

Durham E-Theses

*Church, religion and secularization in the theology of
Christian radicalism: 1960 - 69 critical perspectives
from the sociology of religion*

John Anthony Williams

How to cite:

Williams, John Anthony (1986) Church, religion and secularization in the theology of Christian radicalism: 1960 - 69 critical perspectives from the sociology of religion. Doctoral thesis, Durham University.

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a <https://etheses.durham.ac.uk/id/eprint/6775/> is made to the metadata record in Durham E-Theses
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full Durham E-Theses policy](#) for further details.

CHURCH, RELIGION AND
SECULARIZATION IN THE THEOLOGY
OF CHRISTIAN RADICALISM,

1960-69

Critical Perspectives from the
Sociology of Religion.

by

John Anthony Williams.

A Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy to
the Department of Theology of the University of Durham in the
year 1986.

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author.
No quotation from it should be published without
his prior written consent and information derived
from it should be acknowledged.



-1. DEC. 1986

CHURCH, RELIGION AND SECULARIZATION IN THE THEOLOGY OF
CHRISTIAN RADICALISM, 1960-69.

Critical Perspectives from the Sociology of Religion.

by

John A. Williams.

ABSTRACT.

This thesis is a study of the proposals for theological reformulation and church renewal made during the episode of radical "secular" theology during the nineteen-sixties.

The radicals sought an articulation of the Gospel, and its expression through the Church, which would respond to, and engage with, contemporary secular social and cultural conditions. Secularity demanded an understanding of faith and theology in concrete social and historical, empirically graspable terms.

Any "secular" approach to theology must be answerable to the critique of the sociology of religion as the discipline which explicitly treats the concrete social embodiments of religious meaning, and the cultural expression and dissemination of religious ideas.

Accordingly, critical tools from the sociology of religion are developed for analysing the theology of Christian Radicalism. An understanding of the nature of religion as a social reality is applied to the radicals' ideas about "religionless" approaches to theism and the meaning of the Gospel. The debate about secularization provides critical insight into radical proposals for the affirmation of secularity and a secular role for the Church. Sociological analysis of the forms of religious institutionalization and modes of commitment is applied to the call for an undogmatic, critical, operative faith.

The critique helps to explain Christian Radicalism's relative lack of influence upon subsequent church life. The radicals were not attuned to the dialectical nature of Christianity's and the Church's presence within society and culture, regulating the relationship between legitimation and criticism of the prevailing order, affirmation and denial of modernity, and orientations to the past and its traditions and to the future, openness and promise.

The thesis reaffirms the importance of the issues tackled by the radicals for contemporary church life, and urges the churches to take them up with the benefit of the sociological sophistication lacked by the protagonists of twenty years ago.

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

<u>INTRODUCTION.</u>	9
<u>PART ONE: PRELIMINARY MATERIALS.</u>	16
I. CHRISTIAN RADICALISM: AN EPISODE IN THE THEOLOGY OF THE SIXTIES.	16
1. The Cultural Context.	16
2. Why "Christian Radicalism"?	19
3. Key Questions for Theology and Church.	22
II. THEOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY: TOWARDS A MODEL FOR CO-OPERATION.	27
1. The Sociology of Religion in the Sociological Tradition.	27
i. Comte, Durkheim and the Refinement of Epiphenomenalism, 27; ii. The Great Divide, 30; iii. Weber, 32.	
2. Problems of the Division of Labour.	35
i. The Social Gospel: Theology Reduced to Sociology, 35; ii. "Christian Sociology": The Hegemony of Theology, 35; iii. "Sociologie Religieuse": Keeping the Disciplines Distinct, 37; iv. Berger and the Sociology of Knowledge: Sociological Imperialism? 41.	
3. Contemporary Advances.	46
i. From Gill to Blackfriars, 46; ii. The Contribution of David Martin, 51; iii. Conclusions, 54.	
III. THE PLACE OF BONHOEFFER.	59
1. Bonhoeffer and The Radical Theologians.	59
2. Bonhoeffer and the Sociological Nature of the Church.	61



3. Bonhoeffer and the Major Themes of the Prison Letters.	67
i. "World Come of Age", 67; ii. "Religionless Christianity", 70; iii. "Man for Others", 73.	

PART TWO: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION. 77

IV. THE NATURE AND SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF RELIGION. 77

1. Religion and the Radicals.	77
2. Religion: The Definitional Question	80
i. Two Preliminary Points, 80; ii. Types of Definition; Functional and Substantive, 83; iii. Objections to Religious Functionalism, 85.	
3. The Substantive Content of Religion.	88
i. "Spiritual Beings": God and the Divine, 89; ii. The Sacred Object, 90; iii. The Holy in Experience, 91; iv. The Sacred Cosmos, 93; v. The Transcendent, 95; vi. The Dimensions of Religion, 96.	
4. The Social Functions of Religion.	98
i. The Durkheimian Tradition; Cohesion and Integration, 98; ii. The Weberian Tradition; Theodicy and Meaning, 101; iii. Conclusions, 104.	

V. THE SECULARIZATION DEBATE. 108

1. Secularization and the Radicals.	108
2. Secularization: Contours of the Debate	110
i. The Basic Thesis; Bryan Wilson, 110; ii. Elements of an Anti-thesis; David Martin, 111; iii. Prolegomena to a Secularization Analysis, 114.	
3. An Analysis of Secularization Processes.	115
i. Socio-structural Secularization; Institutional Differentiation and Rationalization of Society, 115; ii. Disengagement and Marginalization of the Churches, 118; iii. Conformity of the Church, 119; iv. Cultural Secularization; Desacralization and Disenchantment of the World, 121; v. Privatization and Pluralism of Religious Life, 123; vi. Transposition of Religious Values, 126.	

4. Towards a Dialectical Resolution.	127
i. Is a Synthesis Possible? 127; ii. Conclusions, 129.	
 VI. RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AND ORIENTATIONS.	133
1. Institutionalization and the Radicals.	133
2. Religion and Institutionalization.	134
i. Religion as Institution, 135; ii. Weber and the Routinization of Charisma, 136; iii. The Dilemmas of Institutionalization, 138.	
3. Institutional Patterns and Religious Commitment.	140
i. Church and Sect, 140; ii. Communal and Associational Religiosity, 143; iii. Typological Conclusions, 147.	
 <u>PART THREE: EXCURSIONS IN THE THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN RADICALISM.</u>	152
 VII. SITZ IM LEBEN: EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH, 1960-69.	152
1. Introduction and Prospect.	152
2. Landmarks on the Way to Christian Radicalism.	153
i. Theological Stirrings, 153; ii. Agitation for Church Reform, 156; iii. The New Morality, 158; iv. The Media Factor, 160; v. Issues, 163.	
3. The <u>Honest to God</u> Debate.	164
i. 'A Bishop shouldn't have written it', 165; ii. 'It gives in to secularism', 168; iii. 'It's upsetting to simple believers', 170.	
4. Contributions to a "New Reformation".	172
i. The Stacey Affair, 172; ii. The Paul Report, 176; iii. The World Council of Churches, 178; iv. <i>New Christian</i> , 182.	
5. Retrospect and Prospect: Whither Christian Radicalism?	185

VIII. RELIGION, TRANSCENDENCE AND GOD.	189
1. Robinson and <u>Honest to God</u> .	189
i. General Observations, 189; ii. Exposition, 192;	
iii. Critique, 197.	
2. Radical Theologians in Search of God.	202
i. John Wren-Lewis; Experimental Creativity, 203;	
ii. Schubert Ogden; Ultimate Worthwhileness, 204;	
iii. Langdon Gilkey; Contingency, Relativity,	
Temporality, 207; iv. Critique, 208.	
3. The Quest for Transcendence.	212
i. Thomas Altizer; the <i>Coincidentia Oppositorum</i> ,	
212; ii. Gordon Kaufman; Limit as Personal, 214;	
iii. Alistair Kee; The Alternative Way, 216;	
iv. Harvey Cox; The Future, 218.	
4. Religion, Transcendence and God.	219
i. The Dialectical Character of Christianity, 219;	
ii. Altizer; Religion as Regression, 221; iii.	
Wren-Lewis; Religion as Neurosis, 222; iv. The	
Pelzes; Religion as Bogus Certainty, 223; v.	
Daniel Jenkins; Religion and the Crisis of Faith,	
224; vi. Allan Galloway; Cult and Culture, 225;	
vii. Conclusions, 226.	
IX. CHRISTIANS AND THE HUMANITY OF JESUS.	232
1. Van Buren and <u>The Secular Meaning of the</u>	
<u>Gospel</u> .	232
i. General Observations, 232; ii. Exposition, 236;	
iii. Critique, 239.	
2. Radical Theology and the Person of Jesus.	243
i. William Hamilton; a Form of Lordship and a	
Style of Life, 243; ii. The Pelzes; the Compelling	
Words of Jesus, 247; iii. John Vincent; the Search	
for a Secular Christ, 249.	
3. The Church and the Twofold Presence of	
Christ.	252
i. 'Christ existing as the Church', 252;	
ii. Jesus, the Clergy and the Laity, 255.	

X. THE AFFIRMATION OF THE MODERN WORLD.	259
1. Cox and <u>The Secular City</u> .	259
i. General Observations, 259; ii. Exposition, 262;	
iii. Critique, 268.	
2. Religion and Secularization: Ideals and Ideologies.	273
i. Munby and <u>The Idea of a Secular Society</u> , 273;	
ii. Adolfs and the Ideology of a Secular Culture, 277.	
3. Matters Arising: The Limits of the Secular?	280
i. Secularization and the Misrepresentation of Mass-Cultural Attitudes, 280; ii. Secularization and the Disappearance of Ultimate Questions, 282;	
iii. Secularization and the Rebound of the Sacred, 284; iv. Conclusions, 285.	
XI. THE SECULAR MISSION OF THE CHURCH.	289
1. Colin Williams and the "Church for Others".	289
i. General observations, 289; ii. Exposition, 290;	
iii. Critique, 295.	
2. The Possibilities and Constraints of a Secular Mission.	301
i. The Avant-Garde of God? 301; ii. The Church of the Diaspora? 304; iii. Conclusions: The Rejuvenation of Religion? 305.	
XII. CRITICAL FAITH AND TRADITIONAL CONTINUITY.	311
1. Gregor Smith, <u>Secular Christianity</u> and the Working of Faith.	312
i. General Observations, 312; ii. Exposition, 314;	
iii. Critique, 323.	
2. Faith and the Believing Community.	326
i. Leslie Paul: Natural Group/Pressure Group, 326;	
ii. Colin Williams: Institution/Event, 327;	
iii. Robinson: Latent Church/Manifest Church, 329;	
iv. Newbiggin: Congregation/Segregation, 330;	
v. From Twofold to Threefold Model, 331.	

3. Conclusions: Community, Congregation and Institution.	333
i. The Faith of the Community, 333; ii. The Faith of the Congregation, 335; iii. The Faith of the Institution, 337.	
XIII. ETHICAL MATURITY AND THE FAITH-COMMUNITY.	341
1. Secularization and Situationism: Profiles of the New Morality.	341
i. Robinson and Fletcher, 341; ii. H.A. Williams, 344; iii. Monica Furlong, 346.	
2. Critique and Alternatives.	349
i. Rules, Traditions and Structural Constraints, 349; ii. The Access of Transcendence, 351.	
<u>PART FOUR: CONCLUSIONS.</u>	356
XIV. RETROSPECTIVE.	356
I, 356; II, 357; III, 358; IV, 359; V, 360; VI, 361; VII, 362; VIII, 362; IX, 364; X, 364; XI, 365; XII, 366; XIII, 367.	
XV. TOWARDS AN EMPIRICAL ECCLESIOLOGY?	368
i. Liturgical Renewal, 369; ii. Folk-Religion, 371; iii. The Clergy, 373; iv. The Church and Politics, 375; v. Conservatives and Liberals, 377; vi. Moralism, 379; vii. Towards an Empirical Ecclesiology, 380.	
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS CONSULTED.</u>	383

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

I wish to register my thanks to all those with whom I have had the opportunity of discussing the ideas which have gone into this thesis, and who made available their several areas of theoretical expertise or practical experience to help sharpen my perceptions of the issues in hand. Needless to say, the finished product, and the form the ideas take in it, are my own responsibility, as is any distortion of the ideas of others which may be present. Thanks are due, then, to (in alphabetical order) Dr. James Beckford, The Revd. Canon Trevor Beeson, The Revd. Dr. John Bowden, The Revd. Dr. Douglas Davies, The Revd. Dr. Robin Gill, The Rt.Revd. Dr. David Jenkins, The Revd. Professor David Martin, The Revd. Dr. Bill Pickering, The Revd. Michael Vasey, Dr. Richard Roberts and The Revd. Canon Professor Stephen Sykes, the latter two both my supervisors in the work. I must also thank my wife Ann-Marie for putting up with the pressures involved in having a husband working at home on a job which unfortunately does not cease to occupy the mind once the books and papers are put away at the end of the day.

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without his prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

CHURCH, RELIGION AND SECULARIZATION IN THE THEOLOGY OF
CHRISTIAN RADICALISM, 1960-69.

Critical Perspectives from the Sociology of Religion.

INTRODUCTION.

The Introduction to this thesis is designed to perform two functions. Firstly, it outlines the basic rationale of the thesis as a whole, explaining what the work sets out to do. Secondly, it gives a brief overview of the contents, to indicate how the structure unfolds in the body of the work.

This thesis is concerned with the theological issues involved in certain controversial debates affecting the churches during the nineteen-sixties. The most prominently public of these, in England, was that surrounding Bishop John Robinson's book Honest to God. There were, however, a variety of other debates which together make up a recognizable theological episode, which this thesis treats under the general heading of "Christian Radicalism". Although this was by no means exclusively an English phenomenon, this thesis concentrates mainly upon the debates as they touched the lives of the churches in England, with particular reference to the Church of England.

The issues involved in Christian Radicalism were often encapsulated in certain slogans, such as "religionless Christianity", "secular theology" and "the death of God". In particular, the ideas put forward in Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison formed the most frequently cited source of influence or inspiration. This source points to a major concern of Christian Radicalism, which is that of a quest for the concreteness of the Christian message.

Put simply, traditional formulations of theological doctrines and traditional understandings of the Gospel were felt to lack empirical "cash value" in an age regarded by

theologians as increasingly secular. It was becoming more and more difficult to state intelligibly just what the propositions of religion and theology were really about- how, in fact, they touched the secular social existence of an assumed "modern man".

Side by side with this problem over theological doctrines went an equally far-reaching dissatisfaction with the performance of the churches. They too appeared to share in the crisis of relevance, of intelligibility and of communication being suffered by the ideas they existed to promote. Insofar as the Church was the place to which a man might expect to turn, *prima facie*, in order to see something of the concrete, empirical and historical realization of theological meaning, the likelihood was that his expectations would be disappointed.

This thesis regards the twin concern for theological reformulation and the structural reorganization of the Church, viewed as intimately related components in an overall programme of necessary reform, as a distinctive feature of Christian Radicalism. For this reason, we have sought to develop a critical perspective on the ideas proposed by the various contributors to the movement which gives full weight to this dual interest.

We wish to take a fresh look at the episode of Christian Radicalism from our vantage point of some twenty years on, in order to uncover some reasons for its relative failure to fulfil its hopes in the area of pastoral and evangelistic effect upon the lives of the churches, and to reassess the areas in which its fruits might still be reaped.

The critical perspective proposed in this thesis is drawn from work in the sociology of religion. This is because this is the sub-discipline of both sociology and religious studies which explicitly pays attention to the social and cultural embodiments of theological meaning, to religion insofar as it

is a social reality, and thus to the empirically available dimensions of the subject-matter of theology.

Like Christian Radicalism, sociology of religion treats theological ideas and institutional expressions- in particular, though not exclusively, the churches- as intimately related. Any claim to be proposing a "secular", that is, an empirically accessible understanding of theology and a corresponding restructuring of church life, must be prepared to meet the critique which the sociology of religion brings to it. This, then, is the source of the critical stimulus employed in this thesis.

Part One of the thesis lays the groundwork for the investigation by dealing with the fundamental materials which form the main co-ordinates within which all the ensuing more specific discussions will move.

Chapter I stakes out more precisely the ground we intend to cover under our heading of "Christian Radicalism", including our justification for the choice of this name. It also introduces the three main sets of questions raised by the movement, towards which our critique stimulated by the sociology of religion is directed. These are, briefly: (i) the possibility of producing a secular approach to the meaning of theism which is not dependent upon religious forms of representation for its intelligibility; (ii) the possibility of providing a theological **affirmation** of the secularization process and of reconceiving the Church's mission accordingly; (iii) the possibility of developing a critical form of faith which is open, creative and not tied to dogmatic formulae and believed solely on authority.

Chapter II discusses the issues raised by our decision to employ sociological concepts as critical tools in the service of theology. We provide some background to the interdisciplinary relationship between theology and sociology, and set out details of both the tradition of sociological work (the Weberian) and the model of theological activity which, in our

view, provide the most fruitful possibilities of interaction. We show how sociological understanding brings out the limitations and constraints involved in any attempt to achieve secular social embodiment of the ideas contained in the Christian vision, the substance of the tradition which is the theologian's raw material.

In Chapter III we indicate the relevance of Bonhoeffer to the whole enterprise, in particular the way in which his own quest for "concreteness" involved him in both an ongoing concern for ecclesiology and an interest in the sociological perspective.

Part Two is devoted to the development of our sociological tools, corresponding to the three main areas of questions outlined in Chapter I.

Chapter IV presents material on the nature and social functions of religion, as the basis for a critical analysis of proposals for "religionlessness". We set forth a view of religion as a cultural system expressing an orientation to the transcendent, which has the dialectical affect of legitimating and stabilizing the world of the individual or the social group by anchoring it in a sacred order, yet also calling it into question by means of the summons to become the more perfect fulfilment of that order which it as yet only incompletely represents.

Chapter V examines the debate about secularization, with a view to laying bare the ambiguities of the process and the double evaluation possible for the churches. We offer as leading themes for the analysis of secularization the processes of differentiation and religious disengagement in the social structure, and the desacralization and pluralistic fragmentation of culture, the effects of which upon the churches must influence any attempt to construct a viable response in theology and church life.

Chapter VI discusses the different types of religious membership and modes of faith-commitment or "ways of being

religious", as a basis for analysis of the radicals' demand for a critically open form of faith. We employ in particular the seminal distinctions between church and sect types of religious institution, and communal and associational styles of religiosity, as tools for understanding the ways in which the inner dispositions of faith carried in the religious tradition come to institutional expression and achieve social and cultural continuity.

Part Three of the thesis contains the substance of the theological analysis we wish to offer, making use of the critical perspectives drawn from the sociology of religion.

In Chapter VII we supply a historical *Sitz im Leben* by describing a representative selection of material drawn from the debates and controversies affecting the churches during the period under review, and showing how the key questions were present in them, both explicitly and implicitly.

We then devote six chapters to our analysis of the main theological themes of Christian Radicalism. In each case, one of the three major sets of questions is to the fore, and hence also the sociological critique appropriate to it from Part Two: broadly the point of view of Chapter IV is applied in Chapters VIII and IX, of Chapter V in X and XI, and of Chapter VI in XII and XIII.

Chapter VIII examines attempts to produce secular approaches to theism, beginning from Robinson's Honest to God. The shortcomings of such programmes are revealed in the light of our view of the nature and social functions of religion and in particular the dialectical conception of transcendence. We argue that the prior commitment to "religionlessness" prevented the radicals from seeing how the meaning of theistic talk emerges from the actual practices of the religious cultural system, within and out of which God is confessed.

Chapter IX argues that the problems of transcendental theism cannot be by-passed by concentrating upon the human figure of Jesus, as in the case of van Buren's The Secular

Meaning of the Gospel. But some clues to the meaning of confessing God in this way may be found in examining the social reality of the Church as it is understood to represent the continuation of Jesus' presence and work in the world.

Chapter X discusses radical theology's attempt to provide a Christian justification of secularization, typified by Cox's The Secular City. We find that the Church must retain leverage for **challenging** certain aspects of the process, rather than opting for wholesale affirmation. The marginalized social position of a highly differentiated religious sector provides a basis for such a stance.

This same social situation leads us in Chapter XI to criticise programmes for recasting the Church's mission along secular lines, as in the thinking of the World Council of Churches. The Church's secular-social engagements must be undertaken in a spirit which reflects the distinctively **religious** orientation to transcendence, something which a religiously **specialized** Church might achieve.

Chapter XII treats the question of how religious believers live out faith in the concrete social context, and canvasses the prospects for the realization of a critically open, non-dogmatic form of faith, as exemplified in the work of Ronald Gregor Smith. We argue for the need for attunement to the dialectical relationship of traditional continuity and critical openness in the different modes of religious commitment, and suggest how these might be embodied in the various levels of the social presentation of the Church.

Finally, we give attention in Chapter XIII to the radicals' demand for faith to develop a mature ethic, not based upon rules and dependence on authority. Once again, we doubt the feasibility of such an ethic being universalized among the whole Christian community, but argue for a dialectical relationship between traditional morality and that which transcends it, given expression in the religious group.

Part Four of the thesis gathers together our conclusions. In line with the dual attention of the work to theoretical thought and practical realization in the life of the Church, we present these in two concluding chapters.

Chapter XIV summarizes the theoretical positions developed in the course of the thesis, chapter by chapter. In brief, these are held together by an emphasis on the need to give due weight to the dialectical tension between the traditional and the radically new, between orientations to past and future, between the legitimation of the prevailing order and the promise of its supersession in a radical alternative. This tension is generated by the very presence of the Christian religious tradition within a socio-cultural context, and acquaintance with the relevant sociological materials could have attuned the Christian radicals more adequately to it.

However, we wish to affirm afresh the importance of the questions raised by Christian Radicalism for the future prospects of faith and the churches in the secularized nations. Therefore, in Chapter XV, we indicate how the questions have recurred in certain controversial issues facing the churches more recently. We warn against dismissing the "sixties ferment" (especially in the Church of England) as a temporary aberration, thankfully since forgotten, and use the lessons of the sixties to sketch out the requirements for any Church desiring to think realistically about the concrete, empirical expression of the Gospel truth it carries.

The title of this last chapter, "Towards an Empirical Ecclesiology?", is deliberately tentative: it expresses our conviction that in this area the fruits of the sixties' debates could yet be reaped, given an adequate sociological sophistication.

PART ONE: PRELIMINARY MATERIALS.

CHAPTER I: CHRISTIAN RADICALISM: AN EPISODE IN THE THEOLOGY OF THE SIXTIES.

1. The Cultural Context.

This thesis addresses itself to certain theological events taking place in the very recent past. To go back only two decades, to the nineteen-sixties, may seem a surprising project for a theological thesis, given the two thousand years of Christian theology available for investigation. But, in theology and the Church as elsewhere, people already speak of the sixties almost as they would about "the Middle Ages" or "the Victorian era", as a kind of past historical period in their own right. Catch-phrases like "the swinging Sixties" and "the permissive society" have become a universal shorthand for an age reckoned to be somehow very distant from our own. Within the churches, "sixties theology" is commonly recalled with a kind of affectionate but wry smile: a novelty, fad or eccentricity, a temporary aberration from the mainstream of theological concern.

A characteristic feature of the decade was the growing tension between two contrasting cultural trends. On the one hand, there was the celebration of modernity, encouraged especially in the West by the sense of grand achievement in the rebuilding of society after the Second World War. In Britain, there was the proud boast of a Welfare State and the promise of general living standards undreamt of in the days of war and depression.

Harold MacMillan's word about "never having had it so good", uttered in the latter part of the fifties, was to seem a fateful slogan; later, the remark of that other Harold, now Lord Wilson, about the "white heat of this revolution" encapsulated the politically optimistic mood. Wilson's election as Prime Minister the year following the occasion of this remark was

presented as the advent of a new, liberal and progressive age for the people. The barometer of pop culture plainly testified to the trend in the phenomenon of the "Mersey Sound" as the vehicle of a new, brash and youthful venture in populist creativity.

But the celebration of modernity was very soon accompanied by the contrapuntal theme of its discontents. Suspicion grew that the technological age might also prove to be the one-dimensional age as far as the human prospect was concerned. The dream of a planned society threatened to turn into a nightmare of enforced artificiality, consumer regimentation and disrespect for freedom. Second and third-generation progressive and liberal thinkers questioned whether the technological miracle could be achieved without radically disturbing the power-structures and authority patterns of the existing society.

The counter-culture of protest, so much a striking feature of the sixties, represented the offspring of modernity refusing to gloss over the disturbing questions to which that modernity by which they had been formed gave rise. Across the spectrum from student violence in Paris to hippies in San Francisco singing "All you need is love", question marks were stubbornly raised against the meaning and values of modernity. Pop culture again indicates the state of play: the Beatles, once working class rock-and-roll heroes, moved on to psychedelia, pot and the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, and eventually to disillusionment and acrimonious split in 1970.

These, needless to say, are very sketchy introductory remarks, and the broader cultural background they hint at will not feature explicitly to any great extent in the further development of this thesis. However, they point to a persistent and crucial duality, a kind of massive geological fault running through the decade under examination, which we shall find reflected also in its religious life.

This is the drive to affirm and to celebrate aspects of the modern age in almost eschatological terms as the threshold of a Promised Land, which is then offset by a retrenchment, and a desire to discover in what transmuted form certain articles from the old world might be carried across the frontier, to make the new capable of being lived in.

Thus, in the first place, it seems that the new age has no need of the outmoded religion of the old, with its hope of other-worldly compensations for life in a world conceived of as unchanging and irredeemably unjust. But equally, it finds itself embarking on a religious quest, by way of Eastern mysticism, or the "counterfeit infinity" (Roszak, 1970; Guinness, 1973) of hallucinogenic drugs, or the fascination of the occult, lest the technological homeland turn out to be a species of iron cage.

Again, the new technocratic man celebrates the rational autonomy of every sphere of life, but his sons, instead of taking up meekly their own scientific specialisms, begin to fear the compartmentalization of discrete technical expertises as a threat to human communication and a sinister way in to manipulative control.

Thirdly, there is a deep-seated uncertainty about the "traditions of the fathers": is the modern man to accept without question the dogmatic authority of his scientific mentors? If not, and he opts instead for a search for fresh patterns of self-expression, authenticity and freedom, where are the lines to be drawn, and what are the limits, if any, to his onslaught upon boundary and taboo? (B. Martin, 1981.)¹

These questions lie parallel to the specific issues for theology and the churches which form the basic structure of our analysis of Christian Radicalism: the question of whether religion can be dispensed with for intelligible secular talk of God, the possibility of a thorough theological affirmation of

the modern secular world, and the search for a faith which is open, creative and not dogmatically-bound.

The general cultural backdrop to these questions goes some way towards accounting for some of the more eccentric aspects of the phenomenon of Christian Radicalism. We refer to such instances as the publication of articles by death-of-God theologian William Hamilton in *Playboy*; the involvement of Bishop James Pike in the occult; Harvey Cox' celebration of a multi-media Eucharist as an avant-garde "happening"; John Robinson's producing snappy little articles for the *Daily Mirror*; or the efforts of H.A. Williams and others to express permissive attitudes to sexual morality in the popular media at what seemed like every available opportunity.

Such events as these make it all too easy to draw cartoon-like caricatures of "sixties theology"², lending support to conservative opinion within the churches which regards the episode as best dead and buried. We hope that our analysis, while certainly critical, will show that the churches cannot afford to ignore the issues being raised by the would-be radical theologies of the sixties, any more than society at large can disregard the hold which that decade exercises over the contemporary imagination.

2. Why "Christian Radicalism"?

The theology we aim to examine in this thesis does not amount to a coherent "school", or an entirely unitary movement, but constitutes rather a mood or style, with a cluster of common features characterizing a variety of contemporaneous theological events. Therefore, we require a conveniently broad, general heading under which to gather our material.

Within the English context, there can be no better place to look for such a heading than in the controversy over the impact of Robinson's Honest to God, for with its unprecedented sales and astonishing level of public discussion, this book as a theological event far outweighed any other in coming to

symbolize a whole incipient mood. Writing in this context upon the prospects for renewal in the churches, one of the most perceptive commentators upon the controversy, David Edwards, then Managing Director of the SCM Press, said:

My belief is that the required movement has now begun to appear...Essentially this deeper movement results from a desire to honour and to hear the secular modern world. The Church must listen to the world before it attempts to interpret the world's own spiritual experience-experience which the world already enjoys, but which it may not acknowledge as in any sense Christian. Here, the whole emphasis is on the Church as mankind's servant. At the centre is a vision of Christ as the man alongside his fellow-men, speaking to them of a God they are already beginning to know. In order that the Church may help the world to see God through Christ, some Christians are quite ready for a wholesale revision of the Church's doctrines and customs, worship and work, organization and architecture, morals and politics, and are ready to declare themselves in favour of change even when they do not see exactly where the process of change will end. If I had to put a label on this movement, as the Evangelicals or the Anglo-Catholics were labelled in their days, I would call it Christian Radicalism. (Edwards and Robinson, 1963:20-21.)

This passage, with its talk of revising both theological formulations and the Church's organizational life in the interests of a discovery of theological meaning in the secular arena, and its willingness to contemplate a casting adrift from all traditional authorities and stabilities in the process, captures well the mood we are to analyse.

When Alec Vidler was looking for a title for his final 1964 Robertson Lecture, in which he wanted to deal with the latest theological fashions in order to bring up to date his survey of twentieth-century trends, he opted for Edwards' phrase, Christian Radicalism. (Vidler, 1965:101-22.) We have followed him in his choice, mindful of the alternatives which were freely used by other commentators at the time.

In particular, the term "radicalism" avoids the pretentious claim to be re-creating a historical phenomenon of massive pivotal significance and complex social and political

motivation which is inherent in the term "new Reformation" (Lloyd, 1964:7; Edwards, 1964; Robinson, 1965.) Further, it is less parochial than such epithets as "Cambridge theology", or "South Bank Religion", two diverse phenomena held together by the involvement of Robinson in each.³

Positively, the idea behind the term "Christian Radicalism" is that described by Robinson himself in a radio broadcast (1963(c); cf. Robinson, 1980.) Choosing to regard himself as a radical, Robinson distinguished this from both the "reformist" and the "revolutionary". The first of these, basically a safe party man, believes that a little tinkering with the theological or ecclesiastical system will save it, whereas the second is a pariah outsider committed to overthrowing the system altogether.

But the radical is a critical, committed **insider**. Just because he is committed, *engagé*, from within, he is compelled literally to get at the roots (*radix*) of what the system stands for and serves- out of love for it, he wants to see it transformed to serve its true ends.

For Robinson, then, and we have chosen to follow him for the purposes of the thesis, radicalism was thoroughly compatible with a devotion to the Church and a respect for theological tradition. The term "Christian Radicalism" is taken as implying a desire, in changing social and cultural circumstances in which religion is bound up as all else, to get at the root of what the Christian Gospel and Church are really all about, and to preserve, repristinate and communicate **that**.⁴

The materials included under our general heading of "Christian Radicalism" may be summed up as these:

- i. The upsurge of semi-popular attempts to convey the meaning of Christian faith and the Gospel to "modern, secular man" which began with the Honest to God controversy.

ii. More serious and substantial attempts to construct a theology of the secular, represented in Britain chiefly by Ronald Gregor Smith.

iii. The contribution of the American so-called "death of God" school, a misnomer for the heterogeneous writings of William Hamilton, Thomas Altizer and Paul van Buren.

iv. The efforts of a generation of committed clergy and laity to introduce fresh thinking into Church life at parish level, seen especially in the experiments in the Diocese of Southwark during Robinson's time as Bishop of Woolwich.

v. The theological celebrations of modernity best represented by Cox' The Secular City and the ensuing debate.

vi. The beginnings of a political theology and an accompanying "servant" ecclesiology seen in the thinking of the World Council of Churches.

vii. The ethical writings capable of summary under the popular head of "the new morality", and based mainly upon a situationist position.

Our task at this point is to indicate the way in which Christian Radicalism persistently demonstrated an interlocking concern for theological reformulation and Church reorganization, which lends itself to the sociologically-informed method of critique we are adopting in the thesis.

3. Key Questions for Theology and Church.

Discussions about church 'structures'...have been criticised for their stress on external, organizational forms. Re-structuring would not answer the present crisis of the churches, nor would it help the badly needed restoration of faith itself. According to these arguments, the crisis in the churches is ideological. Even if this were true...it would be shortsighted to ignore the entanglement between faith, ideology, on the one hand and the particular organizational forms by which these are institutionalized on the other. (Thung, 1976:183.)

Here a sophisticated sociologist states explicitly what was sensed, if not always articulated clearly, by the radical Christians of a decade earlier.

The Editor of the Anglican monthly *Prism*, by that time the liveliest organ of the radical mood, wrote in April 1965:

There is a difference between the attitude that takes an organization as given, but wants to tinker with the machinery to make it more effective or productive, and the attitude that questions the whole nature and purpose of the organization, but sees that it still has something vital at the heart of it, that calls for a totally fresh means of expression.

This is a typical recognition that whereas the problems of the Church in modern society will not be met by institutional renovation alone, the tackling of the central **theological** issues will not suffice unless they spill over into the concrete "means of expression." This spilling-over will be evident in each one of the theological chapters of Part Three of the thesis.

Bishop Robinson himself observed the same duality in writing firstly Honest to God, in which the reformulation of orthodox doctrines in a manner intelligible to "modern, secular man" was to the fore, and following it up with The New Reformation? in which he argued for a restructuring of the Church and its missionary task in order to engage with the needs of modern society. As a further example of this insight made rather less directly, we may quote the words of R.J. Page:

[There is] a significant...lay group, partially inside and partially outside the Church, for whom theological ideas continue to have meaning. These individuals appear to find many of the traditional patterns of organizational life trivial...they are likely to find much of the language and thought-forms in which Christianity has been expressed meaningless...they are inclined to regard the essence of Christianity as service to others...Many of them have turned away from the institutional Church because they no longer find the traditional 'answers' helpful. (Page, 1965:117-8, ~~Emphasis mine.~~)⁵

Christian Radicalism exhibits a preoccupation with certain issues expressed now in the form of theoretical theological questions, now in that of a concern with Church life and organization. This will be documented in much more detail in Chapter VII, but briefly the issues are these:

Firstly, an alienation from the Gospel was believed to have been brought about by its statement in terms of a concept of transcendence no longer relevant or intelligible to the modern mind. God was represented as an objectively existing being, somehow wholly other than the world and yet everywhere present to it. The subject-matter of theology appeared to have little to do with the day-to-day life of the ordinary man.

Corresponding to this was the religiousness of the life of the Church: that is, it was seen by the outsider as a mysterious kind of club dedicated to esoteric spiritual pursuits and cut off from the real world. The radicals wanted to bring theology and Church back into touch with secular, empirical realities, a desire summed up under the slogan of "religionlessness".

Secondly, the Christian message was felt to have become tied to a damaging concept of "other-worldliness". Christian faith was committed to a notion of two worlds or orders of reality, of which the unseen, eternal and spiritual had the priority, bringing about an undervaluing or even a denigration of this material world. This circumstance had set the Church on a course of carping criticism of, and at least implicit opposition to, all the manifestations of modernity which were so markedly transforming the **material** lot of modern people.

Correspondingly, in its organizational life the Church had increasingly lost touch with the distinctive patterns, rhythms and structures of secular life. The radicals wanted to reverse the apparent negative stance of Christian theology towards modernity, and prove the change through a far-reaching reordering of the Church's pastoral and mission priorities.

Thirdly, there was a sense that both the Church's traditional doctrinal apparatus and its institutional form were only serving to erect needless barriers in the way of people's responding to the Gospel of Christ. Doctrinally, through insisting on credal and dogmatic statements forged in the heat of bygone controversies as the test of genuine faith, the Church was guilty of "making up heavy burdens and piling them on men's shoulders."⁶

Possibly worse still, through an unhealthy preoccupation with its own internal affairs, and the weddedness of its hierarchical structures to the social *status quo*, it was "shutting the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in men's faces".⁷ The radicals wanted to see a Church that could "travel light" in respect of both doctrine and organization, offering a faith that could direct and transform secular living, rather than a set of creeds to be clung to in defiance of it.

These, then, are the key questions for theology and Church addressed by the participants in the episode of Christian Radicalism. It remains to point out briefly, in this opening chapter, that both the Church-reforming and the theological aspects of the episode were open to, and to some extent fell victim to, an unhealthy one-sidedness.

Thus, for example, the matter of Church organization and mission readily degenerated into pragmatic, piecemeal and non-theologically based reforms, whereas debate about the doctrinal issues raised in a book like Honest to God tended, even in its own time, to vanish into academic abstraction without reference to Robinson's stated **apologetic** reasons for writing it. We aim, through the importation of the sociological perspective into our critique, to avoid this falling apart of what, for the sake of the Gospel and the good of the Church, must be kept inseparably together.

To spell out more clearly what we mean by "importing the sociological perspective into our critique" is the task of the next chapter.⁸

NOTES

1. Discussions of the counter-cultural movements of the sixties are found in Roszak (1970), Guinness (1973), L.Paul (1973:246-64), B.Martin (1981). Roszak and Guinness both pay attention to the attempt to mount a critique of modernity from within its own premises marked by Marcuse's One Dimensional Man. Guinness thinks that the failures of both optimistic liberal humanism and the radical counter-culture to provide an alternative to the erosion of the Western Christian culture left a major cultural vacuum in the Seventies. For him, Christianity is the "Third Way", but the radical theologians of the sixties, instead of grasping this, merely succeeded in apeing one or the other of the failed categories. Bernice Martin regards the counter-culture and its wider influence via the "expressive professions" (artists, teachers, clergy) as largely an "onslaught on boundaries and taboos of all kinds" (51), an "expressive revolution". She sees a variety of this in the radical theologians' eagerness to abolish the boundary between "sacred" and "secular". The ambiguous attempt first to celebrate the meaning of modernity and then to escape its potential limitations on the human is clearly shown in these analyses.

2. See for example this passage in Holloway (1972:47-8): "The whole decade flashes across my mind like some lunatic kaleidoscope; the Rector of Woolwich pushing a beauty queen through the streets in a wheelbarrow; Malcolm Boyd going on TV to announce with passionate solemnity that Jesus Christ, like all men, had a penis; Canon Montefiore of Cambridge electrifying the world press by saying that Jesus Christ could have been a homosexual; an up-to-date harvest festival in the South of England in which the liturgy had been written by the vicar, ending with the following responsory: 'Are we happy? You bet your life we're happy!'...Ah, the 60s!"

