From Narrative to Necessity

From Narrative to Necessity: Meaning and the Christian Movement according to Hegel

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PREFACE

Monotheism might be regarded as both ancestor and abstract essence of the absolute point of view with which both modern philosophy and modern science have striven to identify themselves, to the point of eschewing merely natural certainties. Thus it has in a sense preceded these two phenomena as condition for their birth, a condition they not unnaturally seek ceaselessly to improve upon, in an at least partial rejection, as captured by the notion of differentiation and reintegration as one operation, arguably the essence of the ancient three-termed syllogism.

This book therefore attempts the ultimate reintegration of recasting the spontaneous religious movement of monotheism, of Judaism developing into Christianity, arguably a form of atheism, in scientific or absolute mode. Islam, where touched upon, is treated under its aspect, incidental it may be but undeniable historically, of one of the many variants upon Christianity.

It does not ignore the previous attempt by Hegel to do precisely the same but rather builds consciously upon it. An experience of neo-Thomism virtually unknown to Hegel is also brought to bear, leading to the conclusion that Hegel rather than the neo-scholastics or Jesuits or even Kant is the continuator of the Thomist Augustinian Aristotelian position. If Kant was the differentiator here then Hegel was the one reintegrating, while we have performed a further reintegration, centred ultimately upon Parmenides as developed and not cancelled by Heraclitus[1]. The final position though, as stressing human command over the material presented to thought, freedom over being, is distinctively post-modern.

An introductory chapter loads the scales in favour of an idealist approach in quasi-Quinean sense, in that being is called in question, as it is throughout the book. After a chapter revising the best expositions of faith as a possibly rational attitude the Christian discovery or intuition of intra-

[1] See *The Logic of Hegel*, i.e. the first part of *The Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (transl. William Wallace), Oxford University Press, 1873, 1965, §88, addition, also 86 add.

divine events or processes, held compatible with divine infinity and immutability, is treated under the rubric of a Trinitarian philosophy. This leads to analysis of notions of being (identity in difference) and, above all, of creation, viewing this as freed from the historic dualism which has contradicted the necessary infinity of the first principle. Creation is not thereby denied but seen as truly a constituent of the divine life. The picture is thus monistic, which is to say scientific as presenting a holistic system or way of seeing things absolutely or beyond appearance merely.

The consequences for human metaphysical and moral nature are rigorously drawn, freed from all anthropomorphisms so as better to illuminate the insights of religion and philosophy. The relevance for contemporary movements from palaeontology and evolutionary theory to Church ecumenism is brought out, while a concluding epilogue attempts to shed light on the vexed debate on Europe in relation to the Christian inheritance. Other concluding chapters treat of both sacramental religion and of dialectic as the method of reason, whether in theology or in the world. For the world without the reason is not an object of thought, any more than you can wash the fur without wetting it, in G. Frege's words.

INTRODUCTION

HOW REAL ARE WE?

How real are we? In particular, what reality has any temporal ephemeral substance in comparison with the timeless truth (or falsity) of ideas? In this book it is appropriate, if unusual, to consider those religious traditions, so decisively influential upon the history of philosophy, claiming to come from out of the world, with a special authority, consequently, as retailed by an empowered prophet or "more than a prophet". Yet philosophy is needed to draw out the meaning of this revelation, as, prior to that, of "revelation" itself. Despite theology's occasional claim to be "queen of the sciences" she has in the last analysis to submit her being and teaching to philosophical evaluation, since even a stance of theological positivism would require argument to justify it, as we find in Karl Barth, for example.

Nor should such evaluation limit itself to a question of truth or falsity. Philosophy is needed not only to draw out the meaning of revelation in *that* sense. It would even be needed to define the status of a putative "dogmatic theology" and this within or as containg or absorbing the latter indifferently. So it forms a large part of the work of theology itself as well, as it is equally, if differently, required in and for the natural sciences. There it is often referred to as "the philosophy of science", though in reality it cannot leave such sciences in their abstract separateness since it is *their own* philosophy in an absolute self-knowing which is, however, necessarily *its own* property alone. Hence such a philosophy more truly absorbs the sciences too to form a Philosophy of Nature. So it is too with religion and thus, equally, theology as the abstracted science of an abstracted religion. For similarly, just as in the case of the particular sciences, philosophy absorbs or "accomplishes" religion in the most perfect or complete form of Spirit or Mind, the Idea Absolute as Hegel claims, creating his own terminology for the purpose. Effectively this is religion itself, the ultimate *Gottesdienst*, he claims, one with the Pauline "understanding spiritual things spiritually", and not an abstractly human attempt to improve upon divine revelation, such as Barthianism would in

all its phases exclude. Such absolute knowledge is itself revelation itself, as spirit, absolute mind, as Hegel claims to establish in the final chapters of *The Phenomenology of Mind*. It is revelation and its own revelation in its being universal or one with the other of itself. This is the Concept, Hegel argues in the *Logic*, including all its constituents as identical with it in their very difference with itself, knowledge admitting no abstract otherness.

In brief, this book needs no apology. After all the question of eternal life, our subject here, remains open. That thesis too, however, of the openness of this question, must be found to be grounded rationally, to be itself reason or, in a word, open to eternal discussion and contemplation. The life of the mind, that is, transcends life in infinite self-reflectiveness. "Be still and know that I am God", namely, in the eternal return of all things. This is the Concept, itself incomposite as no longer, in Logic's result, subject to break up in judgment and syllogism, one with the grain of sand or babble of the brook, as with the "still small voice" of the Elijah stories or the smile or frown on someone's face. Intellect illumines all, freshness of the freshness, in full absorption of iimmediate sense.life. This is, it is shown here, what philosophy *has to* cater for in an activity no different from itself.

