Kashmir in the far north to the southern most peak of the continent. I reflected a good deal on this point during my visit; and, on my return to Chicago, pondered its implications. Shortly after my return from India I was to hear Professor Milton Singer, Anthropologist and Chairman of South Asian Studies in The University of Chicago, remark that, when the South Asia Studies group of the University first undertook their study of India as a culture they cast about for clues to the best way to approach it. They tried out several paths of inquiry, following the lead of political history, discussions of social structure, racial groupings and the like. "But we got nowhere," he said, "until we centered upon its religious history. Religion we found to be the heart of the matter."

I began to see that what I had been stressing as "structure of experience" and "mythos" since writing *Faith and Culture* gave fresh import to these findings by anthropologists, as well as to my own experiences in talking with Hindu philosophers and historians in India. The orbit of meaning of which I was speaking, however, was not to be understood simply in conceptual terms; it related to bodily feelings, or the human psyche, surfacing on occasions as sensibilities, but persisting mostly as a reservoir of felt experiences. "We think with our bodies," Whitehead is reported to have said on one occasion in emphasizing the vector character of the conceptual act. These remarks and experiences have greatly influenced me in re-thinking the nature of the relevance of the Christian legacy, including the themes and motifs of the Judaic heritage for understanding Western experience.

As indicated earlier, I had renewed my interest in Whitehead even before coming to The Divinity School faculty, though more specifically as his mode of thought related to, or was expressive of, the mood of thought that was coming into prominence in the thirties and forties in response to publications by various philosophers of science, and physicists such as J. E. Boodin's *Three Interpretations of the Universe* (1934), Max Planck's *The Universe in the Light of Modern Physics,* and Sir A. S. Eddington's *Science and the Unseen World* (1929) and *The Mysterious Universe*

(1930), in which "the new vision of science" was being addressed. On coming to The Divinity School faculty I was to encounter a lively interest in Whitehead among younger members of the faculty, due in part to the stimulus of Charles Hartshorne's course on "The Philosophy of Whitehead," but organized and vigorously projected by Bernard M. Loomer who, having written his doctoral thesis on "The Theological Significance of the Method of Empirical Analysis in the Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead" (1942), had just become Dean of The Divinity School. I had difficulties, as I recall, with the "cultic" tone in which Whitehead was being heralded among some of my colleagues; nevertheless I shared their appreciation of him and, in my way, participated in it. In the autumn of 1953 I began a sequence of courses on Christian Theology in Relation to Philosophy. This sequence began with an examination of Kant and Hegel as they had influenced liberal theology, following with seminars of William James and the emergent evolutionists, focusing principally on S. Alexander's *Space, Time and Deity.* Formative themes in Whitehead's philosophy of organism were then explored. Since *Process and Reality* was being examined page by page in Professor Loomer's course on Whitehead, and in Professor Hartshorne's course on Whitehead as well, I addressed specific themes in the Whiteheadian literature as they related to the contributions by James and the emergent evolutionists, notably S. Alexander. In the sequence as a whole I was concerned to visualize and to convey the pattern of thinking that emerged in correlating these empirical and realistic strands. Back of this procedure was the assumption that not everything of importance in these other legacies contributing to process thought had been adequately addressed in *Process and Reality*; and that much of what was peculiarly pertinent to religious inquiry was to be found in these sources antedating *Process and Reality.*

I was later to probe the interrelation between James' radical empiricism and the phenomenology of Merleau Ponti and others, concluding with observations as to symptoms of rapport and variations between Ponti's reformulation of the phenomenological theme, taking into account aspects of the new vision of science, and certain features of Whitehead's philosophy. The outcome of probing these several perspectives has issued in what I designate as *empirical realism.* While empirical realism as I project it clearly implies correlation of influences from these various modes of inquiry, correlation is not the defining term. What is more expressive of it is holding these various perspectives in juxtaposition as beams of light illumining different aspects of the problem, simultaneously with evoking restraint upon any effort to effect a closure upon what is being conveyed through experience as lived.

IV

Some Reassessments of the Continuing Effect of Earlier Influences

When I left The Divinity School of The University of Chicago, following the completion of my doctoral work in 1929, I had a strong sense of leaving behind much that had loomed significant, even indispensable to the school, and which had excited my interest at that earlier stage. The central core of what was being rejected was the socio-historical method of inquiry; and in large measure that included what was envisaged in Modernism as well. Twenty years later, after I had returned to The Divinity School as Professor of Constructive Theology, I expressed this sense of rejection more decisively, yet with sadness, "for," as I said at the that time, "the men who exemplified the point of view which now seems remote and irrelevant were the men who literally cradled my theological mind." With regard to method of inquiry and perspective that sense of estrangement persists; yet evidence has since come to my attention which suggests that, despite those symptoms of irrelevance, certain habits or style of inquiry persist in my thinking and writing which suggest that the socio-historical method had left its imprint on me in ways I had not suspected or discerned at earlier stages of my thought. One such discovery occurred in 1963. Members of The Divinity School faculty had met in Swift Halls Commons to discuss my book, *The Realities of Faith*, which has been published in the fall of 1962. Professor Nathan Scott introduced the discussion of the book in the course of which he asked, "Bernard, why does it seem so important to you to lay out 'the formative imagery' of any given period of history before you proceed with discussing that period?" For a moment I was taken aback by the question; for, as I responded, "How else is one to proceed?" I was to recall later that in every course I had taught in which the theological position of other theologians was to be interpreted and discussed, I had introduced my characterization and analysis with a brief exposition of their formative imagery. That act of clarifying and identifying with the formative imagery of an individual theologian or period of theological inquiry, was straight out of the socio-historical. Another characteristic in my thinking which concurs with the procedure implanted by the early Chicago School is the concern to see a point of view under consideration in its developing, historical context. This is of apiece with the early Chicago School's penchant for viewing any system of thought within an evolutionary context. Seizing upon characteristics or dominant ideas or doctrines in a system and looking at them abstractly in some typological fashion has