3. In America, the expression "radical theology" referred more narrowly to the heterogeneous collection of writings artificially combined by the media into the "death of God theology" (Altizer and Hamilton, 1968; Cooper, 1968.) For them, "Christian Radicalism" as we are defining it included much that was not true radicalism at all, precisely because of its desire to operate within the Church. Thus Hamilton: "the theologian does not and can not go to church, he is not interested, he is alienated, he must live outside" (Hamilton, 1968:96-7; cf. Miller, 1967.)

4. We are aware that our use of the term "radicalism" could be criticised on the grounds that it suggests properly a political engagement which many of the theologians we are studying did not possess. We are trying to expound our overall argument without overtly political dimensions, but there will certainly be points at which a political interpretation of circumstances is invited.

5. This twofold pattern can be traced in many other places in the material. Thus van den Heuvel (1967:24): "the fruits of Bonhoeffer's initial contribution are best felt in two realms of the Church; its theology and its structures." R.P.McBrien (1969) opens a book on the post-Vatican II Church with two chapters, 'The Secular Meaning of the Gospel' and 'The Secular Mission of the Church'. Holloway (1972) has similarly 'The Surrender of Theology' and 'The Surrender of the Church'; and Bowden (1977), evaluating the effects of the sixties' ferment, or the lack of them, in the Church of ten years later, has chapters echoing Robinson, entitled 'Honest to God' and 'Whatever happened to the New Reformation?'

6. Matthew 23:4.

7. Matthew 23:13.

8. Something should be added here about Vatican II, which was responsible for producing the most substantial, systematic and far-reaching documents on the Church to emerge during the sixties. This thesis pays no direct attention to the ecclesiology of Vatican II, and this omission should be accounted for. Firstly, it would have been quite impossible to incorporate so vast an issue as Vatican II without considerably modifying the whole plan of the thesis. Secondly, by far the greater part of Christian Radicalism was a Protestant phenomenon, which is not to deny that there were many very astute Roman Catholic comments upon it (e.g. Ryan, 1964; McBrien, 1966 and 1969; Adolfs, 1967; McCabe, in Edwards and Robinson, 1963: 165-180). Thirdly, discussion of the Vatican II documents was so detailed within Roman circles that it was only quite late in the decade that they were really thrown open to wider ecclesiological discussion. And lastly, Catholicism's own self-confessed "radicalism", that of the "Catholic New Left" (Wicker, 1966; Woollard, 1972:45-53), which itself entered into dialogue with Vatican II, was moving in a very different philosophical universe from that of the theologians we are treating here, and aimed to challenge the theological secularizers.

CHAPTER II: SOCIOLOGY AND THEOLOGY: TOWARDS A MODEL FOR
CO-OPERATION.

This chapter discusses the theoretical and methodological problems raised by the proposal to introduce sociological perspectives as a stimulus to the criticism of theological ideas. We wish to justify the use we shall be making of sociological materials in the course of the thesis with reference to certain principles governing the interaction of the disciplines. This means that this chapter will put forward a view of the enterprise of theology which makes it possible to speak of sociological insights as being relevant to it, and, on the other side, a discussion of traditions in sociology designed to show which is most favourable towards fruitful co-operation.

Briefly, we understand theology as critical reflection upon the Christian tradition in the light of its continual interaction with social and cultural contexts via the lives, beliefs and practices of religious believers. The sociological tradition most favourable to dialogue is that deriving from the work of Max Weber. It should be kept in mind that this chapter is concerned with the interdisciplinary issue, and not with sociological theories of religion **as such**: these form the subject of Chapter IV. The chapter begins with a survey of the sociological tradition designed to show the difficulties involved in any proposal to relate it constructively to the tasks of theology.

1. The Sociology of Religion in the Sociological Tradition.

i. Comte, Durkheim and the Refinement of Epiphenomenalism.

The science of sociology was the child of the strictest type of rational empiricism to proceed from the Enlightenment. Yet, it also announced a radical challenge to the confident prediction of the demise of religion that accompanied scientific secularism. For the fascination of all the early

sociologists with the phenomenon of religion is plain. As Robert Nisbet writes:

No other single concept is as suggestive of the unique role held by sociology among the social sciences in the nineteenth century, or as reflective of its underlying premises about the nature of man and society, as the concept of the sacred, (Nisbet, 1967:221.)

Thus Auguste Comte, usually regarded as the "father" of sociology as a self-consciously elaborated separate scientific discipline, did not follow such as Voltaire in celebrating the demise of religion at the hands of the liberating rational spirit.

Comte, in his Positive Philosophy of 1853, argued that positive science, with sociology as its controlling discipline, must displace all religious or metaphysical superstition as the foundation for both individual and social thinking and action. He envisaged sociology uncovering the universal laws governing social evolution, freeing man from bondage to either material or intellectual determinism and enabling him to control his social environment and plan his future. He referred to the most primitive stage of mankind's development as the "theological, or fictitious."

Yet in his Positive Polity, his blueprint for the planned, scientific society included exhaustive proposals for a religion of Positivism, complete with liturgy, sacraments, calendar of Saints' Days and priests in vestments. Comte insisted on the abiding necessity of religion as a means of social integration, of rendering human associations durable, and of enacting moral consensus. That is:

Far from being a mere bundle of beliefs, subject, as the Enlightenment had thought, to the exterminative action of education and science, religion is ineradicably built into the very nature of mental and social life. (Nisbet, op.cit: 225.)

The classic breakthrough in expounding this "ineradicable" nature of religion was of course made by Durkheim, who sought to transcend the limits of pure positivism by refusing to

regard religion as obsolescent, nor to treat it as self-evidently false (Bellah, 1970(a)).

Durkheim wrote that "there is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself" (1915:427). In attempting to spell out the precise content of that "something eternal", he set in motion a development in sociology which has helped to create immense problems in the way of any rapprochement of the discipline with theology.

The problems arise from the fact that Durkheim's approach is no longer **merely** epiphenomenalist and reductive. Theologians had been able to respond to this earlier style by simply declaring sociology mistaken and opposing its apparent "mechanistic" view of humanity (e.g. Slater, 1911). Durkheim, however, was not so easily disposed of. His method proceeds from two crucial notions, that of the "social fact" and that of the functional unity of every society.

A social fact, firstly, is a societal phenomenon conceived as objectively existing and capable of exerting constraint upon the individual members of the society. (Durkheim, 1938). Religion, as a social fact, or as a whole collection of such facts, is something which is simply **there**, comprising certain rites and institutions, customs and groupings, and as such available for sociological scrutiny **independently** of individuals' personal interpretations of it or dispositions towards it. Durkheim, in his desire to be sociological in the very strictest sense, systematically excludes attention to individual experience and constructions of meaning as an illegitimate psychologizing of sociology's proper domain.

Secondly, Durkheim envisages sociological explanation in terms of the contribution of social facts towards the total functioning of the society in question as a harmonious system.

Thus, as is well known, the social fact of religion is treated as a society's means of objectifying and ascribing sacred status to its own corporateness and cohesiveness, "society" itself being something of which the whole exceeds the sum of the parts:

There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and its personality. (Durkheim, 1915:427.)

These emphases of Durkheim opened the way to a double development in sociology which profoundly affected the main lines of the sociology of religion, lowering its status as a sub-discipline and reducing the prospects of collaboration with theology.

ii. The Great Divide: Grand Theory and Abstracted Empiricism.

The "great divide" to which we refer is that criticised so sharply by C.Wright Mills in his The Sociological Imagination, between "grand theory" and "abstracted empiricism". Applied to religion, the options look like this: on the one hand, functional theory, as elaborated in the greatest of detail by Talcott Parsons, seizes upon Durkheim's dictum that every society **must** possess both an overall functional unity and a means of giving symbolic expression to this. The notion of religion is transmuted into that of whatever forms the most general stratum of symbolic legitimations overlaying the entire social system, the ultimate court of appeal of consensual values, that which holds everything together.

This brand of the sociology of religion begins to look like the apotheosis of all theology- in its comprehensiveness and generality, it makes Christian theology look inexcusably parochial and particular. When the conclusions Durkheim drew from the study of a small-scale aboriginal society are simply carried over into the study of complex modern societies or generalized into universal theories of what religion **must** be

and do, theology and sociology just look like rivals in the business of comprehensive meta-empirical explanation.

But, on the other hand, Durkheim's proposal to carry out sociological analysis without reference to the question of personal, subjective constructs of meaning has encouraged that brand of "hard-nosed empiricism" in sociology which comes close to eschewing the responsibility for theory altogether. In much modern sociology the disproportion between minutely detailed empirical investigation and very slender theoretical conclusions has become a byword among critics of the subject's claim to true scientific credentials. In the area of religion, even the churches have been enthusiastic about taking up sociometrical and demographic studies, surveys, questionnaires and so on, which yield "factual information" but leave theology and the Gospel mercifully untouched.

During the period following the seminal work of the classical sociologists, theoretical work in religion was subsumed more and more into the generalized constructions of grand theory. Little distinctiveness of religion, as that about which theology specifically reflects, remained. At the same time, practical research was likely to treat religion as one among many of the manifestations in a society liable to statistical measurement, but not a particularly important one. The heuristic value of such research remained small; religion itself was largely assumed to be on the wane as a social influence, and sociologists would have been amused at the suggestion that the labours of theologians could in any way be served by theirs.'

The paucity of creative and theoretically fruitful material under the head of the sociology of religion was being pointed out by a number of commentators in the fifties and early sixties (Ward, 1961:18-24; Birnbaum, 1956; Simey, 1963; Brothers, 1963; Banks, 1967.) David Martin (1966(a)) described

the situation as "a case of status deprivation" for the sub-discipline: "to study religion is like studying a residual penumbra...the proper place for religion is a footnote." Sociologists had found it difficult to shake off the historical unilateralism they had inherited from Comte and the "creeping epiphenomenalism" that was a lurking threat in the Durkheimian tradition. These are the reasons why the approach we are proposing here owes more to that other major line of development, which runs from the work of Weber (and from Marx before him, with certain qualifications)².

iii. Weber.

Weber's work contains the seeds of all the main theoretical issues which concern sociologists of religion to this day (Hill, 1973.) The relatively low profile of the Weberian perspective in the dominant stream of sociology in Britain and America from the twenties to the fifties was an important factor in the empirical-theoretical split we have been discussing (O'Dea, 1970; Budd, 1973; Robertson, 1978:243-57). We wish to set out three features of Weber's method which, when applied to religion, present important potential points of contact with the approach of a critical theology.

Firstly, Weber insists upon seeking to understand the subjective meaning religious beliefs and actions hold for the agents. "Sociology", he wrote in his Theory of Social and Economic Organization, "is a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects." Demonstrable **statistical** uniformities do not constitute valid sociological generalizations, still less laws, unless "they can be regarded as manifestations of the understandable subjective meaning of a course of social action."

It is not enough for the sociologist to give an analysis of the functions performed by religious beliefs and practices for the society as a whole, viewed as a complete and integral

system. Even identical external circumstances can be both experienced and interpreted very differently by different persons. The sociologist can cast light upon the meaning which believers confer upon the world through the use they make of the items of religious belief and practice given to them in their particular tradition. The theologian needs to pay attention to this in his reflection upon the coming-to-expression of the Gospel in specific contexts.

Secondly, and here is the nub of the vast body of literature generated by Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, ideas themselves, religious ones included, are capable in certain circumstances of acting as motive forces in social change. This is not a reversal of social or material determinism in favour of an assertion of the priority of ideas as independent variables. Rather, the interplay of ideas and material forces and interests is complex and fascinating: the sociologist aims to find out under what conditions certain ideas were able (and so might be able again) to grip the imagination and the subjective understanding of whole cultures in such a way as radically to change them, materially as well as intellectually.

In this process, the sociologist must always be alert to the likelihood of ironies occurring in the historical developments. The road from theological ideas to eventual social consequences is a very long and winding one, and the consequences may sometimes appear to contradict they very ideas which gave rise to them. Weber's is a very highly sophisticated thesis, attempting to trace the possible trajectories of initiating ideas through the mutations and constraints of a host of changing historical and sociological variables. However, nothing less will do justice to the questions attendant upon investigating the **contemporary** realization of theological meanings, which the radical theologians were aiming to achieve.

Thirdly, there is the device employed by Weber for producing substantive theoretical content out of the intricate mass of empirical and historical detail: the ideal type. In his writing on scientific method, Objectivity, Weber defined this as follows:

An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasised viewpoints into a unified analytical construct. In its conceptual purity, this mental construct cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality,..

The ideal-type is an attempt to analyse historically unique configurations or their individual components by means of genetic concepts.

The concept of the ideal type stresses the imaginative, inductive component in the sociologist's theoretical method. It brings scientific objectivity into line with artistic creativity, in projecting a "way of seeing" which leads to fresh understanding of intractable historical complexity.

For the theologian, types will be helpful as the middle term between the raw materials of the tradition in which the Gospel comes to him, and the problem of specific contextual application. The type extracts from the mass of possibilities a single trajectory with the distinguishing features proper to it, "all other things being equal". Although all other things never are equal, the variables do show certain frequent patterns of recurrence, so that a small number of types may suffice to help the theologian to see what the possible realizations are of a particular theological idea in the situation he is contemplating.

We shall examine further the relevance of this sociological method to our view of the theological enterprise later in the chapter. At this point, however, we want to take up, in the light of the elements of the sociological tradition outlined so far, the matter of specific conceptions of the relation between the disciplines. We shall do this by citing a

number of "samples" of different understandings of the "division of labour" in which all the typical problems are brought to light.

2. *Problems of the Division of Labour.*

i. The Social Gospel: theology reduced to sociology.

The liberal Social Gospel forms an example of a theology which, by attaching itself unambiguously to a meliorist doctrine of social evolution, could welcome the prospects for a collaboration with a sociology which itself regarded the present age as the pinnacle of human progress. Walter Rauschenbusch wrote in his Christianity and the Social Crisis:

The Kingdom of God, at every stage of human development, tends towards a social order which will best guarantee to all personalities their freest and highest development...[it] is not a concept nor an ideal merely, but an historical force. It is a vital and organizing concept now at work in humanity.

The simple **equation** of the application of the Gospel with present processes of social change will clearly not do in view of the complexity of the Weberian analysis. We shall have occasion later to criticise cases where Christian Radicalism tried to employ sociological insight as a kind of **direct**"guide to what God is doing in the world" (Little and Younger, in Callahan, 1966: 69-75, 77-81; Clements, 1972; Woollard, 1972; *infra*, chs. X & XI.). The charge that sociology is reductionist with regard to religious meaning cannot be answered simply by identifying such meaning with certain "subconscious social presuppositions" (as Mathews, 1912), somehow "at work" in society.

ii. "Christian Sociology": the hegemony of theology.

The Anglican "Christendom" Group, which traced its heritage back to the Christian Socialism of the previous century, used the term "Christian Sociology" to describe its work in the nineteen-thirties. Figures associated with the

group included T.S.Eliot, Maurice Reckitt, V.A.Demant and William Temple; a Summer School of Sociology was instigated at Oxford from 1925, and a journal, *Christendom: a Journal of Christian Sociology*, first appeared in 1931. Demant, in his 1933 publication God, Man and Society- an Introduction to Christian Sociology, defined the movement in this way:

Sociology is the objective and dispassionate study of society...There is no specifically Christian method of doing this, But insofar as we undertake it for the purpose of judging in the light of Christian standards the quality of the behaviour to which the social structure predisposes men and also claim to elucidate and evaluate the forces which make up that structure in the light of the Christian doctrine of human nature and of the purpose of God, then we can validly speak of a Christian sociology (~~emphasis mine~~).

Demant goes some way here towards accepting that "sociology" must be allowed to proceed on its own terms as an empirical discipline. But on closer inspection a confusion of categories appears, when he goes on to claim for theology the ability to "elucidate" the forces which go to make up social structures, with the aid of certain Christian doctrines. In other words, theology really retains the upper hand all the time. Demant thinks that a proper understanding of "human nature" and "the purposes of God" would be sufficient to alter "social forces."

There is, therefore, a retreat from the concrete into idealistic theological prescription. Sociology is conceived as doing all the spadework, perhaps, but it is theology which comes in afterwards to take the credit for producing the goods. The problem has been given decisive analysis by D.L.Munby (1958), who argues that judgments drawn directly from theology cannot be applied, without more ado, to **particular** social instances as though the theological judgments themselves were based upon empirical evidence. "There is no easy bridge from the kind of insights afforded by Christian metasociology to the facts of everyday life" (Munby, op.cit:53.)

"Christian Sociology", in effect, is not really sociology at all but a form of Christian social philosophy. It shows particularly clearly that there is no room for dialogue between sociology and theology just as long as theology is conceived as coming to the discussion free from social conditioning, armed with specific prescriptions and propositions having the status of untouchable revelation.³ The Catholic priests who first developed the method of pastoral study known as "religious sociology" were well aware that theology does not simply **dictate** a sociological pattern, and attempted to ensure that the two disciplines were kept methodologically quite separate.

iii. "Sociologie Religieuse": keeping the disciplines distinct.

Religious sociology represented, to some degree, a mutual agreement to keep theology **out** of sociology, and vice versa, on the basis of an assumed competence of its practitioners in both.⁴ Empirical sociology was regarded as offering to the Church a set of tools of pastoral utility. These might reveal severe long-standing difficulties in the way of the effective promulgation of Christianity in certain types of social environment. They did not, however, seem to encroach so dangerously upon theology's proper territory as a reductionist sociology had done.

This was a matter of some importance for the first clerical practitioners of religious sociology, given the prominent tradition of anti-clericalism and militant secularism in their native France. The Catholic ethos of the movement actually created a situation in which priests with genuinely specialist sociological training could exhibit a surprising degree of scientific detachment, almost to the point of appearing to be prepared to explain away all variations in religious practice by wholly extrinsic factors of class, occupational status, political commitment, historical tradition

and so on, while retaining unimpaired, as belonging to an altogether different frame of reference, a completely orthodox theological position.⁵

The question for us is whether such a position remains viable without the peculiarly self-confident and self-contained institutional and theological base for operations provided by Roman Catholicism. In his Introduction to the first English edition of Fernand Boulard's pathfinding Introduction to Religious Sociology, Michael Jackson of the Sheffield Industrial Mission wrote:

In England the tension between the theologian and the sociologist is likely to appear more strongly than in France, where most religious sociology is done within the context of the French Church. It is a tension between two sets of concepts. Karl Mannheim discussed it in his influential book, Diagnosis of Our Time. He wrote, 'Sociology in its historical origins is a secularized, perhaps the most secularized, approach to the problem of human life. It tries to understand 'the whole range of human behaviour and evaluations as problems of individual and group adjustment'. Theology cannot be content with this. Mannheim argued that the tension must be held. Sociology must go as far as its method takes it in the study of religion. At the same time, the essentially ambiguous nature of the Church and of religious practice must be recognized. If the tension is held and the limitations of sociology seen, then the resulting use of sociology will be fruitful. The correct handling of religious sociology depends on the directing role of theology (Boulard, 1960:xvii; ~~emphasis mine.~~)

In this passage the old problems raise their heads all over again. Religious sociology cannot maintain its strict compartmentalization of expertises unless it is content to remain little more than a prosaic kind of ecclesiastical sociography. Insofar as it claims to explain anything, it comes up against the problems of epiphenomenalism and reductionism: just wherein lies the distinctive and irreducible contribution of theology to the enterprise? Jackson wants to solve this by reasserting a "directing role" for theology, but this does not really cohere with his implied approval of Mannheim.

For when, in the work cited, Mannheim offers to the theologian a concept of the disclosure of God's truth by means of "concrete paradigms" embedded in social contexts, he permits the sociologist to intrude rather further upon the theologian's domain than Jackson suggests. In fact, his recommendation that the theologian search for such paradigms approaches an understanding of Weberian ideal types as a vehicle of **theological** understanding.

The "ambiguity" of which Jackson speaks is an important perception, but not quite in the way Jackson expresses it. Elsewhere he writes that

...there are aspects of the Church's life which sociology cannot penetrate. The Church is more than a social, historical institution, it is the Body of Christ. This ambiguity of the Church's nature sets certain limits upon religious sociology (Boulard, op.cit;xi.)

This puts the matter in terms of a traditional retreat into theological protectionism -i.e.the idea that sociology cannot get at the **true** essence of the Church, which is theologically guarded and spiritually discerned (cf.Poulat, 1967: "the invocation of the supernatural serves as a kind of diplomatic bag"-i.e. sociology may not inspect the contents). But we should want to put it otherwise. It is not so much that there is somehow "more to the Church" than sociological analysis can see; it is rather that there is always more to an **image** such as "Body of Christ" than attains to socio-cultural realization at any given time or in any given place.

By the time Jackson was writing his "Introduction to an Introduction" for an English readership, continental religious sociology was already realizing that the safe division of labour envisaged by its founders could not survive the broadening of the discipline beyond the bounds of Catholic pastoral studies. The journal *Social Compass*, for example, was quietly trying to drop the use of the term "sociologie religieuse", with its strong suggestion of concealed

commitments on the part of its practitioners. Two examples of writing in the English context will indicate how refinements to the conception of religious sociology were being considered.

The first, typically from a Catholic quarter, is Conor K. Ward's study of a Liverpool parish, Priests and People. Although the body of the work restricts its attention to narrowly circumscribed empirical issues, and its explicit conclusions are modest, Ward does offer, in a chapter headed "Prospect", some pointers to a further advance:

The truths remain unchanged and contemporary man can learn much from the brilliant syntheses of the past, but the concrete conditions of each era present features unique in some respects, and on the social plane each era requires its own integration with the message of the Gospel. In the quest for such a synthesis in our time, the sociologist and the theologian complement each other...

Theological exposition of an ideal can be supplemented by empirical description of the ascertainable results of religious communion in its varying degrees and different realizations...It is possible that the theological ideal is rarely, if ever, realized...(Ward, 1961:128-9; ~~emphasis mine~~.)

Here Ward hints at a conception of theology as dealing in ideals, a general vision for man and society issuing from a particular understanding of religious belief and practice, whereas sociology deals with the actual extent of realization of the ideal possible in varying social and cultural contexts.

The other example is the pioneering study of the Bishop of Middleton, E.R.Wickham, Church and People in an Industrial City, which together with Wickham's further work was deeply influential in the development of innovative models of pastoral and evangelistic ministry in the Sheffield Industrial Mission. Wickham insists that, in contrast to the ideas of Christian Sociology about the priority of the doctrinally-given understandings of "human nature" and the world, the meanings of such doctrines as Fall and Redemption can only be ascertained with reference to the concrete social contexts which are the "domain" of their application (Wickham, 1964:68).

He sees the claim of theology to be "prophetic" as inescapably bound up with sociology, for the element of prophecy does not come in declaring to the world a word from outside, of unconditional force, but precisely in the use of sociological analysis to enliven and give fresh application to the familiar theological materials:

For sociology...studies the development, the nature and the laws of society; and prophecy...is the reading of the present through a profound discernment of the past, and a realization of the possibilities, even the certainties that lie ahead, in the light of our handling of the present.' The very word that the Church speaks to the world, therefore, through which she seeks to speak God's Word, is inseparable from understandings that, if theological, are also sociological in kind. (Wickham, op.cit;70-71.)

Wickham speaks of "prophecy" where we should be content simply to use the word "theology". In so doing, he points to the important task of "reading the past", in which an insight into sociological constraints and regularities is essential, coupled with an orientation to the future in terms of "possibilities, even certainties". These we see as given pre-eminently in the Christian tradition, and this critical mediation between past and future is a distinctive pattern of theological reflection. However, this is to run on ahead somewhat at this point; and before we come to the more recent constructive models for the interdisciplinary relationship, we have to look at one more approach which, in deliberate reaction against the optimism of religious sociology, seemed to raise a still more intractable set of problems.

iv. Berger and the Sociology of Knowledge: Sociological Imperialism?

The options of a merger between the disciplines, or a strict separation, or the bid for hegemony on the part of theology, can be complemented by that of a similar bid by the other side. Peter Berger, with his colleague Thomas Luckmann, mounted in the early sixties a hard-hitting critique of the

whole "religious sociology" approach as the basis for a future sociology of religion (Berger and Luckmann, 1963; see also Luckmann, 1967: ch.1.)

Berger and Luckmann took up the point already discussed above, concerning the retreat of sociology from the larger theoretical questions about religion and society into narrowly sociographical and statistical studies. In particular, they argued that a concentration upon institutional, church-centred patterns of religiosity, such as that found in religious sociology, was inadequate to the task of understanding the social significance and function of religion in a situation where (as almost all over Europe, though not in America) official religious practice was becoming very much a minority option.

Berger and Luckmann's proposed means of rehabilitating the sociology of religion as a theoretical discipline was to relocate it within the domain of the sociology of knowledge. This itself was understood more broadly than in Mannheim's original conception. For them, it was not only an account of how ideologies and world-views are carried by different social strata, but a theory of the whole human enterprise of interpreting the world by means of the construction of systems of meaning. The "social construction of reality" involves men and women in a dialectical process of projection and response to that which was projected, now perceived as objectively given (Berger and Luckmann, 1967).

Berger applied the general theory to the specific case of religion in his The Social Reality of Religion, and it is here that the damaging contentions arise. For the problem now is not so much the familiar one of reductionism, which theology has been inclined to counter on the grounds that it is simply inadequate to the evidence; it is a matter of a radical relativism, in which theology itself as much as any other set of human ideas or claim to knowledge is treated as just

another function of the universal human activity of meaning-projection, which is therefore entirely context-dependent.⁶

There are, however, a number of reasons why we feel justified in denying that Berger's bid for sociological imperialism is as irresistible as it first appears to be. Firstly, in his own earlier work (Berger, 1961(a) & (b)) Berger took up a somewhat neo-Orthodox position with regard to the distinction between "religion" and "Christian faith". Sociology's task was seen as the debunking of religious pretensions and ecclesiastical absurdities, since religion as a social product was subject to all manner of corruptions and alienative functions from which the inner reality of radical faith had to be sharply distinguished.

Berger's later development ought undoubtedly to be seen as part of a process of shaking off this neo-Orthodox past, as he came to doubt that faith itself could be so readily preserved as a commodity immune from relativizing analysis; and as such, there are elements of over-reaction about it.⁷

Secondly, Berger himself has delineated the relationship between sociology and theology in terms more favourable than the bare theory might suggest (Berger, 1973:181-90.) In this essay, originally published separately in 1967, Berger defends the strictly **sociological** methodology of treating religion, and therefore theology too, as a human projection. At the same time, he argues that this need not preclude the **theologian** from supposing that

the anthropological ground of these projections may itself be the reflection of a reality that includes both world and man, so that man's ejaculations of meaning into the universe ultimately point to an all-embracing meaning in which he himself is grounded, (Berger, op.cit: 183; for a critique see Pannenberg, 1974,)

Berger even avers that, as far as their most basic concerns and procedures go, sociology and theology belong to "discrepant and mutually immune frames of reference", a

statement which comes close to re-affirming a standpoint of safe compartmentalization. However, it is not so simple as this. The procedure of "relativizing the relativizers", by which the theologian turns the tables on the sociologist by claiming that his sociologically-constructed view of man and the world is no more entitled to the claim of absoluteness than is his theological one, still leaves theology with certain requirements to meet.

Theologians must obviously not make ostensibly empirical statements which are subject to disconfirmation by sociological research (Berger, op.cit:184). But more than this, sociology will not be content to be treated as an ancillary discipline to pastoral studies. For the theologian may come to reflect that

...he was not born as a theologian, that he existed as a person in a particular socio-historical situation before he ever began to do theology- in sum, that he himself, if not his theology, is illuminated by the lighting apparatus of the sociologist, (ibid,)

Theology is not sealed off from the social context, and the type of theology which emerges at any time will undoubtedly be in some measure a response to the cultural environment. But the question we have to raise is just what the theologian is entitled to treat as his methodological baseline, in the sense of that which is his *datum*, the frame of his entire work, within which to cease to operate would be to secede from his proper *métier* altogether.

Our third ground for rejecting the imperialist pretensions of Berger's sociology is found in his own projected answer to this question. Setting aside a crude fundamentalism which simply attempts to deny the incursions of relativity upon theology, together with its more subtle neo-Orthodox form and the existential relocation of faith in the recesses of a sociologically untouchable subjectivity, Berger proposes a

return to what he calls "the spirit of classical Protestant liberalism" (ibid:188.) This does not, of course, entail a return to the **conclusions** of that movement. It means, rather

...a step-by-step re-evaluation of the traditional affirmations in terms of [the theologian's] own cognitive criteria (which need not necessarily be those of a putative 'modern consciousness'...)

It is, above all, a spirit of intellectual courage which is equally removed from the cognitive retrenchment of Orthodoxy and the cognitive timidity of what passes for neo-Liberalism today (ibid:188-9.)

The important point here is that Berger proposes that the theologian engage in a dialogue with the tradition, a process in which sociology has a vital, critically stimulating role to play. In a more recent work (1980) Berger has followed up his commendation of liberalism by speaking of its inductive method of doing theology. This is based upon the conviction that ultimately what underlies the tradition is a formative, definitive **experience**; and that, as Troeltsch saw and struggled over, no historical-social manifestations finally and assuredly capture and make permanent the founding experience. But to share in the tradition which is its fruit is, Berger says, to be able to afford the "mellowness" of liberality.

It is therefore odd that the immediate product of Berger's advocacy of this dialogue with the tradition in The Social Reality of Religion was the follow-up work A Rumour of Angels, for in this Berger fails to make theological use of his own cultural theory (cf. Lindbeck, 1984:20.) He does not approach religion as a cultural system, carrying its tradition in the form of a nexus of beliefs, rites, stories and social embodiments, and suggest examining how these items of the tradition serves the believer as an interpretation of his world or a motivation for action in it.

Instead, he produces the programme of seeking out signals of transcendence" in secular experience, a kind of sketch for a new natural theology. When he then speaks of "confronting the traditions", "in search of whatever signals

of transcendence may have been sedimented in them" (Berger, 1970:104) Berger remains unprepared to grant the theologian the right to treat the tradition as his *datum* .

We have now looked at four possible ways of relating theology and sociology: a merger of the two, strict compartmentalization and a bid for hegemony on the part of each over the other. All four possibilities raise for the theologian in their particular ways the recurrent problems of reductionism (epiphenomenalism), determinism and relativism. But we have already suggested that the Weberian tradition in sociology holds out further potential.

Since the shaking-up of the dialogue brought about by Berger, which in itself probably generated more heat than light in view of the ambiguities of his position, advances have been made which depend upon the introduction of a rather different approach. Within a Weberian sociological tradition, the question of how **theology** should be understood in order that sociological considerations might be relevant to it at all has been pursued. It is in this context that we present our own position in the final part of this chapter.

3. Contemporary Advances.

i. From Gill to Blackfriars.

In Britain it was Robin Gill who took up, in three works (1975, 1978, & 1981), the task of clarifying for both sides, but especially for theologians, the issues involved in relations between theology and sociology. It is significant that Gill's The Social Context of Theology, despite its aims being relatively modest, came to a theological readership, at least, as something of a new departure. Berger, it has been said, had succeeded in "bewitching" the sociology of religion for a decade; if so, he had certainly placed an effective moratorium on any easy interdisciplinary advance. Gill wanted to clear the

ground, dispel some confusion and make moderate proposals about the principles upon which future dialogue might proceed.

Gill's first step was to urge that both theologians and sociologists accept the other's right to employ what he called an "as if" methodology. Sociologists must proceed as if there were a sufficient sociological explanation of all religious phenomena, since sociology is by definition that discipline which studies the world by the methodological isolation of the social factor.

Similarly, theology is entitled to operate as if the basic Gospel material and the Christian tradition were fundamentally valid, since it is these which form the theologian's raw material and methodological baseline. (It is not theology as such but the philosophy of religion which does not make this initial presupposition.) If both sides could admit this much, Gill believed, charges by theologians that sociology "left no room for the Holy Spirit", and the suspicions of sociologists that theologians were "committed" and therefore unscientifically biased, could be put aside.

However, having said this, Gill went on to speak more specifically to the theologian of what he must recognize if he expected to be taken seriously by sociology. He must accept that all theology is necessarily done in a social context. The theologian is making conscious choices about how to interpret his context and to develop his theology in dialogue with it. But this is not all: the theologian is himself also a **product** of his cultural context. He does not come to his theological problems free from pre-understanding and built-in preferences and attitudes. Thus theology itself is, at one level, amenable to being understood in "social construct" terms.

We have, therefore, to develop a model of the theologian as involved, as participating in a social and cultural world, and therefore as committed to the dialectical process of

reflecting upon and criticising that world in the light of his tradition, and *vice versa*. For the tradition with which the theologian works is only available to him at all as part of a cultural "package", and yet it is given to him within the Church's life as the resource for interpreting and- importantly- transcending that "package".

Granted this dialectical process, Gill insisted on the possibility that theology might also at times prove socially significant, that is, act as an **independent** variable within society. The Weberian background to all of this is clear enough. However, it is not Gill's immediate application of his ideas, in his first two books, to the Honest to God debate which interest us here.* The development of his position in terms of the **type** of theology which could build upon this sociological model of dialectical involvement came in an essay prepared for the Oxford Blackfriars Symposium which brought together a group of theologians and sociologists in 1980 to try to advance the interdisciplinary cause. Gill's essay (1980) is reproduced in a longer version as chapter 6 of Prophecy and Praxis. It sums up well the prevalent attitude of the symposium towards the theological task, in its proposals for what Gill calls a "praxis theology."

The word "praxis" refers to a compound activity in which (in this case) religious practice in the sense of participation in the life of a community of faith, and critical reflection on both the religious tradition and the world in the light of such ongoing practice, are bound up together. According to Gill, a praxis theology might use "sociological techniques and theories...to arbitrate on the validity of particular theological positions and notions."

Just as, in the past, theology has had to become answerable to historical and philosophical criticism, so now it must expect to have to respond to the scrutiny of sociology. The basis for this is the recognition that theological ideas

and concepts cannot be tested as to their **meaning** save with regard to the social formations and attitudes with which they are accompanied in particular contexts.

Gill's proposal, as he explicitly remarks, follows the Marxist refusal of the dichotomy in Western philosophy between ideas and behaviour, or a supposedly "value-free" cognitive content and a commitment to action. (Claims of sociology to be "value-free" represent a distortion of the meaning of the term in Weber's usage.) It warns us to be wary of the distinction between "pure" and "applied" in theology. It implies that the role of sociology for the theologian, as well of that of supplying factual, empirical material and raising critical questions about theological pronouncements based on purportedly, but inaccurate, factual premises, will be to describe, as it were from the outside, the social forms and configurations, dynamics and pressures, relationships and tensions, which are the product of, and indeed the realized meaning of, theological statements about God, man and the world.

Gill himself has not applied his suggestive ideas to any great extent in his own analyses of the Church's social role.²³ David Martin has, however, made a substantial contribution to understanding how the process works. Before we come to this, we may indicate how two of the other Blackfriars contributors helped further in the development of this important approach to theology.

J.Orme Mills depicts the theologian as "go-between":

The theologian...aims to articulate a 'comprehensive sense' of reality, but in a different way from the social theorist. Consciously or unconsciously he sets out to do it by acting as 'go-between'- as a creative interpreter-between, on the one hand, the wider society and its culture, and, on the other hand, the life-giving, meaning-determining communication (for the Christian, the 'gospel') simultaneously motivating and preserved by the

believing worshipping group to which he is linked. Each is seen as deepening understanding of the other...The tension that the theologian has to cope with is unique only because the essence of the 'life-giving, meaning-determining communication' that it his task to articulate in the categories of the 'wider society' is seen by the 'believing, worshipping group' not as a creation of the group itself but as 'wholly given', and it is this 'givenness' that characterises the communication (Mills, 1980:8-9; emphasis mine).

We should note here the recognition of the dual role played by the tradition upon which the theologian reflects. On the one hand, because it is handed down by the worshipping group as part of a whole cultural package, it has to be understood in relation to its context and its past. The theologian has to interpret how and why he came to be who and where he is, as a member of a religious tradition and a wider society. The relationships set up in the past between tradition and context may well be subtle and even ironic, and the theologian must seek to understand them.

But then, because he is committed to treating the ideas within the tradition as coming from beyond him, as determinative of what is finally to be, as distinct from the limited and provisional nature of the prevailing state of affairs, he has also to tackle the question of how the tradition may be deployed to realise the future- of how, so to speak, "more light and truth" may yet "break forth" from it.

Another contributor, Timothy Radcliffe, in an essay entitled "Relativizing the Relativizers", describes theology as "creative praxis": "Theology is an encounter of Church and world in which the meaning of the Gospel becomes articulate as an illumination of the world" (quoting Cornelius Ernst). This mediatory role of theology means that it is not properly conceived as one more discipline or methodology alongside others, one more source of interpretative information about the world. Theology on its own adds nothing at all; its proper place is working **with** the disciplines like sociology which seek to understand man in his social context.

It is always a matter of "theology **and**" rather than "theology **or**". There is a place for the critical praxis of theology wherever Christians seek to employ the distinctive insights of any secular discipline in the service of applying the Gospel.

ii. The Contribution of David Martin.

As a sociologist in the Weberian tradition with clear commitments and interests in the area of religion and theology, Martin's credentials are particularly suited to the approach we are putting forward. In the current context, his special contribution is to have captured the interaction of theological and sociological factors in the unfolding story of religious social reality in a dynamic, historical and dialectical way.

Martin shares, to begin with, two basic principles with Mills' position in the passage quoted above. These are, firstly, that theology is concerned to aim at **comprehensive** interpretation of human situations, i.e. to provide overall categories of understanding which at the same time give maximum coverage to the particulars of experience.

Secondly, Martin supports the view that what makes the theologian's standpoint unique is the conviction that the "set" or "frame" into which he gathers up his interpretation is itself something given, **there**, objectively present; not merely constructed out of the available social materials, but able to stand over them and prescribe a final, normative possibility (Martin, 1980(b):47).