The picture then of the displacement of philosophy by each of the special sciences one by one as they develop in this way emerges as a moment, rather, in the development of philosophy itself, an alienation or self-exile preparatory of a more secure return, analogous to that spiritual reclamation of external nature which is the process itself constitutive of philosophy. By spiritual (*geistig*) one understands the mental as determinative of the whole, as its "form" (*forma formarum*).

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A century ago in England R.H. Benson wrote a historical novel, *By What Authority?*, in favour of a triumphantly logical, and loved, Roman Catholicism beleaguered by Tudor absolutism and English national feeling, as well as by the theories, which some would call insights, of Luther and other then recent "reformers". The title question comes from a scene in the *Gospel according to Matthew*. For Benson, it seems, all authority comes from Christ-God through Peter to the Roman hierarchy under the Pope. This, he would insinuate, is just what Christ would not tell the pharisees, *viz*. by what authority he did what he did. In his "counter-example" of

John the Baptist's baptismal and allied practices, however, Jesus asks "Was it from heaven or from men?" He does not repeat the term "authority" (*exousia*). Perhaps he was not comfortable with it. He may have been even less comfortable with it than the evangelist, in the midst of the first Jewish-Christian conflict, only discreetly indicates.

So it is a weak point for Benson and those of his mind that his title-question mirrors pharisaical categories, too crude and forensic for the "prophet and more than a prophet" of the Sermon on the Mount, for example. The pharisees, after all, were referring to his not being one of them or of some parallel ecclesial body commissioning him, to his not having been through the usual school of priestly or scribal formation ending with an authoritative commission, as still practised in the churches.

Jesus himself, however, is represented as commissioning leaders, "shepherds", to whom he wanted people to listen. He stressed though that they were not to "lord it" over those whom they were there rather to serve, whether expounding those scriptures Jesus claimed to fulfil or organizing money collections, tasks that others also were equally free to fulfil. The idea of two levels of service, of those who sit or do not sit "in the seat of Moses", was Jewish, and there is little reason to assume that Jesus the Jew would have abolished it. Thus the disciples continued after his death to go to the synagogue for the prescribed prayers. It was before such synagogal bodies that Paul or Stephen first wished to proclaim Jesus as Christ. However the imitation of this pattern among the first Christians and in some theologies, even to the point of reviving the idea of a sacrificing priesthood, may well have been a development more human than divine. The new movement maybe needed around two millennia to realise its supra-religious character, quite apart from the need (after its adoption by the Emperor in particular) to impose itself upon a populace impressed by such things and accustomed, like most of humanity, to priests and their sacrifices.[1]

It is remarkable, I note here, that Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth Christian century, takes as his example of a natural law more evident *apud omnes* than those secondary precepts devised by human reason (such as private property) the need to offer sacrifice to divine beings. What is even

[1] My view of Jesus and Christianity owes a great deal to the arguments and research of H. Küng and E. Schillebeeckx. Cf. Damien Casey's article (on the Internet; see also Note 6 below) on the *fractio panis* in early Christian frescoes and the references given there.

more remarkable is to find contemporary “Thomists” still confidently repeating this example as if it were self-evident in our secularized or Protestant world, where it appears distinctly archaic and so little self-evident as to seem a prime counter-example to the thesis of natural law invariance.

Perhaps Aquinas wanted to put in a word for the Mass as a sacrifice, something hardly self-evident. The Christian impulse, developing “spiritualizing” tendencies in the Hebrew prophets, was to abolish propitiatory sacrifice in favour of what pleases God in human behaviour, the conduct of life. That the life and death of Christ himself has often been presented as a sacrifice, the supreme sacrifice, on the old sacerdotal model, is surely to be ascribed to a theological mood only, a need for figure and analogy, for mystical types. Thus even a conservative Christian of today such as C.S. Lewis baulks at the idea that God wants blood, preferring to present salvation not as “atonement” but as God's first doing for us what we otherwise would not manage ourselves, *viz*. dying (and rising again). And so we find Aquinas, again, in the heyday of the sacrifice-theology, saying that one drop of Christ's blood was enough and more to “atone” for sins, thus undermining the whole sacrificial paradigm without saying so.

But if a sacrificial priesthood is not needed, then one can wonder whether that other prong of religious control, viz. jurisdiction, hierarchy, is more than a human preference either. It was, again, the pharisees who introduced a question about authority. What Jesus says is “Believe me for the very works' sake”, i.e. for myself, and not as an empowered official, even if it is true that some accounts of the resurrection stress a now unique empowerment, inseparable from the idea of ascensional enthronement but clearly intended, all the same, to bolster the power of the leaders of the first Christian communities. “Whoever listens to you listens to me.”

Thus we come to “the” resurrection. As distinct from the idea of enthronement resurrection was already enshrined in at least a part of the most progressive and visionary Judaism, that of *II Maccabees*, reflected in the presumably typical figure of Martha in John's Gospel, as a general destiny either for all or for “the just”, as in the teachings of Qumran, for those who had suffered for Yahweh, for his name. So it might seem retrograde to make the possibility of rising again depend upon Jesus, as if God could not raise just anyone, a viewpoint safeguarded in the traditional teaching of *John* (chapter 5) of the resurrection of “the wicked” as well, to judgment. But resurrection is here separated from glorification, coming

only through the uniquely just man and Son (a relation not clearly dependent in Scripture upon a virgin birth, however the unique election, of him who "came out from God", was to be thought of).

In some traditions, some early communities therefore, e.g. the Marcan, there appears to have been an aversion to the idea of resurrection appearances, made so central in later, more unified teaching. There need be no "lost ending" to Mark's Gospel, therefore.[2] Perhaps the miracle for him is the empty tomb, though in that case why would the angel ask the women why they sought the living "among the dead", i.e. if the author's mind were that there were no dead there? The "He is not here" is not entirely decisive on this point of interpretation, even if the traditional way of taking it may still seem *prima facie* the more natural. One might want to say that the Christian hope leads one already to live in the glory beyond the Last Day, as when Jesus offers Martha something better than her "I know that he will rise again at the last day", although all the generations of Christians have been in no better case than she with regard to the deaths of loved ones, the great triumphs of faith and hope seeming to leave grief in place, even if we are not "as those who have no hope". But again, the Jewish, pre-Christian mother in *II Maccabees* had great hope.