always seemed arbitrary; but more seriously, it overlooks nuances, transitions, reversals and revisions within a mode of thinking that invariably distort the point of view under consideration. I think the procedure I have followed through the years possibly enlarges upon what the socio-historical method intended in analyzing the thought of one person or of a community of thought; nevertheless it is of apiece with what was conveyed to me in my encounter with the early Chicago School.

By contrast, what always shocked me in Wieman's thinking and mode of teaching, and throughout my associations with him in later years was his seeming indifference to the developmental character of thought. Like Reinhold Niebuhr and others he preferred the typological procedure that afforded a swift and compact characterization of a point of view in theology or philosophy of religion. This procedure, I realize, is commonplace in philosophical analysis. And perhaps the philosophers attentiveness to basic concepts lends itself more readily to so bare and unhistorical a procedure. However that point is evaluated, I recognize that my procedure has been that of the social or cultural historian for whom such conceptual digests of thought can be helpful or adequate only as they are set or seen within a developing context of historical experience of whatever age or period.

To cite one other possible derivative in my thinking from the early Chicago School, I have thought that, conceivably, my preoccupation with "themes of the faith" along with a corresponding indifference to pursuing historical doctrines of belief, or of reformulating them in contemporary terms, could be vaguely expressive of the modernist's procedure. Shailer Mathews spoke repeatedly of Christian faith "breeding true to itself" and of distinguishing between persisting convictions and doctrines. Doctrines, he held, are the legitimization of these persisting convictions through the use of analogies and social patterns that are expressive of recognizable and communicable meaning in the period of social history being studied. In say, as I do in *Fallible Forms and Symbols,* that "doctrines are expendable, the legacy of faith is not," I would seem to be identifying to an extent with that socio-historical mode of interpretation. The historical "gestalt" to which I point, however, is inclusive of a larger orbit of meaning than was envisaged in "the social movement" with which Mathews identified Christianity. It was inclusive of selective strands of Judaic history that had been formative of a cultural élan which assumed climactic form in the historical Jesus and his followers, a coalition that came to be called "Jewish Christians." Mathews, who insisted on holding to the conception of Christianity as a social movement in the Near East, focused sharply, if not exclusively upon the social teaching of Jesus. I, in turn, represent this

cultural legacy as being inclusive of a larger span of Near-Eastern history, focusing specifically upon the redemptive theme as being formative of its cultural elan and the pattern of reflections which were to give form to its cultural sense of destiny; and incentive to pursue it. Furthermore I probe this cultural elan with an eye to subliminal dimensions of the cultural elan, as informed by notions which have become meaningful and directive in my mode of inquiry: e.g.: "structure of experience," "mythos" and "orbit of meaning." This mode of inquiry represents in itself a sharp divergence from the socio-historical method of the early Chicago School and its spokesmen; for whom the overt act of formulating doctrine provided an appropriate area of inquiry. The nearest they were to come in probing below or behind the conscious or overt level of inquiry or social analysis was in Mathews identification of "analogies" and "social patterns" expressive of a given "social mind" in any particular period of history. These could be subliminal at the moment of usage in the sense that they conveyed an instant backdrop of communicable meaning within a given historical group, requiring no further elaboration or persuasion, least of all explication. Within a later "social mind," earlier analogies and social patterns would find no such ready recognition or acceptance; for new clusters of recognizable meanings, expressive of our derivative from the new social mind that had emerged, had displaced the older imagery.

My alternative to this succession of social minds within a continuing social history is the ebb and flow of psychical currents of awareness and sensibility within the structure of experience, wherein the events or accidents of history, not necessarily the gradual evolution of a social mind, play a role in evoking or restoring to conscious awareness what is deeply judging, restorative, even redemptive, or that can provide access to what is redemptive and healing.

As one pursues these contrasts between the two modes of addressing the Christian legacy within Western experience, their affinities seem less and less convincing; and their contrasts more marked and decisive. Perhaps the words "conceivable, but remote" describe the affinities.

The nature and degree of Gerald Birney Smith's influence upon my thinking through the years is at once evident, yet obscure. Its evident character is conveyed in the way I tended to identify my own theological stance with his long after I had left The Divinity School in those early years. One striking instance is my classifying myself along with him under the caption, "Mystical Naturalists" in *American Philosophies of Religion*, a book which Wieman and I wrote together. Wieman's name appeared under "Naturalistic Theist." Much that I wrote in my first book, *Modern Man's Worship* dealing with the theme, At Home in the Universe and