The Christian tradition offers one way of tracing a connecting thread through the labyrinth of interpretations suggested by the potentially chaotic mass of circumstances amidst which individuals and groups must live and move (cf. Bowker, 1973). It "carves an arc out of the spectrum of possibilities". In so doing, and over time, it creates certain social patterns and tensions, structures and forms, which the

sociologist of religion seeks to understand. Martin's original way of characterizing these arrangements is to speak of a "theo-logic" and a "socio-logic", which turns the question of the relation between two academic disciplines into a matter of dynamic socio-historical developments.

The theo-logic is composed, as to its actual cultural manifestations and means of transmission, of a "stock" or "repertoire" of images. These are the constituents of the Christian tradition: Cross, Virgin, Brotherhood, Holy City, Servant, and so on. Each image may be regarded as a little capsule of explosive, inserted into the social structure, capable under favourable conditions of exerting powerful force for radical change (Martin, 1980(a):15 and *passim*). In this way Martin rejects reductionism and retains for theological ideas the right to claim a reality *sui generis*; it subsists in the area of vision, possibility and promise, and it is socio-culturally set forth in the form of what Martin calls a "code", via image and symbol.

But the drive of all such images for concrete historical realization encounters "social resistance" (op.cit:71ff). As Martin puts it in the Symposium essay:

[The theologian's task is] to brood upon the paradox of a plenitude and power which can only express itself creatively within strict limitations and rules, and which only achieves fulness in relation to that which is not itself (Martin, 1980(b):47).

The socio-logic uncovers all manner of constraints and costs governing the bid of the Christian vision for embodiment. This recognition entails for Martin a judicious attitude towards the issue of determinism:

Every system says; these things must be and these things need not be. Indeed, the most potent systems suggest how men may collude creatively with necessity...Sociology does not require us to accept that every option is already pre-empted by the antecedent concatenation of circumstances. Indeed, my own view is that options are real just because they are very circumscribed. We can

choose precisely because the range of possibilities is constricted (ibid:49-50),

In this light, every social and cultural form achieved by an originating theological idea appears as the fruit of a struggle, a temporary, partial and probably fragile victory gained at considerable cost in the face of daunting odds. Sociology analyses and outlines the conditions under which the normative vision carried by the Christian code may achieve various forms of partial realization.

I am saying how the ontological reality is embodied and how the theological norm is made effective. The embodiment may be partial, the norm may not be fully realized...We have to expose the socio-logic informing a symbol-system, and consider what light that can throw upon the form and development of the theo-logic (ibid:58).

The theme of Martin's The Breaking of the Image is the successive mutations and distortions undergone by several specific Christian images in the historical course of this kind of dynamic process. It is a dialectical process because both images and context, both theo-logic and socio-logic, affect and are affected by the other. But the pull of forces can be such that an image ceases to represent its original radical ideal. The alliances and collusions entered into by the religious images on account of social constraint are capable of leading to their being bought out by the cultural context, forced to conform to prevailing structures and patterns and so apparently made of no effect and emptied of their ability to be socially significant.

But Martin insists on a double evaluation of this. It may threaten harm to the very kernel of the Gospel ideals; and yet, it is only by entering into these risky cultural alliances that the religious ideas are ensured the probability of survival, by seeing to it that they are carried through the generations in the clothing of tradition. And as long as they are so carried, they retain their "charge", a latent or dormant potential which can be re-activated. Theology only goes on at all, or should,

in full awareness of the pains and discomforts of this dialectic.

Martin does not maintain in his work the distinction we have made between the religious tradition and **theology** as the process of critical reflection on it. But putting his insights together with those of Gill and the theological contributors to the Blackfriars symposium, who do make the distinction, provides us with a viable model for a dialogue between the disciplines. One reservation remains before we go on to sum up our position.

Martin's recent work has met with a hesitant reception from both sides of the interdisciplinary fence. Some sociologists have tended to regard him as having deserted sociology altogether in favour of theology, whereas some theologians are suspicious of a type of writing which (as in The Breaking of the Image) appears to deal with theological themes without employing the familiar tools and "jargon" of that discipline.

It is possible that Martin's marginalization in both disciplines indicates that this way forward in the dialogue is only feasible along a fairly narrow front, i.e. where the sociology of religion is interested in theological ideas and theology is concerned about how they are expressed in the life of the Church. Obviously this is far from the whole of what a fully-fledged dialogue would have to involve. On the wider issues, there are many questions yet to be answered¹⁰, but the "narrow front" where the approach we have been discussing is appropriate is, after all, the front upon which this thesis is located.

iii. Conclusions.

This thesis introduces sociological perspectives into the critical analysis of theological ideas. Since this procedure is fraught with methodological and theoretical dangers, we have

tried in this chapter to give quite extensive treatment to how we hope to deal with them. In particular, we see the constructive interaction of the disciplines as entailing a particular tradition of sociological work and a corresponding model of theology.

The sociological tradition followed in the thesis is that deriving from the work of Weber. This is because we find here a due attention to the meanings religious beliefs and practices hold for the individual agents involved, coupled with a sufficiently sophisticated account of the dialectical interaction between ideas and material factors of the social context. We have indicated earlier in the chapter why we do not consider the other major sociological tradition, stemming from the work of Durkheim, to offer such fruitful possibilities to theology.

Within the Weberian tradition, we are adopting the approach to the behaviour of the Christian religion in social and cultural context which we find in the work of David Martin. This supports a dialectical view of the relationship between the logic of a body of theological ideas, in terms of vision, possibility and promise, and that of social patterns, structures and relations in terms of constraint, cost and necessity.

A particular model of theological work corresponds to this sociological method. It has been proposed by Robin Gill and other contributors to recent dialogue between theologians and sociologists, and proceeds from the recognition that the theologian operates with a religious tradition as his *datum*, a tradition which itself shapes him and in which he is involved, and which at the same time is handed on within an overall cultural package in which the tradition has been involved in a complex set of two-way relationships with the social context.

The theology to which sociological considerations are relevant is therefore a theology which attempts a critical explication of the contents of the religious tradition, and of the social and cultural context, in the light of the interface between the two in which the theologian, in virtue of his own participation in the life of the community of faith, is caught up.¹¹

Sociological insights can stimulate theology towards a sharper understanding of the tradition in terms of the relationship of present to past, by uncovering the alliances between religious and ideas and social context which have led to the current situation of religious and cultural life.

Then, when theology goes on to try to discover how the tradition may be activated to bring about a new relation of present to future, sociology can again sharpen the enterprise by pointing to the constraints and costs to which such advances will be subject.

This is the way in which we intend to employ sociological perspectives in our analysis of the theology of Christian Radicalism. It will be the task of Part Two of the thesis to develop the specific sociological tools to be used in the third and main Part.

Before going on to do this, one further component to the basic "frame" remains for Part One. This is the place of Bonhoeffer in the issues raised by Christian Radicalism; for Bonhoeffer, to put it in Martin's terms, was certainly concerned to discover the relationship between a theo-logic and a contemporary socio-logic, and in this way he provides a link between the topics of our first two chapters.

NOTES.

1. It would be false to imply a total neglect of religion in the sociology of the twenties to the fifties. In America, the Lunds' studies on "Middletown" and Liston Pope's Millhands and Preachers were notable inter-war exceptions. In Britain in the fifties came W.M. Williams' Gosforth: the Sociology of an English Village, M. Stacey's

Tradition and Change: a Study of Banbury, and W.S.F. Pickering's unpublished Ph.D thesis, The Place of Religion in the Social Structure of Two English Industrial Towns, all giving substantial attention to religious life. Nevertheless Gerhard Lenski was able to present his The Religious Factor in 1961 as in the nature of a pioneering attempt to apply Weberian methods to discovering the relationships between religious beliefs and attitudes in other areas of social life.

2. We have not distinguished the Marxist as a third distinctive tradition in sociology. Apart from mere limitation of scope, we have kept to just two major traditions because we think it misleading that Weber and Marx have so often been presented as holding opposing views about the priority of either ideas or material factors in promoting social change. We think it preferable to regard both as representing a dynamic, dialectical and historical tradition of sociological analysis, as distinct from a more static structural-functional type. In this way it can be seen how, outside specifically Marxist contexts, Marxian ideas have often been received *via* the Weberian modifications of them. This appears at various points in our account of the task of theology.

3. The optimistic ease of Christian Sociology's application of theological principles to social issues shows how far English theology was from getting attuned to the Barthian movement which was sweeping Europe. It is noteworthy that renewed interest in the relevance of sociology only arose among Protestant theologians with the eventual decline of dialectical theology, with those most interested in sociology frequently former Barthians themselves.

4. The pioneer of the movement, French Professor of Canon Law Gabriel LeBras, produced his initial article, 'Statistique et Histoire Religieuse. Pour un Examen détaillé et pour une Explication Historique de l'Etat du Catholicisme dans les Diverses Régions de la France', as early as 1931. His collaborator Fernand Boulard brought out his first Religious Map of Rural France in 1947, but no English translation of his work appeared until 1960. The English churches were slow to realize, in the post-War mood of national optimism, that England was every bit as much "pays de mission" as France.

5. This ability to compartmentalize looks too much like professional schizophrenia to Protestant eyes, and raised doubts among non-Catholic theologians about how readily religious sociology might be transplanted into Protestant soil. No Protestant could match, for example, the startling variety of the voluminous works of that scourge of the American journals, Father Andrew Greeley.

6. Berger's sociology of knowledge perspective has been described as the "fiery brook" through which all theology must now pass in its quest for an authoritative truth-claim. The pun on Feuerbach is not entirely justified, however, for whereas Feuerbach's inversion of Hegel to claim that the so-called "divine spirit" is really none other than the ideal projection of human nature (in The Essence of Christianity) enabled Marx, in criticising Feuerbach, to go a step further and argue for the economic-material base to ideas of that "nature", Berger's position, in relativizing everything, both Marx and theology included, ends by leaving everything as it is.

7. The pervasive role of humour in Berger's work also leads us to take his "methodological atheism" with a pinch of salt. The point is that sociology's "debunking" attitude deflates the pretensions of all humanly devised systems and makes their claim to be treated absolutely seriously look comic: "This will lead to a posture vis-a-vis society of the latter as essentially a comedy, in which men parade up and down with their gaudy costumes, change hats and titles, hit each other with the sticks they have or the ones they can persuade their fellow-actors to believe in" (Berger, 1966:185). Hamnett (1974) takes Berger to task for going to great lengths to display his "atheism" before doing a dramatic about-turn, all carefully planned, of course- the conjuror performs a dazzling feat of "look no hands" before triumphantly producing the ace from up his sleeve and declaring himself a believer after all!

8. In chapter 6 of The Social Context of Theology, Gill looks at the interpretations of secularization offered by Robinson (1963), Mascall (1965), Ramsey (1969), Newbigin (1966) and Barry (1969). He finds in them a common tendency to make uncritical assumptions about the nature of modern society, and a general failure to acquaint themselves with substantial sociological work on the subject, but he does not examine their theological recommendations in this light. In chapter 5 of Theology and Social Structure he looks at the Honest to God debate for evidence of the possible social significance of theology, but only advances examples of non-theological factors assisting the book's impact.

9. Gill's account of the social function of the churches in Prophecy and Praxis is that they may help to "embed key general values or principles into society" (op.cit:134). This reflects the interest in ethical issues which has occupied him since that time (his Textbook on Christian Ethics was recently published by T.&T. Clark), and belongs to an interpretation of secularization as "transposition", which looks for the religious origins of supposedly secular values in society (cf. Gill, 1984). Both this point and that in note 8 above lead us to the view that there is more in the theoretical ideas put forward by Gill than he has actually made use of himself.

10. I understand that a more recent meeting of the group, which took the Garden of Eden narratives of Genesis 1-3 as its subject-matter, experienced difficulty in advancing the dialogue once the earlier narrow "front" of co-operation was left behind.

11. There are obvious affinities between this position and the method of Liberation Theology. Segundo (1977:75ff.) speaks of theology as the "second step", where the first is commitment. He means that theology cannot be brought pure and unconditioned to a social situation and applied to it; rather, the theologian begins by being involved in that situation and forming certain judgments about what is good and desirable in it. In Gutierrez' words, "theology comes after": its resources facilitate and direct critical reflection, from the Christian tradition, on what is already under way. Of course, for Segundo "commitment" means political commitment, and the notorious difficulty of applying the specific recommendations of the Liberationist approach to a vastly different socio-political milieu has led us to develop our position without direct dependence on the Latin American theologians. However, see Davis (1980:23ff.) for a suggestive account of how "original theology", which is done in the very act of (often pre-reflexive) Christian living, worshipping, serving, needs to be related to "scientific theology", theology as a formalized and thematic discipline, through the *praxis* of a critical theology.

CHAPTER THREE: THE PLACE OF BONHOEFFER.

1. Bonhoeffer and the Radical Theologians.

The name of Bonhoeffer supplies a link between the concerns raised in the two preceding chapters. Firstly, his is the theological influence most markedly present and most frequently acknowledged behind the ideas of Christian Radicalism.

Secondly, his work represents a pioneering attempt to come to grips with those aspects of the task of theology for which, as we have tried to show in the previous chapter, sociological perspectives can prove both critical and constructive. This is quite explicit in his early doctoral thesis, Sanctorum Communio, but implicit in his whole *oeuvre*, as we shall argue shortly.

But as a beginning we must briefly indicate the scope of his importance for the radicalism of the sixties. These remarks are designed only to single out the features of Bonhoeffer's work which were of particular relevance to the radicals, and to indicate why this is especially significant from the point of view of this thesis. They are not meant to provide a comprehensive overview of his theology.¹

Acknowledgement of Bonhoeffer as influence and inspiration is, as we have said, frequent. Paul van Buren prefaces The Secular Meaning of the Gospel with Auden's poem, Friday's Child, which is headed "In memory of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, martyred at Flossenbug, April 9th, 1945." He opens his introductory chapter with Bonhoeffer's words, "Honesty demands that we must live in the world as if there were no God"; and he claims that his own work is an attempt to develop the "nonreligious interpretation of Biblical concepts" for which Bonhoeffer called, in answering the question, "How can the Christian who is himself a secular man understand his faith in a secular way?" (van Buren, 1963:2.)

Harvey Cox progresses only to the second page of his Introduction to The Secular City before he writes:

Secularization...is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer in 1944 called 'man's coming of age.' To some, Bonhoeffer's words still sound shocking, but they really should not. He was merely venturing a tardy theological interpretation of what had already been noticed by poets and novelists, sociologists and philosophers for decades. (Cox, 1968:16.)

He reverts to Bonhoeffer's question, "How do we speak in a secular fashion of God?" in chapter 11 of his book, where he observes that it is among other things a **sociological** question.

John Robinson alludes to Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison on p.23 of Honest to God as the second of three pieces of writing, the ideas in which had proved seminal for his thinking:

I first encountered extracts from these in *The Ecumenical Review* for January 1952...One felt at once that the Church was not yet ready for what Bonhoeffer was giving us as his last will and testament...that God is deliberately calling us to a form of Christianity that does not depend on the premise of religion.²

The aspects of Bonhoeffer's work which proved to be most suggestive have been set out briefly in an essay by William Hamilton (1968:118-123.) According to him, Bonhoeffer is "communicating to many young Protestants today because his are the only theological words written in the recent past that can help us understand the new era into which we are moving." The words in question are found, Hamilton says, partly in Bonhoeffer's Ethics, but chiefly in the Letters and Papers from Prison. The three central ideas are:

- i. The coming-of-age of the world and the positive evaluation of the process of secularization.
- ii. The plea for a religionless Christianity, and the positive evaluation of the rejection of religion by the modern world.
- iii. The notion of being "challenged to participate in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world." This last

idea may be filled out with the secular Christological understanding of faith as a way of being in the world that conforms to the pattern of the presence of Christ as the "man for others".(cf.Richard, 1967:13.)

Three of Bonhoeffer's phrases which became leading slogans of Christian Radicalism, "world come of age", "religionless Christianity" and "man for others", provide us thus with a framework around which to organise our own remarks. They also correspond, closely in the case of the first two and more loosely in the third, to the issues we have already stated to be the major concerns of the sixties' radicalism: the problems of a secular approach to the reality of God, the theological affirmation of secularization and the reconceptualizing of the commitment of faith.

It is not strictly relevant, in outlining the influence of Bonhoeffer on the radicals' thinking, to ask whether their interpretation of him was always sound. Certainly, in drawing their inspiration almost exclusively from the fragmentary and enigmatic prison letters, they were well aware that they were not attempting a balanced evaluation of Bonhoeffer's life's work, brief though it was. We do not, therefore, propose to treat directly the question of whether Bonhoeffer was misused, as critics of the radicals were very ready to argue.³ However, we do intend to point to certain features of Bonhoeffer's work which the radicals may not have perceived, because they were unacquainted with his earliest writings, and which throw valuable light on why his later work seemed to speak so illuminatingly to their own concerns.

2. Bonhoeffer and the Sociological Nature of the Church.

Bonhoeffer's doctoral thesis Sanctorum Communio, presented to the Berlin theological faculty in 1927 when he was only 21, did not appear in an English translation until

1963, i.e. not until interest in Bonhoeffer had been stimulated by the publication of the prison letters. At the time of its publication in 1930, the work found no ready audience. Its concern to conduct a **dogmatic** enquiry into the **sociological** nature of the Church appeared to blur the distinctions marked out by the divide between Barth and Troeltsch- the way of historical relativism in the study of the Church as a sociological entity in the latter case, and the radical revelationism of the dogmatic method of the former. Furthermore, the work was experimental in that Bonhoeffer was trying to move away from the essentialist perspectives of Liberal Protestantism which he had learnt at Berlin from Harnack.⁴

Bonhoeffer's friend and prison correspondent during his last months, Eberhard Bethge, has summed up Bonhoeffer's concern in the early period as "the quest for the concreteness of the message." (Bethge, 1967.) He clarifies this in two propositions: "Concreteness is the attribute of revelation itself", and "Only the message which becomes a specific concrete word is the eternal word of authority." That is, it is not merely the "application" of the message which deals in the concrete, but the very form and substance of it. The dogmatic terms, such as grace, justification, reconciliation, may be regarded as social facts. Thus the recent studies of Dumas and Ott both single out "reality" as the controlling idea of Bonhoeffer's theology.

Phillips has shown in The Form of Christ in the World how Bonhoeffer's thought revolved around the dual foci of the authentic shape and style of the experience of Christ, and the social nature and function of the Church. For the Church is what is empirically available to us objectively, as the institution with a *prima facie* claim to represent Christ before the world.

Likewise it is the Gospel image of the man Jesus which is subjectively present to give some concrete, humanly graspable form to the Gospel message. Martin Marty points to Bonhoeffer's question, "What is Christianity, or indeed who is Christ, for us today?" as his leading problem, and he notes that his way of approaching it remained constant from his initial location of these characteristic problems of theology within the sociological setting of the Church (Marty, 1963.)

This concern for concrete social form helps to explain Bonhoeffer's dismissal of "religion", insofar as it seeks to offer inwardly-oriented, psychologizing or individualistic answers to his theological questions. For Christ does not come to meet **my** need and to make **me** self-sufficient. Rather (in traditional Lutheran terms) in being *pro me* and also "for others" in weakness and suffering, he lifts the issue of justification, salvation and wholeness on to the level of community and mutuality. Once more, ecclesiology is implied in Christology. (Ehrlich, 1969.)

So, in Sanctorum Communio, Bonhoeffer sought to enlist the aid of sociology in coming to grips with these questions. He insisted upon a definition of the Church as "Christ **existing** as the Church." He attempted to elucidate the theological meaning of such a statement by means of concepts drawn from Hegelian idealism (the Hegelian "right"), personalist philosophy and the formalistic school of sociology associated especially with Ferdinand Toennies and Georg Simmel.

Briefly, he argued that man is essentially a social being, and the category of the personal is only realized in the mutuality of relationships: in community. The normative form of human personhood would be found only in the **divine** community, marked by a particular quality of relationship. Here he imported the concept of "collective person" to characterize the

community, which as a moral, supra-personal entity in itself possessed an "objective spirit".

These notions could readily be theologized into line with the doctrines of the Person of Christ and of the Holy Spirit as their perfect and normative form. The "essential Church", then, was the normative and ideal form of human community. In such a community of persons, the experienced reality of God was to be found- a claim already damaging to traditional metaphysics. For as Bonhoeffer put it boldly in his second book, Act and Being, "einen Gott, den es 'gibt', gibt es nicht."

Peter Berger (1963) has pointed out the defects in Bonhoeffer's use of sociology to substantiate his case. Sociological development has made his espousal of Toennies, Simmel and just one aspect of Durkheim (collective spirit), to the exclusion of Marx and Weber, look very unwise. Today, we should be inclined to class Bonhoeffer's "sociology" as "social philosophy", despite his attempt to distinguish the two. Phillips has criticised Bonhoeffer for trying to describe "the visible and unique form which revelation assumes among the secular structures of society" (1968:49) in an unhistorical, non-dialectical way, simply translating a presumed theological norm into the alternative language of social philosophy.

Berger agrees in finding the theological contribution somewhat imperialistic, and goes on to criticise the "Hegelian and pre-Marxian" concept of "objective spirit". He suggests that to argue as Bonhoeffer does for a "collective person" idea of human community and then to say, on *a priori* theological grounds, that this has in practice been broken by sin, is to treat Hegelian anthropology as though it were a kind of sociology of the pre-Fall period! Bonhoeffer has been too eager to reify his sociological concepts, which as Berger says are only analytical constructs, into some sort of representation of reality. He rejects liberal theological essentialism, but adopts a sociological kind instead.

However, the last sections of Sanctorum Communio do take up questions which are obscured rather than clarified by the faulty methodology of the bulk of the work. One of the most important of these concerns Bonhoeffer's awareness of the discrepancy between the empirical Church and the ideal community he has described. He is anxious to account for this without retreating into what Harvey Cox has called the "gaseous spiritualism" of a doctrine of the "invisible Church" (Callahan, 1966:210.) He writes:

The Church is the presence of Christ, as Christ is the presence of God...The Kingdom of Christ or the Church is...present to us in concrete historical form, and present in such a way that it must reckon with having many nominal members. It is present, in other words, as a national church (*Volkskirche*) and not as a 'gathered' church (*Freiwilligkeitskirche*.) (Bonhoeffer, 1963:151; emphasis mine.)

Wherein lies the middle term of union between the gathered *sanctorum communio* and the *corpus permixtum* of the *Volkskirche*? For Bonhoeffer, in the Word which takes priority in any case over the Church, which constitutes the Church and which the Church bears and preaches. "The *sanctorum communio* sustains the others...in whom the possibility of becoming 'effective' members of the Church is dormant...by virtue of the Word" (ibid:152).

We must neither regard the mere fact of the Church's sociological form as equivalent to sin, nor treat it as a kind of apparition of a purely ideal, unreal Church never to exist in this world. For even as Christ entered history, so has God willed the historical form of the Church's life. "No matter how dubious its empirical form may be, it remains the Church so long as Christ is present in his Word" (ibid:146). To the extent that the Word is realized, made concretely present in the Church's forms and service, the empirical Church as *Volkskirche* will be "pressing forward" into the essential Church of the *sanctorum communio*.

Bonhoeffer admits that a time could come when the given form of the *Volkskirche* might no longer be capable of pressing forward in this way; and then, such practices as infant baptism, which can only be meaningful within a conception of the community in which some exist and profess for and on behalf of others, might have to cease.⁵ Bonhoeffer observes here a situation which is consonant with the idea of the sociological expression of theological meanings found in Martin and discussed in the previous chapter: that the Church is always at once both in part the authentic expression of the idea (image) from which it springs, and in part threatens to contradict it.

In his lectures, Bethge goes on to trace the development of Bonhoeffer's quest for concreteness through all his major works. He sees the outcome of the search beginning to emerge in a thoroughgoing "theology of the natural", an endorsement of the worldliness of the world as the arena in which God's reality in the form of the presence of Christ might appear.

Bethge is even prepared to view the seemingly much more world-denying The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together as stages of the same development. Here, the concrete form of faith appears as a costly and sacrificial service in commitment to a Christ demanding exclusive allegiance. Then, this taking seriously of one's vocation under Christ for the sake of ultimate things leads readily on to a fresh vision of the totality of Christ's Lordship in the penultimate things also, and indeed over those of no religion at all.⁶ The scope of application of the search for Christological concreteness broadens out from the specific communion of saints to the whole of society.

And so finally arise the questions of the prison letter of April 30th, 1944:

In what way are we 'religionless-secular' Christians, in what way are we the *ek-klesia*, those who are called forth, not regarding ourselves from a religious point of view as specially favoured, but rather as belonging wholly to the world? In that case Christ is no longer an object of religion, but something quite different, really the Lord of the world. But what does that mean? What is the place of worship and prayer in a religionless situation? Does the secret discipline, or alternatively the difference...between penultimate and ultimate, take on a new importance here?

3. *The Relevance of the Major Themes of the Prison Letters.*

i. "World come of Age."

We have devoted some time to this background territory which was rarely traversed by the radicals who made most use of Bonhoeffer, because it helps us to see why his prison utterances should have seemed to strike the right note, and it provides additional explication of the approach to the secular theology we are taking in this thesis. We can now deal quite briefly with the three leading themes indicated in the "slogans" introduced at the beginning of the chapter, and show the place they hold in our later detailed theological discussions.

Only in the Letters and Papers from Prison does the subject of secularization appear explicitly. As the concept of the world's coming-of-age, it is compounded with Bonhoeffer's already established Christocentric emphasis to produce the new ideas so characteristic of the letters (W.Hamilton, 1962; and cf. Metz, 1969). The crucial passage comes in the letter of June 8th, 1944:

The movement that began about the thirteenth century...towards the autonomy of man (in which I should include the discovery of the laws by which the world lives and deals with itself in science, social and political matters, art, ethics and religion) has in our time reached a certain completion. Man has learnt to deal with himself in all questions of importance without recourse to the working hypothesis called 'God'...As in the scientific field, so in human affairs generally,

'God' is being pushed more and more out of life, losing more and more ground,...

Bonhoeffer traces the trend towards the autonomy of man and the world through the thought of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, Montaigne, Machiavelli, Grotius and Descartes, to Spinoza, Kant, Fichte and Hegel, and in so doing makes two points clear. Firstly, the "autonomy" of man-in-the-world has nothing to do with "maturity" in any ethical or morally approbative sense. These are intended as matter-of-fact judgments about the nature and mode of man's being-in-the-world and his self-understanding. They do not imply he has "grown up" in the manner of the more extreme nineteenth-century meliorist type of rationalism. It is, in any case, strictly speaking the **world** which is said to be of age (*muendig*) rather than **man**.

Secondly, Bonhoeffer's real interest in developing the idea focuses on the question of God, and is not basically anthropological at all. James Mark has located the core of the concept of coming-of-age in the abolition of the "working hypothesis" of God (Mark, 1962). The acquisition of knowledge by scientific methods requires, as far as possible, the elimination of unverifiable postulates as bases for its procedures. As long as God is conceived of in such a way, he is doomed to be ever on the retreat into the ever-diminishing gaps in knowledge. Bonhoeffer wants to halt this process before it is too late, by reconsidering what it means to speak of the presence and activity of God at all.

This is clear from Bonhoeffer's conviction that the maturity of the world is given in Christian faith, and can only be properly understood in relation to it. As R.Gregor Smith puts it, "Faith is not the scaffolding by which we have been able to rise to this height, which may then be knocked away, leaving the structure of the world in solitary power over itself" (Smith, 1966:180). The true understanding of secularization and the true understanding faith has of God's

way of being in the world belong together. Bonhoeffer wrote on July 16th, 1944:

God himself compels us to recognise this. So our coming of age leads us to a true recognition of our situation before God, God gives us to know that we must live as men who manage their lives without God, The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we are ever standing.

Secularization means for Bonhoeffer that reason and science, man unaided, can **in principle** explain all things, can be self-sufficient. There is no special department, no enclave of life, which can be reserved for God, as a kind of base from which the Church might continue its opposition to the progress of secularization. God is not identifiable in a particular place or practice; and this fact, which at first appears to mean the disappearance or demise of God, points instead to a new way of perceiving all of reality and the world as with God, under God and before God.

But this cannot make sense unless the message of the Gospel is a concrete one. It will not do to use the abstract noun "concreteness" as the basis for a vague idea of all reality as somehow in an undifferentiated fashion the arena of God's presence and activity. There still has to be some sort of break in the seamless web of the world which can give a point of departure for any talk of God whatsoever.

So it is that to affirm secularization as leaving no room for any special department of life where God is to be found paradoxically raises in acute form all over again the question of what the Church, insofar as it continues to exist as a distinct body of people, can be for. The question of "gathered Church" and "national Church" is sublimated into that of "minority practising religious group" and "secular presence of Christ".

The problems which arise out of Bonhoeffer's beginning of an attempt to come to terms with secularization theologically in a positive way develop much more fully in the more extensive theological responses to secularization we shall be looking at in Chapters X and XI in Part Three. In order to examine them in a way which fastens critically upon the claim to "concreteness", we shall introduce perspectives from the sociological treatment of the secularization process.

ii. "Religionless Christianity."

Bonhoeffer's rejection of religion now becomes intelligible, inasmuch as religion is irredeemably tied to this no longer feasible concept of God. We need to deduce this from Bonhoeffer's use of the term "religion", since he nowhere defines it explicitly. On April 30th, 1944, he wrote:

The time when people could be told everything by means of words, whether theological or pious, is over, and so is the time of inwardness and conscience- and that means the time of religion in general [emphasis mine],..Our whole nineteen-hundred-year-old Christian preaching and theology rest on the religious *a priori* of mankind,..But if one day it becomes clear that this *a priori* does not exist at all,..and if therefore man becomes radically religionless,..-what does that mean for 'Christianity'?..

Religious people speak of God when human knowledge,..has come to an end, or when human resources fail- in fact it is always the *deus ex machina* that they bring on to the scene, either for the apparent solution of insoluble problems, or as strength in human failure- always, that is to say, exploiting human weakness or human boundaries.

And, on May 5th:

What does it mean to 'interpret in a religious sense'? I think it means to speak on the one hand metaphysically, and on the other hand individualistically.

From these quotations emerge a variety of ways in which Bonhoeffer thinks of religion as a mode of relationship between the human and the divine. We can set them out so as clearly to show their relevance to the interests of the radicals.⁷

i. Religion means "being told everything", i.e. the individual is the passive recipient of a body of teachings and traditions. But contemporary culture casts doubt on the value of "just believing". Insofar as religion means submission to authority it appears to deny the possibility of growth into an authentic expression of faith under modern conditions.

ii. Religion locates God in the inward spiritual experience of the individual, in the "soul", as to his subjective presence. But modern thinking makes exceedingly problematic the notion of a specific recess of the human make-up wherein God is pre-eminently known, and which has its own distinct type of experience.

iii. Religion, on the other hand, places God in a metaphysical "beyond" or "other world" as to his objective existence, and this inevitably makes him appear remote or irrelevant to secular ways of thinking.

iv. Religion assumes that there is a basic human religiosity which is permanent and universal, so that if this appears to be declining, it looks as though the Gospel has been defeated and God has failed; but this surely cannot be so.

v. Religion encourages a "God of the gaps" mentality by invoking God at the points of special human need or ignorance. But it cannot be right that the relationship between man and God should be inoperative when man is confident, contented or in possession of a high view of human capabilities.

All of this amounts to more than just a reaction against the pietism of Bonhoeffer's background. Moreover, it is not merely a reproduction of Barth's polemic against religion. Barth argued that religion is irreconcilably opposed to revelation, because it represents the idolatrous and self-righteous presumption of man to reach God.²³ Nevertheless religion must and will persist, either as wilful unbelief or as brought under judgment and continually relativized under the transcendent power of revealed faith.

But Bonhoeffer's approach makes such questions beside the point. For it is no longer a question of what man attempts to achieve in himself being confronted by what God declares from beyond him. It is a matter of finding a logic for speaking of God's presence with man and the world under the conditions of modern culture. The "secret discipline" of religious practice envisaged by Bonhoeffer cannot be fitted into the framework of Barth's analysis.

The rejection of religion is consonant with the desire of Christian Radicalism to bring the meaning of all theological concepts within the horizon of this one world reality. Within that one reality, moreover, theological meaning is to be located upon the plane of the outwardly visible, the empirical and social, rather than in the inner life of individuals. This alone, Bonhoeffer believed, could do justice to the type of man he saw emerging from the rational-scientific era.

In such a situation, it becomes all the more important to enquire into the place and role of the small minority who do continue to practise religion under the form of the *disciplina arcani*. The continuing importance attached to this by Bonhoeffer gives no support to the argument of some conservative critics of the radicals, to the effect that Bonhoeffer the devout Christian remained a religious man (in his terms) *malgré lui*. An exception among such critics was right to point out that

[Bonhoeffer] is saying that for some people at any rate, those who manifest the right qualities of life, no religion at all is necessary. God has evidently brought them into this kind of life. The Church cannot presume now to lay other demands on them, asking that they become religious (Morris, 1964:25).

How far was Bonhoeffer justified in his speculations about religionlessness, and if he was, to what extent would the attempts of the radical theologians to follow up his ideas and build on them be likely to bring about the kind of reshaping

of the Christian presence in the world he expected to see? In order to give critical attention to the radicals' proposals for secular approaches to the reality of God we shall be examining how sociology has treated the nature and functions of religion insofar as it is an inescapable social reality.

iii. "Man for Others".

Bonhoeffer summed up the projected theological reconstruction he did not live to carry out in the "Outline for a Book" he enclosed with the letter of August 3rd, 1944. Here, he described the Christological form of secular faith:

Encounter with Jesus Christ. The experience that a transformation of all human life is given in the fact that 'Jesus is there only for others'. His 'being there for others' is the experience of transcendence... Faith is participation in this being of Jesus (incarnation, cross and resurrection). Our relation to God is not a 'religious relationship to the highest, most powerful and best Being imaginable- that is not authentic transcendence- but our relation to God is a new life in 'existence for others', through participation in the being of Jesus. The transcendental is not infinite and unattainable tasks, but the neighbour who is in reach in any given situation, God in human form-... 'the man for others', and therefore the Crucified, the man who lives out of the transcendent.

"Man for others" is not a slogan of Christology alone, but a proposal for a secular doctrine of God and a historical form of transcendence. It describes a mode of being in the world. And insofar as this is intended to be concrete and empirically discernible, it lies open to scrutiny under the category of sociological form (this is a continuity between Bonhoeffer's earliest and last works). Hence it also lends itself to an ecclesiology:

The Church is the Church only when it exists for others. To make a start, it should give away all its property to those in need. The clergy must live solely on the free-will offerings of their congregations, or possibly engage in some secular calling. The Church must share in the secular problems of ordinary life, not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others.

The concepts of Man and Church for others prescribe a pattern by which Christian presence in the world may be identified which builds upon the theological notions of God's absence from a world come of age and the consequent need for a religionless form of faith. It is not therefore either a triumphal or a comfortable prospect for the Church. The affirmation of secularization is by no means a serene and self-evident declaration of the active presence of God in all that now makes up the modern world. Those who practise the secret discipline of religion are a minority whose perception of the divine stamp upon their secular lives is achieved with pain and a sense of struggle, even as it was for Christ.

So, on July 18th 1944 Bonhoeffer wrote that "Man is challenged to participate in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world...He must live a 'worldly' life and so participate in the sufferings of God." Three days later he added:

The Christian is not a *homo religiosus*, but a man, pure and simple, just as Jesus was a man...it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to believe...This is what I mean by worldliness- taking life in one's stride, with all its duties and problems, its successes and failures, its experiences and helplessness. It is in such a life that we throw ourselves utterly into the arms of God and participate in his sufferings in the world and watch with Christ in Gethsemane.

The concept of "for others" completes, as far as Bonhoeffer was able to complete it, the positive side of the programme implied by his reconstruction. It looks for a radical reconceptualization of the nature and content of Christian faith as the ground of a particular way of understanding and living one's secular commitments.

The theologians of Christian Radicalism wanted to see such a change, wherever faith seemed to them to be characterized mainly by attachment to traditions, doctrines and moral rules prescribed by authority. Since we have seen that

any new conception of the commitment of faith must have its sociological dimension, our examination of how the radicals approached the issue, in Chapters XII and XIII, will be informed by a study of how sociology has understood the modes of religious commitment and belonging in the faith-community.

This presentation of how the questions raised by Christian Radicalism appeared in Bonhoeffer brings to an end this first and preliminary part of the thesis. The materials laid out in it delineate the contours of what follows.

In sum, we have stated what we mean by Christian Radicalism and what the main questions raised by it are.

We have explained how, methodologically, we propose to use sociological materials as critical tools for the analysis of these questions.

Finally, we have indicated how Bonhoeffer's seminal work united similar theological concerns with an interest in the sociological dimensions of dealing with them.

The task of Part Two will be to set out the sociological instruments themselves.

NOTES.

1. Detailed works on Bonhoeffer include J.D.Godsey, The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1960; J.A.Phillips, The Form of Christ in the World, 1968; A.Dumas, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality, 1971; H.Ott, Reality and Faith: The Theological Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1966. There are also the collections; The Place of Bonhoeffer, ed. M.Marty, 1963; and World Come of Age, ed. R.G.Smith, 1967.
2. Other examples might be added. Smith (1966:175-85) devotes a chapter to Bonhoeffer. Van den Heuvel (1967; ch.1) takes his cue from several lengthy quotations from the prison letters. C.W.Williams (1966:54-61) also points to Bonhoeffer's influence on the theology of secularization. And W.Hamilton says of his The New Essence of Christianity (12, n.1): "My essay as a whole is deeply indebted to Bonhoeffer, and may be taken as a theological response to the coming-of-age of the world as he has analysed it."
3. For example, Richardson (1966:20-21) dismisses the idea of "religionlessness" as based on a mistranslation of *religionslos*, stemming from English unfamiliarity with German pietism. Barry (1969:79) is quick to point out that Bonhoeffer was "a deeply religious Christian". Morrison (1966:25) indicates that Bonhoeffer quoted Matthew 18:3 in the selfsame context as that in which he spoke of living in the world *etsi deus non daretur*—yet the Gospel verse is about becoming as little children, not being mature, grown-up or come-of-age.
4. Thus, even in the Letters and Papers from Prison, his rejection of Bultmann is based on the claim that he "goes off into the typical liberal reduction process—the 'mythological' elements of Christianity are dropped, and Christianity is reduced to its 'essence'".
5. Bonhoeffer argues that infant baptism would be meaningless in a situation where *Gemeinschaft* had given way totally to *Gesellschaft* as the mode of social organization. For then, membership could only be on an individual, voluntaristic basis. It is an important question whether this change has actually occurred; Martin (1979) explores the relevance of this to baptism. The Archbishop of York has recently echoed Bonhoeffer's view of the *Volkskirche/Freiwillichkeitskirche* theme: "A group which chooses as part of its Christian commitment to accept a measure of responsibility for those it sees as being outside of itself, has a possible means of

retaining its own sense of identity, and of avoiding the perils of exclusiveness" (Habgood, 1983:90).