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Even the resurrection might not fully satisfy human aspirations unless it were specified as a full reclamation of the past, an abiding embodiment of memory, such as might be one of the more positive motives for the "eternal return" idea, claimed by today's defenders of Nietzsche to be a scientific hypothesis.[3] Finding, anyhow, a reality to suffice for actual human aspirations, or being able at least to postulate it, may be seen as part of the investigation into our own reality as preventing it from being, let us say, substantively Sisyphean or self-defeating, ontologically interpreted.

The notion of such reclamation (of the past) can however be viewed as an expansion of the *Divine Ideas* thesis. God, concludes Aquinas, does not know created things in themselves but in his idea(s) of them, which are, each one, identical with himself. Similarly human memory, man being in the divine image, is of a greater dignity than a mere power to recall a dead

[2] Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, on this point.
[3] See the entry on Nietzsche in *A Dictionary of Metaphysics and Ontology* (ed. Burkhardt & Smith), Philosophia Verlag, Munich 1990.

past. It is incidental to memory to be restricted to the past. If the future were more than an *ens rationis* then memory could hold that too.[4] The point here is that it holds things and events more nobly and fully than does our fleeting experience of their actual occurrence. As God is not removed from us by knowing us rather in his idea of us (than as we fancy we are "in ourselves"), where he is total active determinant, so in our memory we give things, or are called upon to give them, their true form and promise, forever. Nothing is lost, which means it is embodied in resurrection, even resurrected. Thus even a hypnotist resurrects, if only, as it might seem, from our brains, memory of which we are no longer conscious.

Our dignity then, in concert with the mercy and faithfulness belonging to any possible infinite being, requires resurrection beyond the powers of immediate nature, but natural at this ethico-religious level. Some notions of "supernatural grace" have obscured this. Of course all is gift and some gifts are doubtless "higher" than others. But we should hope that "death shall not have dominion"; as did the pious Jews of their time or Dylan Thomas in ours.

We might see then the resurrection of Jesus, the Gospel accounts, as fostering a general hope, indeed belief, that "death shall have no dominion", rather than as being a very particular, quasi-sacramental cause of what is to happen at the "Last Day". We have noted already that appearances, possibly even an empty tomb, are not essential to all visions of Christ's resurrection-cum-enthronement as held by the various groups among the first Christians. Similarly, the sitting "with Christ in the heavenly places" of *Ephesians* can bring the Last Day together, telescope it, not only with an *individual's* deathday, when he passes "out of time", but also, in an anticipation sure enough to make it actual, with this very present. This surely was the seed-ground of Western optimism, and of a dream of human dignity. *Agnosce o Christiane dignitatem tuam*, exclaims the late fourth, early fifth century Augustine, transported in contemplation of the Christian proclamation and what it entails.

Our point though is that this can apply on a view of the resurrection rather different from Augustine's, putting the stress rather where we find it in Kant's philosophy, which then the rising of Christ but confirms, though as maybe the supreme instance of it. The view is not foreign to the New

[4] Here one can see the positive point in Richard Sylvan's "sistology", his Meinongian complaint of prejudice in favour of the actually existent.

Testament, where they declare it is not possible that death could hold such a man, since God is faithful, just as is said of the martyrs to this God in the *Old Testament*, especially in later pre-Christian times, increasing clarity fighting against the apparent dominion of death.

We might ask further though about that embodiment of memory we mentioned. For Aquinas every resurrected individual finds himself "at the perfect age", of thirty-three perhaps. Against this we have traditions of cherubs, cupids, *putti* and so on, and our poetic traditions of our childhood, "angel infancy", as itself a perfect age in a very special sense. The typically modern re-evaluation of family situations with the stress on respect for children, their rights, to the point of a quarrel with traditional notions of discipline and upbringing, the desire rather to enjoy children while and as they are, just as children, seems indeed a natural outcome of the Romantic idealisation of childhood found in Wordsworth or Newman and based upon the Gospel itself. If it is complained that children are treated as adults a rejoinder may be that young parents now behave, and wish to behave, more like children, with more of the freedom and immediacy of children. A child who dies, any, might need no more to resurrect as an adult than a thirty-year-old might then need to be a sixty-year-old.

Aquinas also speaks of angels, all of whom, he argues, have the species or natures of all things (individual as well?) imprinted on their intellects from their creation, independently of experience, and it is from this perspective that he can exploit the saying that men shall be "as the angels" who, it follows from the above, have no need to "grow up". The thought is that there is no marriage or family in heaven, no further marriage one might think, though C.S. Lewis too is keen to dissociate the resurrection from renewed contact with spouses, relatives and so on ("I'm afraid we have no assurance", he says). But here we are arguing precisely against this sheer dependence upon authority and real or imagined historic promise, not as if despising it but as seeking the metaphysical roots in which such premises themselves would have to be grounded, as true to eternal being. The positivist theological talk, incidentally, as it developed in the fourteenth century, about an absolute freedom of God, unrelated to truth (which they mistakenly see as a conditioning factor) and hence random, is quite simply the denial of God as anything more than an ideological cipher, in a philosophy unconscious of itself. The corrective comes when we talk, later, of such freedom as *constituting* truth, in Hegel as, previously, in Aquinas.

If, anyhow, such *species*, such knowledge, are then, though *post factum*, impressed upon men as well, all men and women of whatever background, then there will in each case be a different kind of integration, if indeed nothing is forgotten. The promise is of seeing all things as God sees them, as he sees himself even. Eventually one would want that, maybe. Earlier though we imagined some kind of eternalisation of our earthly experience, symbolized in the "eternal return", though a transfiguration might be wanted to be involved. This is not far from Biblical views, if one thinks of the transfigured wounds of Christ, "slain from the foundations of the world". That was his experience, after all. But then we might all be as we die (another piece of tradition), this last moment somehow including all our memory and giving it its eternal character, whatever that will be (the "many mansions").

Aquinas's unbaptized babies become grave young men, or women, in a Dantean limbo (now officially out of favour). We mentioned cherubs and *putti*. Is there for humans a perfect age, except in some off-centre animal sense? Would children, in an eternal world, suffer from not growing up if "of such is the kingdom of heaven"? Then what was the point of saying that? One might imagine a life of four years, of a latter-day English child perhaps. His or her early death might be as it were a call to just that child's state we others were only permitted to pass through. In eternity, resurrected, he may be as on his death's day. The garden he looked upon, his mother's face, a certain picture-book, a pet dog or cat, all these open ever outwards as so many icons, bearers of the absolute. Memories of evil show up for the empty poverty they are, swallowed up in the humour of an unimaginable forgiveness, a desire to console. He has no desire to be older, no dream of "when I am big". Children do not commonly so dream with any desire, while the aged who mourn for lost youth maybe lack wisdom. Youth is for them, according to our thesis, in memory, embodied memory.

Yet such is the nature of our subject that we might as well, following a Gospel lead, invert the whole conception and hypothesise that everyone finds himself there as a child, instead of Aquinas's "perfect age" of thirty-three.[5] Concerning babies anyhow, however far towards conception we go back in supposing eternal life, we are free to speculate, to imagine states friendly to our thesis. These truly are the naked *putti*, flying through the

[5] But cp. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia* 24, addition: "And so the words of Christ, 'Except ye become as little children.' &c., are very far from telling us that we must always remain children."

air, peeping through the petals of flowers, laughing and gurgling upon the winds of heaven. Who knows, except that no one wants to be other than he or she is? An infant death, again, is maybe a call to an eternity as a joyous sylph-like spirit, a zephyr taking many forms, as in our childhood books and poetry, and by quality of being not much concerned with adult knowledge, as the Ring of Power was a pure trinket to J.R.R. Tolkien's embodied nature-spirit in his Old Forest, Tom Bombadil. There would be no reason not to want to be Tom Bombadil.

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Some will want to find this a facile optimism, dispensing with the “strait gate”, the “narrow road”, though I think we can use these ideas too. It certainly might seem to devalue or at least relativise adult human intellect somewhat. In the ambience, anyhow, of “high” Anglicanism in which I first encountered Catholic notions nothing seemed to people more urgent than to pour scorn upon the conciliatory saying, “Well, we are all going the same way, aren't we?” “No we are not all going the same way”, would snap back the irritated answer. Those were pre-ecumenical days and there was, one suspected, often enough a tired indifference to religious truth in the closing of discussions with that saying, though it was not found so outrageous as the variant “It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive”. But is this universal fraternalism of the shared road necessarily a product of fatigue or hopelessness? What if it is a triumph of hope such as the narrowly religious, clutching their solitary talent, have lacked the magnanimity to embrace?

Our claim is that the Christian resurrection-faith has somehow served to unlock a more general or philosophico-cosmic insight within the historical *populus Christianus*, and maybe further afield too. This emphasis was present in the early Alexandrine school and Gnosticism had elements of it, though always commingled with a repellant dualism. But too much of what these people were after was rejected, perhaps out of mass-fear of the higher literate class just as much as from a felt need for purity of doctrine. It is significant that Luther's teaching, at one of the first crossroads of modernity, is sometimes classed as Gnostic (e.g. by Eric Voegelin), insofar as it should make salvation depend upon a purely mental certainty or “assurance”. Even if we cannot, even should not, ourselves claim such an assurance (of “salvation”) yet the Reformation remains a breakthrough of subjectivity and of the subjective confidence a person ought to have, independently even of a putatively positive

revelation maybe enormously strengthening it (but always bringing with it the temptation to fanaticism or intemperate zeal).

The Catholic condemnation of this assurance depends upon a very fine point. It does not, for example, condemn the well-known stance of Julian of Norwich, “All shall be well and all manner of thing…” All manner of thing might seem to mean well for you and me whoever we are. Dylan Thomas continues the tradition that “Death shall have no dominion”, the mad shall grow sane, the sea give up its dead and so on. One may not however assume without argument and for the sake of this paradigm that all evil acts, inclusive of a choice of death (for others especially), reduce to madness. It was, anyhow, always good to give vent with the Psalmist to strong hope, *non moriar sed vivam*, or the heartfelt prayer *non confundar in aeternam*, so easily shading from the subjunctive imperative into a felt future simple tense, an irrepressible assurance become palpable in, for example, Bruckner's Catholic setting of Ambrose's *Te Deum*. Here we have assurance consequent upon a strong exercise of hope, the virtue, and no mere presumption.

There is as it were a quarrel, basic to our being, between intellect and time. It is as if we begin to participate in a knowledge of time which is itself eternal. Memory just in itself begins this assimilation even in the short term, creating the possibility over one, ten or more minutes in which “time stands still”. It is unthinkable that any of experience be lost or vanish, though it may take on a different aspect. God knows all things, we say, and certainly truth remains. So St. Teresa was right that this our being ought to arouse in us great desires as proportionate.

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J.R.R. Tolkien again, no mean theologian, spoke of God's (or “Iluvatar's”) special gift to men of death, not given to his elves, for example. Resurrection philosophies are ways of trying to explicate how death can be a gift, *ianua vitae*. We have distinguished resurrection from appearance events (e.g. those in the Gospels) as being a wider notion. Protest remains, however, the protest against death, the foreseeing of nostalgia, and we have tried to meet that with our theory of memory as fullest embodiment, as the presence of all times. Yet the memory has to be more than memory as we know it. We might require that the events must be as actual as when actually occurring, as now. So a realisation of God, of the divine ideas as

our proto-reality, may negate this hesitation. We look forward to a glorification from which this existence now will seem insubstantial.