6. The distinction of penultimate and ultimate things, in place of the more traditional this-worldly and other-worldly, is a strong motif in Bonhoeffer's Ethics. The penultimate things have value in themselves as the reality of the world in which the process of "conformation to Christ" is taking place. "The Church is nothing but a section of humanity in which Christ has really taken form." Ethics is thus treated as Christologically concrete, but the historical variability of what this means is taken into account: "Christ does not dispense with human reality for the sake of an idea which demands realization at the expense of the real."

7. We have made our own analysis here in order to bring out the relevant points. Among other accounts, W.Hamilton (1962) singles out as elements in the rejection of religion, the decline of "longing for the eternal" and the "other world", the rejection of the idea that man needs the notion of God in order to complete his world-view, and the refusal to major on "boundary situations" as the place where God becomes known. K.Hamilton (1966(a):71ff.) points to religion as dealing in generalized understandings of God as a meeter of needs (i.e., not Christologically specific). Hordern (1968:121) speaks of the end of the sacred-secular distinction which confined religion to the sacred sphere, the concern for "personal salvation" and inner piety, and the God-of-the-gaps metaphysic. R.G.Smith (1966:177) sums up the issue by approving the conclusion of Ebeling (Word and Faith, 148ff.) that "religion for Bonhoeffer means an attitude which regards man's life as somehow completed by the addition of God."

8. "The two primitive and as it were normal forms of religion are... the conception of the deity and the fulfilment of the law" (Church Dogmatics, 1/2:315). These two features presuppose that man possesses some idea of God and is conscious of his need of him and of how he might contrive to supply it, viz. by keeping the law. "His need is not in the least like the neediness of the believer, who with empty heart and hands finds himself thrown back entirely upon the revelation of God."

PART TWO: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION.

CHAPTER IV: THE NATURE AND SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF RELIGION.

In this chapter we set out an approach to the question of the place and role of religious life within society based upon sociological theory about religion. Beginning from whatever is to hand in society that is commonly accepted as "religion", we identify the religious by its substantive content rather than by its function. We view religion as a cultural system which gives expression, through rites and symbols, beliefs and practices and conventions, to an orientation towards the transcendent. Such an orientation regulates a dialectical process which both stabilises and legitimates the world-order of the religious group, and yet induces critical dissatisfaction with it, and thus motivates action for change. All of this will be spelled out in detail in the presentation which follows.

1. Religion and the Radicals.

The Church is primarily a religious organization, and the Christian Gospel caters for the religious needs of man. It is the job of the Church to preach, to pray, to sing hymns and to encourage and develop the pious feelings of its members...Religion is not concerned with the whole of life, but with a part of life...What can be done to make the Church more religious?...We must...increase our emphasis upon the Church as a religious organization with a limited purpose (David Nicholls, in *Prism*, quoted in Robinson, 1963(a):134).

John Robinson reports that he could hardly believe his eyes when he read this passage. The question of religion was high on the agenda of Christian Radicalism from the beginning, stimulated directly by Bonhoeffer, indirectly by Barth, as we indicated in the previous chapter. The entire question cannot be adequately understood without examining the issues into which the sociology of religion gives us access, namely those of the nature and functions of religion as an actual social reality. We shall have to take quite seriously the possibility

that there is more truth in Nicholls' observations above than Robinson thought conceivable.

Before embarking upon a sociological account of religion, however, we shall keep the theological context alive by illustrating briefly the relevance of the question for the radical theologians. This is simply by way of a reminder of the reasons for undertaking the sociological discussion which follows, and in which we shall for some time be leaving the directly theological treatment behind.

Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison were published by the SCM Press in 1953, when Ronald Gregor Smith was Editor. His own book, The New Man: Christianity and Man's Coming of Age, which appeared in 1956, was one of the first works in English to give serious treatment to Bonhoeffer's ideas about a religionless Christianity. Although the book received little attention at the time, it was later acknowledged by Alec Vidler (1965:109) as an important precursor of Christian Radicalism. By 1969, after Gregor Smith's early death, his publishers Collins felt it worthwhile to incorporate the bulk of the early book with other material into the posthumous collection, The Free Man. Interest had clearly mounted very considerably in the intervening years of the sixties.

Vidler himself first took his cue from Bonhoeffer in his essay on "Holy Worldliness", given as a paper to the Church Union School of Sociology at Oxford in June 1956 and published in his Essays in Liberality in 1957. He reverted to the theme in his contribution to Soundings, "Religion and the National Church", where he linked Bonhoeffer's plea to some much earlier words of F.D.Maurice: "Religion against God. This is the heresy of the age...We have been dosing people with religion when what they want is not this but the living God." It is a significant feature of the radical mood, which fits well with the interest

of Bonhoeffer, that Vidler's consideration of religionlessness led him into a discussion of the contemporary Church (cf. Daniel Jenkins, 1962).

To return to Robinson, "Must Christianity be religious?" was one of the three key questions that Honest to God set out to explore. The Bishop's amazement at the words of Nicholls above is complemented by his approving quotation of the very different testimony of John Wren-Lewis (Robinson, op.cit:42), who had come to Christian faith precisely when he discovered that it was **not** the "religion" he had always equated with superstition (see *infra*:200-201, 219-220).

Robinson approached the matter again more explicitly in the context of secularization (Edwards and Robinson, 1963:268-75), when he took up the statement of J.C.Hoekendijk that "Christianity is a secular movement" which requires "dereligionizing". He wrote:

Men and women are coming to commitment to Christ as the clue to life not because they are specially drawn by 'religion', nor because he meets them as the answer to their 'religious' needs. Indeed, they are not particularly interested in religion, let alone in the Church as a religious club.

These remarks should be just sufficient to keep us in mind of the theological debates which are our underlying topic, as we now turn to sociology. One further passage from R.Gregor Smith, quoted here without comment, will help to sharpen up the questions:

Christianity as a faith is always in conflict with Christianity as a religion...Christian faith includes within itself the permanent protest against its own religious forms and expressions. In this important sense Christianity understands itself as being more than a religion, as including within itself the negation of religion, though permanently destined to carry religion along with itself, that is, to give form and expression to its own faith in some kind of concord with traditional and social expectations (Smith, 1969; Ch.2).

2. Religion: The Definitional Question.

i. Two Preliminary Points.

At the opening of his The Sociology of Religion, Max Weber wrote:

To define 'religion', to say what it is, is not possible at the start of a presentation...Definition can be attempted, if at all, only at the conclusion of the study. The essence of religion is not even our concern, as we make it our task to study the conditions and effects of a particular type of social behaviour...The external courses of religious behaviour are so diverse that an understanding of this behaviour can only be achieved from the viewpoint of the subjective experiences, ideas and purposes of the individuals concerned- in short, from the viewpoint of the religious behaviour's 'meaning'.

But Weber never reached the conclusion of his study- and indeed, given his method, it is doubtful whether he ever could have done. Nevertheless, in the absence of a preliminary definition, Weber clearly had some kind of criterion which determined for him the object of his study of religion: what was to "count"? If we are to avoid the confusions which resulted from the tendency of the radical theologians to talk about religionlessness without setting out analytically what they understood by "religion", we too must establish a baseline, as Weber did without regarding it as a "definition". There are two important points about the establishment of such a starting-point.

The first is that our approach to religion should begin from what is there: that is, we treat as religion, as far as possible, whatever society- that is, our society- treats in common-sense terms as "religion". This principle follows the general view of method in the social sciences advanced by Alfred Schutz in his Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences, in which he sought to draw out some implications of the Weberian concept of *Verstehen* or subjective understanding.

Schutz argued that the conceptual constructs of these sciences were in the nature of second-order abstractions from common-sense ideas, just because the sociologist's observational field was a complex of relationships **already holding meaning** for the actors involved. This approach has been supported in other discussions of method from within a Weberian standpoint (Budd, 1973:10, 84; Dobbelaere and Lauwers, 1973).

The second point is that we should be prepared to accept that, to some degree, the very conceptual **category** of "religion" may have arisen in, and properly belong to, a Western Judaeo-Christian context. Schutz states that any understanding of a social phenomenon, including therefore a religious one, can only proceed from our own involvement with it at the pre-theoretical level, either by direct participation or by simply being a product of the same culture which produced it. Our analytical concepts can only be developed out of our own way of categorizing experience, and in so doing we may quite properly use conceptual distinctions which may not be made in the same way within other cultures (Goody, 1961). Therefore, in the case of religion, **any** procedural option about what is to "count" carries the risk of an ideological bias, by purporting to know in advance what religion "really is", but this need not vitiate the enquiry as long as the enquirer is aware of it (Dobbelaere and Lauwers, art.cit).

So then, insofar as "the category 'religion' is one which has **arisen** in socio-cultural contexts where the Judaeo-Christian tradition has predominated", it refers to "a situation in which there is a particular type of ambivalence as to the relationship between this material world and another 'world'" (Robertson, 1970:43, 47). It depends upon the acknowledgement of a possible state of affairs which is "how things ought to be", which is other than "how things are". Strictly speaking, "religion" as a Western and strongly Christian category need

not form part of the intersubjective, everyday self-understanding of "primitive societies" at all.

What we have said so far allows us to specify both a limitation and a certain breadth to what is included in our understanding of religion. The limitation is that we do not need to claim to be producing a universal and completely general religious theory. We can justly claim that, in the interests of developing an understanding of religion under contemporary Western cultural conditions, our approach interprets religion in a way which applies pre-eminently to Christianity. This also means that we can justify a certain concentration upon the churches, which to the popular common-sense view represent both religion and Christianity *par excellence*, in terms of official institutional expression.

But conversely, we can also claim that not **only** Church-religion is covered by our approach, since "religion" is widely considered in society to cover rather more than what goes on in the churches. In other words, we can accommodate the current emphasis of the sociology of religion on folk-religion, and associated non-official manifestations of religion, that which Towler has called "common religion":

...those beliefs and practices of an overtly religious nature which are not subject to continued control by the churches and whose significance and importance will not usually be recognized by the churches (Towler and Chamberlain, 1968; see also Towler, 1980).¹

The sociology of religion has probably had to over-react against a former unjustified limitation of its attention to "church-oriented religiosity" (Luckmann, 1967), so that now the impression is occasionally given that the churches have no particular claim to be in any special way the socio-cultural repository of religion. We reject any such suggestion, but maintain that there is no absolute qualitative difference between religion as formally practised in the churches and the religiosity found outside them. Non-official religion is not

necessarily non-institutional; that is, it still conforms to conventional, externalized patterns. The importance of sociological attention to folk-religion is that it isolates a continuing sub-stratum of religion, common to church and non-church religious culture alike, which theological approaches to the life of the Church often omit from consideration.

ii. Types of Definition: Functional and Substantive.

Robertson (1970:34-47) has distinguished three related twofold classifications of definitions of religion. They may be nominal or real, inclusive or exclusive, functional or substantive. Real definitions are formulated with reference to certain features observed to be common to cultural phenomena generally recognized as religious. Nominal definitions, on the other hand, are more or less arbitrary, constructed in order to locate religion within the sociologist's overall socio-cultural theory.

Nominal definitions tend to be inclusive in scope, either to provide the "grand theorizer" with ample evidence for his view that the social system **must** have a place for religion as its most general level of value-consensus and integration, or else to give to the "abstracted empiricist" a rough-and-ready guide to which phenomena he wishes to study, in the absence of any great interest in theory. The typical case of a phenomenon which a nominal definition might include as religious is Communism. On the other hand, the typical case of a "religion" which might not fit into a Western-based real definition is Buddhism. Because of the view of the definitional baseline taken in the preceding section, we believe that the dangers of over-exclusiveness inherent in real definitions are considerably less than those of over-inclusiveness in nominal ones.

The most fundamental distinction, however, lies between functional and substantive approaches to religion. Functional

definitions are most often nominal and inclusive, and substantive ones real and exclusive. The former identify the religious phenomenon by what it **does**- the function it performs- within the social system. The latter seek to specify certain intrinsic properties a phenomenon must possess in order to count as religious- i.e. to define religion by what it is.

The classic definition of religion formulated by Durkheim incorporates elements of both types, and therefore serves as the best illustration of the distinction, and starting-point for the discussion of the implications of each. According to Durkheim, a religion is

...a unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church all those who adhere to them.

Durkheim's definition is a model of clarity. It sets out what he believes religion consists of, namely both beliefs and practices, united by a common orientation to the sacred, which he then briefly defines in a small parenthesis. This is the substantive part of the definition. It then states the function such beliefs and practices perform, which is to do with the integration of a social group around a powerful moral consensus that gives it a corporate identity. By calling this a "Church", he lastly suggests a further substantive criterion for religion, that of public assembly. The analytical fruitfulness of Durkheim's definition has not been surpassed, and the core material of the definition still sets the contours of the discussion.

Since we shall be devoting most of our attention in due course to elaborating a substantive approach to religion, we shall proceed now to enumerate the shortcomings of a functional one in attempting to comprehend the place and role of religion in contemporary society.

ii. Objections to Religious Functionalism.

The social function which is most commonly made to serve as the definition of religion is that of symbolically expressing, and so contributing to the achievement of, social integration and cohesion. The first problem raised by this approach is that it both **reduces** the field of functions which religion might be considered capable of performing, and at the same time **widens** that of what might be treated as "religion" on account of its actually fulfilling such a function.

The ambiguity of this can be seen in this passage from A.R.Radcliffe-Brown, a leading functionalist in British social anthropology. It should be borne in mind that Radcliffe-Brown is writing in this article about **religion**:

An orderly social life amongst human beings depends upon the presence in the minds of the members of a society of certain sentiments which control the behaviour of the individual in his relation to others. Rites can be seen to be the regulated symbolic expression of certain sentiments. Rites can therefore be shown to have a specific social function when, and to the extent that, they have for their effect to regulate, maintain and transmit from one generation to another sentiments on which the constitution of the society depends (Radcliffe-Brown, 1945; emphasis mine).

In this passage, the term "rites" has replaced the "religion" of the article's title. This is only made possible by the process of making the Durkheimian view of the **function** of religion into the **whole definition** of it. The possible scope of meaning of religion is limited to society alone, as it is assumed that somehow religion's "proper" function is always to do with the integration and cohesion of society. If certain rites can be identified which appear to do this, they can be equated with religion simply on this account. We land up in the position where any kind of "functional equivalent" of religion, regardless of its content, ideological or practical, must be allowed to **be** religion, on account of its social function.

What is overlooked is that the overarching system of ritual and belief which serves the cohesion of a small-scale and pre-modern society, which is unreflectingly accepted by all its members, may no longer be at all what "religion" implies, at least in any common interpretation, in the modern West.

Secondly, once the issue is formulated in such a way as to ask, what do people **need** in order for their society to possess stability, order and cohesion, psychologizing approaches are invited. For example, J.M.Yinger (1963) defines religion as "a set of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with the ultimate problems of human existence".

The reasoning behind this runs as follows: societies must hold together- this depends on a degree of consensus- at the very least there must be agreement about the **really** important questions- these are the ones men cannot answer by purely empirical means, like the meaning of life and the problem of evil- therefore they are answered by supra-empirical concepts, symbolically expressed- and any such system is "religion".

By this means the question of religion, in terms of what society at large thinks is religion, can effectively be bracketed: the churches may even be functionally irrelevant to the issue. This recasting of the question in terms of certain unchanging constituents of the human psyche not only renders "religion" highly elusive, but also makes talk of "secularization" more or less of a red herring. Yinger, for example, prefers simply to speak of "religious change".

There are still more reasons for doubting the value of a functionalist way in to the analysis of religion. A third is the distinction between "latent" and "manifest" functions made by Robert Merton (1957). The function of religion in producing and maintaining social cohesion is very largely a latent one: the actual practitioners of religion consider themselves to be

engaged (for example) in the worship of God, or in the offering of sacrifice, with quite other purposes in mind.

The functionalist approach here implies that the latent function is somehow more "true" than the manifest one, and this in turn suggests the idea that if the latent function could be made manifest, i.e. if in future religious worship could be devised with the express intention of celebrating national solidarity or united moral purpose, the old manifest function might fall away and all participants concur in the greater worth and rationality of the new interpretation.

But this is a very improbable scenario. For there is built in to the common apprehension of religion the idea that deliberately to **foster** the aims of worship somehow causes it to lose its authenticity. Religious activity has to be conceived as self-justifying, as an end in itself, if those who engage in it are to regard it as genuine. There is a kind of irreducible, if indefinable, surplus of meaning about religious activities which makes all attempts to understand them in terms of secondary or latent effects seem inadequate and superficial.

Even in totally non-Christian cultural contexts, many cultures distinguish between "true believers" and those who merely practise religion by observing the appropriate rituals as a matter of custom, perhaps because of the social benefits which accrue to them by so doing (Horton, 1960). There is a critical "break" between religion and all its discernible latent functions; on the one hand, religion can undoubtedly occasion social conflict and promote values or ideals which are not consonant with those of society at large, while on the other hand the consensual values and aims of a society **may** be subscribed to upon what certainly does not look like a religious basis.

Functional approaches to religion are, then, too liable to betray a conservative bias. They can emphasise both the claim

of the *status quo* to represent "the best of all possible worlds", and the practical impossibility- doubtless comforting to some theologians!- of religion's demise. They cannot distinguish religion from its surrogates or functional equivalents (O'Dea, 1966:17; Budd, 1973:46-52).

Finally, functional definitions lend themselves too readily to the interests of those who wish to avoid the question of transcendence. For the purposes of research, religion is placed on a par with other phenomena which seem to have certain social functions in common, and thus what is specifically "religious" about religion is systematically excluded (Berger, 1974). But we shall not make very much progress without attempting to define just that. The study of the functions of religion will make more sense if it comes **after** the attempt to isolate what it is, substantively, which makes religion religious.

3. The Substantive Content of Religion.

Reverting to Durkheim's definition invites us to consider the substantive content of religion thus: "a unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden". Our discussion will take the form of an examination of a variety of ways, including Durkheim's own, in which the "sacred things" might be understood.

The central theme running through these alternatives is that religion be seen primarily in terms of an orientation or disposition towards an object which is conceived as being not of this world, but transcending it. More will be added later about the meaning of "transcendence".

i. "Spiritual Beings", God and the Divine.

"Belief in spiritual beings" was the famous "minimal definition" of religion offered by the founding father of social anthropology E.B.Tylor in his Primitive Culture of 1871.² The attraction of this approach, as well as its simplicity, is that it appears to reflect the popular intuition that "religion" and "God" belong inseparably together (along with "Church", we should add). But Tylor only employed the expression in the conviction that the belief concerned was pre-scientific and erroneous: to put it bluntly, that there were no such beings. There are great obstacles in the way of understanding the meaning of religion for believers if an analytical baseline is adopted which carries with it the immediate assumption that the believers' understanding is, in fact, mistaken.

The most serious attempt to revive Tylor's definition in modern times, that of Melford J.Spiro (1966), exhibits this difficulty. Spiro concludes from anthropological evidence that "the belief in superhuman beings and their power to assist or to harm man approaches universal distribution" (art.cit:94), and offers the definition of religion as "an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings" (ibid:96). Herein Spiro shows more than a hint of the scientific confidence of the early social scientists that religion is now on the wane, so that a definition can freely be adopted which is not in itself sociologically intelligible; the sociologist is not expected to have to interpret religion as **himself** a practitioner of it. So the essentially question-begging and non-rational phrase, "superhuman beings", can be left in.

But for the contemporary person (including the sociologist) who is both an observer and a would-be participant in religious life, the notion of "superhuman beings" is just part of the problem. It was precisely the possibility of a secular approach to the understanding of God which the

radical theologians were concerned to canvass. In other words, as a means of objectifying the religious universe the concept of superhuman or divine beings poses more questions than it answers. As a pair of concepts which clearly belong together in the everyday apprehension, "religion" and "God" appear as elements in the one question at issue, and not as question and answer respectively. This is why we cannot without further ado take the substantive content of the religious orientation simply as God or the divine.

ii. The Sacred Object.

Durkheim's own account of that towards which religious belief and activity is oriented enlisted the concept of the sacred as "things set apart and forbidden". This was intended to be a strictly sociological account, arrived at out of a study of the ritual worship and celebrations of the Australian Arunta tribe, researches into whose culture and society provided Durkheim with the primary evidence for his theory. Religious activities address themselves to symbolic objects, things which may possess no intrinsically unnatural or unusual qualities in themselves, but are rather **deemed** sacred by the societies in question.³

Durkheim's strict sociological method debarred him from psychologizing his concepts, and the most he was prepared to say about the subjective attitude towards the sacred was that it consisted of "respect". By this he meant not so much an experience of awe or reverence in the presence of the object as a propriety of treatment of it. The gap between sacred and profane was a "logical chasm" rather than anything objectively discernible. Whatever was sacred was treated as "other"; a cult was formed around it; symbolic death and rebirth were often required in order to pass across the chasm into communion with it. Through such ritual processes the social group brought to expression the conviction that reality is rightly comprehended

in terms of social order, which is supra-personal, absolute, not dependent upon individual choice.

Durkheim's opinion that a supposedly simple and primitive form of religion would display most clearly the essence of what religion is really all about has been discredited with the decline of evolutionary views of culture. "Primitive" religion today is not necessarily the same thing as "early" religion, nor is "early" religion equivalent to "essential" religion. Durkheim's understanding of the sacred object is too inflexible a tool, on its own, to do justice to the range of religious phenomena known to us today. On the other hand, the characterization of the sacred in terms of the "logically other", and as a familiar thing upon which is bestowed a quality which renders it unfamiliar and compelling, is an important insight to which we shall adhere in the further development of our point of view.

iii. The Holy in Experience.

The counterbalance to Durkheim's reluctance to consider individual experience in his sociological theory is found in the approach to religion which sees its distinctive content as centred upon an experiential encounter with the holy and the human response (cf. Mensching, 1947; Wach, 1951). This is the theory given classic expression from the theological side in Otto's The Idea of the Holy (although "idea" gives a misleadingly intellectualist translation of the phenomenon of *das Heilige*).

Following Otto but in the service of sociology, Mensching identifies the holy by the contrasting and complementary experiences of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*: the object of the experience both causes shuddering and fearful hesitation, and yet draws irresistibly on. The "lofty value" of the object suggests what is most desirable and perfect for human well-being, but in so doing also induces in the

individual or the group a profound dissatisfaction with their own **lack** of holiness- they and it are radically different as well as intimately attracted.⁴

Berger also takes up this dialectical quality of the holy which attracts and repels (1974; 1980: ch.2). He borrows from Schutz the idea of "finite provinces of meaning", states of experience in which the taken-for-granted reality of everyday life is called into question by juxtaposition with **another** reality, of immense significance, by comparison with which the everyday itself appears as a mere "finite province". The characteristic experience of religion is an orientation in which the world of normal experience is made to appear relative and incomplete, but also potentially extraordinary and richer than usually perceived. Berger considers that this state of affairs is dangerous and precarious: the "alternative world" of the holy cannot be let loose among us, as it were, all at once. This is why religion, which is our only way of catching a glimpse of such a transfigured reality, paradoxically also behaves as a way of keeping it from us and us from it.

There is a strong tendency for interpretations of religion based on the "holy" to suggest that authentic religious experience is properly abnormal, ecstatic experience. Since the more intense spiritual **experiences** are only the prerogative of the few at any given time, it would be dangerous to define the ideal of religion with reference to the charismatic experience of a small minority. Much routine and faithful religious practice, as commonly understood, would thereby be devalued or rendered even more problematic. Consequently, we think it better to pursue the dialectical elements in the idea of the holy in relation to an interpretation which places less stress on experience as such: and this is the approach which sees the distinctive orientation of religion as residing in an "other world", or a "sacred cosmos".

iv. The Sacred Cosmos.

Berger defines religion in this way:

Religion is a human attitude that conceives of the cosmos (including the supernatural) as a sacred order (1980:43).

And again:

Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established (1973:34).

Within the human process of the social construction of meaningful reality, religious reality is constructed by objectifying the idea of the ultimate order, ground and rationale which accounts for the way the world appears in the social experience of the individual or group. In religion, a world-order is conceived which is determinative, normative, and explanatory of the experienced world. This conception is objectified: it appears effectively as "another world", a sacred order of existence upon which **this** reality depends for its continuity, stability and meaning.

The sacred order as an objectified world assumes a unique aura of facticity: religious people maintain that only this order constitutes the "really real". This aspect is captured in the definition of religion given by Clifford Geertz:

...a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Geertz, 1966; ~~emphasis mine~~).

We agree with Geertz that no belief can count as religious unless it has reference to this "general order" conceived as possessing a unique and determinative reality. But the postulation and, in the terms of religious life, the **confession** of such an "other world" brings with it certain characteristic problems. It can function both negatively and positively for the believer.

On the negative side, Berger has made much of the alienation typically induced by religion when the objectification of the sacred cosmos turns into reification (*Versaechlichung* gives way to *Verdinglichung*). Then the religious ideation creates the impression that the human agent stands in a powerless and passive relation towards an inexorable and unchangeable givenness, a cosmic determination and legitimation of how the world is and to which he or she can only submit in "blind faith". But this is "bad faith", bringing men into bondage to what, sociologically regarded, is their own construction. Religion, as Berger put it in his earlier work The Precarious Vision, "ratifies the O.K. world", and thereby creates alienation, since the "real world" is not, after all, "O.K."

But this is the inevitable risk involved in the process of religious objectification which is necessary, in the first instance, to assure the believer that there is order in the world, and that action taken within the constraints of social reality can be treated as purposive and worthwhile.⁵ The other side of the story is rather different.

Fallding defines the supernatural as "any influence for which empirical proof is not given in nature but by which men nevertheless acknowledge themselves constrained" (1974:20). This element of constraint is the crucial point here. In what way does the sacred or "supernatural" order constrain? The answer is, by presenting itself as an ideal, or normative, or fulfilled order for the world. The relationship between the experienced world and the sacred cosmos is one of similarity and difference: similarity, in terms of affinities between the social experience of the religious group and the type of sacred world their religion posits; but difference, insofar as the other world is free from the contradictions, inadequacies and discontents which taint all present social experience.

In this way, the sacred cosmos can exercise constraint in the form of a morally compelling imperative (Fallding, op.cit). It prescribes a socially agreed "constitution", an agenda for what is socially desirable; and this ideal is presumed to be what is pre-eminently, indefeasibly real. Once again, this very facticity can contribute, where religious faith is largely pre-reflective and uncritically held, to a dangerous alienation when it is assumed that there is an inevitable "just is-ness" about the prevailing relationship between the other world and this world. This danger is typically seen in the assumption that while "this world" is a vale of tears and a mass of sin, the "next world", after death, will right all wrongs and perfectly redress the balance.

v. The Transcendent.

The concept which most generally sums up and expresses the ideas contained in these various models of the distinctive object of the religious orientation is that of the transcendent. Cultural features count as religious if they are anchored in, or directed towards, the acknowledgement of an order of reality, or a realm of being, which is not this empirically available, everyday order, but is nevertheless sufficiently congruent with it to act as a constraining ideal upon social perception and to urge commitment to realizing it. A religion both affirms the social group's construction of reality by locating it within a meaningful order, and provides a normative vision for coping with aspects of that reality which present a threat to such affirmations of meaning.

The person who, in his or her construction of the world, operates from the basis of a religious faith, displays an orientation or disposition towards the transcendent, the objective content of which is best described as "another world", conceived as a changed, ultimately perfected version of this world, and acting as a constraining and compelling ideal or vision over it.

In general terms, that which transcends bears a double relation of affirmation and negation to that which is transcended. To transcend something is to elevate it or sublimate it beyond its best exemplifications of itself, to do away with it, not by rejection and casting aside, but by lifting up and transfiguration.⁶ The transcendent is always other, but never **wholly** other, for that would rob it of any possible correspondence with the experienced world.

The fundamental experience or disposition of religion, the orientation to the transcendent, finds cultural expression in an intricate, historically conditioned and shifting network of symbol-systems, rites and social forms. Participation in this rich symbolic life within a given religious culture, which occurs publicly and corporately as worship, develops and nourishes the orientation to the transcendent which supplies the mainspring for the social group's rationally construed and purposive involvement in this empirical world.

vi. The Dimensions of Religion.

The foregoing summary leads to one further consideration about the content of a substantive view of religion. In terms of empirically available social facts, the orientation to the transcendent is present in the form of a cultural system (Geertz, art.cit; cf.Lindbeck, 1980; Slater, 1979). The discernible and analysable forms of the presence of religion within a society are best set out as a variety of cultural "dimensions".

Thus Joachim Wach distinguishes three modes of expression of religious experience. (He follows Otto in placing a distinctive and powerful experience at the heart of the religious phenomenon; we should wish to reduce emphasis on the mystical or charismatic character of this, and speak instead, as we have done, of a "disposition" or "orientation".) The three modes are the theoretical, consisting of myths or stories and

the more formally elaborated religious doctrines; the practical, consisting of ritual activities and prescribed forms of ethical behaviour; and the strictly sociological, comprising different forms of religious community and association. (Wach, 1947).

Wach's analysis simply develops further what was already implicit in Durkheim's definition of religion, which specified beliefs, practices and a "moral community called a Church" as the components of a religious cultural system. Other proposals for classifying the dimensions tend to follow broadly similar lines (Fallding, 1974; Smart, 1971; Slater, 1979). But to say that, when we seek to understand the place and role of religion in contemporary society, we are examining a cultural complex of beliefs and stories, rites and deeds, and forms of social grouping, all having reference to a notion of the transcendent, involves us in being careful not to treat any one of these elements as "the real thing" in preference to another.

In this way, inarticulate faith is disadvantaged by emphasis on the doctrinal dimension; ethically-conceived religion may be undervalued by concentration upon the requirements of ritual or sacramental practice; insistence upon one type of religious belonging may cause insensitivity to the agent's own sense of another- and so on. The sociological study of religion has to suspend certain distinctions which the churches are accustomed to take for granted; as David Clark writes of the inhabitants of the North Yorkshire fishing village of Staithes:

No-one...conceives of the religious realm in terms of folk and official elements; the individual is merely born into a social setting in which a rich variety of religious beliefs and practices are in existence, inside and outside the churches (Clark, 1982:166).

It is apparent that we have not been able to exclude from this discussion of the substantive sociological content of religion some reference to the social functions it performs. Having earlier set out objections to the specification of

functions as the initial definitional baseline for the study of religion, we may now return to the question of functions in the light of the substantive approach here set forward.

4. The Social Functions of Religion.

Religion, by its reference to a beyond and its beliefs concerning man's relationship to that beyond, provides a supra-empirical view of a larger total reality. In the context of that reality, the disappointments and frustrations inflicted on mankind by uncertainty and impossibility, and by the institutionalized order of human society, may be seen as meaningful in some ultimate sense, and this makes acceptance of and adjustment to them possible. Moreover, by showing the norms and rules of society to be part of a larger supraempirical ethical order, ordained and sanctified by religious belief and practice, religion contributes to their enforcement when adherence to them contradicts the wishes and interests of those affected. Religion answers the problem of meaning. It sanctifies the norms of the established social order at what we have called the 'breaking points', by providing a ground for the beliefs and orientations of men in a view of reality that transcends the empirical here-and-now of daily experience (O'Dea, 1966:6-7).

In this passage, Thomas O'Dea incorporates, within a view of the substantive content of religion broadly similar to that presented here, the two major traditions of the social functions of religion. These are the Durkheimian, centred upon the notions of social order, integration and cohesion, and the Weberian, centred on the problem of meaning.

i. The Durkheimian Tradition: Cohesion and Integration.

We have already drawn the main outlines of this typical functionalist perspective in presenting our objections to its use as a **definitional** base. One of America's leading functional theorists of the post-war years, Kingsley Davis, argued in his Human Society that all societies need to maintain agreement on certain key ideas and attitudes among their members, relating to moral values, normative order, explanations of social phenomena like status and class, and so on.

Absence of consensus on any of these would threaten social stability and heighten tension and conflict. Societies uphold the required agreement by deriving these ideas from ultimate ends, by reference to another world: certain symbols and rituals, by being dubbed sacred by the society, thereby come to exercise a compelling hold upon its members and thus facilitate their acquiescence in the social order as an objectively given system.

The conservative ideological bias of this is apparent, caught as it is in a pair of twin assumptions: firstly, that every social phenomenon **must** be functional, i.e. serve the ends of the system as a whole; and secondly, that religion in particular has an overarching general role to play in ensuring that the whole system can be functionally integrated, by providing metaphysical anchorage for it. This way of analysing religion's integrating and legitimating functions lies wide open to the negative twist given to it by Berger. He writes:

Religion legitimates social institutions by bestowing upon them an ultimately valid ontological status, that is, by locating them within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference (Berger, 1973:42).

But he goes on to say that this process causes the institutions concerned to confront men as "inexorable facticities" depriving them of the power of choice:

Religion mystifies institutions by explaining them as given over and beyond their empirical existence in the history of a society (ibid:97).

Berger here rightly points out that as long as an attempt is made to conceive of society as a single functional system, in which religion is the ultimate sanction of legitimacy, the much-needed stability and order are bought at the cost of alienation of persons and ossification of religious contents.

But there is another side to the integrative function. For modern societies are not simple functional unities. It is increasingly impossible to apply any of the criteria or

functions of religion to an **entire** society (Berger, 1980:17). Religious orientations are rather the province of certain groups within societies, although the membership of the groups may overlap. The orientations may be measured in terms of adhesion to a particular religion, or to a denomination, or to neither; or in terms of a form of religiosity, such as "folk"-communal, "personal"-private, and so on, which may occur within or without an organized form of religion.

In such circumstances, it is the function of religion in sealing and supporting the identity of the religious group rather than of the whole society which comes to the fore. That is to say, who and what **we** are, and what our distinctive construction of the world is, and our consequent values and motivations for action, can be defined **over against others**. Amid a flux of relative and unstable social circumstances, "identity" provides a fixed point; it "freezes" a particular frame of the world in a rapidly moving sequence of possible frames which threaten to throw the individual into disarray. Hans Mol writes:

Identity on the personal level is the stable niche that man occupies in a potentially chaotic environment which he is therefore prepared vigorously to defend. Similarly, on the social level, a stable aggregate of basic and commonly held beliefs, patterns and values maintains itself over against the potential threat of the environment and its members (Mol, 1976:65).

This identity is a fragile frame, which may be constructed around a number of foci: the self, sexuality, an ethnic group, a sect or cult, or a universal religion or secular commitment. Religion as the "sacralization of identity" can stabilize or "fix" any of these identities, at the level of the individual, social group or trans-national community. In this process, objectification appears as a necessary and positive feature: it tells a group that they can have confidence in their understanding of who they are and what their role in the

world is to be, because it is objectively, ultimately grounded. In this way, the sacred cosmos can exercise constraint in the form of a morally compelling imperative (Fallding, op.cit). It prescribes a socially agreed "constitution", an agenda for the normative social order and the action of individuals within it.

This recasting of the integrative function of religion in a modern culturally pluralistic context leaves open the possibility that religion may yet be socially critical. The religious group may regard the resources of their tradition, around which their identity is defined and through which their cohesion is celebrated and upheld, as sacralizing a construction of the world which is radically different from that of their everyday experience. A massive assurance and stability on their part may co-exist with considerable conflictual tension in their society as a whole. The question of the extent to which this understanding of how religion's sacred cosmos may function is applicable to contemporary cultural conditions and affects the life of the churches is, of course, the question of secularization, which is the topic of the next chapter.

ii. The Weberian Tradition: Theodicy and Meaning.

As we made clear in Chapter Two, Weber believed that religious ideas and impulses were potentially independent and socially significant forces which, by causing those who held them to see and interpret the world in a particular way, induced patterns of activity which could enter into complex interactions with socio-economic structures.

Religious ideas function to produce their distinctive interpretation of the world by offering compounds and structures of **meaning** in the face of life-situations which might make human confidence in the rationality and worthwhileness of the world subject to doubt or even collapse. Weber used the theological term "theodicy" to refer to this



religious function: not so much a justification of the ways of God before men, as a means of vindicating the claim that social existence is meaningful.

A problem of meaning arises for the human actor because realities do not conform to expectations (Weber, 1965:138ff; Berger, 1973:61ff). As Berger puts it, the sacred cosmos is perpetually threatened by chaos. The threat is brought by a number of contexts of experience, as O'Dea (1966:5) has spelt them out.

The "uncertainty context" represents the observation that "the best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft a-gley" (Burns)- all human ventures are liable to unexpected disappointment, calling into question the supposed rationality that lay behind their planning.

The "impossibility context" simply states that you cannot always do what you want, and possibly that you can **never** do it precisely as you want. Human endeavour is met, if not by the limits of suffering or coercion, at any rate always by the boundary of mortality.

Finally, there is the context of scarcity: the requirements of order in society have led to a differential distribution of goods and resources, and too often people's aims are thwarted, not by personal powerlessness as such, but by sheer lack of material wherewithal to fulfil them.

All of these contingencies can put the notion of a final undergirding order and rationale to the world under severe strain. Weber argued that religious ideas provided rationalizations which would stave off the threat and restore the balance necessary to allow individuals to go on living in the world without despair.

There were at least four types of "theodicy": the promise of compensations in this world; a similar promise for the world beyond death; the doctrine of a thoroughgoing dualism, with the principles of good and evil forever engaged in a

deadly struggle in this world; and the doctrine of *karma*, which posits the resolution of all conflict and uncertainty in a universal balance attained at the end. Weber left open for specific investigation the range of consequences, for example in terms of social activism or quietism, which differing theodicies might have in varying socio-economic contexts.

Not surprisingly, in view of our presentation so far, the interpretation of religion as an answer to problems of meaning invites evaluation in two ways. For, on the one hand, the promise of compensations may be regarded as spurious, with religion functioning as "mere ideology" to prevent people from perceiving and responding to the **real** causes of powerlessness and scarcity. This is the Marxist view, of course, although Marx allowed that religion was also a **protest** against suffering, even while those who protested in this way could be effectively prevented, by the very means of their protest, from taking measures to alleviate it. The insight of Marx into the ideological function of religion is a true perception of how the risk and the cost involved in religion's performing a necessary social function is always that of becoming **dysfunctional**, and thus denying its own best nature.