Belief in divine ideas creates the possibility of meeting one's own image, the *Doppelgänger* who is more truly myself (as God is closer to me than I am to myself) than I am and therefore shakes my identity to its foundation as he, who is I, passes by. But I must pass over into his life, he who knows my childhood glories and sufferings more intimately than I do myself, like the heavenly man of *Daniel* in some ways.

This feeling of possible nostalgia, betrayal of present or any reality, was strong in Nietzsche, for whom it must always be this life, this world, eternally projected even in its temporality, just as the life of Christ, a certain number of years, reflects, embodies, the Trinitarian processions, so that it is not a change in a "pre-existent" Christ. Rather, that life has always existed, as caused by being known, it too, in the divine eternal idea of it. But a question then is whether resurrection is not present there in the midst of that life as a growing light (or does each day grow in memory?), not negated by any experience of death. We only experience the deaths of others, as we think. Even a release from great pain would always be just that, never death, where if we know no more we also do not know it. It is an objectification. But is this not to deny our hope? It would mean anyway that we have to learn to love our life now, and that "to them that have shall be given".

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One becomes more and more dissatisfied with traditional speculations, about body and soul, sense memory *versus* (surviving) intellectual memory and so on. What is wrong with all these speculations is the idea of a time after the "death of the body".

But first of all we can wonder, again, if anyone dies at all (setting aside the idea of the body dying). We observe indeed the deaths of others, but no one observes or experiences his own death, since it is defined as the end of experience. This must be so, even if the heart or brain were recorded on our instruments as "dead", i.e. no longer functioning, yet if experience palpably continued we would have to change our notions (maybe we would then think that life was supported by something in the liver or elsewhere).

Consider next the idea of the “eternal return”, taken up again by Nietzsche. The so to say poetic merit of that conception, though it is also a serious hypothesis in physics, is that nothing is lost. This corresponds to the love we have for our life, its memories. “Gather up the fragments so that nothing be lost”, we might want to say. If one embraces that conception one can perhaps live through time in the awareness that all is present “all the time” and beyond. One need not actually experience sensations of recurrence. We live as it were hanging between Proust and Plato.

This was also a way of destroying the confused and gloomy idea of the “time after”. In Sweden, for example, one speaks naturally of the dead as having gone out of time (*de gick ur tiden*) at the moment of death, as we say that they passed away or, less felicitously, passed on. Passing away, however, is in English culture seen as a vulgar euphemism veiling a horrific reality, as is not the case with the Swedish expression. There one preserves an affectionate contact with previous generations, whom one will eventually join.

Nietzsche wanted to say, maybe, that this life is all there is, that it is fully sufficient, since it has infinite depths corresponding to the capacity of our intellect as *capax Dei*. Thus the Evangelist said that the whole world could not contain all the books that would need to be written to describe what a certain relatively short-lived person (Jesus) did. We do not want to look forward to a “future state” in which we will be strange to ourselves, having merely changed horses as Feuerbach put it. Nor need the idea of glory be interpreted in this way. As for *agilitas* and the various qualities of the resurrection body, we should as far as possible aim at acquiring those characteristics now. Of course the ageing, the crippled, still more those born crippled, and therefore indeed all of us, must and should hope for such a transfiguration, and this shows the limitation of the Nietzschean conception. Still, it is a general rule that to them that have shall be given, and we should all think of ourselves as having the gift of abundant life becoming ever more abundant, everlasting joy upon our faces, our mortal faces, and so on.

But if that solution, convertible into the possession of all of our actual or “empirical” life in memory, maybe a memory, present memory, more actual than our fancied present, is insufficient, while the “future state” notion, on the other hand, is somehow blasphemous, life-denying, then fulfilment seems to escape us.

The solution, like all solutions, depends upon our confidence in the infinite being from whom everything comes. I mean a confidence not only in his or her faithfulness, but in his or her being as infinite, outside of which there is no being to speak of (though we of course speak of it since our language is devised for and fitted to the being of our non-being).

Thus Aquinas concludes rightly that this being's knowledge of us is knowledge of his own thought or idea of us rather than of us in ourselves, in the way that we think of ourselves as in ourselves. He does not depart from the eternal contemplation of his own essence in thinking of us or (causatively) knowing us. Indeed each (to us) separate idea is identical with his simple essence and act of being. This of course means that they are not really distinct and this alone makes Traherne, Wordsworth, Vaughan or Charles Williams (or Leibniz or Nicholas of Cusa) right in seeing a glory in each particular, “a world in a grain of sand”, something which corresponds to each individual person's natural urge to know all things and their first cause.

God is the true idealist and solipsist. In this sense all is “stored for thee at home” and nothing is lost. I am not firstly myself. The infinite being is closer to me than this self, as Augustine already knew. The world is God's dream, even after granting that a divine dream is substantial and truly creative, just as he speaks with things and not mere symbols, “manipulates the things themselves” (Aristotle). His Word is indeed a person, for Trinitarians. So we are dream figures, but born to find our reality in his eternity. How?

We shall understand, firstly, that we sit there already, “in the heavenly places”, a truth that predestination would hint at. In this sense we have all died before, we all look back upon an infinitely repeated life, to use mythological terms. We are, in knowing our life, participating in the eternal unchanging knowledge. Only joy is the rule, and peace and so on, and all evil and failure shall be overcome. So we are never entirely in it. What else is hope? Hope is indeed the ethical quality of this knowledge (or faith and love: it is the same). “And the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” For that destruction we are of course always waiting; and yet it has occurred already, before the foundation of the world even, deep in eternity, which is one with necessary being. Death, for Hegel, more radically, is the disclosure of the mere phenomenality of finite “life”, the “ruin of the individual” who therefore, in the concrete inter-relatedness of all notions in the Notion, never was.