In other words, solutions to problems of meaning are undoubtedly necessary, but equally undoubtedly dangerous. The danger is as we have just described it; but the positive possibility is this. Weber saw how religion was able to retain a leverage for social change precisely by exploiting the perceived gap or discrepancy between the world that is, the world of social experience, and the world presumed to supply the ground and explication of it. There was no simple congruence between the religion of a particular group and the social structure to which they were subject. The interpretation of circumstances offered by religion is sufficiently "fitting" to serve the need for meaning in the generality of cases, but there is always a certain shortfall, a **lack** of "fit" which

religious people understand, not as a failing of logical or empirical adequacy in their religion, but as a failure of the world to conform to **true** reality.

The function of religion in providing meaning, then, need not imply the mere provision of complete justification for the existing state of affairs, any more than the provision of social cohesion and integration necessarily means the support of the *status quo*. Indeed, especially for people who are not regularly involved in formal religious activity, appeal to religious ideas may indicate a strong element of question and struggle in their experience of normal life. As Towler says of folk religion:

The fact that it survives is all the more significant in that it still seems to express the transcendent element in personal experience and bestow meaning on what would otherwise be perplexing (Towler, 1974;ch.8).

iii. Conclusions.

We have presented, in this chapter, an approach to religion based upon an attempt to define its substantive content, and only then to proceed to asking about the social functions it performs. The starting-point for any such definition is whatever is widely and generally accepted in the society around us as "religion". This allows us to treat what goes on in the churches as having a special claim to be "religion" *par excellence*, while requiring us also to look more widely into manifestations of unofficial or folk-religion.

Religion has been defined substantively as a cultural system, embodied in myths and doctrines, ritual and ethical practice, and social groupings, which expresses an orientation to the transcendent. This is variously characterized as the sacred, the holy or the divine, but particularly in terms of a whole world-order, an "other world" conceived as the ultimate

basis for and legitimation of the order of the experienced social world of the group.

Because this "sacred cosmos" or other world of religion appears as a fulfilled, perfected and normative or ideal version of this world, it not only grounds it in a metaphysical order, but also exercises a constraint over it. It comes as an imperative, summoning religious people to action to bring the world into conformity with its sacred counterpart.

In the light of this, each of the main ways of analysing the social function of religion is susceptible to both positive and negative (dysfunctional) development in practice. This is an inevitable part of the dialectical process of the quest of religious ideas for social expression which we discussed in Chapter II.

The appeal to religious legitimations as the source of social cohesion and integration can therefore induce alienation and a *mauvaise foi* which is simply reduced to passive acquiescence in the prevailing order. But religious ideas can also be the source of strength of purpose, unity of commitment and identity for individual groups within society. As such, the structural supports of their religious orientation can motivate such a group to critical action in the interest of the vision for society which their religious tradition holds.

Similarly, the use of religious ideas to provide solutions for problems of meaning can explain away injustice and rationalize the intolerable. But this risk is inherent in the enterprise of providing through religion the assurances and explanatory structures necessary to instil confidence into people threatened by a fragile and insecure world. The meanings carried in the religious tradition can also open up a critical gap between the world that is and the world that ought to be, and so motivate action born of restlessness and discontent.



The view of religion advanced in this chapter will supply the critical stimulus to our examination of the proposals of Christian Radicalism for a secular, non-religious approach to Christian talk of God in Chapter VIII. This chapter has for the most part tried to speak in general terms about religion, subject to the constraints of working within a Christian context, referred to at the beginning of the chapter. The next chapter looks at the modifications to, and strains upon, this general understanding, consequent upon changes affecting religion in modern society: i.e. the debate about secularization.

NOTES.

1. The move away from concentrating upon "church-oriented religiosity" not only into cults and sects, as in the work of Bryan Wilson and more recently James Beckford, but also towards uncovering the inarticulate and latent religious dispositions governing a great deal of social belief and behaviour at mass level, is perhaps the most pervasive trend of all since the plea of Berger and Luckmann (1963). David Clark states uncompromisingly at the beginning of his study of folk religion in Staithes, Between Pulpit and Pew: "Only in recent years has sociology begun to show much interest in religious life outside the institutional churches...we must shed those blinkers which so firmly detract from our view of religion and embark upon a study which does not confound the religious institution with the religious *tout court*." One of the broadest approaches of all is found in Edward Bailey's studies of "implicit religion", in which behaviour, with its ritual, custom and convention, is studied in order to discern the underlying commitments which shape and direct the choices and value judgments of individuals. (In detail in the unpublished Ph.D thesis, The Religion of a Secular Society, Bristol 1976; for a summary see "The Implicit Religion of Contemporary Society: an Orientation and Plea for its Study", in *Religion*, vol. 13, 1983:69-83.) However, in our view Bailey's work raises very serious methodological problems in view of his definition of religion as "commitment" pure and simple. It seems to us that even attempts to tap religious residues wider than folk-religion as it is usually understood require as a control on their efforts some more precise definition of what the indispensable religious content is.

2. The enormously influential Golden Bough of Sir James Frazer (1890) used the definition "propitiation of supernatural powers". Once again, it was only possible for such a definition to be employed on the clear assumption that, from a strictly scientific point of view, it represented a mistaken belief. Frazer argued that both religion and magic represented pre-scientific ways of manipulating the cosmos to obtain the desired human ends; but whereas magic was crudely materialistic and would die out with the advance of rationality, a place would still be found for a purified ethical religion. But Malinowski (Magic, Science and Religion, 1925) later challenged the view that "primitive peoples" only distinguished between magic and religion within a generally unscientific mentality. He argued that there were cases in which they appealed to neither magical nor religious means, but felt that purely "natural" or, in our terms, "scientific" causes would suffice to explain a situation or achieve an aim. Malinowski thereby took a step in the direction of allowing religion as a category *sui generis* to perform its own special functions. Against this it can be seen that Durkheim's approach to religion was already a very considerable advance over that prevailing in his time within the early anthropological tradition.

3. Durkheim was trying to avoid approaching religion as though it dealt principally in the abnormal and the extraordinary. For this reason he rejected Spencer's definition, "the belief in the omnipresence of something which is inscrutable". Primitive societies, Durkheim, acknowledge "marvels" and "wonders" with due astonishment, but religion is not primarily or particularly to do with these- it accounts more usually for the prevailing normal order of things. Of course, what should be added to this is the observation that to set apart sacred objects as a means of symbolizing the very givenness and unconditional nature of the common order is in itself to acknowledge that there is mystery even in its normal taken-for-grantedness.

4. Interpretations of religion which focus on the distinctive experience which lies at its centre are not the same thing as psychological interpretations, which find their classic exponent in Freud. The ancestry is rather in Kant and Schleiermacher

(cf. Bowker, 1973:168). Kant sought to justify the *sui generis* nature of different ways of experiencing the world, viz. moral, aesthetic, religious, each of which within its own logic carried its own *a priori* synthetic propositions, i.e. judgments stating matters of fact about the world. Kant's demonstration of the limits of Enlightenment rationalism from within its own premises provided the ground upon which Romanticism could develop its notions of alternative modes of knowledge than the scientific-rational, and Schleiermacher took up the issue in the area of theology. The thread which runs from Kant via Schleiermacher and the Romantics eventually to both Weber and the religious phenomenologists like Otto is more "modern" than the strict positivist strand of rationalism in the nineteenth century, because of its willingness to take religion on its own terms as a distinctive mode of interpreting the world. One of the most attractive formulations of the issue was that of William James in his The Varieties of Religious Experience: concerned neither to dismiss religion by positivist reduction, nor to allow theologians to shield it from scientific investigation, he argued that the religious state of mind is best understood as a distinct disposition or affection which might characterize any other emotion or be applied to any object. There could be religious awe, or religious gladness, or religious zeal, or religious discontent, and so on, but there did not seem to be a state of mind identifiable simply as "religious" without more ado. This can accommodate our view that what is religious about religion is the transcendent orientation built into it. As James wrote, a religious experience might be any experience insofar as it appealed to "such a primal reality as the individual feels impelled to respond to solemnly and gravely, and neither by a curse nor a jest" (op.cit:39). Religion will not accommodate either the sceptical *je n'en fichisme* of a Voltaire, nor a world-weary and grudging "acceptance of the universe" mentality (ibid:36,41).

5. As Geertz writes: "If one were to essay a minimal definition of religion today it would perhaps not be Tylor's famous 'belief in spiritual beings'...but rather what Salvador de Madariaga has called 'the relatively modest dogma that God is not mad'" (Geertz, art.cit:13).

6. This account of the meaning of "to transcend" is indebted to that *crux interpretum* for translators of Hegel, *aufheben*.

CHAPTER V: THE SECULARIZATION DEBATE.

It is not very problematic to say that a church has a task in the transformation of society or at least must engage in efforts towards establishing a better world...But...it turns out to be highly problematic in actual practice. It would be extremely helpful if the contrast between what seems a theological truism by now and what happens in practice could be explained in a satisfactory way...It seems...that sociological analysis can throw light on some of the implications (Thung, 1976:77).

No theory of the social nature and functions of religion can survive without consideration of the characteristic constraints and influences brought to bear upon religious life by contextual factors of society and culture. The most important sociological paradigm for interpreting such factors within the contemporary Western situation is the concept of secularization. It is a "sensitizing concept" (Dobbelaere, 1981:10); that is, it starts from common-sense impressions and suggests lines of investigation, general guidance about relevant empirical instances. As such, it requires careful analysis to determine more precisely how it is to be used. This chapter approaches secularization by distinguishing between socio-structural and cultural processes, as applied both within society at large and to religious life in particular. The origins of the analysis lie in Weber's notions of the rationalization of society and the desacralization or disenchantment of culture.

1. Secularization and the Radical Theologians.

The Christian radicals understood themselves to be engaged in an attempt to reconceptualize the Christian proclamation and restructure the concrete social mode of its expression in a manner appropriate to the cultural forms of a "secular society". Advocates and critics alike of the radical theology accepted that a process of secularization was taking place. Amongst theologians, accustomed to viewing the world of

religion from the standpoint of church life, a felt sense of crisis affecting the churches was the primary impetus for the thinking about secularization which mushroomed in the sixties.

John Robinson wrote of the task of finding a "new currency" for handling Christian truths in a modern world:

The most distinctive fact about this world is that it is a secular world. Our whole assessment of the contemporary situation is bound up with our judgment about the meaning of secularization (Edwards and Robinson, 1963:248).

Harvey Cox' The Secular City is subtitled, Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective. These processes are described on the opening pages as "two equally epochal movements", and the first question addressed by the book is "What is secularization?"

Van Buren twice sums up the theme of The Secular Meaning of the Gospel as "How may a Christian who is himself a secular man understand the Gospel in a secular way?" (1963:xiv, 2). He states categorically, "Modern man is not 'out there' to be spoken to; he is within the being of every Christian trying to understand" (ibid).'

Most of the theologians concerned, such as Cox, Ronald Gregor Smith and Albert van den Heuvel, formulated their definitions of secularization to correspond with a favourable theological interpretation of the process, deriving from the work of Friedrich Gogarten. Recourse to sociological material was sketchy and spasmodic. In the case of the British debate following Honest to God, most of Robinson's critics and defenders made assumptions about a secularization process which was adversely affecting the lives of the churches. Few, however, showed acquaintance with the important and in some respects parallel debate which was under way, certainly from the mid-sixties, within the sociology of religion in Britain (Gill. 1975).

Therefore, having provided a brief reminder of the theological issues which are the object of our critique, we now turn to an examination of that debate.

2. Secularization: the Contours of the Debate.

i. The Basic Thesis: Bryan Wilson.

Within the sociology of religion in Britain, the issues in the secularization question were well laid out in what could be called the *thesis* and *antithesis* of the work of Bryan Wilson and David Martin in the sixties. We shall draw attention to the main difficulties of the concept, therefore, by way of a brief contrast of their positions, before going on in the next section of the chapter to propose our analysis of the secularization process.²

Wilson has for twenty years been the most consistently unrepentant proponent of a thoroughgoing secularization theory among leading sociologists of religion. His Religion in Secular Society: a Sociological Comment was the first major book-length study to attract attention beyond the bounds of his discipline. Wilson's well-known definition of secularization, which he has not seen fit to modify, is "the process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance" (Wilson, 1969:14; cf.1982:149). Wilson did not define religion in the early book, but has more recently stated that he means by it, substantively and quite minimally, "the invocation of the supernatural" (1982:159).

It is important to notice what Wilson's definition of secularization does and does not do. It **does** address both the more subjectively cultural aspects of religion and its objective social expressions: it is not fair to accuse Wilson, as some critics have done, of being concerned only about "church" or institutional religion.

It does **not** merely equate secularization with "the decline of religion" in the sense of imagining an imminent state of affairs in which men simply no longer possess religious representations as part of their cultural apparatus.

Rather, Wilson is concerned about the social **significance** of religion, and of its institutional and organizational forms. He is claiming that, with regard to other sectors of the social and cultural systems, religion is neither relevant nor influential. It does not materially affect the public structures or shared conventions, and thus is powerless to shape the social order or national cultural consciousness. The emergence of this state of affairs is what is meant by "secularization."

Wilson's analysis, then, proceeds from the common-sense impression that religion is on the wane- that society is less religious than it used to be. We shall give much fuller treatment to how Wilson sees this decline in the social significance of religion taking place at the appropriate points in our analysis of secularization processes. As a collection of descriptions of those processes, all of which have resulted in problematic situations for the institutions of religion, Wilson's work remains unmatched in scope and lucidity. The criticisms of his thesis advanced by David Martin are not so much that he is wrong about the facts, as that he has been too ready to fit them into a single theory with an air of historical inevitability and irreversibility. Secularization is neither a one-dimensional nor a univocal process.

ii. Elements of an Anti-Thesis: David Martin.

In a still oft-quoted essay, Martin called for the elimination of the term "secularization" as "a tool of counter-religious ideologies" (Martin, 1969:ch.1. For a critique see Pratt, 1970:5). However, he has subsequently produced his own General Theory of Secularization, which attempts to co-ordinate all the variable processes included under the umbrella term

"secularization". It would be uninteresting merely to argue over whether or not there is such a thing as secularization, since most of the argument would be a matter of definitions. What is more important is to be sensitive to the refinements necessary in trying to interpret the common-sense, baseline concept more adequately.

Martin issues a number of important critical warnings. First, with regard to the apparently simple thesis of decline, he points out the hidden presuppositions about "true religion" which lurk there. For example, the High Middle Ages may be taken as the very zenith of the religious society, with the Reformation marking the onset of secularization. But a different evaluation of the essence of religion could result in treating medieval Christendom as the height, or depths, of the secularization of religion, with the Reformation as a great religious revival (Martin, 1969:54).

For example, Wilson seems prepared to accept what Martin calls a "utopian" view of the Middle Ages as a kind of "golden age" of religion. He treats the evidence for a mass of magical, superstitious and pagan practices persisting throughout that time as reinforcing the view that religion permeated and saturated every stratum of social and cultural life. Yet, in the present day, similar evidence, i.e. of persisting folk-religiosity, interest in magic and the occult, and the spread of cults and sects, is treated by him as evidence of secularization.

Martin further warns against conventionalizing history, except for analytical convenience (Martin, 1973). That is, you cannot treat any of those convenient typologies, such as communal-associational, theological-metaphysical-scientific (Comte), tribal-town-technopolitan (Cox), as descriptions of historical actuality. They do not describe a simple, unilateral and unequivocal process by which all societies progress into

modernity. The idea of a progression from "religious" to "secular" in which the more of the latter means the less of the former is a similarly unacceptable scheme.

Discussions of secularization, Martin insists, are inevitably bound up with the peculiar nature of Christianity, and the tensions it sets up with culture. Martin treats the dynamics of that relationship in the mutations undergone by Christian symbols and meanings as they encounter the resistances of successive socio-cultural contexts in The Dilemmas of Contemporary Religion and The Breaking of the Image. We have already given an outline of his approach in Chapter II.

The same point of view underlies the historical treatment of A General Theory of Secularization. Here, Martin attempts, with something like a Weberian complexity, to study the patterns of secularization arising in the various western nations under the impact of such variables as the form of Church-State relationship resulting from the Reformation, the relation of religion to nationalism, and the rise of industrialization, scientific progress and urbanization.

In England, therefore, there is no avoiding the peculiar historical position of the established Church in trying to understand not only the relationship between Church and society under contemporary conditions, but also the prevalent, non-articulated religious understandings of the people. Martin is saying that every statement about secularization carries with it a religious underside, which when turned up reveals an unsuspected subtlety about the continuing collusion of Christianity with culture; and in England, at least, the established Church is vital to understanding it.

The secularization debate as carried on between Wilson and Martin demonstrates the subtleties which need to be taken into account in developing an adequately sophisticated

understanding of secularization. In the next section of the chapter, we present an analysis of secularization processes which attempts to reflect the persistent double evaluation encountered in the preceding account. But first, let us sum up the preliminary decisions which have to be made if it is to be clear what such an analysis is intended to do.

iii. Prolegomena to a Secularization Analysis.

Any attempt to classify the several processes which go to make up what is termed *in toto* "secularization" must declare certain basic presuppositions. The first of these is that a specific definition of religion must be assumed (cf. Robertson, 1978:258ff). In our case, the definition is a substantive one, regarding religion as a cultural system expressing an orientation to the transcendent. In fact, functional definitions of religion do not invite the consideration of contemporary religious change in terms of secularization at all, since they begin by assuming that, whatever outward appearances might suggest, religion is an ineradicable human need and will therefore be found, albeit in a transmuted form, even in the most secular environment (e.g. Greeley, 1970; cf. Glasner, 1977:113).

Secondly, a historical baseline is required. Secularization can variously be traced back to the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, the New Testament or the Old, and so on. We believe that the clearest position is to treat secularization from a socio-structural point of view as being a running commentary on the break-up of Christendom. The gradual erosion and decline of institutional and cultural arrangements which took their rise in the conditions of the High Middle Ages is the connecting thread in the complex tale of secularization (Davis, 1980:32ff). This does not, of course, entail simply regarding that Medieval period as quintessentially "religious".

The next criterion for arranging a classification is whether the socio-structural or cultural aspects of secularization are to the fore. The definition of secularization offered by Berger indicates this distinction: "the process by which sectors of **society** and **culture** are removed from the domination of religious institutions and **symbols**" (1973:113, emphasis mine).

Structurally, secularization may be analysed in terms of changes in the overall social structure, or of unwilling effects upon religious institutions within the structure, or of the changes effected by such institutions in an attempt to respond.

Culturally, secularization may likewise be analysed in terms of general cultural change, or of the impact of this upon religious culture, or of adaptations within the religious culture. These possibilities produce a six-fold analysis.

*3. An Analysis of Secularization Processes.*³

i. Socio-structural Secularization: Institutional Differentiation and Rationalization of Society.

This is the most general structural conception of secularization, which reaches back to Weber's analysis of rationalization. According to Weber, the spread of a "formal rationality" (*Zweckrationalitaet*, Weber, 1965:110; cf. Scharf, 1970) in the organization of society results in non-affective, instrumental values dominating the decision-making processes and limited, short-term ends assuming greater importance than the solving of "ultimate" problems. Allied to rational organization is the strict division of institutional labour and precise specification of functions.

The process of differentiation simply allows the claim of sectors of the social structure, or institutional sub-systems of society, to be self-governing. They remain interdependent, certainly, but do not have to acknowledge any superimposed omniscient master-authority to arbitrate upon

their operations. Indeed, such omnicompetence becomes increasingly impossible, with the accumulation of distinctive expertise and specialist knowledge within each sector. Parsons, who gave the name "differentiation" to the process, finds it religiously neutral. It is a necessary part of the maturation of a social system in which each part is to find its proper function.

The successive relinquishments of ecclesiastical control over the institutions of science, education, politics and social welfare are well-documented, and the process continues in the contemporary debates about religious education in schools and, with particular interest, the relaxation of restrictions upon Sunday trading. But the process cannot but be problematic for the religious institutions. For whereas Parsons, for example, has argued that insofar as religious institutions lose their "peripheral functions" in favour of "core" ones, they are better fitted to accomplish their proper ends (Hill, 1973:239; Budd, 1973:121-4), the fact is that specialization of function has not in the past been the way in which these "proper ends" have been understood. Rather, they have been conceived as general, overarching and unitive.

In his analysis of rationalization in the institutional sub-systems of society, Wilson rejects the view that certain non-rational human needs- for theodicies, a sense of cosmic order, identity and social belonging- require a socio-structural *locus* of fulfilment, as the object of public consensus. In a rational, technological society, these former "latent functions" of religion, which Wilson refers to as "the collective gratification of the emotions" (1969:17), are simply taken over by a variety of rational-instrumental agencies, in virtue of which the functions in question simply become **manifest**. Shorn of the breadth and depth which the religious context gave them, they assume a deliberately limited range, as the objects of personal choice.

Thus, people no longer practise religion as a non-reflective, socio-culturally given means of overcoming contingency by locating themselves in a higher order. Instead, they consciously choose, from time to time, to go to see a film, or to take a holiday, to "get away from it all", as an act of therapeutic escapism. In short, there is an **industry** for shelving, rather than solving, "ultimate problems" (Wilson, 1982:ch.2).

The rationalized society is also unfavourable to the persistence of community. In Wilson's view, the transition from a communally-ordered society, in which duties and responsibilities were acknowledged between individuals on a personal basis, to a rational bureaucratic structure which prescribes obligations in accordance with office and status (Weber, 1965:333ff.), is damaging to religion. The possibility of appeal to traditional, religiously inculcated values declines. The concept of moral order is eroded by pragmatic, utilitarian considerations. No longer can the solidarity and mutual respect of the members of a community be grounded in an order and an imperative which transcends the interests of any individual involved.

Religion, the invocation of the supernatural, used to be the very "ideology of community" (Wilson, 1982:159), but no more. "In the advanced societal system, the supernatural plays no part in the perceived, experienced and instituted order" (ibid:162). As a result, the nostalgia for community is widespread. For example, many people resent the "cold charity" or institutional care doled out by the welfare services, and seek instead to set up localised "community care" groups, which hope to rediscover a more personal and affective basis for meeting human need.

At this point the discussion of rationalization shades off into the question of a continuing cultural role for religion.

This is to be expected, since we are dealing with complex processes analytically, and each piece of analysis artificially extracts and highlights one process which in reality occurs, in varying degrees, in combination with others. We continue here, then, with the socio-structural aspects, returning to the cultural questions later.

ii. Disengagement and Marginalization of the Churches.

The first and simplest of the arguments Wilson advances in support of the secularization process is the "decline thesis". The common-sense impression of the "man in the street" is that religion is on the wane. Accepting that sociological theory starts from such impressions, Wilson marshals the readily available barrage of statistics of institutional decline, which betoken a crisis for the churches as the twentieth century advances.

Churchgoing is a decidedly minority option. The churches have relinquished the directing and regulative role they once performed in social welfare, education, leisure and politics, and retain only a semblance of power attached to the dignity of certain ceremonial occasions, together with a vastly reduced sphere of influence in family life, through rites of passage and the like. "The statistics of decline", however, explain nothing on their own, and so this aspect of secularization needs to be explicated further by means of a sociological model such as that provided by Berger (1973: ch.6).

Berger describes the territories which have been evacuated by institutional religious control as "liberated" with regard to religion. These spheres, of politics and economics, the mainspring of Western industrial capitalism, constitute the heart of modern social systems, in that it is they that determine the actual material conditions under which people lead their lives. Religious considerations, however, are only marginal to them now. The churches, in giving up any formal

control over them, have had to settle for a position of double marginality.

In the first place, the churches find themselves concerned with the **private** margins of social life, for example the family, where the values espoused seem to have little application in a wider social context. In the second place, they are allocated a continuing function at the **public** margins, where certain state and civic occasions are dignified by forms of religious ceremonial, which to all intents and purposes look like no more than a rump, a ritualistic survival. "Religion manifests itself as public rhetoric and private virtue. In other words, in so far as religion is common it lacks 'reality', and in so far as it is 'real' it lacks commonality" (Berger, 1973:138; cf. Williams, 1985).

Berger regards this polarization as an inevitable concomitant of the processes of modernization; it results in an immense difficulty for the "plausibility structures", those institutional supports which serve to lend credibility to religious ideas. Nevertheless, Berger's view of religion as ultimately grounded in the ineffable experience of "otherness" causes him to remark that what may be bad for the churches' self-esteem may not be so bad for the transcendent power of religion. Enforced marginality may hold out hope for the vitality of ideas which owe their originality and attractiveness to the **refusal** to identify without reservation with any finite and fallible social system.

iii. The Conformity of the Church.

Shiner (1967) writes: "The religious group or the religiously informed society turns its attention from the supernatural and becomes more and more interested in 'this world'". In the face of the progressive rationalization of the world and its institutions, religious organizations may decide

to adopt increasingly professionally rationalized and instrumental means for attaining specifiable proximate ends. Religious teachings may also be reinterpreted to apply to non-transcendent objectives.

Wilson treats this form of the churches' response to secularization with considerable scepticism. It is the way of conformity: churches altering their structures and their activities in ways which bear witness to the influence of rationalizing and privatizing motifs among them. In this way, Wilson is able to claim that the very phenomena the churches would point to as evidence of renewed life in the face of secularization merely count in favour of his overall thesis. Religion in Secular Society focused on the thriving nature of American church life, the growth of the Ecumenical Movement and the development of sects.

In America, Wilson argued, religion itself had been internally secularized into a professionally specialized, rationally ordered industry. Church affiliation had assumed a strongly non-religious cultural meaning along ethnic or status group lines (cf. Herberg, 1967).

Ecumenism was largely a case of weak organizations being willing to settle their differences and amalgamate in the interests of creating an appearance of strength and importance (cf. Berger, 1973:145-52). In this way the professional prestige of the clergy, whose social role had become questionable, could also be enhanced.

The proliferation of sects was to be expected in a pluralistic situation lacking a single overarching belief system. Small and exclusive groups could seek compensation for the social stabilities of which a secular society was depriving them, such as a close-knit, culturally cohesive community, or a variety of non-rational, ecstatic experience.

Elsewhere, Wilson has interpreted such phenomena as the charismatic movement, liturgical renewal and pastoral reform similarly, as determined by aspects of the secularization thesis: the Church has to be "modernized", "democratized", "communalized" and so on (Wilson, 1976:84ff).⁴ But these views betray in Wilson himself a certain nostalgia for the traditions of an older society, which is liable to make his judgments on religion somewhat one-sided. To be rational in religion appears to be plainly **mistaken** in Wilson's view (see e.g. Wilson, 1965).

There is little to add here about the evidences of such a pattern of secularization, except to say that they are more widespread in America than in Britain, which illustrates Martin's argument about internal factors affecting the likelihood of different secularization processes occurring in different nations. However, from the point of view of our definition of religion, "conformity" does become highly problematic, since it suggests that moves undertaken by the churches towards the renewal of religious life are liable to succeed at the risk of the loss of genuine religious contents.

iv. Cultural Secularization: Desacralization and Disenchantment of the World.

The theme of desacralization, again going back to Weber, is the broadest and most generally applicable interpretation of the secularization of culture. Weber perceived in the rise of attitudes of formal rationality, structurally embodied in the phenomenon of bureaucracy, and motivated by the conviction that the world is intrinsically capable of rational-empirical manipulation, the seeds of a "disenchantment" (*Entzauberung*) of the world. The concept of the sacred involved a disposition to view the world in terms of mystery, of otherness; not as something self-contained and self-explanatory, but an open system, pointing beyond itself, and possibly permeated by supernatural powers (Acquaviva, 1979). Such a disposition was everywhere in decline in the emerging modern world.

Weber, like Wilson after him, was pessimistic about the prospects of a disenchanted society, inhabited by "specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart", imagining itself to have attained the pinnacle of civilisation while condemning many to dwell within an iron cage of unyielding rationality. What Weber called a "substantive" rationality, or a rational orientation to **absolute** values treasured for their own sake and not merely dictated by immediate empirical need (*Wertrationalitaet*) could not readily be fostered in a desacralized situation. It was, therefore, a great irony that elements motivating the decline of the sacred could be found within the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition (cf. Berger, 1973:116-130).

The theme of the desacralization of culture strikes a consistently pessimistic note among accounts of secularization. For the Christian tradition, by its ubiquitous and unavoidable presence at every juncture of cultural concern, even if intermingled with all manner of sub-Christian constituents in mass religion, nevertheless once provided **the** unifying frame and context for the intimation of the sacred—that is, it prevented the attribution of ultimacy to the immediate givens of society and insisted on the subordination of the social order to something judging and surpassing it.

Wilson describes what is happening in this way. In the rationalized society, institutional functions tend increasingly to be manifest, engineered to achieve specifiable ends. But a rationally-ordered system is dependent in the end upon some schema of non-rational values and dispositions which serve to prevent people from merely lapsing into cynically a-moral abuse of the system. These, according to Wilson, are the humanistic values of "disinterested goodwill", affective relations not limited to kinship groups and the like, public and individual honesty. Such dispositions were once inculcated, primarily, in the context of a religious world-view.

The decline of **this** role for the Christian "picture" is startling: the rudiments of the picture are no longer known, even as background cultural apparatus, to large sectors of the population⁵⁸. Instead, a hotch-potch of half-formed ideas and principles tries to do service as some sort of *ad hoc* world-view. The less well-educated and unreflective are likely to possess only the shreds and tatters of a part-secularist, part-religious set of assumptions they pick up, hit or miss fashion, along the way.

The purpose of religion, Wilson believes, has always been the provision of salvation, a concept which has varied in content with changing social contexts (Weber, 1965:84ff). In a situation of increasing discontent with the state of affairs brought about by secularization, the churches might just discover a limited, mainly private role again in offering a salvation from that discontent.

v. Privatization and Pluralism of Religious Life.

It is possible for the secularization of culture to give birth to its own distinctive forms of religious life, which spring up from below with the removal of official world-views imposed from above. But these forms will almost certainly be esoteric rather than popular, drawing upon the multiple sources of Eastern religions, mysticisms, psychotherapeutic techniques or the occult in order to provide an escape from the iron cage into an alternative world, the home base of leisure time and "private life".

Thus Bellah (1970(b)) has envisaged the development of "modern religion" as an individualistic, humanistic orientation, concerned with self-discovery and "spiritual consciousness". Modern religion will operate with flexible sets of symbols in a spirit of "critical realism": the symbols are the very substance of the religious mode of interpreting the world and cannot be discarded in favour of some strictly secular,

empiricist point of view, but modern people are free to choose and develop their own symbols, to modify or discard them if they fail to assist them in taking responsibility for their fate in relation to the "ultimate conditions of existence".

Luckmann (1967) has written that one of the peculiarities of modernity is that "the real self no longer lives in the real world", a judgment that fits well with the idea that modern religion will engineer the passage out of the "real world" of rationality and proximate, instrumental ends, into the private world of the "true self". Since Luckmann regards religion very broadly, as man's capacity to transcend his biological nature, he is able to propose a future "invisible religion" as a complete functional alternative to familiar institutional forms. But these privatized cultural systems are only available to the privileged, for whom the most pressing problems are those of personal "meaning" and the nurture of authentic selfhood. Things are otherwise with the majority.

Martin has directed criticism at this type of analysis of contemporary religious life. An emphasis on the views and values of élite intellectual culture should not blind the cultural analyst, in his view, to the essential **sameness** through time of the religious undertow of non-élite culture, such as is to be found both inside and outside the churches. For England was never more than partially, or superficially, converted to Christianity, so that much of what is now classed as "secularization" may amount to what is happening to the Christian upper layer of religiosity now that its structural legitimations are crumbling. Martin puts it like this:

It would seem that vast numbers of people work on the assumption of two basic principles; one is the rule of fate or chance, conceived as rooted in a kind of symmetry (such as that disasters occur in threes), and the other is a 'moral balance', rooted in a universal homeostasis whereby wicked deeds eventually catch up with those who perpetrate them...

All such examples...suggest that far from being secular our culture wobbles between a partially absorbed Christianity, biased towards comfort and the need for confidence, and beliefs in fate, luck and moral governance incongruously joined together (Martin, 1967:76).

In this respect, at least, modern religious culture is not particularly pluralistic. Contemporary folk-religiosity, which Martin rightly refuses to treat as if it were something quite other than "church religion", is remarkably uniform (Mensching, 1947). It is

...a religion of habit and the *status quo*, devoted not to choice but to the community of generation, in particular the family, since this is now the locus of cultural inertias and the stronghold of the 'given' (Martin, 1980(b):12).

On the one hand, just because this type of religion is no longer practising **church** religion, this does not mean it has become Wilson's deliberately-chosen, limited-range instrumental means of emotional gratification.

On the other hand, although closely related to Christian faith, it is a paralysed, non-dialectical religion: it only upholds and legitimates the experienced world of those who hold to it, and contains no critical potential.

The cultural privatization of religion presents another delicate set of ambiguities for the churches. For it is easy, as Wilson and Martin have agreed from their different points of view,⁶ for movements aimed at revitalizing the Christian proclamation to capitalize only upon these prevalent cultural preferences. They may end by sponsoring a vast Christian culture with its music, drama, community activities, youth projects and so on, which stands towards the everyday world, not in a relation of transcendence, but as a religious alternative to everyday life. For those who enjoy the luxury of participation in it, it can be exciting and fulfilling; but in the meantime, the alienation of the society round about from faith, and the dissipation of culture, go on unchecked.

vi. The Transposition of Religious Values.

The final secularization process represents a more optimistic evaluation of desacralization, and suggests a new secular task for the churches. The culture is seen as assimilating or absorbing into itself formerly religious values and notions and transposing them into a secular key. That is, they become embedded in the culture in such a way that their point of reference is located within society seen as a self-contained and unitary system. No longer do the values concerned require the guardianship of religion to keep them alive or to provide them with their justification. Whereas specific religious **institutions** become differentiated and possibly marginalized, the ideals, values and ends they exist to promote take form in the surrounding culture in such a way that the culture is enriched but the ideas lose their recognisably religious form.

It could, therefore, be the business of the churches still to nurture and institutionalize such values, as modern man's means of salvation from the corruption of his rational system:

As yet, only at the margins and in the interstices, and principally in the domain of private life, has such religious endeavour been effective, in allowing some men, at least, to transcend the present discontents, and in producing, by way of the dissemination of dispositions of goodwill and commitment, that salt of the earth that is necessary to sustain the social order (Wilson, 1982:179).

The churches have therefore acted, and might still act, as a kind of "transformer station" for introducing and establishing key general values and principles into society (Gill, 1981). In this line of analysis, the world can be judged to be more Christian than ever before (Parsons, 1963), whether or not many choose to practise an official religion.

The continuing role of the churches is, however, problematic. For in the first place, it remains unclear to what extent the embedded values really are self-perpetuating, and to

what extent they still depend upon explicit religious support. It may be that some such values are no more than archaic "survivals" in modern society, which have so far managed to hold out against the onslaught of technical rationality, but will be doomed to disappear without a continuing religious vitality.

In the second place, the transposition model needs to be alert to the lessons of the "Protestant Ethic" thesis: namely, that there is ample room for nice historical ironies upon the road from the religious idea to the secular transposition. Secularization as transposition pays scant respect to the concerns of churches for the "purity" of their ideas. Nevertheless, the fact that this is so suggests that the churches have not, after all, "worked themselves out of a job". The "embedding" process is never complete, and may always have to be started all over again; and here is a further hint that the expulsion of the churches from the centre of the social and cultural system may, in the end, be to their advantage.

4. Towards a Dialectical Resolution.

i. Is a Synthesis possible?

Our analysis of secularization contains under every heading both assertions and qualifications about the contemporary situation, both negative and positive evaluations and prospects. Returning to the contrasting positions of Wilson and Martin, do they in the end contradict one another? One sociologist who has argued that the various theses require and complement each other is Bryan S. Turner, in his recent Religion and Social Theory (1983), and the following remarks are stimulated by his proposals⁷.

Wilson, as we have already pointed out, is particularly concerned about the social significance of religion, that is to say, its importance at the public, institutional and structural

level of society. Despite his employment of a substantive definition of religion, his analysis of the past situation of the Church, by comparison with which present developments appear as decline and loss of influence, reflects strongly Durkheimian assumptions about the function of religion. Insofar as the Christian religion is said to have formerly provided the overarching basis for societal cohesion and the repository of consensual values, it is the religion of the minority educated and ruling élites which is in view. Wilson, however, does not state this explicitly.

Martin, on the other hand, pays much more attention to the "subterranean theologies" and religious substrata of non-élites and the less educated. Whereas the map of religious development based mainly upon élite culture displays a pattern of declining influence and secularization, Martin's map shows a striking continuity and similarity through the ages. The mass of the people were partially Christianised, partially pagan, and still are. Insofar as their religion serves the ends of cultural integration and offers them a meaningful construction of the world, the meaning is a second-hand one, derived from the dominant cultural form of Christianity. Insofar as their religion performs a function proper to **them**, it is more likely to be one of comfort and compensation in the face of a prevailing order in which they are disadvantaged.

What is happening under present conditions? The break-up of the Christendom situation deprives the rulers of society of the services of religious and ecclesiastical systems in the interests of social control. There is less likelihood of an official religious ideology as a legitimation of the world being unreflectingly accepted by the majority through a process of cultural percolation. But at the same time, mass religion becomes even more fragmented, confused and ineffectual than before. This is because the mediation of organised religion, which in the form of local churches once helped to intercede

between élite-cultural and mass-folk forms of Christianity, is all but lost.

What the alternative viewpoints of Wilson and Martin indicate is characteristically paradoxical. The cultural compromise of Christianity represented by the "Christendom" system and its later developments risked turning the Gospel into a means of domination and of restraining change. Yet this same compromised religion turns out to have been important in maintaining a measure of creative Christian hope and faith at mass cultural levels. The churches have had their role in the secularization of Christianity through becoming assimilated to systems of social legitimation. But such assimilation has been the means by which Christian ideas have been made available to the mass of the people.

ii. Conclusions.

The processes of secularization display a whole range of double features which materially affect the possible responses of the churches to them. Firstly, every index of secularization is capable of being counteracted by corresponding evidences of religious continuity, and this alerts us to the fact that secularization is far from being a unitary and uni-directional phenomenon.