Sunlight on the grass, on water, a child's face, a moment of music, an insight quicker than thought, anything at all… To look is to paint a picture, an icon, of what “eye hath not seen”. It comes down to that inspiredly simple thought, that “God is not a God of the dead, but of the living”, so if God is a God of any of our dead then those dead, out of time maybe, are living. God, after all, cannot be seen as ignorant, so if we are alive for him then we are truly alive and how he knows us, in his “essence”, is how we truly are. It is a matter therefore not merely, with Shostakovitch, say, of protesting against death (his penultimate symphony) but of denying it. “He who believes in me will never die.” Nor does it seem that there is need to interpret that belief as restrictively as has been done in the past.

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Cripples, we say, certainly don't want those evils and privations eternalized and it is said by our metaphysicians that there is no divine idea of evil, though God has perfect knowledge of every reality. So one postulates ideas of eternal compensation, analogous to the dead infants resurrected to a humanity at the “perfect age” of thirty-three.

This is however in principle transcended in the Christian tradition in the idea of the Lamb slain from the foundations of the world, or that of the glorified wounds of Christ. This image permits the realities of just this man's earthly life to be eternally possessed, in “glory”. So why not apply the same measure to the privations, pains, short-comings, of us others. This intuition, anyhow, lies behind the idea of indifference, that joys and woes can equally be taken from God's hand, as what is best for as belonging individually to us. It can annul the folly of envy. Popular wisdom concurs in allotting a variety of different characters, the star-signs, which an individual should gladly accept as his destiny, as he should the day of the week on which he is born, even though “Wednesday's child is full of woe”. This has nothing to do with the Calvinist presumption against a general glorification; that is just what we are combating.

The big problem, holding back consciousness of this view, was always that of “sins”, of a postulated moral universe (alongside the actual one) where infinite and hence indelible offences were committed daily. Rather as Aristotle rated a little of contemplation as worth more than the whole range of non-intellectual goods, so here the smallest *inhonestas* made life no longer worth living. If a lust for vengeance played its role in the formation of these conceptions historically, then a first step in teaching us

to receive without the despair of rage, with forgiveness, the wrongs that are done us was to imagine the Lord as righting all wrongs and readjusting the scales. He says, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay”. This would still have to be reflected in his image and likeness however, and so we get, in the Latin Christian tradition, the virtue of *vindicatio*.

But later we are taught that God, which is to say reality, does not take vengeance. God forgives, and more than we do. Ultimately, the person besieged also by this kind of evil, “vindictiveness”, this deficiency or deformity of his free action, suffers, and that more deeply than do cripples and the rest. And so to deal with it we have the Christian remedy, the glorified wounds of Christ, the sins nailed to the cross, so that our “sins” too can be glorified as transferred to him who was “made sin for us”.[6]

The question has to arise whether we cannot and should not also be made sin for ourselves, perhaps as a response to this Christian vision, rather than in denial of it. “Greater things than I shall you do…” As Eckhart teaches, one can accept and love all that one has done, I mean the fact, the truth, that one has done it, even as one moves away from it (one notion of “repentance”). We write loving autobiographies. This is the opposite of wishing to do the same things again, for there one still sees them as good. I am speaking of deeds seen now as bad, as privations, as failures. I lovingly and gladly accept that I failed to help my parents when I was younger and I talk to them about it. I have no special interest in establishing that I did not culpably fail. The impulse to self-justification is what Christianity, for example, was concerned to wipe out. It is legalistic and sociomorphic. We are what we are and must learn to glory in that, like the birds that sing, but who also make their efforts in learning to fly. There is no reason why these ideas should not be applied to the great killers of history, they too. Something like this no doubt lies behind de Sade's suggestion that everyone should have rights over everyone's bodies. It was his way of hinting that rights do not belong in nature. They do however belong in law just as long as we choose to protect the weak and others in this way as part of our vision of happiness.

An objection, to the view advanced here, that death is chimerical (though it is rather, by *the same* token, that *life* is chimerical: it is bounded by death, which is *thus* not truly death) might seem to be that at least half

[6] On evil and pardon philosophically considered cf. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, esp. VI, C, c3.

the human race experience the cessation of a main vital function, menstruation as needed for reproduction, "in the midst of life". Yet this too is but phenomenal. "No birth no death."

Otherwise, and as touching the resurrection, a long sleep is not felt. *A fortiori*, centuries of being dead are not felt. Here indeed it is "every man a penny", be he Plato or Wittgenstein, and in this way too time, before and after, is neutralised. That it was found necessary to teach that the (separated) souls of the redeemed were in heaven now, "before" the (their?) resurrection, depended upon the needs of those still on earth. But is such needed, any longer, whether or not we appeal to relativity theory? We should rather say that "the body" is and never was anything apart from the soul, the position namely of Absolute Idealism as it is of Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*, Book VII.[7] The eternal future is already and has always been present and actual. This is the meaning of predestination, of "sitting with Christ in the heavenly places" and so on. If the dead go "out of time" then they are neither now nor not now. Again, we find a fusion of the ideal and the actual, while, looking in reverse, this life is eternally contemplated or repeated. We are there now, while we are here, and when we are there we will not lose "here".

[7] Aquinas too seems to concur when he says that "the body" is an expression legitimate in logic but not in metaphysics. Yet he says, commenting on I *Corinthians* 15, that *anima mea non est ego*, the traditional discourse seemingly winning out here over a strict hylomorphism and the unicity of the substantial form, as becomes more explicit in Duns Scotus. Cf. F. Inciarte, *Forma Formarum*, Verlag Karl Alber, Freiburg/München, 1970, and his article "The Unity of the Aristotelian Metaphysics", in English translation forming chapter 5 of *Substance and Action*, Verlag Georg Ohms, Hildesheim 2002.