Secondly, as to the **past**, secularization appears both as a complex of processes representing a move **away** from religion, and as in part the product of an ongoing collusion of the Christian religion with its historical context. The churches' judgment upon it must therefore overcome the simple dichotomous options of either deploring or welcoming.

Thirdly, as to the present and the future, secularization presents in many respects a bleak and unpromising analysis of contemporary religious life and of the prospects of the churches. But it also suggests that the true seeds of hope may

lie in the more negative parts of the analysis, whereas serious reservations are raised about those aspects of contemporary religious life which the churches might be inclined to regard as the more hopeful.

The position regarding the structural and cultural aspects of secularization may be summarized in this way. Within the social structure, institutional differentiation is resulting in a multiplicity of sub-systems, each with its own characteristic area of expertise and specific competence. The institutions of religion are involved in this process as a social fact. The question for the churches is whether they can face up to growing marginalization, accept it and then capitalize upon it with a properly understood specialization in their particular field, which is religion.

Cultural secularization results in the fragmentation of world-views, increasing religious confusion and the spread of cynicism in the face of unremitting instrumental rationality. The contemporary cultural means of combating this serve only to shelve, rather than solve, the problems. But a religion which has become detached from the task of sacralizing the social order may be able to reclaim afresh the right to engage in cultural criticism. Under the conditions of secularization, the Christian tradition might supply the independent resources necessary in order to reintroduce the category of transcendence, by means of which a culture is called to surpass itself.

This is the understanding which will be brought to bear upon our examination of the attempts of Christian Radicalism to draw up a positive theological programme in response to secularization. But our suggestions about a revitalized religious role arising out of a double-edged understanding of secularization, combining a determined realism about the problems of the situation with an affirmation of the

dialectical nature of hope, remain merely idealistic without consideration of the actual religious believers to whom we are ascribing this role.

Therefore, it is necessary to examine the nature of membership within a religious group and participation in its life. We need to ask how religious faith works, in terms of giving to believers a certain way of living and acting in the world. The sociological contours of religious commitment and membership are the subject of the next chapter.

NOTES.

1. See also Gregor Smith (1966:138); "One thing is clear...The tide of secularism has swept over the whole of the western world"; Macquarrie (1968:13); "Nowadays theology has to be done in a secularized world"; Davis (1966:11); "Christians today are faced with two interrelated processes. The first is secularization..." Even Mascall (1965) assumes that modern man is "secular", but objects that the task of the theologian is to make him less so.

2. Some sources for the discussion of secularization can be listed here. Bryan Wilson's major contributions are Religion in Secular Society, 2nd edn, 1969; Contemporary Transformations of Religion, 1976; Religion in Sociological Perspective, 1982, esp. ch. 6. David Martin touches on the issue in A Sociology of English Religion, 1967; but more fully in The Religious and the Secular, 1969; The Dilemmas of Contemporary Religion and A General Theory of Secularization, both 1978.

Processes of secularization and secularization theories are classified in Shiner, 'The Concept of Secularization in Empirical Research', available as pp. 460-73 of K. Thompson and J. Tunstall, eds., Sociological Perspectives, 1971; Glasner, The Sociology of Secularization, 1977; Robertson, The Sociological Interpretation of Religion, 1970, and Meaning and Change, 1978, the closing chapter of each; Hill, A Sociology of Religion, 1973, chs. 11, 12; Budd, Sociologists and Religion, 1973; ch. 7; Gill, The Social Context of Theology, 1975:112 (a flow-diagram); and Dobbelaere, Secularization: a Multi-Dimensional Concept, 1981.

Further individual theories are developed in Berger, The Social Reality of Religion, Penguin edn, 1973; Acquaviva, The Decline of the Sacred in Industrial Society, 1979, orig. pub. 1964; O'Dea, The Sociology of Religion, 1966; Gilbert, The Making of post-Christian Britain, 1980; and Fallding, The Sociology of Religion, 1974, ch. 7.

3. See n. 2 above for sources of classifications. We have not followed any of them exactly, but have tried instead to bring out the dialectical aspects of the relation between secularization and religious life. This is also done, though in rather a different way, by Fallding (1974:207-11).

4. I especially recommend Wilson's po-faced description of the eucharistic 'happening' masterminded by the newly un-secular Harvey Cox during the hippie era - see Wilson, 1976:92-4.

5. There is an ignorance about the Christian religious tradition among otherwise well-educated people whom one might expect to be better informed, regardless of whether or not they consider themselves believers. This comes out, for example, in the course of popular quiz programmes, where widely read people are often unable to answer quite simple questions on religious subjects. Similarly, a newspaper like The Guardian which aims to cater for an intellectual readership falls down badly on the quality of comment it is able- or feels necessary- to give to religious affairs.

6. Wilson's dismissal of such phenomena of the contemporary churches as "charismatic destruction", "communitarianism" and "eclectic mysticism" (especially in Wilson, 1976) is very similar indeed to the treatment Martin gives to liturgical changes involving things like the Kiss of Peace, the restoration of the "primitive" *agape* meal and the "cult of spontaneity". See, e.g. ch. 6 of The Breaking of the Image and many other places in his writings, such as the notorious PN Review 73, containing the parliamentary petition urging the compulsory retention of the Book of Common Prayer for worship in every parish of the Church of England.

7. Turner's point of departure is his discussion of the Marxian "dominant ideology thesis". The relevant part of his argument is this: the Durkheimian view of religion as "social cement" is criticised for failing to give due weight to social conflict, and assuming that the overarching religious legitimation for the social order is

actually shared and acquiesced in by all members of a society. In fact, it represents the ideology of the ruling class. But Turner questions the view that the subject classes merely absorb the dominant ideology and so reflect in their religion the world-view imposed upon them as a means of social control, in the form of a "social opium". This, in its way, also amounts to a social cohesion view of religion, and fails to do justice to cases where religion functions to mobilize action against the dominant class. In fact, Turner argues, the masses have a "split consciousness"; they have partially absorbed the dominant ideology, with religion supporting the *status quo*, but they also display signs of another type of religion which expresses an alternative function of protest.

CHAPTER VI: RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AND ORIENTATIONS.

The question of the renewal of religious life under the conditions of secularization comes home to roost, so to speak, with the issue of actual religious congregations and individual religious persons. We have to ask in what ways religious faith, with its distinctive transcendent orientation, operates in practice within the institutional channels of the religious cultural system. A variety of styles of membership and commitment within the religious institution produce different orientations to the social world and modes of action in it. This chapter examines the analytical types of religious institutional involvement deriving from the two fundamental typological distinctions of church and sect, and communal and associational religiosity. It suggests how the resulting types may be deployed in relation to the conditions of secularization set out in the preceding chapter.

1. Institutionalization and the Radical Theologians.

Christian Radicalism displayed a mood of unease about the institutional Church. This can best be described as a felt sense of incongruity between the content and implications of Christian faith as the radical theologians were seeking to understand it, and the actual "style of life" (William Hamilton's phrase) or mode of being-in-the-world which the available institutional forms of Christianity appeared to engender. The American death-of-God theologians represented an extremity of rejection of the relevance of the Church to their whole task of theological reconstruction (Hamilton, 1968:23, 96-7; Altizer, 1967:9-10). The vehemence of their rejection caused David Jenkins (1969) to suggest that the "deadliness of the Church" was the real circumstance behind the mistaken announcement of the death of God.

But for the less extreme, the problem was whether, and in what way, the authenticity of faith as the fundamental experience or disposition of religion could be maintained in the process of institutionalization. We shall come to definitions shortly; but here we simply wish to keep the theological background in mind. It is a background which repeatedly expresses reservations and qualifications about the institutional factor in religious life. As Cox writes, "The church is not in the first instance an institution. It is a people" (1968:137). But "a people" comes close to being an abstraction. More concretely, we might simply say that the Church is people, i.e. particular persons.

Robinson puts the rhetorical question, "Is not the Church an archaic and well-protected institution for the preservation of something that is irrelevant and incredible?" (1965:13-14). In so doing, he doubtless expresses how he fears the Church may look to outsiders, and the word "institution" in this context is a loaded one. Colin Williams contrasts the motifs of the Church as "institution" and as "event" (the latter term being that favoured by Barth), and suggests that there is a tension here which is inherent in the whole idea of a Church persisting recognisably through time and changing contexts (Williams, 1969:28-9).

There are large ecclesiological questions here which do not come within the scope of this thesis. But the one which we do have to take up is the problem of finding a religious social reality which can effectively nurture and embody a mature and creative relation of faith to the world.

2. Religion and Institutionalization.

The most fruitful line of analysis of the types of religious institution in the sociology of religion has been the distinction between church and sect, first introduced by Weber

but greatly elaborated by Troeltsch. We shall come in due course to a discussion of this typology, but we do not want to deal with it at once in this chapter. For most sociological discussion of the theme has proceeded directly from Troeltsch rather than Weber, partly because Troeltsch's work was available in English translation so long before the relevant portion of Weber's writings. As a result, the original context of Weber's introduction of the typology has not always been fully recognised. That context is the emergence of the church as a means of ensuring the **continuity** of a religious tradition in such a way that it need no longer depend upon the special powers and gifts of pioneering individuals.

Taking our cue from this context of Weber, we shall begin by examining the problems attendant upon the institutionalization of religion, because these provide the groundwork for any discussion of how faith may come to concrete social expression.

i. Religion as Institution.

Peter Berger defines an institution as follows:

...a distinctive complex of social actions...a regulatory agency, channelling human actions in much the same way as instincts channel animal behaviour (1966:104).

An institution is, in Durkheimian terms, a "social fact", possessing an objective existence over against the individual and the power of constraint upon his behaviour:

...a changeable, but permanent, product of purposive social role behaviour which subjects the individual to obligations, gives him formal authority and possess legal sanctions (Hasenhuettl, 1974).

In religion, as in other areas of social life, institutionalization occurs in order to give permanence, continuity and recognizability to an originating or fundamental experience or disposition. The faith which lies at the heart of the Christian religion becomes channelled into external cultural forms which govern convention and pattern

expectations as to the character and content of that religion. Institutionalization permits the outside observer to identify Christianity as a cultural system. It provides a kind of code or shorthand which bypasses the need for fresh exposition on every occasion of what faith is about. Religious believers "know what to do" because of what is institutionally given and prescribed.

Institutionalization is more than just formal organization, although it almost always includes it. Much folk-religion, for example, has very little formal organization but is highly institutionalized: it prescribes very precisely what the ritual behavioural requirements are in particular situations, so that severe personal sanctions may be imposed upon anyone who fails to observe them. Institutionalization is largely pre-reflective and unplanned, and indeed, planned formal organization (or reorganization) in the Church may well fail if there is no grasp of the underlying institutional assumptions of the people involved. Institutionalization is inevitable, and there is no pristine purity of faith recoverable independently of it.

ii. Weber and the Routinization of Charisma.

Weber's theory of routinization (*Veralltäglicung*) develops the question of institutionalization with regard to religion somewhat further (Weber, 1965:324-35, 363-92). Weber sees new religious movements as coming to prominence under the impact of the *charisma* of the prophetic leader of the movement. This charisma is a phenomenon akin to Durkheim's "sacred", although conceived by Weber as attaching to particular persons rather than objects. It is a property which elevates the one who is possessed by it above the common run of men and gives conviction and the power to elicit commitment to what he says. The bearer of charisma is uniquely able to introduce the transcendent into effective circulation among the

human community. From the very beginning, then, a division is introduced which is problematic for the continuing vitality of a religious movement: there is the charismatic figure, and there are the followers.

When it becomes necessary to perpetuate the spirit of the religious movement beyond the death of the original charismatic leader and his circle of followers, into the next generation, the process of routinization begins. In particular, what is at stake is the provision of a set of guarantees that the religion will henceforth remain the **same**: that is, will continue to reflect and embody authentically the internal logic and "feel" of the originating faith-experience. Since the pure charisma exists only *in statu nascendi*, a potential crisis of authority occurs with the death of its bearer.

Weber says that this crisis is typically resolved by the replacement of the individual and personal charismatic authority by "traditional" authority, "resting on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of the status of those exercising authority under them". Still further along the line of development, "legal-rational" authority depends "on a belief in the 'legality' of patterns of normative rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands."

The result is an increasing detachment of charisma from persons and relocation of it in prescribed offices. The purest type of legal-rational authority, according to Weber, is bureaucracy: and with this his account of institutionalization clearly comes into contact with the problem of secularization. The very measures which arise in protection of the identity of the religion and as a means of safeguarding its cultural transmission and making it readily available to the people become a threat to its integrity. There is a whole set of

tensions built into the very concept of institutionalized religious belonging and commitment, which introduce ambiguities and variable patterns into the apparently simple notion of the expression of religious faith in its worldly context.

iii. The Dilemmas of Institutionalization.

Weber introduced the distinction of church and sect, as we have said, in the context of routinization. The features which he says characterize the emergence of a **church** actually suggest quite clearly a range of dilemmas inherent in the process. The four features listed by Weber are: the rise of a class of religious professionals, or priesthood; a universal claim, i.e. the religion becomes in principle open to all; fixed dogmas and rites which can be systematically taught; and a form of antecedent organization based upon the concept of the charisma of office. In an influential article, O'Dea (1961) has indicated the dilemmas which are made unavoidable by this combination of features.

Firstly, the emerging distinction between clerical and lay practitioners of the religion helps to support another polarity observed by Weber, that between "virtuoso" and "mass" patterns of religiosity. Within the religious cultural system, many lay people will simply assert their right to expect certain benefits from the institution into which they have been socialized, together with a "lukewarmness" about active commitment. On the other hand, the clerical virtuoso believer may come to carry on his occupation in pursuit of certain professional interests. In either case, lukewarmness or professionalism, the continuing authenticity of faith is called into question.

Secondly, the development of a range of fixed liturgical and dogmatic symbols can produce the process described by Berger (1973: ch.4), in which "objectification" becomes "reification" and results in alienation. There is a loss of



transcendence; religious participation serves only to express and legitimize certain aspects of social solidarity and given order, including quite possibly relations of domination contradictory to the original thrust of the symbols concerned. Faith no longer engages in the dialectical process of affirming the meaning and value of the experienced order, only to deny it at the next stage in the name of that which surpasses it. The religious symbols are absolutized and become opaque and inflexible.

Thirdly, an increasingly bureaucratic organization can become preoccupied with its own internal mechanisms. Office charisma can subtly cease to resemble charisma at all, and faith can be made of none effect by a trend towards institutional introversion and specialist cliquishness. Under the conditions of religious privatization, this development can occur in such a way as to delude those involved into thinking that their busy-ness is an index of success.

Fourthly, the formalization of dogmas and ethical rules as a convenient and necessary shorthand means of depicting the shape and content of faith in its cultural forms can lead to a cessation of religious growth in individual believers. Doctrines can come to act like amulets and incantations merely to protect the security of those who appeal to them, and moral rules may serve to by-pass all creative and painful ethical thinking in response to the complexity of actual issues. The religious group that sees itself as a beleaguered minority in society is especially susceptible to taking refuge in this conservative mutation of faith.

Fifthly, the institutionalization of religion brings about alliances, collusions and compromises with the "parent culture". This bears a risk that particular religious attachments might prove advantageous to the survival of the prevailing social system, and coercive means of enforcing them may develop.

Although these may not be violent or inquisitorial in nature, they will nevertheless put faith under pressure, in such a way that religious organizations seek ways in which a select minority among their members can still bear witness to the critical transcendent dimension of faith, while justifying the temporary acquiescence of the majority in a degree of compromise on the grounds that the religious ideas depend upon some continuity of cultural embodiment for their survival.

The cultural promulgation of religion is thus a story of advance and regress, checks and balances, bargaining and control. The channels through which religion runs on its social course and which give to it a recognizable shape and direction also contain eddies and undercurrents which can sometimes belie the superficial flow. Religious people are gathered into particular groupings and try to give expression to their faith through the medium of particular religious cultural systems which regularly act back upon the faith itself to neutralize, modify or indeed to challenge it. The forms of institutionalization have, however, been analyzed into certain dominant types, and these form the subject of the next section.

3. Institutional Patterns and Religious Commitment.

i. Church and Sect.

We have placed the subject of church and sect-types of religious organization within the overall context of the emergence of institutional patterns of religious cultural transmission, in line with Weber's presentation. Weber broached the subject of the sect in the context of his discussion of reactions **against** the concept of "office charisma": the sectarian type of religious organization attempts to recapture the spirit of earlier movements by insisting afresh upon the demonstration of individual personal qualification, both for basic religious membership and for office.

In keeping with the heuristic nature of the ideal type we pointed out in Chapter II, Weber does not attempt to trace within Church history a single line of development of actual religious organizations from sects to churches, or back again. It is not helpful to spend time trying to identify whether particular bodies count as churches, sects, or some alternative or intermediate type.

The multiplication of sub-types was a process which occurred within the sociology of religion as successive writers attempted to improve upon the typology as they found it in Troeltsch.² With his historical perspective, Troeltsch was perhaps ambiguous about whether he was treating church and sect as analytical types or historical instances³, but we wish to keep clearly to the former use.

In this respect we follow the plea of Gustafson (1967), who urged that sociologists should recognize that the two fundamental criteria of Troeltsch's typology were those of whether the religious organization conceived of the "means of grace" as efficient objectively or subjectively (dependent on individual qualification), and whether membership was in principle universalist or particularist. We are enquiring, that is, into the style of religious membership and commitment appropriate to differing types of institutional form.

The central passage in Troeltsch (1931:331-43) yields the following characterization.

Church membership comes about by ritual incorporation and subsequent socialization into the cultural system of an antecedently existing religious organization. That is, the Church is anterior to personal faith. It guards and administers an array of institutional means to objective right standing in the religion and personal participation in its benefits. These things are available in principle to everyone without regard to qualifications of character. As a result, church membership conceives faith as part and parcel of membership in the wider

society, and does not sense a strong tension with it. It allows special levels of commitment and seriousness to be reserved for certain minority groups within the organization.

Sect membership depends upon voluntary commitment by previously and personally qualified individuals. That is, personal faith precedes the concept of the church: there is no antecedent organization. Sectarian membership entails the development of ritual forms solely as a reminder to the members of their special standing and qualifications, which sharply distinguish them from the world at large. All members are expected to aim at equal levels of commitment, through religious discipline and asceticism of personal secular life.

Troeltsch also noted the likelihood of the church, as being an integral part of the secular order, being supportive of the ruling classes, whereas the sect, with its stance of opposition to the world, would be associated more with the lower classes. However, it is clear that when we emphasise in the typology the criteria of different forms of religious membership and commitment, this class distinction need not be inevitable. In circumstances where the religious disposition in general is regarded with hostility by the official, central institutions of society, a "church" style of religious commitment can become a powerful organ of protest, in view of the massive institutional givenness it represents, over against that of the prevailing system.

Similarly, a sectarian type of membership can encourage a spiritual elitism which may prove highly attractive to ruling groups within a society, who can add the value of special religious qualifications to the other features which already set them apart from the mass of the people. The conditions of secularization are especially favourable to this development.

Bryan Wilson has detailed the hospitable nature of modern cultural circumstances to sectarian growth, and his proposed

typologies of religious sects include very much more than the basic stereotype of the sect as the expression of religious protest by the materially disprivileged.⁴ According to Wilson, sectarianism has now become universal in modern societies, and this is a point we shall pick up in the concluding portion of this chapter.

But we want to set the church-sect axis of variation alongside another, which resembles it in obvious respects but presents significant differences. The criteria here are no longer those of styles of membership in the religious collectivity, but of different religious orientations in themselves: that is, ways of being religious in the world.

ii. Communal and Associational Religiosity.

The typology of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* first proposed by Ferdinand Toennies (1955; orig.pub.1887) did not for a long time receive the attention it deserved within the sociology of religion. Toennies' typology was not of course worked out specifically in a religious context, but attempted to elucidate two fundamental modes of human societal coexistence.

Thus Toennies wrote: "All intimate, private and exclusive living together is understood as life in *Gemeinschaft*. *Gesellschaft* is public life- it is the world itself." To the former belong the family, marriage, language, folkways and beliefs, the common ownership of "fields, forest and pasture"; to the latter, business, commerce, the sciences, the ownership of "joint stock". Whereas it is possible to fall into bad *Gesellschaft*, bad *Gemeinschaft* would be a contradiction in terms.⁵

Gemeinschaft is about the holding together of human collectivities through affective values, intimacy of relations and mutual understanding. It implies common conventions and

unspoken agreements which govern the union of potentially disparate or conflicting parties. It rests upon certain shared ideals, purposes and meanings which underlie and go beyond purely immediate empirical ends and value persons for intrinsic reasons rather than the attributes of achievement or status.

Gesellschaft orders the social world by positions and offices; it does not distinguish between persons on affective grounds, but offers differential treatment on account of qualifications and standing. It expects clearly defined, explicit statement of objectives and rationales in all matters of co-operation between individuals or groups, but these are strictly limited in application to the projects in view, and have no claim upon the private values and personal preferences of the individuals involved.

With regard to religion, Toennies wrote:

One becomes part of a religious *Gemeinschaft*; religious *Gesellschaften*, like any other groups formed for given purposes, exist only in so far as they, viewed from without, take their places among the institutions of a political body or as they represent conceptual elements of a theory; they do not touch upon the religious *Gemeinschaft* as such (1955:37).

This suggests a distinction between two forms of religiousness: in the one, there is a more or less unreflective or spontaneous sharing in a culture that is given- "one becomes part of" it. In the other, there is a deliberate entering upon a group programme with a definite aim in view, an attempt to put into practice "conceptual elements of a theory". The sociology of religion has shown a renewed interest in Toennies' typology in trying to explore further these different modes of religious orientation.

Having previously criticised the increasing subdivision of the church-sect typology, E.Goode (1968) went on to suggest that attention to "communal" and "associational" patterns of

religiosity might offer a greater purchase upon the social realities. Goode observed, for example, that contrary to the idea that sectarian religion is less ritualistic and therefore less apt to stress the requirements of formal participation in religious rites than church-type religion, most non-practising people who professed any religious belief at all tended to profess adherence to church-type rather than sectarian religious bodies. Again, whereas sectarian religion was supposed to appeal to lower-class groups in society, working-class people tended to show a high valuation of the ritual-formal elements of religion more characteristic of churches.

In order to explain these and other discrepancies, Goode argued that it was necessary to distinguish between formal religious participation and the salience of religious conventions and ways of thinking within the whole culture of a person or group. There were, he suggested, at least two distinct styles of religious involvement. One was oriented more towards what was strongly felt, shared and communally expressed within the culture of a group, while the other was more concerned with segmented organizational participation, but did not necessarily carry any strong emotional investment.

Goode added that this suggests that religion in a modern society is unlikely to function in a Durkheimian way, for official ritual participation may have little to do with any awesome or transcendent intimation of the sacred, while many who possess a sense of the significance of religion lack the corporate involvement in it to unify them into a "moral community" around it.

Goode's analysis took up and developed some of the points made earlier by Lenski (1961), who had employed the notions of communal and associational religiosity as analytical distinctions in assessing the influence of religion upon people's attitudes in other areas of institutional life. Lenski

stressed that every religion produces its own communal sub-culture, which has a membership and scope of influence far wider than the numbers of those who actually practise the religion.

Communal religiosity, which becomes inextricably bound up with an embracing culture, fosters a resilient but parochial view of life. It keeps conservative traditions going, and exercises a profound, implicit and unreflective socio-cultural influence simply by those who hold to it being who they are—it is what they are socialized into. This influence may be at work in contrary directions to policies being pursued explicitly by the **churches** in **their** attempt to influence the secular society (cf. Martin, 1966(b); Fichter, 1954).

Such policies generally carry assumptions about the normative status of associational religiosity. That is, they envisage small groups of persons who regard one another as (in this case) "Christians" in a way they clearly do not consider others to be. Associational religiosity regards a high-profile religious practice, and the pursuit of distinctively religious activities, especially in leisure-time (Pickering, 1968), as the essence of religious commitment. When secular-social action is undertaken through the medium of associational religiosity, it has to be seen to be undertaken by the Church or other religious group as a matter of policy.

As a pattern for the institutional canalizing of the energies of faith, communal religiosity risks the dissipation of faith into conformity with the surrounding culture. Associational religiosity, on the other hand, risks the sterilization of faith through over-protection from "environmental pollution".

Communal religiosity can be held in bondage to the past, but associational religiosity can be rootless, dependent on the

dispositions of the changing group of individuals who choose to adhere to it.

The former often fails to support a critical faith because it is too closely tied to the pre-reflective task of legitimating and stabilizing the community's world-view. But the latter also fails frequently, because it is purely idealistic, and appeals to religious theory as though the solution of social problems were merely a matter of its application.

iii. Typological Conclusions.

It is clear that the church type of religious organization bears a special affinity to the communal type of religiosity, and the sect type to the associational. But the categories are not the same. In dealing with church and sect, we have emphasised the criteria and styles of membership within the religious collectivity. In the case of communal and associational, the stress lies upon the modes of religious functioning and orientation within the agent's social life as a whole.⁶⁵

We have already said that modern conditions encourage the passage from church to sect-type religious organizations. Similarly, contemporary religiosity is more likely to be associational where it is readily identifiable. However, the picture is less simple than that, in two respects. Firstly, the contemporary churches are very keen on the concept of "community", implying a half-formed recognition that something has been lost when the associational mode becomes entirely dominant.

Secondly, traditional working-class environments still persist in some places where an older style of communal order continues to carry with its cultural apparatus a set of religious ideas and conventions, even if fragmented, declining and subject to confusion. But the churches are most alienated

from the cultural milieu where vestiges of the "community" they seek are most likely to be found (Gilbert, 1980:91).

Further possibilities emerge if the two typologies are put together to produce four possible types of overall institutional religious orientation". The two "dominant" types are familiar enough from all that has gone before. They involve, of course, a communal religiosity in a church-type frame, and an associational one in a sect-type. What we might call the two resulting "recessive" types deserve further mention.

The first would combine a sectarian frame with a communal type of religiosity. This possibility is of particular relevance under the conditions of secularization, which are resulting in smaller, marginalized practising congregations. The way for such sociologically sectarian groups to capitalize on marginality could be to take responsibility for the community in which they are set and its cultural life; that is, to refuse to limit their religious specialism to the clearly demarcated associational sphere.

The other possible type would involve bringing together a church type of membership with an associational religiosity. In this case, the relevant index of secularization is the process of cultural fragmentation and privatization. For whereas this is reflected in a move of religious life toward the associational end of the spectrum, a counterbalance to ineffective idealism could be afforded by the heightening of the religious institution's church-type features- its givenness, its traditions, its availability to all-comers.

These are suggestions which will be taken up in more detail in our discussions of the actual proposals of Christian Radicalism about the practical life of the churches. But in sum, the cultural tradition which channels faith has always to be affirmed, in order to give the movements of religious life a

secure foundation with lasting value; and it has always to be denied, in order to make room for what surpasses it. Faith has to be bound up with culture in order to be a living organism at all; but it has to retain the leverage to stand aside and challenge it.

This brings to a close the setting out of the sociological instruments which are to provide the critical stimulus to the discussion of the theological themes of Christian Radicalism which follow in Part Three of the thesis.

We have presented, firstly, a view of religion itself as a cultural system expressing an orientation to transcendence as its core content. Such an orientation, by constructing an other world or sacred order conceived as perfected and normative, serves both to grant meaning and stability to the experienced social world of the religious group, and to criticise it by summoning it to become a more fulfilled realization of the ideal. The transcendent idea is carried in the images and symbols, rites and stories, ethical codes and organizational forms which are the outward and visible constituents of the religious cultural system.

Secondly, we have traced the processes of secularization which render the maintenance of the transcendent orientation problematic under contemporary cultural conditions. Classes of secularization process can be analysed into the socio-structural and the cultural. With the former, institutional differentiation and religious disengagement leave the churches as marginalized, increasingly specialized religious institutions. With the latter, desacralization reduces the overall culturally unifying role of religion, but privatization and pluralism are leading to a fragmentation of culture in which religion too is caught up, as religious options for the self are divorced from the "real world".

Finally, we have shown how the question of recovering the vitality of faith in such circumstances has to come to terms with the inevitable constraints of institutionalization. In that context we have presented two typologies: that of church and sect points to two distinctive styles of cultural expression of faith by membership within a religious collectivity, and that of communal and associational religiosity indicates two modes of exercising faith within the world. The juxtaposition of these models suggests ways of maintaining the transcendent dialectic of religion under present conditions.

These concepts will now equip us for the task of analysing and criticising the attempts of Christian Radicalism to discover a viable way of presenting the Gospel and embodying it in the life of the Church under the conditions of modernity as the theologians of the sixties perceived them.

NOTES.

1. For a discussion in general sociological terms of the different types of organization deriving from Weber's categories of authority, see A.L. Stinchcombe, "Formal Organizations", in ed. N. Smelser, Sociology, 1967:169-72. According to A. Etzioni (Modern Organizations, 1964:58-61), churches figure towards the "normative power" end of a continuum of types of means of control exercised by organizations over their members. That is, power rests upon the prestige and esteem engendered by the authority. This is closest to Weber's "traditional authority". Etzioni argues that normative power tends to produce commitment in those exposed to it (by contrast, for example, with "coercive power", based on physical sanctions, which produces alienation).

2. Thus Niebuhr (1929) added the denomination, deriving it from the sect at the point of its becoming socially established and no longer representative of the deprived, while Martin (1962) argued for the presence of the denomination as an independent third type. Becker (Systematic Sociology, 1932) added the "ecclesia" in order to distinguish a former "church" under conditions where no organization any longer made universal claims for itself. Yinger (1957) added the "established sect" in recognition of the fact that not all sects turn into denominations with time. Yinger also introduced the "cult" to cover Troeltsch's third category of "mysticism", which he saw as particularly appropriate to the privatized religion of the modern age (and see Pfautz, 1955).

3. Troeltsch clearly favoured the sect as a more authentic expression of the primitive Gospel: "There can... be no doubt about the actual fact; the sects, with their greater independence of the world, and their continual emphasis upon the original ideals of Christianity, often represent in a very direct and characteristic way the essential fundamental ideas of Christianity" (Troeltsch, 1931:335).

4. Wilson's empirically-based work on sects is in Sects and Society, 1961, Patterns of Sectarianism, 1967, and Religious Sects, 1971. The most recent general discussion is in Religion in Sociological Perspective, chs. 4 & 5, Religion in Secular Society, chs. 11 & 12, and Contemporary Transformations of Religion discuss sect development in relation to secularization. On this see also Gilbert, The Making of post-Christian Britain. Glock and Stark (1965) contains their essay on the relationship between the emergence of different types of religious organization and varying kinds of deprivations: i.e. it is not simple a matter of an affinity between sects and material disadvantage.

5. Toennies' analysis becomes clearer when it is recalled that *Gesellschaft* in German means not only "society" but also "business", "a company". Sociologists have proposed many other criteria for "community" than that of closeness and affectivity of the relations of social coexistence, e.g. MacIver and Page, Society: an Introductory

Analysis, 1961:8, "The mark of a community is that one's life may be lived wholly within it", a definition which actually excludes churches from being communities. They said, "The bases of community are locality and community sentiment." By contrast Weber, Explorations into Urban Structure, 1964:109, wrote: "Communities comprise people with common interests who communicate with each other", excluding the territorial criterion altogether.

6. The communal-associational typology is one of a number of related binary models of societal relations and involvements proposed in sociology. One of the earliest was Durkheim's concept of "mechanical" and "organic" solidarity; in the former type, the given order is simply accepted as "how things are", whereas in the second, the social world is treated as a living and developing entity towards the maintenance of which men may make individual, voluntary contributions. Mary Douglas (1974) employed the terms "grid" and "group": the former refers to the salience of position rather than boundaries in the society's "cosmology" or construction of the world, while the latter points to the importance of defining "us" by not being "them". The latter type, she argues, favours highly ritualistic, sacramental forms of religious observance over against the explicitly articulated, discrete propositional meanings characteristic of the former. Cf. further Turner (1970) on *communitas* and structure; Mol (1976) on identity and adaptation; and Reed (1978:69, 157-61) for an extensive summary and synthesis describing the features of "communal and associational churches". Turner (1983) makes use of Weber's distinction of mass and virtuoso religion as an expression of religion's twofold operation in the service of traditional continuities on the one hand and élite ideologies on the other.

7. Towler (1974; chs.6 & 7) advances a complicated typology of religious orientations which breaks down the church-sect distinction into the criteria of other-worldly or this-worldly, and individualist or collectivist orientations, to produce four types which he compares with Bryan Wilson's typology of four types of sect. He then asks about the relation of each type to Glock and Stark's five "dimensions" of religiosity, in order to produce a schema for plotting the direction of secularization processes as they affect institutional religion. James Beckford has also been working recently on the refinement of models of religious orientation as a more fruitful approach than that afforded by the old church-sect typology of organizations. We have had to offer a very much simplified typological model in order to keep the lines being pursued in the thesis sufficiently clear.

PART THREE: EXCURSIONS IN THE THEOLOGY OF
CHRISTIAN RADICALISM.

CHAPTER VII: *SITZ IM LEBEN*: EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF THE
CHURCH, 1960-69.

1. Introduction and Prospect.

Now that we have fully presented the sociological concepts which are to inform and stimulate our theological critique of Christian Radicalism, we are in a position to return in much more detail to the content of the movement as a recent historical episode in the life of the churches, as we introduced it in Chapter I. This chapter aims to provide a concrete setting in life for the theological discussions which follow, and to show how the issues to be discussed arise out of that setting. This is a necessary task in view of our model of theological activity as critical reflection arising at the interface between the religious tradition and the world. We want to illustrate how a whole series of debates, controversies and events in the church life of the sixties repeatedly threw up certain key questions, often implicitly, which cast fresh light on the issues the theologians involved were considering more explicitly.

We are concentrating most closely, although not exclusively, on the English church situation. In the period under review, much of the most instructive material is to be found in the ephemera of passing controversies and public debates, rather than in theological treatises. We shall have recourse to the religious press, television and radio broadcasts and pulpit pronouncements, together with popular paperbacks and conference reports, for much of the documentation in this chapter. Christian Radicalism comprises a series of experiments, fashions and moods rather than a single co-ordinated movement, but it is hoped that a presentation of



some of the more prominent theological and ecclesiastical "events" of the time will show a recognisable pattern of questions emerging.

We have divided the material into three parts. The first documents the flowing together of a number of streams into the phenomenon of Christian Radicalism early in the sixties. The second concentrates on the debate about Honest to God and its immediate sequel. The third highlights a number of important contributions to the mood of radical reform in the churches in the course of the decade. Each section will present the documentation of relevant debates and events first, and we shall conclude with a drawing together of the theoretical issues arising out of them.

2. Landmarks on the Way to Christian Radicalism.

i. Theological Stirrings.

In 1962 a group of Cambridge theologians under the editorship of Alec Vidler published a volume of essays entitled Soundings. This in itself was nothing unusual: in fact, Vidler explicitly acknowledged that the book stood in a distinguished line of similar collections by earlier Anglican divines'. But Soundings was noteworthy for its chastened and tentative tone. Vidler wrote in the Introduction:

The authors of this volume cannot persuade themselves that the time is ripe for major works of theological construction or reconstruction. It is a time for ploughing, not reaping...our task is to try to see what the questions are that we ought to be facing in the nineteen-sixties.

Looking back on the publication of the volume, Vidler later affirmed:

We took the view that there was a great deal of fresh exploratory work to be done in the region of fundamentals and that it would be misleading to disguise the fact that we had no new theological construction to propose (Vidler, 1965:104).

The essayists certainly did address themselves to "fundamentals". But this tone was, in the circumstances of the time, quite surprising. The mood of the post-war Church of England under Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher seemed optimistic: "the Church is in good heart", he had said on his retirement. The success of the Parish Communion movement was changing the face of Sunday worship in the direction of more lay and family involvement. Congregations appeared to be holding up in size. The recovery of the nation from war and the inter-war years of depression was proceeding encouragingly. The Church was hopeful of being able to combine a welcome for social and scientific progress with a timely warning against moral decline, and so keep modernity Christian.

But in the pages of Soundings, one could discern fears that the Church would be riding for a fall if its intellectual base proved inadequate to cope with the encroachments of modern cultural patterns upon the would-be believer. Howard Root wrote of a "post-religious temper" in the world, and the need for intellectual integrity and a "preachable Gospel" in the Church. H.A. Williams suspected the Church of promoting a fundamental dishonesty in its religious life, and concealing from religious people the truth about both themselves and the world. John Habgood thought that the "truce" between religion and science was premature and insufficiently grounded. More broadly, in England at least, theological thinking had never come to terms at all profoundly with the issues thrust upon Continental theology by Barth, Bultmann and their respective successors.

Vidler himself, in his contribution on "Religion and the National Church", drew upon Bonhoeffer's prison letters in outlining a form of secular faith which he believed a national church might exist to promote. He had already begun to explore these ideas in a paper given to the Church Union Summer School of Sociology (i.e. "Christian Sociology", see *supra*:32-4) at

Oxford in 1956, entitled "Holy Worldliness" (Vidler, 1957). These explorations reflected a fear that neither contemporary theology nor the churches were taking with full seriousness the impact which modern cultural conditions were having upon the institutions of religion.

The essayists were not alone in their fears. In 1956 the Scottish theologian Ronald Gregor Smith had published perhaps the first piece of "secular theology" to appear in England, The New Man. It was explicitly inspired at various points by Tillich, Bultmann and Bonhoeffer, all three of whom were to appear later as the theological sources for the Bishop of Woolwich in Honest to God. In particular, Smith showed at this early stage a deep concern for how people might live as Christians under modern cultural conditions. He called for a "this-worldly transcendence" as the authentic form of the life of faith for contemporary man. He abhorred the idea of a Church "standing over the world with a whip" (1956:68f.) to browbeat people into a religious package, to be accepted with take-it-or-leave-it finality. But in 1956 there was as yet little hearing for such ideas.

Another radical thinker in advance of the event was E.R. Wickham, whom we encountered previously (*supra*:37-8) in connection with "religious sociology". Wickham, through his work with the Sheffield Industrial Mission, was under no illusions about the real state of much contemporary church life. The closing sections of his Church and People in an Industrial City (1957) made use of Tillich's ideas about a "theonomous" culture. Wickham observed that the Church's long history of failure in the industrialised urban areas involved a fundamental misconception. A Church could not successfully infuse a Christian character into culture- i.e. **produce** theonomy while at the same time sacralizing a particular social order- i.e. **assuming** that some kind of theonomy already existed.

One more small book which took up the ideas of Bonhoeffer was Daniel Jenkins' Beyond Religion (1962). Jenkins made plain the link between the purely theological implications of Bonhoeffer's speculations and the question of the kind of body the Church is to be, as a concrete social presence, within a secular civilization. He acknowledged, at the start of the book, that "religionless Christianity" was "in danger of becoming a catch-phrase". This remark, coupled with the fact that his book appeared in the semi-popular "Religious Book Club" series put out by the SCM Press, bore witness to a gradual spilling over of these theological issues into a wider public.

ii. Agitation for Church Reform.

The second factor in the emergence of Christian Radicalism before Honest to God was an upsurge of criticism of the institutional Church. A strong reforming tradition had been in evidence for some time among a number of younger clergy, many of whom had emerged from the post-war renewal of religious life at Oxford. Most of them belonged to the moderately Catholic tradition in the Church of England, and had been influenced by the liturgical movement, behind which lay the scholarly work of Gregory Dix and Gabriel Hebert. Their interests were represented by the *Parish and People* movement, which was led in the sixties by such figures as Trevor Beeson and Eric James. Several of the young Catholic reformers became curates or incumbents under the episcopacy of Mervyn Stockwood at Southwark in the early sixties.

The work of these reforming clergy was characterized by a frustration with the ecclesiastical machinery which they had inherited, and a desire to see more flexible structures designed to enable the Church to engage with a changing world. They did not, in the early stages, lean towards any kind of "secular theology". Rather, they interpreted the Gospel in terms of a fundamental opposition to the world, and wanted to see a more committed, more clearly delineated, if numerically smaller

Church. They tended to be impatient with folk-religion and nominal attachment, preferring to think in terms of a corporately committed Church existing for the world, in order to transform it².

The Anglican monthly journal *Prism* was at its foundation in 1957 very much the organ of the Catholic "ginger-group" among the younger clergy. David Edwards wrote of it, "To contribute to *Prism*...is to be typecast as an angry young man, although you may be a nun discussing the atonement" (Edwards and Robinson, 1963:21-2). *Prism* even discovered and encouraged its own *enfants terribles*, such as Roger Tennant, a former missionary priest in Korea whose trenchant style became a byword among "Prismatics", as the monthly's regular readers and contributors came to be known.

Prism gathered up and expressed very crisply the mood of exasperated affection, commitment and impatience toward the Church which appeared, with varying emphases, in such books as the collection Essays in Anglican Self-Criticism (1958), David Edwards' Not Angels but Anglicans (1958), Nick Earle's What's Wrong with the Church? (1961) and Eric James' Odd Man Out (1962). As time went by it lost its Catholic theological and ecclesiological bias and became more and more involved in the promotion of the emerging radicalism, publishing for example a good deal of new material by such lay theologians as James Mark and John Wren-Lewis. Its irreverent and iconoclastic style made it into a popular ecclesiastical equivalent to the television "satire" boom of the early sixties.

But the clientele of *Prism* remained very much a minority within the Church at large. The journalist Paul Ferris, whose The Church of England was a cool and timely analysis by an avowed outsider, described the more widespread popular image of the radicals, as their reputation mounted, in these terms:

There are convenient categories in which to put clergymen with uncomfortable ideas...They can be written off as academics; not for them the hurly-burly of a tough parish in Bradford or Bristol, but cool cloisters and dangerous books by foreign theologians, from which they raise their heads only to appear on television- egged on by producers to compete with Evensong by broadcasting ruderies about the Church. Or they can be scooped up in a phrase- 'the Cambridge school of theologians', or, better still, 'South Bank Religion' (Ferris, 1964:9).

Ferris' remarks here refer to the increasing media attention being paid to the bearers of radical ideas and criticisms of the Church. Before looking more closely at this "media factor", we must add a further strand to the developing pattern of radicalism.

iii. The New Morality.

The one area in which, it was confidently assumed, the Church could continue to claim a special competence to give instruction and lay down principles with authority, was that of morality. Throughout the period of Christian Radicalism, reactions to clerical pronouncements on moral issues formed a kind of running commentary on the wider progress and reception of what the radicals were attempting to do. Some examples of this will follow.

Much attention was directed to the contributions of H.A.Williams to both Soundings and the 1963 Cambridge lecture series Objections to Christian Belief. In each of these pieces Williams argued that the traditional way of Christian morality as apparently taught and required by the Church was repressive and not conducive to true moral growth. He was prepared to urge that, contrary to the traditional teachings, such things as extra-marital sexual activity could have redemptive consequences, by contributing to personal wholeness in love. Williams said as much on television in October 1961, and triggered off a barrage of angry correspondence as a result.

Still earlier than this, John Robinson had become something of a *cause célèbre* by giving evidence in favour of the publication of Lady Chatterley's Lover at the obscenity trial of October 1960. His remark that "what Lawrence is trying to do is to portray the sex relationship as something essentially sacred...as in a real sense an act of holy communion" was a piece of "secular theology" far beyond what most of those who heard of it could take. Several correspondents in the Press at the time attributed the Profumo scandal at least in part to the morally deleterious effects of "Woolwich theology".

The 1962 Reith Lectures by G.M.Carstairs, in which the assumption that chastity is a virtue necessary for social cohesion was questioned, and the widely-disseminated report Toward a Quaker View of Sex, were regarded by many as equally damaging. Pulpit pronouncements served to reinforce the impression that the clergy were deserting their role as the guardians of public morals in favour of dangerously liberal modern ideas. Robinson, for example, preached an impassioned sermon against the death penalty, in Canterbury Cathedral of all places, while Canon Douglas Rhymes of Southwark Cathedral used the pulpit there to deliver a denunciation of Christian prejudice against homosexuals.

The traditional views which reacted to all this with widespread dismay can easily be documented from other issues. In June 1963, for example, the editor of the evangelical journal *The Churchman* wrote of the "sex-obsessed elucubrations" (*sic*) and "poisonous swill" of books like Lady Chatterley's Lover, with which people could "stuff their lower natures". He went on to deplore the introduction into schools of "godless" text-books, containing contributions by the likes of Julian Huxley; and he noted ominously that the Bishop of Woolwich was known to have spoken approvingly of the latter.

In a different context, Monica Furlong records the occasion on which the entire membership of a Derbyshire Methodist Circuit petitioned the BBC against the highly successful satirical review, *That Was The Week That Was*. Intrigued by the unanimity of the move, Furlong asked: "Have...all 900 of them...ever protested *en masse* before? About the H-Bomb perhaps, or about apartheid, or about hanging? So far as anyone knows, no" (Furlong, 1965:24-5).

Clearly, a wide gulf of incomprehension was opening up; and growing media attention was doing much to bring the gulf to light, but little towards bridging it.

iv. The Media Factor.

The emergence of all the constituents of the radical mood introduced so far was greatly furthered by the coverage of the media. During the early sixties, controversies concerning the churches, and indeed theology itself, were increasingly coming into the public domain. Theological cats were more frequently being let out of their safe academic bags into the floodlight glare of Press and television. Some of the broadcast statements about which complaints were received can be set down here in order to illustrate the prevalent mood.

Speaking on the radio in April 1960, H.A. Williams ventured the view that faith does not mean "believing what you know isn't true". In the case of faith in the Resurrection, for example, he said that it meant "having such confidence in this personal God that you can't believe that death is the end". Of the risen Jesus, Williams said: "The force of his presence upon his disciples was so terrific that they did in fact project it into a vision of himself." The fact that these ideas are commonplace in theological circles has to be juxtaposed with the whole array of assumptions underlying the hostility with which they were received outside those circles.

That Williams got himself into trouble was perhaps not surprising. For well before the appearance of Honest to God he had told Paul Ferris, almost as a casual aside, that "everyone would agree" that it was now quite orthodox to refer to God as "the ground of all being" (Ferris, op.cit:264-7). But even the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, incurred criticism for saying in the *Daily Mail* that he "expected to meet some present day atheists in heaven". The editorial in the *Church Times*, in response, argued that if this were so, it would remove from many faithful priests the motive for evangelization and invalidate their labours.

The decision of the Cambridge Divinity Faculty to entitle its open lectures series for 1963 Objections to Christian Belief was calculated to attract attention. There was, again, a widespread astonishment that four theologians should agree to speak in public, ostensibly at least, about what counted **against** the faith they were employed to expound and teach. But this safely academic venture was a modest exercise in "vulgarization" compared with other "media events" entered into by the churches during the same period.

These included, for example, various attempts to get in touch with young people through the medium of pop culture. At Salisbury Cathedral a "Pop Evensong" was held, which produced the response from one critic: "It does not speak very highly for the standard of preaching nowadays if the only method of drawing people to Church is to pander to their worst instincts" (*Church Times*, 6.4.62). John Robinson went on ITV's youthful religious magazine *Sunday Break* to be quizzed by a group of critical teenagers; and the Archbishop of York, Donald Coggan, discussed God, sex and the younger generation with pop singer Adam Faith on the BBC (Coggan said, "Religion is so jolly relevant to this life"). Elsewhere, even the agnostic journalist and author of cult novel Absolute Beginners, Colin MacInnes, found himself in the unlikely position of writing

about the Church and presenting his tentative religious views on television (MacInnes, 1963).

The event we have chosen to illustrate the media factor in greater depth is an edition of BBC Television's serious religious discussion programme, *Meeting Point*, which went out on November 4th, 1962. The programme featured Alec Vidler in conversation with Paul Ferris, but it was Vidler rather than the self-confessed outsider who caused controversy by failing to assume the role of the Church's **defender**. Amongst Vidler's remarks were the opinion that the Church ought not to concentrate so much on "religion", that open discussion ought to replace the sermon, and that he was "bored with parsons" and thought the "clerical caste" ought to be abolished. He also maintained that "there's been so much suppression of real, deep thought and intellect, alertness and integrity in the Church."

The *Church Times* reported on the programme under the headline, "Cambridge Priest's Attack on Church"³. In response, a woman wrote to the paper thus:

Those of us who are struggling to teach the young and uphold our Churchmanship in a materialist world are not helped when her ordained ministers themselves deny all that we have received and learnt to hold most dear,

Monica Furlong observed that this correspondent

...clearly has an heroic fantasy of herself battling against the wicked world with a kind of Lady Bountiful sweetness. But is life like this? Is trying to be a Christian like this? (Furlong, 1965:29).

There were calls for the Archbishops to set up an enquiry into the content of religious broadcasting, an issue which in fact continued to cause spasmodic concern for several years.

But another *Church Times* correspondent saw it differently:

I would have thought them [the Archbishops] better occupied in finding out why so many of us stay at home on Sunday evening to watch *Meeting Point*. Here at least we

are saved from quaint hymns and endless sermons preached from 'six feet above public opinion' and with an assurance which many lay folk suspect (J.Richards, 16.11.62).

The *Church Times* left the last word to the Bishop of Woolwich, who wrote on December 7th to say that, far from these radical ideas being the product of a common-room, ivory tower mentality, it was only since he had ceased to be a Cambridge don and had come face to face with the acute problems confronting Christian faith in the inner city that he had come to appreciate such thinking. He had, he said, written a book out of his experience, which was shortly forthcoming.

v. Issues.

We have singled out some theological stirrings, agitations for Church reform, moral pronouncements and heightened media attention to religious controversy as factors of a radical mood, in the emergence of which the publication of Honest to God came as something as a watershed. The theological issues latent in these early movements can be summarized at this point.

Firstly, there was uncertainty about the continuing value of religion, as conventionally understood, as a vehicle for conveying the reality of God to contemporary men and women. Religious worship, in particular, appeared to be highly problematic. It was what the Church, to all intents and purposes, specialised in; yet it seemed a useless and irrelevant specialism. To put it at its briefest, "what goes on inside churches" was being called into question.

Secondly, there was a sense that the relationship of the Church to the modern world would have to come under review. It had been a case of the Church combining a judicious welcome of some aspects of progress with a habit of deploring others, notably in the moral sphere. But now the issue was becoming sharper. If the vitality of faith was to be preserved at all,

the pressures were towards a more far-reaching adaptation to the modern world on the one hand, or a more vehement confrontation of it on the other. A polarization was beginning to appear between the parties recommending one or the other of these alternatives.

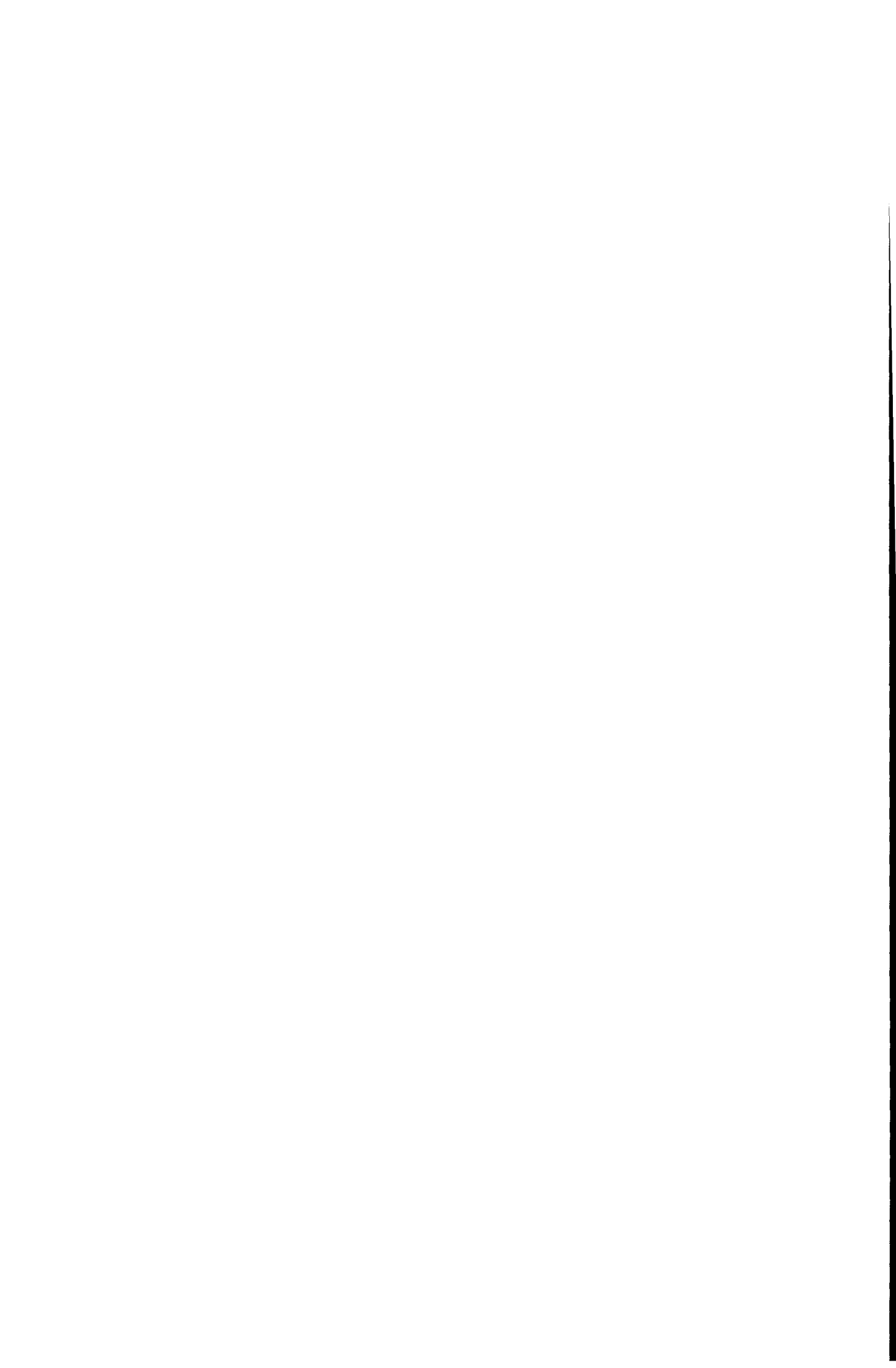
Thirdly, questions were being raised about the authoritative status of the Church's dogmatic and moral teachings. It was being asked whether faithful Church membership was compatible with a spirit of critical, open enquiry towards these things. The gradual appearance of a gulf between certain purveyors of radical thinking and the religious public was forcing the issue: how, if at all, was theological questioning compatible with "simple faith"?

Attention to all of these issues was being made more urgent by the factor of media coverage. However, one event served above all others to sharpen them all: and that, of course, was the publication of Honest to God in 1963.

3. The Honest to God Debate.

The debate about Honest to God has been extensively documented and discussed, some would say to the point of overkill. We do not wish simply to reproduce the familiar accounts here, but to isolate several related strands in the high-profile public controversy, in order to indicate the underlying theological questions they imply.⁴

It is noteworthy, as a preliminary point, that the two sections of the book which attracted most attention at the time were the opening chapters about changing the "image" of God from either "up there" or "out there" to a depth model, and the later one on the "new morality". Both of these had been preceded by media treatment: the former in Robinson's *Observer* article of March 17th 1963, entitled "Our Image of God Must



Go", and the latter through the Bishop's earlier involvement in the "Lady Chatterley" trial. And both God and morality are matters with which, in the popular estimation, religion and, *a fortiori*, bishops, ought most fervently to be defending.

We shall examine the debate under the headings of three of the accusations most commonly levelled at Robinson during its course.

i. "A Bishop shouldn't have written it".

A sympathetic reviewer of the book, C.L.Mitton in the *Expository Times*, wrote that it was "fundamentally not an essay in unorthodox theology, but a venture in evangelism". Robinson was prepared to accept this: he said that he was "trying to help those who are on the fringe of the faith or quite outside it. This concern determines almost every line of what I wrote". The propriety of this aim, and of a bishop seeking to fulfil it in the way Robinson did, was differently evaluated in the two main organs of the Church Press.

The editorial of the *Church of England Newspaper* pointed out that a reading of the book "should be accompanied by a recollection of the conspicuous failure of the Church of England as a whole to make Christianity meaningful to this generation".

The *Church Times*, however, declared roundly: "It is not every day that a bishop goes on public record as apparently denying almost every Christian doctrine of the Church in which he holds office".

Robinson, as we noted in Chapter I, chose to regard himself as a "radical", which for him meant a committed **insider**, dedicated to getting at the roots of what Gospel and Church are about and to fostering fresh growth from those roots in the present time. He believed that the idea of a "missionary bishop" was fully compatible with such a task

(Edwards and Robinson, 1963:240-1). Others disagreed, but for diametrically opposed reasons.

Firstly, there were the critics who simply rejected the idea that a bishop should undertake this kind of exercise at all. Even the Archbishop of Canterbury expressed regret publicly before the Convocation of Canterbury on May 6th, 1963, that the bishop should have become so embroiled with the media in putting forward what inevitably looked like a damaging thesis.

Less guardedly, an angry correspondent in the *Church Times* found it intolerable that a "junior bishop" should have written a "cheap paperback" of this sort.

But others doubted whether it was **possible** for Robinson to accomplish the task he had set himself, simply because he **was** a bishop, and hence identified with the religious establishment. This was the view of Methodist John J. Vincent (1965:84ff.), who saw little likelihood of the Church of England, let alone one of its bishops, turning into an agent of what he termed "radical discipleship".

Similarly, in a radio broadcast in which Robinson and his wife Ruth took part in December 1963 with Werner and Lotte Pelz, Mrs. Pelz expressed anxiety lest people who were otherwise attracted by what Robinson was saying were put off by his appearing to be safeguarding himself within the Church.⁵

The first group of critics, in our judgment, did not merely expect conservative conformity from their Church leaders. They testified to certain assumptions about the institutions of religion and the dispositions and demeanour proper to a bishop as the religious personality *par excellence*. They feared a sell-out to secularity, which would erode the particular dignity and mystery attaching to a bishop, a quality of detachment and difference which symbolized the over-againstness of religion towards ordinary life. Ultimately, the

proper modality of the presence of God amid human affairs was felt to be at stake. What Robinson did, in his courting of the popular media, and what he wrote, in terms of a "non-religious" style of faith, hung together perfectly, and damagingly, in the perception of these critics.

The other group, not surprisingly in view of this, were those who were personally much more committed to "religionlessness". They suspected that a bishop could not but be "religious", and felt that Robinson's keenness to remain a critical insider gave the game away. This was very much the attitude of the participants in the American "death of God" debate, who were much less sanguine about the possibility of radical theology being done within the existing Church or religious framework (Miller, 1967; W.Hamilton, 1968(b); Horder, 1968:142ff; Ogletree, 1966: ch.1).

The existence in America, as against Britain, of a superficially thriving church life with fast-growing congregations, no doubt contributed to the sense that the serious theologian must disassociate himself from all that. For the American churches displayed a kind of secularized religion which was not at all the same thing as the secular form of faith for which the theologian was striving. In England, by contrast, the most committed insider could regard himself as somewhat "eccentric" within the spread of cultural life as a whole.

The argument about whether or not it was appropriate, or even possible, for a bishop to be a radical as Robinson understood it, raises therefore in our view a set of questions about the nature and social role of religion and religious institutions, related to the theological understanding of how God is present and may be known in human experience of the world.

ii. "It gives in to secularism".

A second area of contention over Honest to God was whether the Bishop was correct in his diagnosis of the situation, i.e. that "secularization" was rendering traditional forms of Gospel presentation and church life unintelligible and irrelevant; and, correspondingly, whether his proposed remedy of a fairly modest adaptation to the circumstances was well-advised.

A random glance at a single letters page of the *Church Times* at the height of the controversy (April 11th, 1963) indicates the issues. One lady wrote to say that if the coming-of-age of the world meant that such theologians as Augustine and Aquinas, Hooker, Lightfoot, Gore and Temple no longer had anything to say, then she would prefer to remain a "child".

On the same lines, another correspondent suggested that it was impertinent to treat the great galaxy of past divines as no more than "rather brilliant teenagers" by comparison with modern man.

A third produced a list of twentieth-century pastors and apologists who, it was argued, had all succeeded in getting through to "the common people" without revising the Gospel in order to do so.

One vicar attacked Robinson's methods: "Addressing agnostics with agnosticism will never convert them". Another accused the bishop of "capitulating to the modern outlook of today"; he wrote:

It needs far more intelligence and courage these days to stick to the Faith than to shout with the crowd and to echo the platitudes of the ignorant and the irreligious.

We may term the issue here the choice between a stance of adaptation or of confrontation towards the processes of modernity. The most vitriolic critics of Robinson were those who favoured only the latter and saw him as having gone overboard for the former.

An illustration of the issue in less polarized form occurred in a radio broadcast, in the same series as the one featuring the Robinsons and the Pelzes referred to earlier⁶. In it Max Warren and James Packer, both orthodox churchmen but on the broader and much more conservative wings of evangelicalism respectively, engaged in a discussion of "recent controversial books". Packer was prepared to agree with Robinson's intentions insofar as the Church "cut very little ice in the modern world". Little of what he called "pulpit talk" had much "cash value" today, but nonetheless Robinson had "thrown out the baby with the bath-water".

Warren's response to this was to say that Robinson was trying to build a bridge across a "void of incomprehension". He pointed out that men are not wholly responsible for what they can and cannot readily respond to in terms of belief: there are social, cultural and historical factors which affect the manner in which the same Gospel **words** that are preached will be received. If we believe that this age no less than any other lies under the control of God, then we must accept that the ways in to faith through the particular perplexities and constraints of the age will differ from what we have come to regard as normal.

But Packer was not convinced. He felt that Robinson's "bridge" would not do if it attempted to put the message in **wholly** secular terms. The Gospel **must** show "secular man" that he is "out of step with God" before it can present to him the way of salvation. The fact that people fail to respond to this is not, and never has been, a function merely of cultural difficulties. The Church's first duty is patiently to tell the whole New Testament story: it is for God to "quicken hearts".

It is plain that a discussion of this sort will degenerate into a *dialogue de sourds* without some agreed and adequate approach to the whole question of secularization.

iii. "It's upsetting to simple believers".

The third area of criticism of Honest to God centres upon the alleged impropriety of unleashing radical theological ideas upon an unsuspecting religious public. In fact there are two sides to the issue: firstly, whether faith admits of a radically critical and questioning attitude towards its traditions at all, and secondly, even if it does, whether the simple faith of ordinary folk should be exposed to this. Bound up with all of this, of course, is the question of whether a **bishop**, of all people, should be the one to be doing the questioning, but we have already looked at this from a slightly different point of view.

Within a generally critical judgment upon Robinson, attitudes varied. One disillusioned clergyman wrote to *Prism* in June 1963 to complain that Honest to God had made matters worse for him. He already felt his ministry to be an irrelevance to an apathetic population, and now even some of his small congregation were being driven away. Others, however, saw Robinson as doing harm to an otherwise potentially thriving ministry.

Nicholas Mosley sparked off a debate in the pages of *Prism* by arguing in an article in June 1964 that the constant concern of the Church to avoid upsetting the "faithful few", which it rationalized theologically as "not offending the weaker brethren", was bogus. It merely served to surrender the sharp edge of the Gospel into the hands of a powerful, reactionary minority. But in the present situation, the Parable of the Lost Sheep had effectively been reversed- the ninety-and-nine had gone astray, and it was indefensible for the Church to devote all its energies to the protection of the one left safely in the fold.

Reactions were immediate and mixed. Giles Hunt, for example, maintained that there remained a distinction between

what could and ought to be said freely in a parish sermon and "in the Cambridge S.C.R."

On the other hand, Roger Tennant invoked the example of Jesus himself in support of readiness to give offence where necessary (*Prism*, August 1964).

A year later still, a clergyman who had been responsible for an early experiment in putting the liturgy into modern English, Guy Daniel, wrote bluntly of the need to expose the Church's "sacred cows". The average congregation, he said, betrayed a "terrible conservatism and sheer closed-mindedness". They needed to be introduced to the issues of radical theology and Biblical criticism, even if it meant emptying the pews to make way for a new, open and committed congregation (*Prism*, July 1965).

"The Church", Paul Ferris had remarked, "is full of people saying 'Sh-h-h!'" (Ferris, op.cit:262). There was, it seemed, an "ordinary, simple Christian" who was evidently living out a pure and uncomplicated faith very effectively, but would have this faith destroyed by exposure to critical ideas. Monica Furlong suspected that this Christian was a myth:

He had had his faith shattered by reading Dr. Robinson's article in *The Observer*, it seemed, (If he was that simple, though, one wonders that he read *The Observer* at all,) [He] had discovered that his Mum and Dad had not gone to heaven when they died, that heaven was not 'up there', that prayers were no good, that fornication was all right (Furlong, op.cit:30).

If the simple Christian **does** exist in this way, we have to ask how far it is in the interests of the religious establishment that he should continue to do so. The furore over the dangerous ideas made public by Robinson raises crucial questions about the nature of the operation of faith in its cultural context, and especially whether it can be effective in the world on a secure basis without ruling out openness to the new and keeping believers in an immature dependence on authority and tradition.

The issues we have tried to exhibit as they emerged from the Honest to God debate recur in a variety of ways throughout the episodes involved in the radicalism of the sixties. In the rest of this chapter, we pick out a number of items for particular study, each of which played a significant role in the radical constituency within the churches. Our four samples are taken in the pastoral experiments in the Diocese of Southwark, the Paul Report (The Deployment and Payment of the Clergy), the influence of the thinking of the World Council of Churches, and the contents of the journal *New Christian*.

4. *Contributions to a "New Reformation"*.

i. The Stacey Affair.

A distressed bishop wrote in 1966, "Much evidence suggests that there is a deep-seated and widely-spread death-wish in the Church of England" (R.R.Williams, 1966:10). He went on:

An obvious element in the situation is what might be called 'failure propaganda'- widely publicised statements to the effect that in this way or that the mission of the Church 'has failed' (ibid).

One such "widely publicised statement" of failure was the article "A Mission's Failure: The Story of One Church in Pagan Britain", published in *The Observer* colour supplement on December 6th 1964, and written by Nicholas Stacey, the former Rector of Woolwich in the diocese of Southwark. While the Bishop of Woolwich was refusing to allow radical theology to remain a talking point for dons and deans alone, clergy of the diocese in which he was a suffragan were likewise attempting to apply radical ideas to parochial ministry, and a traditionalist bishop like Williams of Leicester found the whole affair bewildering.

The large urban parish of Woolwich had become the focal point of experimental ministry in Southwark diocese, encouraged

by the bishop, Mervyn Stockwood. He had put Nick Stacey, one of the young Oxford Catholic reform-minded priests referred to earlier, in charge of a team of curates, together with ministers of other denominations and some engaged in secular occupations, with the mandate: "Build up a team of clergy and for God's sake do anything to show the people of Woolwich that the Church exists" (cf. Mehta, 1966:83-97; Bentley, 1978:40-45).

A number of unusual measures had been taken by Stacey at Woolwich. One redundant church had been demolished and another converted into a bingo hall, of which Stacey wrote that it had "done more to create a community spirit in a slum corner of the parish than anything else we have done". Unused aisles in the parish church were sealed off to provide a coffee-bar for teenagers, and a discotheque was run in the crypt. There was office accommodation and a Citizens' Advice Bureau on the premises. Lunches were provided for local shop and office workers, and a branch of The Samaritans was set up. Stacey wrote of "a great hive of compassion and love and social concern and worship and fellowship operating from that building".

Yet the experiment ended with Stacey's resignation, not only from the parish, but from the parochial ministry altogether, in a blaze of publicity. Treating the Woolwich mission as a failure, Stacey went into a career with the Social Services, and much later reiterated the pessimism about the institutional church which had led to his decision to resign:

The structures as we have them of full-time clergymen and lots of buildings and a large number of organizations, and the Church's role as a sort of Third Estate of the land, with the bishops in the House of Lords and the status of the hierarchy, all that has massively declined and will continue to decline (Bentley, *op.cit*:40).

Stacey felt that there was little support or understanding from the Church at large for what he was trying to do at Woolwich; moreover the actual congregation there stubbornly refused to

grow much larger despite all the experimental measures. Out of the episode, we wish to focus on two unresolved questions, in line with our overall analysis of the period.

The first arises out of Stacey's disappointment that attendances at organized worship remained so low. His friend and colleague Eric James, then the Director of *Parish and People* and rector of another urban parish in Southwark, was surprised that Stacey had even been thinking in terms of possible numerical success. In an article in *Prism* in February 1965, he asked whether Stacey could have forgotten that

...adherence to the Body of Christ- if the Church is to serve and penetrate the world as it is- will necessitate a breakdown of the old structures of Church life and the development of far more unstructured patterns,

Stacey, it seemed, had retained certain unexamined assumptions about "religion" and churchgoing which had jeopardized his capacity to judge the success or otherwise of what he was doing.

An attempt was made to bring to light the hidden agenda concerning the meaning and priority of formal religious practice in the Church's missionary aims in an edition of BBC Television's *Meeting Point* in which Stacey, James and Stockwood took part in a studio discussion following a film report on the Woolwich experiments. The programme's chairman, Robert McKenzie, tried to focus attention on getting a "straight answer" to the question whether **success** was ultimately dependent upon getting people to religious worship in Church.

While Stockwood prevaricated, Stacey insisted that "the Church has traditionally taught that man is a worshipping animal; the Church is structured on the basis that worship is important". But James broadened the issue into wanting "to see the Church geared to helping people live at depth...to help people to be human and to live in community". The precise

meaning and place of **religion** remained unresolved and largely unexamined.

The second question is clearly seen in Stacey's apparent readiness to speak of the parish around him as "pagan". Theologically, he approached the situation with a model of a clearly defined and separated Church, set as a witnessing community in the midst of an unbelieving world. Yet, he was prepared in pastoral work to go to immense lengths to meet people on their own ground. He sought to minister to the perceived needs of the community as though the proper application of the Gospel were the enrichment of people's lives at that level.

But a community which saw itself as already in some sense Christian, by contrast with Stacey's evaluation of it as pagan, was quite happy to accept the Church's ministrations at the level at which the Church was proffering them. Stacey's frustration arose out of the mis-match between the results of a chosen pastoral strategy and his own underlying theological preferences.

The Woolwich experiment, then, betrays an insufficient grasp of the complexity of the situation vis-a-vis "secular society". Stacey wanted to believe in a unique and specialised religious mission for the Church. He also wanted to pursue a policy of broad and generalized community involvement as a conception of mission *in tandem* with secular social agencies. Such a position generates severe tensions, which Stacey himself was only able to resolve by opting unambiguously for a single alternative, i.e. that of secular social work.

To these dilemmas might be added the point which recurs throughout the episodes covered in this chapter, to the effect that attempts at radical thinking and practice were widely misunderstood in the Church. There was, in the Stacey affair, the familiar polarization between ideas about radical change

and creative faith on the one hand, and assumptions about simple believers and traditional continuities on the other, with too little understanding between supporters of either side.

ii. The Paul Report.

In his Report on The Deployment and Payment of the Clergy, Leslie Paul deliberately set aside the more theoretical and theological questions in order to observe his brief of giving absolute priority to practical organizational questions. He was, however, well aware of the inseparability of theology from practice (see especially Paul, 1968 & 1973), and the range of critical responses to his Report indicate that the crucial questions remained implicit in it. Two elements in the response will serve to make this clear.

Paul intended to lay bare the structural problems brought about by the Church of England's organizational life being geared to a social pattern, i.e. medieval feudalism, which had long since passed away. Nevertheless, his Report was attacked for the "bureaucratic rationalization" it seemed to envisage. Archdeacon Guy Mayfield, the author of sociographic and statistical studies of the Church, wrote to the *Church Times* deploring the "failure" of the Report to acknowledge that the Church and its clergy could not simply be treated as **any** "organization", but constituted something *sui generis*, not to be understood without taking account of the Holy Spirit.

The criticisms of Bryan Wilson in *Theology* (1965) lent a somewhat back-handed support to this view, by maintaining that professional rationalization would lead to internal secularization and loss of "distinctive religious contents" in the Church. Since Wilson also believed that these contents themselves were "geared to a society that is no longer with us", his strictures scarcely held out much hope to conservatives who wanted to appeal to such arguments as

grounds for keeping things as they were, but the underlying point remains.

It is the idea that there is something about the distinctively religious which might easily be damaged by forcible adaptation of the Church to modernity. A need is sensed, but not fully articulated, for the preservation of some shift into otherness, some break with prevailing structures and meanings, as a condition for the effective operation of religion. As another *Church Times* correspondent put it sharply, "[We are told that] a reorganization of the Church will enable it to speak more clearly to the modern world. Is it permissible to ask **what** the Church of England is to say?"

Among the practical issues tackled by Paul concerning the training, deployment and payment of the clergy, the use and location of church buildings, and the legal setting-up of parishes, with patronage and parson's freehold, it was around the latter that most debate crystallised. This is the second element to which we wish to draw attention. Those who addressed themselves to the defence of the freehold did so for quite different reasons, which serve to point up yet again the unresolved issues we are examining here.

Firstly, a country vicar wrote to the *Church Times* in February 1964 in the following terms:

[Country people] like to have their own priest living among them- a father-in-God whom they know and who knows and trusts them.

Institutional church life is here seen very much in terms of the religion of the people, of "blood and soil", holding together the local community in a Durkheimian bond of moral consensus and sacred symbolism. All this is focussed in the uniquely representative figure of the parish priest, tied by his freehold to the very land in which his church and home are planted.

Faith itself, on such an understanding, will nourish and sustain participation in the continuities of ongoing, traditional community life. It will have little room for the disturbing of certainties or the exploration of the new.

By contrast, the same freehold was defended in a letter to *The Times* by Norman St. John Stevas, admittedly an outsider to the system, on the grounds that it encouraged freedom of thought and independence of mind. A parish priest could "speak out" without fear of dismissal; and moreover, any system which could promote "a little eccentricity" in an increasingly monochrome society must be a good thing.

What we have here is the very different picture of the maverick figure of the priest, responsible to no-one but God and with his living guaranteed in a manner which makes him financially free from manipulation by any single power-group. As such, the priest can come to embody the Church as the "institutionalization of criticism" (cf. Metz, 1969:115ff.; Kerr, 1968), and the living denial by faith of any and every "party line".

Where one curiosity of organization can be defended for such opposing reasons, there is cause for investigating the underlying conceptions of faith's working in the world and its institutional forms.

iii. The World Council of Churches.

Our third sample of the radical mood highlights all the confusions brought about by the introduction of new ideas into a church situation which had not yet come to terms with the basic underlying questions. In an early article, William Hamilton distinguished the "ecclesiastical radicals" as a sub-group within the overall movement of radical theology (Hamilton, 1968:21-2). As a typical example of the thinking of this group, he cited the address given by the Dutch theologian

J.C.Hoekendijk to the World Student Christian Federation in 1960. Hoekendijk had proposed an ecclesiology demoting the Church from the privileged position of the focal point of God's action in the world, and substituting the mission order God-World-Church, with a self-effacing Church as the servant of the world.

The Student Movement represented here by Hoekendijk was from its inception closely linked with the young World Council of Churches, which resolved at its third Assembly in Delhi in 1961 to initiate studies on "The Missionary Structure of the Congregation". Working groups were set up all over the world, and quickly produced study material which was published in the periodical of the Council's Department of Studies in Evangelism, *Concept* (see C.Williams, 1965(a):ix-xv; 1966:12-16).

In Britain, the Youth Department of the British Council of Churches devoted its 1964 New Year Conference to these studies, with the W.C.C.'s director of studies in evangelism, Hans Margull, as visiting speaker. Almost at the same time, the Student Christian Movement held a conference at Swanwick, Derbyshire, under the title *The Death of the Church*, where the speakers were Albert van den Heuvel, then the W.C.C.'s Youth Secretary, James Mark, and (oddly enough) David Martin.⁶

These studies, together with contributions in America of such writers as Harvey Cox, Gibson Winter and William Stringfellow, evidenced a concern to combine forms of secular theology, conceptualizing the mission of the Church in inner-worldly terms, with a recourse to sociological models to enable the Church to structure itself for such a mission. The theologians in question appealed to sociological work in such areas as the study of communities, organizations, work and the family, rather than to the sociology of religion, for their diagnoses of contemporary life.