CHAPTER ONE

FAITH AS THINKING WITH ASSENT

One finds this criticism of "neo-Thomism", that it simply asserts that reason will never go against faith. Where it seems to do so we just know that our reasoning has gone wrong somewhere. The openness necessary for the discovery of truth is here lacking, comments John MacQuarrie (*Twentieth Century Religious Thought*, London 1971, SCM; ch. 18, sect.89).

The Thomist position, however, might rather mean that we will never be asked to believe something unreasonable. Here the view sets no restriction whatever upon thinking. It rather makes a statement about the nature of Christian belief, containing an implicit invitation to think the data of revelation through so that the (rational) necessity of it can be seen. Yet this statement is also one, again, positive, about the nature of man and his thinking.

What we do find in Thomas Aquinas himself is a doctrine that reason naturally needs a ("super-natural") guidance which it must trust and rely on, as the tides need the moon. As natural this might well mean that it has it in itself, in an, again, natural transcendence of (its) nature. So whether or not this guidance should ever be construed as a limit is at least an open question, though it clearly was thus viewed in the system under which Aquinas himself lived. Yet the whole event of revelation, as is more proper to just the idea of a revelation, can rather be seen as a great opening up and without limit too.

There is, besides, a conceptual difficulty in the idea of truths beyond the reach of reason. The original postulate of a harmony between faith and reason, if thought through, might seem to demand revision of this and some related ways of understanding "supernatural" truths. Therefore one might ask, in the opposite direction (not necessarily the other "extreme"), whether they might not all be assimilable to those truths that Thomas says

are revealed only because too few men with too great time and difficulty would attain to their discovery. The claim therefore is that they are accessible to reason. Unfortunately there is a tendency here, hardly discouraged by Thomas, to reduce revelation to declaring to people what they should believe. It is as if revelation as a notion is always slipping down and away from the original richness of an epiphany.

Once revealed truths are accepted their superior rationality becomes clear, as the Christian Trinity, it is claimed, is a superior and more viable conception than that of Allah. Thus if we concede that some philosopher has shown that a solitary divine person is inconceivable, there seems no reason in principle why another philosopher might not postulate, or urge as probable, either a plurality of divine persons or the operation of relations within the divinity, equivalent to thought-processes perhaps, or both.

Reason in any case has and has had a great task presented to it by dogmas such as that of the Trinity, as the early example of Augustine illustrates. Nor have reasonable and unreasonable ways of understanding this mystery (which the dogma sought to identify) yet been exhaustively distinguished. As with Christology, the careful choice of official wording can never fully conceal that many earlier understandings of these mysteries, inclusive of those with the highest sanction, get contradicted. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* is another example. There is no telling, to take a further example, how far a richer, more philosophically cogent notion of eternity might go in modifying the doctrines and dogmas of the creation of the world "in time" or of the "pre-existent" Christ (Cf. H. McCabe, *God Matters*).

The discovery, and it is no less, of evolution is a more obvious example still of how reason is compelled to reinterpret "supernatural" truths, rather than to submit to their dictation in the way envisaged in earlier Thomism. Doctrines of the soul and special interventionistic creation are under great pressure to give way to what to many seems a grander conception. In this conception the emergence of man in God´s image and even of Christ as definitive God-man is seen as built into creation from its first instant or, in terms of the Hegelian dialectic, from its first postulate (we do not need to make our temporal mode of perception essential to the process or structure).

Here we need to relate these ideas to the historical development within Christendom. The original impulse to definitions of dogma came very

largely from the secular authority, desirous at best of preserving peace within his or her realm, at worst of bending Christian belief in a more manageable direction, inclusive of altering power-structures within the Church to harmonize with such factors as, perhaps, the Imperial move to Constantinople or the general dominance of men over women in society, this latter coinciding with the gradual reduction of an original metaphor of sacrifice to a more literal sacrifice-theology in harmony with previous Roman religious practice and a felt need for the offering of sacrifice for the temporal security of state and society.[1]

Thus it is only by a rather doubtful analogy that the meeting, three centuries earlier almost, at Jerusalem described in Luke´s *Acts of the Apostles* can be seen as the first of a series of ecumenical councils. Nor did it define any dogma, the main achievement being that people met and learned to understand one another. Instead, some rather minimal disciplinary measures protective of Jewish sensibilities were passed, minimal in that they did not distinguish between moral and ritual *desiderata* ("abstain from fornication and things strangled"). Such distinction had been a main point of Christ´s teaching, however, at least as this is recorded in the then still to be written Gospels.

Discussions about faith and reason and their relation as traditionally conducted relate to these dogmas. Today such discussion often centres around the interpretation of dogmatic *formulae*. This is clearly part of an attempt to make dogma consonant with reason, rather than the other way round (though there, obviously, there would be no question of "making": the harmony of faith and reason is itself "dogmatic" in form). One can thus go so far as to find a given formulation infelicitous or misleading, never needing to say it is wrong.

Examples here are legion, and here we are not repeating the examples of in-depth intellectual penetration of elements of faith (not necessarily "articles") discussed above. We are examining the more superficial but historically acute phenomenon of reservations and revisions with regard to entrenched verbal credal propositions.

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[1] Cf. Damien Casey: "The *fractio panis* and the Eucharist as Eschatological Banquet", *Macauley University Electronic Journal*, 18 August 2002, www.womenpriests.org; Joshua Furnal, "A Theology of the Table", *New Blackfriars*, July 2011, pp. 409-414.

The faith-reason presumption is perhaps that such formulations can always be "saved" (one speaks of "saving the appearances"). But it is not always so. Not a few theologians, it is plain, are unable to take the more recent Marian dogmas seriously, while Hans Küng thinks that nobody should be obliged to believe in the virgin birth, a doctrine which anyhow wears a different face, so to speak, now that we know that the woman contributes half of the genetical constituents of the new human being. Jesus might seem in danger of being seen more as a Marian clone than as one begotten of God. The Immaculate Conception, too, only retains its sense so long as we adhere to a literalist Augustinian view of "original sin" fast vanishing from our comprehension. These considerations in turn demand reassessment of papal infallibility as defined in council and even a critique of the *Rationalist* provenance of this notion as such, for which Küng suggests "indefectibility" should be substituted when speaking of the Church, as expressing no more than our confidence in Christ´s presence among those who trust in him as long as life, theirs individually or that of the world, lasts.

But the two concerns, with *formulae* and with realities, do eventually merge. Believers confess *resurrectionem mortuorum et vitam venturi saeculi* and a "second coming" in glory *judicare vivos et mortuos*. Here already in the pages of scripture we find interpretation, e.g. in John´s Gospel: "and this is the judgment, that men preferred darkness to light… because their works were evil." We may see this as part of the ongoing effort, showing that confidence in reason that Aquinas makes explicit, to make the tradition intelligible, first to a wider audience, then to ourselves. One can hardly deny that a kind of spiritual imperialism ("salvation is of the Jews", John represents Jesus as saying) underlies the development of Paul´s thought, leading him to abrogate the Law, to interpret Christ´s death as a destruction of the Law itself, upon which Jewish exclusivity had been based. This leads to an intensification of the cosmic, universally mutual community of acceptance and forgiveness recorded as preached in Christ´s own life. Paul solves his own problems by seeing the *Old Testament*, his "Bible", as more suitable for interpretation than for simple acceptance. "These things happened in a figure" and so on, a method later on attributed much more comprehensively, however, to the protagonist of the Gospels himself. Thus, "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so shall the Son of Man be lifted up…"

At its highest point, though, such interpretation as it were negates itself, becoming the means to a more deeply inspired literalism, as in the

(probably authentic) argument for resurrection from God´s identifying himself to Moses, in the "inspired" page, as the God of Abraham and Isaac, who had died. Yet God is God of the living, *ergo*… Awareness of resurrection though is not here necessarily attributed to the Mosaic writer himself.

Belief in resurrection had been reached by pre-Christian Jews in a rational process, arguing from the consistency of divine justice in a way echoed by Kant and even Plato, starting out from a dualist anthropology. It is reason too which exerts pressure within theology away from a materialistically "miraculous" view of the accounts of Christ´s own resurrection. Such pressure is not necessarily reductionist. "Even if we knew him in the flesh we know him so no longer." Indeed, with the eclipse of dualistically spiritualist anthropologies by the monistic evolutionary record a confidence in resurrection or its equivalent (what?) beyond death, of course by the divine will or second creation, appears more clearly as a simple religious and moral response to human existence and community feeling, a basic intuition not other than Julian´s "All shall be well" in the fourteenth century. Again, the interpretation passing from after to beyond death, from a later time to an exit from time, begins in Scripture. Thus Martha knows that all will rise "at the last day" (John´s Gospel). Jesus replies "I am the resurrection", so death is already conquered, goodness knows how. *Omnis qui vivit et credit in me non morietur in aeternum*. The *et credit in me* need not be seen as a restriction but more as explication of *vivit*.

The appearance of Christ and his message, as indeed the appearance of man and his eternal destiny derivable from his intellectual nature, has to be seen as written into phenomenal evolutionary history from the beginning. Obscurely, this already lies behind the difference between Scotus and Aquinas as to whether the divine purpose of incarnation was consequent upon sin merely. The historicisation of sin in the apparently contingent tale of a Fall in Eden has obscured the necessity, a necessity of divine perfection of love, of the development, perhaps best charted by Hegel who, incidentally, offers us an interpretation of the *Genesis* story (hardly an account) difficult to improve upon (*Encyclopaedia*, Logic 24). Here spirit and determinate nature are as it were naturally at war with one another, even though man is of course also naturally inclined to live reasonably, to order his (other) inclinations. The advent of reflection, Hegel argues,

> involves a thorough-going disruption, and viewed in that light, might be regarded as the source of all evil and wickedness - the original transgression.

The spiritual, he says, "sunders itself to self-realisation". But this position of severed life has in its turn to be suppressed, and the spirit has by its own act to win its way to concord again.

Hegel adds that while "we" accept the dogma of Original Sin we must give up seeing it as consequential upon an accidental act of the first man. He might have added that *a fortiori* then we must give up doctrines of the original preternatural gifts and of the "wounds" of original sin unless, again, suitably reinterpreted.

For Hegel "the theological doctrine of original sin is a profound truth" and he has only sarcasm for the "modern enlightenment" which "prefers to believe that man is naturally good… so long as he continues true to nature." There is of course a terminological problem here. For Hegel it is natural for man to feel the call to strive with his spirit against the too easy path, and Aquinas´s account of *lex naturalis*, inclusive of the virtues naturally needed for *ardua*, difficult things, says the same.

This might seem obvious. The effect, however, is that sin is demythologised to something natural and to that extent necessary. It is no longer an offence both infinite and gratuitous, placing us under divine wrath. Such wrath is rather a moment in a dialectic, as indeed the very idea of a salvation history seems already to suggest. Catholics have sometimes decried this tendency to equate createdness with sinfulness as a Lutheran aberration. It was this, one might concede, so long as the idea of sin retained its full Augustinian force. Read the other way, however, we have here little more than the Thomistic dictum that "what can fail sometimes does".

What is important for Hegel is the uncovering of rational necessity behind what religion presents, in narrative fashion, as merely contingent, contingency being of the essence of narrative and narrative being of the essence of a "salvation history", such as Christianity or Judaism, but not Islam, presents us with.

It is claimed here that the Thomistic postulation of a harmony between faith and reason is detachable from a restrictive ecclesial-disciplinary context. With creeds and dogmas is associated a passing over from