Consequently they tended to accept without question the inevitable decline and outmodedness of traditional religion,

and to assume that the Church's task was somehow to "engage with the emerging structures". The movement lacked a more detailed attention to the **ambiguities** of the secularization issue as sociology has dealt with it. (We shall undertake a closer examination of the theology involved in Chapter XI.)

John Robinson found much to stimulate his thinking in this early work of the W.C.C. (Robinson, 1965:88-100). He perceived a clear link between the emerging "servant" ecclesiology of the Council and recent moves toward a more adequate theology of the laity, and indeed a "lay theology", associated with the work of the Christian Frontier Council since the 1940s (Robinson, 1963(b); Bliss, 1963). The Servant Church was to be the Church of the people, every member actively in service in his or her secular calling, while the Church's traditional religious activities remained necessary only in order to equip the laity to fulfil these responsibilities.

These ideas were fully expounded in the eventual W.C.C. Report, The Church for Others, published in 1967. The British Council of Churches produced an ecumenical programme for the use of local study groups, The People Next Door, based on the W.C.C. Report, but it was here that bewilderment began to set in (Jones, 1967).

The programme combined a mood of welcome to the "secular world" with one of critical uncertainty about the religious interpretation of the Gospel. It emphasised the world as the arena of God's saving activity, and called for the Church to develop "go" rather than "come" structures, in order to put itself in touch with God's ongoing mission, rather than being concerned to enlarge its own borders. But all of this was open to total misunderstanding by the average congregation, without a very substantial programme of adult education to precede it.

The contrast comes out starkly in a number of independently produced pieces of work dating from the same period as the W.C.C. studies. For example, the William Temple College at Rugby published a Report, Mainstream Religion, based upon an analysis of the contents of all broadcast religious services, and those taking place in 23 churches, during June 1963 (see in *The Modern Churchman* for June 1965). The findings lent support to the picture of churches preoccupied with their own affairs, with little of note to say, vaguely attacking the "materialism of the modern age", and so on.

In May 1966, *The Times* published a series of articles entitled "Christians Asleep", which took a pessimistic view of the Church's current position with regard to the parish system, finance, clergy training, mission and the assimilation of radical thinking. It was claimed that Honest to God had produced a neo-conservative backlash in the theological colleges among ordinands in training. Progressive thinking was to be found chiefly in "para-church" agencies such as the Church of England's Board for Social Responsibility, and rarely in the mainstream.

The printed reactions to these articles were familiar: some deplored their "cynical tone", others pleaded for "a more definite lead from the top". One blamed the Church's plight on "lack of belief in the Church's creeds by those who were supposed to teach them"; another, on a loss of "the essential simplicity of the faith".

Items like these offer glimpses of the real situation, which make it clear why great difficulty was experienced in trying to get the ideas of the W.C.C. to "take root" in English church congregations. As long as little attempt was made to penetrate the actually experienced forms and modes of religion and faith, and to understand their significance for those who practised them within the life of the churches, it was likely that the recommended programmes would only achieve the

creation of an élite as potentially divisive as the "clerical caste"- the keen, intelligent, committed "frontiersman" among the laity.

iv. *New Christian*.

The journal *Prism* ended its eight-year run in September 1965, and was replaced by the fortnightly *New Christian*, which capitalized on the image *Prism* had more or less unintentionally acquired, by setting itself up as very self-consciously radical, irreverent and outspoken. The quality of articles, however, never justified the doubled frequency of publication.² Despite this, a number of the controversies pursued by *New Christian* will serve us well in summing up the undercurrents of opinion and interests which consistently characterised Christian Radicalism.

The question of the purpose and continuing possibility of organized religion as a vehicle for disclosing the meaning of God under contemporary conditions was raised provocatively by Methodist minister Ray Billington in a set of proposals for what he called a "non-Church", in an article in 1966. Rejecting all the trappings of traditional religious practice as fundamentally alienating and irrelevant, Billington offered a blueprint of small and fluid *ad hoc* gatherings of like-minded Christians, coming together as the mood took them, to work out "how to express love in their secular social contexts". Even *The Times* printed an article by Billington on the subject on November 19th, 1966.

Some of the responses, such as that of Alison Adcock ("Non-Church is Nonsense" in *New Christian* for June 1966), treated the issue as a joke. Others, like that of H.D.Lewis in *The Times*, were more serious. But each of these two queried to what extent what Billington was looking for was not already provided in the Society of Friends; and this, in itself, poses

very clearly the problem of whether an approach to faith through secular channels and with little public and ritual organizational structure can avoid the evaporation of distinctive religious content.

Billington himself showed that he was now uncertain about any such content when he argued in a later article, "The Tedious Church Reformers", in *New Christian* in May 1968, that the "Christian task" of "providing creative possibilities for human living, making sense of existence and discovering human values" had no longer anything to do with the possible preservation of **any** sort of Church. The controversy over Billington, trivial in itself though it may have been, forces us back upon the question of why the removal of the religious trappings which have seemed to stifle the vital Gospel content of Christian faith should lead, disappointingly, to the disappearance of anything which makes such faith distinctively Christian at all.

The second item we wish to extract from *New Christian* concerned the visit of Billy Graham to Britain for evangelistic crusades in 1966. The relevant *New Christian* leader criticised Graham's methods for offering "instant mission" which neither took account of the concrete social context nor attempted to provide a long-term pastoral-evangelistic strategy capable of responding to over a century of Church failure to cope with social change. Graham plainly did not see any necessity of adapting the Gospel to cultural circumstances, nor of trying to conceive what "salvation" and other Gospel terms might mean within a thoroughly secular context. The editorial took a dim view of the value of any "success" Graham's methods might appear to achieve.

Whereas some respondents argued in Graham's defence that, whatever his shortcomings, he was at least getting the Gospel

heard by many who would never enter a church in order to hear it, others denied that what he was preaching was really "the Gospel" for today at all. All that we wish to comment on this debate is that it displays *in nuce* the potential confusions in the whole issue of whether the Church should adapt to secularization or confront it.

For the Church does not have a free and unfettered choice in the matter. But one thing is clear: secularization cannot possibly be welcomed as gain because it frees the Church to concentrate on its proper, specific mission, if there is as much dispute about what that "specific mission" is as the argument over Billy Graham suggests.

Lastly, we single out the interest of *New Christian* in the much-publicised resignation of Charles Davis from his Roman Catholic orders in 1968 (cf. Bentley, *op.cit.*:39-42). The journal even invited Davis to contribute articles, as one who had experienced and fought the tensions and frustrations imposed upon creative, critical faith by a traditional institutional system (Davis, 1968). Davis wrote in *New Christian* that, for committed Christians, the Church "is not the source of the values they cherish and promote. On the contrary, they live and work in contrast and opposition to it."

The journal itself linked its coverage of the Davis affair with criticism of the controversial encyclical of Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, published that year. Neil Middleton argued in an article (August 1968) that, as usual, it was the so-called "simple believers" who would suffer. For they were bound to uncritical acceptance of whatever the Pope said, and uncritical assent to any kind of dogmatic formulae could, he argued, only produce illusory consensus and prolong personal immaturity.

New Christian saw that the issues raised by the encyclical and by Davis in particularly polemical form in the very officially authoritarian context of the Church of Rome

were not, after all, confined to that Church. For throughout its short life it tried to do battle, often too frivolously, against all forms of uncritical, backward-looking, immature religious faith. In a secular culture which no longer permits the imposition of official world-views "from the top", what sort of institutional arrangements would enable the growth of a mature faith, leading to a viable religiously-based world-view, from below? The journal saw the problem; but rarely were its contributors sufficiently in touch with the people it wanted to help to be able to produce realistic proposals.

5. Retrospect and Prospect: Whither Christian Radicalism?

At the Annual Conference of the Modern Churchmen's Union in July 1969, David Edwards, the original proponent of the term "Christian Radicalism", looked back over the course taken by the movement during the decade which was shortly to end. Despite regretting some of the more "outlandish" developments, he remained "cautiously optimistic". Important, if unspectacular, Church reforms and theological reconstructions were under way, and Edwards wondered whether the time might now be ripe for the churches to compile a new, short confession of faith.

Edwards envisaged such a confession beginning from the style and meaning of actual religious practice and Christian living, and proceeding from there to the Church as a real historical institution, then on to Christology, and only lastly to the doctrine of God. This would be the order of a moderately secular dogmatics. However, although many reforms **have** proceeded, in a rather piecemeal way, the harvest of the sixties in terms of the systematic reconstruction hoped for by Edwards has not been reaped. The mood at the end of the decade was permeated by disillusionment among the radicals and relief among their opponents.

In the Foreword to the New Christian Reader, published by the SCM Press in 1974, Trevor Beeson wrote:

The late 1950s and early 1960s were a time of new hope in most of the British churches. *Parish and People*, the Keble Conference Group, the Renewal Group in Methodism, and similar bodies, attracted into their membership large numbers of the most able clergy and there was an abundance of ideas about the reform of the Church and the reinterpretation of traditional theology. Some of this found expression in the explosion of paperback theology, and it was in this creative atmosphere that *New Christian* was planned and launched. But by the time the magazine was established the situation was changing: hope was giving way to despair, and it was being suggested that the institutional life of the Church was beyond reform.¹⁰

New Christian came to an end with the decade. The *Parish and People* Movement, having shifted its emphasis increasingly from liturgical issues to the secular-social aspects of the Church's mission (its 1966 conference borrowed from the W.C.C. the title "The World is the Agenda"), was eventually swallowed up in 1970 in a short-lived ecumenical coalition called *One for Christian Renewal*. Robinson returned to Cambridge and devoted much of his academic work to his earlier field of New Testament Studies.

Some, like Edward Norman (1977 & 1979) regard the whole episode as the beginning of the capitulation of the Church to secular humanism, in a desperate and misguided bid to be up-to-date. Others, such as Holloway (1972), are rather more charitably, though decisively, critical. Bowden (1977), on the other hand, regrets the failure of the Church at large to grasp the opportunities of those radical years, flimsy though some of the ideas were theologically.

In still other places, direct continuities of the radical tradition are to be found into the seventies: Salvation Army officer Fred Brown (1970 & 1973) risked reprimand and expulsion for publishing his own brand of "secular theology", while John Vincent has continued his pursuit of an "alternative church" (the title of a 1977 booklet; cf. Vincent, 1980) to the

present time. And Alistair Kee's The Way of Transcendence, a late (1970) contribution to the literature of "Christian atheism", has recently been reissued by the SCM Press (1985). The recent works of Don Cupitt may also be cited in support of the continuance of the theological side of the radical tradition.

What this chapter has tried to do is to provide a *Sitz im Leben* for the theological discussions which follow. This was in accordance with our model of theological activity as taking place at the empirically graspable interface between between Gospel tradition and social context. The radicals intended to produce a theology sensitive to and interpretive of the secular situation, and to focus their reconstructions on the tangible life of the churches. Therefore, we have attempted to show, underneath the more explicit theological proposals and rather in the interstices of debate about them, how the problematic issues were emerging, often unnoticed.

We have done this by paying attention to a good deal of ephemeral, non-scholarly and only quasi-theological material. We maintain, and hopefully have shown, that seemingly trivial churchly wrangles can really not be disregarded in the theological enterprise, but contain the seeds of crucial issues for theology. In particular, we have pursued throughout the chapter, though not with absolute rigidity, the three clusters of questions we have already argued are particularly important for Christian Radicalism: the place and function of religious practice as traditionally understood, the interpretation of secularization and the Church's response to it, and the possibility of a creative and critically reflective faith.

Sociological tools for a greater critical penetration of these questions were set out in Part Two of the thesis. The remainder of Part Three brings these perspectives to bear upon the major theological themes of Christian Radicalism, and our

attention now turns to the more substantial writings of the period.

NOTES.

1. Previous Anglican symposia include the controversial Essays and Reviews (1860), Charles Gore's symposium Lux Mundi (1889), and the more liberal Oxford collections Foundations (1912) and Essays Catholic and Critical (1926). The latter strongly influenced the Report of the Doctrine Commission, Doctrine in the Church of England (1938). The occasion of the 1958 Lambeth Conference produced the volume of Essays in Anglican Self-criticism, while in 1964 Alan Richardson headed a small team responding to issues in the Honest to God debate, Four Anchors from the Stern.

2. I owe the retrospective evaluation given here to Trevor Beeson, in conversation.

3. David Edwards, Vidler's successor as Dean of King's, Cambridge, concluded that the Church Times' heavily slanted report was more responsible for the strength of feeling against Vidler than the original broadcast, which many correspondents had probably not seen (see Prism, February 1963).

4. For documentary background and commentary upon the episode, including its media coverage, we rely upon The Honest to God Debate, edited by Edwards and Robinson, 1963; ch.7 of R.J. Page, New Directions in Anglican Theology, 1967; ch.11 of Ferris, The Church of England, 1964; the whole of the May 1963 issue of Prism; ch.2 of Furlong, With Love to the Church, 1965; ch.1 of V.Mehta, The New Theologian, 1966; ch.2 of Bowden, Voices in the Wilderness; and ch.5 of Gill, Theology and Social Structure. The latest sociological account is R.Towler, The Need for Certainty, 1984, which examines the enormous correspondence received by Robinson in the wake of the book's publication in an attempt to classify types of religious orientation shown by the writers.

5. Thus Roger Tennant remarks vis-a-vis Honest to God in Prism for May 1963; "Just as you are beginning to wrestle in the dark with the unknown angel, Dr. Robinson will switch on the light and intone a few words in a familiar clerical voice."

6. Thanks are due for references to the text of radio broadcasts on the Home Service, 29.12.63 and 12.1.64, to the BBC Written Archives Centre at Caversham Park, Reading.

7. See Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8.

8. The texts of the conference addresses are printed in an unpublished booklet of the SCM Theological Colleges' Department, The Death of the Church: Five Talks Given at Swanwick, which I have by courtesy of David Martin. Revised versions of van den Heuvel's talks are available as chs.2 & 3 of The Humiliation of the Church.

9. References from New Christian are taken from A New Christian Reader, ed. T. Beaumont, 1974. At the same time as he was editor of New Christian, Trevor Beeson (now a Canon of Westminster Abbey and Chaplain to the House of Commons) also edited a parish magazine inset, Outlook, Timothy, Lord Beaumont, the architect of both publications, intended it as an alternative to the "cosy" image of other insets like The Sign and Home Words. Hence, Outlook was once in trouble because its "film correspondent" used the word "lesbian" freely in a review!

10. New Christian printed two documents, in satirical style, which offer excellent summaries of the mood of radical theology. An early edition featured the "95 Theses for the New Reformation", containing propositions about all the theological points we shall be discussing in the next six chapters; and late 1969 saw the twelve "New Decade's Resolutions". The tone of these was harder, more edgy, and much more oriented towards the socio-political engagements of the Church.

CHAPTER VIII: RELIGION, TRANSCENDENCE AND GOD.

This chapter is the first of six which will analyse in detail the theology of Christian Radicalism, as outlined in the Introduction. The first topic is the attempt to develop a secular (i.e. non-religious) approach to the understanding of God. As we have already made clear, we regard the underlying issue here as the problem of traditional religion in contemporary cultural circumstances, since it is through religion that people have generally considered themselves to be put in touch with God. Therefore, our discussion will be stimulated by the sociological understanding of religion set out in Chapter IV.

We shall focus the discussion, as will be our practice in each of these six chapters, by concentrating first upon one representative work, in this case Robinson's Honest to God. We shall examine Robinson's proposed reworking of Christian theism in conjunction with his view of the place of religion, following up our exposition with a number of criticisms which set the tone for what follows. We shall then devote space to analyses of other proposals of radical theology, firstly for secular-based approaches to the question of God, then for models of transcendence, and finally for attitudes to religion. Our cumulative conclusions will be stimulated and informed throughout by our deployment of the sociological ideas advanced in Chapter IV.

1. Robinson and Honest to God.

i. General Observations.

We aim to deal with Honest to God on its own terms, namely as an apologetic exercise, directed towards those who, in a "secular age", no longer find traditional Christian formulations either relevant or intelligible.' This is the whole thrust of the book's opening chapter, in which Robinson

confesses himself a man divided: on the one hand, very much an insider, more or less set apart for the Church since birth and thoroughly at home with orthodox doctrine and traditional liturgy, but on the other hand, as bishop of a tough and declining urban area, increasingly aware of the alienation of ordinary people from all that his "goodly heritage" stood for (see McBrien, 1966:4-15 and Robinson, 1980:10-26).

More than this, as Robinson analyses his situation, he admits that even for himself, certain areas of orthodoxy do not really "strike home". They do not infuse life and faith with vision and purpose, but merely exist as part of the lumber of tradition. Conversely, a handful of less orthodox, exploratory writings **do** seem to "ring bells", and Robinson begins to wonder whether they might also do so for those bewildered outsiders who have more or less given up on religion and the Church. Out of just this sort of **felt sense** of an urgent need for reformulation and reconstruction sprang the whole of the radicalism of the sixties; and as a response to such a sensed need ought Robinson's book also to be judged.

His three stimuli to fresh thinking were Tillich's sermon, "The Depth of Existence", found in his collection The Shaking of the Foundations (1949), Bultmann's seminal essay on "New Testament and Mythology" in Kerygma and Myth (ed.H.W.Bartsch, 1955) and the "religionless Christianity" passages in Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison. Honest to God is ostensibly organized around the three questions which Robinson felt these brief writings posed most acutely:

From Tillich he derives the question, "Must Christianity be 'supranaturalist'?" This he works out specifically in relation to the doctrine of God, which is really the controlling theme for the whole book.

From Bultmann comes the question whether Christianity must be "mythological", which relates most plainly to Christology.

From Bonhoeffer Robinson takes the question whether Christianity must be "religious", which is especially relevant to matters concerning the Church, spirituality and liturgy.

However, Robinson does not maintain this kind of symmetrical pattern in his use of the three theologians. Rather, he takes first of all the basic terms of the problem from Bultmann. The Gospel is traditionally expressed in thought forms and images which are unintelligible to modern man, and must be translated into categories he can grasp- or rather, which can grasp him. But Robinson does not follow Bultmann's programme, which continues to rely heavily on the assumption that a Word from beyond, issued in the critical event of preaching, can penetrate a man's existential situation, challenge his questionableness and summon him to the decision of faith.

Instead, Robinson accepts Bonhoeffer's critique of Bultmann, to the effect that you cannot demythologize the language of the redemption story but leave intact the concept of a transcendent God who "acts" and "speaks" in the kerygmatic event. For it is precisely the loss of the dimension of vertical transcendence in the actual mental constitution of secular man that lies at the root of the problem. Bonhoeffer thought that Bultmann, coming from an earlier generation, had failed to see this, and Robinson agrees with him.

Nevertheless, Robinson still does not adopt Bonhoeffer's proposal, which is essentially to replace a vertical with a horizontal projection, aiming to discover the dimension of transcendence in the secular concept of "man for others". He opts, instead, fairly unambiguously for what he believes to be Tillich's solution, constructed around the language of "depth".

Robinson's reliance on Tillich reflects his conviction, expressed at the very beginning of Honest to God, that the

central problem of traditional theism is that it posits a God who is "a Being" located, if not literally "up there", at least metaphysically "out there". For it is Tillich who mounts the most concerted campaign against this way of thinking God. Even so, although the problem of objectifying language about God is a familiar one in academic theology, Robinson is not really concerned to work out a highly sophisticated theological position which can protect the transcendent otherness of God without falling into the philosophical trap of objectification.

Rather, he is anxious that all such language of otherness, however refined, creates **at the level of popular pre-reflective awareness** an impression that God is "not here". He is detached, reigning in splendid isolation, incompatible with the modern world. This is why Robinson's text is peppered with those much-criticised "caricatures": "above the bright blue sky", "a visitor from outer space", "the Old Man in the sky", "a super-Being beyond this world" (Robinson, 1963(a):13,15,17,49). Theological caricatures they may be, but there is little doubt that they are what transcendental theism amounts to for many people, not a few of whom will be regularly in the churches.

This, then, is in our view what Robinson is trying to do in his alternative proposal for theism. We turn now in greater detail to an exposition of how he does it, beginning with his adaptation of Tillich's "depth" model in chapter 3 of Honest to God.

ii. Exposition.

There are at least four constituents to Robinson's argument for the Tillichian projection. Firstly, Robinson commends depth imagery as intrinsically "richer" and more suggestive than height. For depth relates to both concern and suffering, both of which may be described as "deep". It covers intensely human, and humane, experiences; and, as "deep" is opposed to "shallow", depth imagery speaks of the truth of how

things are, not just in everyday, superficial terms, but "beneath the surface", under profound examination, at bottom.

Secondly, this notion of digging down to the depths indicates the alternative projection for theism, downward to the Ground of Being:

When Tillich speaks of God in 'depth', he is not speaking of another Being at all, He is speaking of 'the infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being' (op.cit:46).

Robinson interprets this to mean that "the word 'God' denotes the ultimate depth of all our being, the creative ground and meaning of all our existence" (ibid:47). He intends this to mean that there is a manner of living "at depth", a kind of thoroughgoing immersion in secular realities, whereupon the divine ground discloses itself.

Thirdly, and closely related to the foregoing, Robinson links depth imagery to Tillich's notion of "ultimate concern":

If that word [i.e., God] does not have much meaning for you, translate it, and speak of the depths of your life, of the source of your being, of your ultimate concern, of what you take seriously without any reservation (Tillich, op.cit:57; Robinson, op.cit:22).

This Tillichian "exercise" for identifying God in secular experience is meant, as Robinson employs it, to add an empirically available element to the possibly elusive "Ground of Being".

Fourthly, Robinson asks what happens when someone **does** take secular life in utmost earnest and pursues an ultimate concern to the limits, with what he now calls "openness to the holy" (ibid:48). His answer is that such a person discovers the ground of being to be both personal and characterized, indeed structured and informed, by love. Robinson contends that we shall discover the ultimate in selfless and self-giving, open and unconditional personal relationships with one another, and

that the purest form of relationship is undoubtedly that of love:

To believe in God as love means to believe that in pure personal relationship we encounter, not merely what ought to be, but what is, the deepest, veriest truth about the structure of reality (ibid;49).²

Robinson spends much time in the rest of this pivotal chapter attempting to defend his position from the accusation of naturalism, and of having completely collapsed any genuine divine transcendence into the immanence of human intersubjectivity. He chooses to define his position more closely by indicating what he approves and what he rejects in the personalist philosophy of John Macmurray and the anthropological theology of John Wren-Lewis.

Macmurray had written, in The Structure of Religious Experience, that "the task of religion is the maintenance and extension of human community" (quoted Robinson, op.cit:51-2). Such community, he had argued, is founded upon a unique quality of human personhood consisting in the union of transcendence and immanence in actual, experienced reality. But Robinson wants to hold that the perception of any such quality in ordinary human experience- "in depth"- is entirely dependent upon the **prior** givenness of God as "divine Ground". He cites Bonhoeffer's *bon mot*, "God is the 'beyond' in the midst" (ibid:53) in support of this, although Bonhoeffer's formula reflects a horizontal projection outward into collective society rather than the depth projection Robinson prefers.

In the case of Wren-Lewis, Robinson approves his statement:

It is hard to see why the projections made by the human race should have a numinous, transcendental character unless there is something numinous and transcendental in the experience of personal relationships themselves (ibid;54).

But despite this, he fears that Wren-Lewis fails to guard himself adequately against the charge that he is really expounding the thesis "Love is God". Robinson struggles to specify precisely where the element of transcendence comes in to the model for conceiving of the divine he has advanced. He reverts to the terminology of Tillich:

There are depths of revelation, intimations of eternity, judgments of the holy and sacred, awarenesses of the unconditional, the numinous and the ecstatic, which cannot be explained in purely naturalistic categories without being reduced to something else (ibid:55).

But on what grounds is secular experience said to be like this? And through what sorts of activities is the transcendent quality perceived in it? On his own premises, Robinson has to try to answer these questions without resorting to categories and resources supplied by religion. After a brief excursus in search of Biblical support for his position, he writes:

Our contention has been that God is not to be met by a 'religious' turning away from the world but in unconditional concern for 'the other' seen through to its ultimate depths (ibid:61).

He rejects the idea that the opportunity of knowing God should be made to depend upon the individual's capacity for "religious experience", a capacity which varies as a purely natural ability from one person to another.

He prefers the testimony of Wren-Lewis, who described how a particular Christian minister had enabled his congregation to see "the common experience of the creative character of personal relationships" as "an encounter with the transcendent". It was "actually an entirely different mode of living-in-relationship from anything known in the world, a **redeemed** mode of relationship" (ibid:63). Robinson stresses that just because Wren-Lewis encountered this in a **Christian** community, "it was not for that reason any the more **religious**, based upon some new kind of esoteric or pietistic experience".

But he still fails to resolve the ambiguity over whether there is a depth-dimension in all personal relationship which the Christian (religious) input helps to make explicit, or whether that input actually creates a mode of relationship "different from anything known in the world".³ He has not yet convincingly argued the case for an analysis of secular experience which can lead to the affirmation of a divine transcendence within it, and which can stand on its own merits without further support by religious considerations.

The religious considerations are found, however, later in the book, when Robinson tries to show how religious worship can itself be fitted into the framework of his "depth" analysis. The popular idea of religion, he thinks, is this:

It relates to that department of life which is contrasted with 'the world'; and in its popular non-technical sense it includes all those activities which go on within the circle of the sanctuary...It is a particular area of experience or activity into which a man may 'turn aside' or 'go apart' (ibid;84-5).

But such a view, he thinks, is not compatible with his proposed restatement of theism, for which "the holy is the 'depth' of the common". God is to be found in opening oneself in unconditional personal relationship to others, in self-giving love; and hence

...the purpose of worship...is to open oneself to the meeting of Christ in the common...to make us more sensitive to these depths; to focus, sharpen and deepen our response to the world and to other people beyond the point of proximate concern...to that of ultimate concern (ibid;87).

So, the Eucharist, precisely because it is the "Holy Communion", is concerned with the disclosure of the sacred in the depth dimension of what is "common", in the double sense of "ordinary, everyday" and "shared, communal". In this way, Robinson can link the sacrament with both his emphases, that the transcendent is to be found in the secular, and that it is supremely disclosed in inter-personal relations:

Holy Communion is communion, community-life, *in sacris*, in depth, at the level at which we are not merely in human fellowship but 'in Christ', not merely in love but in Love, united with the ground and restorer of our whole being (ibid;86; cf. Robinson, 1960;58-71 for his earlier understanding of this issue).

This is as far as we need to take our basic exposition of Robinson's proposals, firstly for a secular approach to the question of God, then for retaining the dimension of transcendence within such an approach, and finally for understanding religious practice within such a framework. We have obviously not been able to avoid hinting at criticism at various points along the way, but now we shall gather up our criticisms more systematically.

iii. Critique.

First of all and at greatest length, we have to express doubt about the suitability of Tillich's concepts of "ground of being" and "ultimate concern" for the job Robinson wants them to do for him. Robinson says:

A statement is 'theological' not because it relates to a particular Being called 'God', but because it asks ultimate questions about the meaning of existence; it asks what, at the level of *theos*, at the level of its deepest mystery, is the reality and significance of our life (ibid;49).

This is to misunderstand the philosophical position taken by Tillich in his Systematic Theology, which owes much to his background in German idealism and even mysticism, through the influence of Schelling. Admittedly Tillich is not entirely consistent, and in the sermon upon which Robinson relies he does imply that an ultimate concern might be some **empirical** concern, and that the "depth" is a potential depth of **experience**. But elsewhere this is not so.

For Tillich maintains that to say that God is "ultimate reality, being itself, ground of being, power of being" is the only univocal, non-symbolic assertion we can make about him

(cf. Tillich, Theology of Culture:61). This assertion cannot include the attribution of the logical category "existence" to God, since this category belongs only to the contingent order. So Tillich writes:

Since God is the ground of being, he is the ground of the structure of being. He is not subject to this structure; the structure is grounded in him, . . . it is impossible to speak about him except in terms of this structure, God must be approached cognitively through the structural elements of being-itself. These elements make him a living God, a God who can be man's concrete concern (Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. I:264).

Similarly, when Tillich says that "the object of theology is what concerns us ultimately", he emphatically rules out any conceivable empirical object of human concern: "Our ultimate concern is that which determines our being or non-being" (Tillich, op.cit:14,17). Robinson's usage would make "a matter of being or non-being" into the same thing as "a matter of life and death", but with Tillich this is not the case.

Rather, Tillich's categories of "being", "ground of being", "ultimate concern", are in the nature of logico-grammatical delineations of the possibility of any legitimate talk of God at all. The notion of "being-itself" formulates the enveloping and embracing structures within which **any** ontology must be erected. "Ultimate concern" is the non-objectified limit or horizon to which we needs must be subject in the articulation of **any** concern. These are thoroughly non-empirical categories which prescribe the rules for any kind of discourse which may justify its claim to be about God. They are not suitable for use as the basis of a restatement of the content of theism in secular, empirical terms.

This rather lengthy excursus into what Tillich meant by the ideas Robinson borrows from him has been necessary in order to clear the ground for a more positive statement. For Tillich, in the aspect of his work which is not taken up by Robinson, argues that once we have laid out the rules of what

can and must be said non-symbolically about God, a great deal more can be said through the medium of religious symbolism.

It is here that Tillich embarks upon his celebrated "method of correlation": the Christian symbols must be interpreted in such a way as to illuminate and answer the questions being implied in contemporary human existence. In other words, Tillich is sensitive to precisely the concept of religion as a **cultural system** which we have tried to expound, and which Robinson ignores.

This, of course, is why in the end Tillich is such a "religious" thinker, as Bonhoeffer recognised. Robinson has seized upon the most austere philosophical prolegomenon to a "secular theology", as found in Tillich, and treated it as though it were itself the substance of such a theology. He has, in effect, domesticated it and reduced it in scope to an empirical exploration of personal relationships. Thus he is inclined to speak of "the ground of **our** being", "**our** (or **your**) ultimate concern", where Tillich would hesitate over the possessive adjectives.⁴

On the other hand, while what he **has** taken from Tillich is unsuited to the task he intends for it, he has **not** taken what might have served him better. Robinson's eagerness to redirect religious worship outward to the world makes him lack the sensitivity to the great store of image and symbol carried by the tradition, all of which Tillich is concerned to utilize. It is ironic that, almost at the end of the book, Robinson admits that

There are whole areas of response where the myth still occasions little difficulty. In prophecy and prayer, in liturgy and worship, the traditional imagery retains its luminous power (Robinson, *op.cit.*:132).

But he never acknowledges how vital this is: **apart from** the liturgical context, we face only "intellectual difficulties".

There is an early glimpse of a better way on page 13, when Robinson revealingly says that "whatever we may accept with the top of our minds, most of us still retain **deep down** the mental image of 'an old man in the sky'". But Robinson is telling us that "deep down" is precisely where the truth lies!

This observation leads us into our second line of criticism, which is that Robinson's decision to regard the ground of being as love, disclosed in the depths of personal relationships, lies under suspicion of being, not the fruit of secular experience, but either an arbitrary imposition or else a commitment made upon some other, undeclared basis.

For there are obviously grave difficulties facing the thesis that, if you examine the quality of human relationships in depth, you must conclude that love, so to speak, is what makes the world go round. To argue that "theological statements...are an analysis of the depths of all experience 'interpreted by love'" (ibid:49) simply begs the question, why interpret by love, rather than anything else?

Robinson claims to be interpreting the Gospel, not constructing a new natural theology. Christian theological statements seek to explicate thematically elements of the Christian tradition as they encounter actual social contexts, including "secular experience". But Robinson's chosen method does not allow him to admit that the givenness of the tradition in which he lives and moves is the rationale for what he says- i.e.it is the tradition which declares, God is a God of love, which is why experience is to be interpreted by love.

This "hidden agenda" explains certain oddities in Robinson's text: for example, why Love suddenly gets a capital L on page 49, and Ground a capital G four pages later. Also on

page 49, Robinson surprisingly says, about the idea of "pure personal relationship" being the ultimate truth of reality, "This, in face of all the evidence, is a tremendous act of faith". But if it is "in face of all the evidence", what is left of the claim simply to be analysing secular experience? Clearly, Robinson comes to his analysis armed with a lively religious tradition, while claiming to be standing religionless on the side of secular man.

A further criticism touches the large claims made for "depth" imagery in itself, quite apart from the "ground of being" metaphysic. For the association with "depth psychology" may well encourage an unhealthily introspective construal of the dimension of transcendence, even to the point of emphasising the "inner life" as the religious arena, precisely as both Bonhoeffer and Robinson were so anxious to avoid. Bonhoeffer reserved his harshest words for "existentialist philosophy and the psychotherapists", who forced man to face "existential depths" they truly did not feel, and detracted from the need to discover "horizontal transcendence" in the experiences of outgoing, secular living.

Robinson typically approves the "westward position" of the priest at the Eucharist on the grounds that it encourages the discovery of "transcendence in the midst". This may be so; but there is also the danger that the inward-turned congregation becomes a kind of spiritual psychotherapeutic group, perpetually exercised over the quality of its own *koinonia*. The trends in pastoral theology encouraged by Christian Radicalism have perhaps owed too much to psychology at the expense of sociology.

Lastly, Robinson's approach tends strongly towards affirming that "everyone is religious really." Religion is firstly rejected, as far as common-sense social perceptions of the religious are concerned. But later on it is redefined, as

"true religion", in terms of a particular function held to be essential for human social well-being. Although Robinson departs from the sociological consensus by treating the building up of human community through authentic, self-giving, "deep" personal relationships as his key function, his position is still subject to the criticisms of religious functionalism advanced earlier (*supra*:82-85).

To sum up, Robinson's proposed means of conveying the meaning of God to those outside the churches runs into several crucial problems. It attempts to establish a "secular" starting point which is not actually the one Robinson possesses. It has the utmost difficulty in preserving, and then accounting adequately for, the dimension of transcendence in secular experience which makes the confession of God possible within it. And its relationship with traditional patterns of religious culture remains ambiguous and obscure. We shall now proceed to see whether other contributors to radical thought about God, transcendence and religion have helped to overcome these problems.

2. Radical Theologians in Search of God.

Christian Radicalism generally accepted that modern cultural conditions were making it increasingly difficult for people to conceive God either as a separate being existing in a manner at least analogous to, though quite independently of, all known existences in the world, or as in any way the necessary conclusion of a logically compelling argument. The theologians were agreed that what could be termed the "Schleiermacher tradition" offered the only hope of advance on the question of God: that is, it would be necessary to undertake an analysis of secular experience in order to establish at least what talk of God might possibly **mean**, quite apart from whether or not it was **true**.⁵

i. John Wren-Lewis: Experimental Creativity.

Anglican layman and scientist Wren-Lewis puts the case against traditional objectifying theism in its starkest form in his 1964 Cambridge Divinity Faculty Open Lecture, "Does Science Destroy Belief?" Theology, in his view, has still not fully accepted the philosophical challenge of the present era, arising out of the refusal to treat this world of empirical objects, the world that lies open to scientific enquiry, as in any sense a mere "appearance", a superficial veil, a symbol of an *ens realissimum* lying invisibly beyond it. The ultimate nature of things is no longer conceived to reside in an order of ideal forms, beyond the flux and imperfection of this temporal moment of sense-bound experience. Rather, it is what lies to hand, what is given in and with the empirical world, that forms the material of all the reality there is, and over which it is mankind's especial duty and privilege to exercise that rule and governorship which will turn those materials to their most humanly beneficial and fulfilling, creative use.⁶

Wren-Lewis gives this very familiar philosophical position a fresh turn by importing into it a model of scientific activity. For science is pre-eminently **practical**: it is not concerned to discover the "truth" of an "order" lying beyond mere appearances, but to propose provisional hypotheses about how to understand, and thus to handle the world, and these are continually tested by discovering whether they **work**—whether they produce results. This procedure, typified by science, is for Wren-Lewis the true spirit of Christian faith, which he sees as a matter of creative experimental living in love in a community of persons, such that "results" accrue in a new and better kind of society, the quality of which can only be described as "transcendent" in relation to what we are familiar with.

Thus for Wren-Lewis, "God" is confessed in the changing patterns of creative, experimental living insofar as they bring

into being new and more desirable forms of society. He is prepared to describe the traditional religious outlook, on the other hand, as a "paranoid" state, in which a man is fixated upon a belief in "occult powers". This stifles all creativity by holding him in thrall to "another", which he believes to be more real than what lies before him. As a result, religion, which is ostensibly all about ultimate unities and harmony, in fact often incites bitter division and conflict born of fear, whereas science, despite being concerned with analysis and diversity, seems to create some kind of international, trans-cultural human communion (the scientific "fraternity"; Wren-Lewis, 1964(b)).

The most attractive part of Wren-Lewis' position is his recognition that the concept of God is bound up with the summons to bring into being a situation for the world which surpasses what currently prevails, an idea which is in keeping with our account of transcendence. But he expresses it *via* a most idealistic and optimistic view of science, which offers little hope of coping with the dark and discouraging side of experience. Further, he gives few indications of how the disposition to creative, experimental living is to be sustained. He is one of those whose past experience of traditional religion has apparently blinded him to any deeper appraisal of what the resources of the tradition might hold.

ii. Schubert Ogden: Ultimate Worthwhileness.

Ogden is the first of two theologians we shall mention here who express some sympathy with the radical position without being thoroughly identifiable with it. His collection of essays, The Reality of God, and in particular the long piece which gives the book its title (1967:1-70), makes the main outlines of his position clear. In his previous work, Christ Without Myth (1961), Ogden tried to reaffirm Bultmann's concept of demythologization while detaching it from Bultmann's insistence upon the kerygmatic event of Christ as the sole

source of the possibility of actualizing authentic existence. The Reality of God pursues his quest for a more **general** grounding of faith in an "appropriate philosophical analysis", and as such falls into the category of works which seek a basis in secular experience for talk of God.

Ogden agrees, firstly, that traditional supernaturalistic theism cannot respond to modern man's increasing secularity, by which he means his assertion of a creative autonomy vis-a-vis the world. This is because such a theism cannot conceive of any **genuine** relational involvement of God with the world. It has become powerless to halt the slide from a healthy secularity into a one-dimensional and uncreative secularism.

But secondly, Ogden sets out to demonstrate that, not only is pure secular empiricism an untenable option, but in fact belief in God is ultimately unavoidable. Religious language, he says, following Stephen Toulmin, seeks to answer the "limiting questions" which are always encountered if one pushes back and back the rational explication of, for example, scientific or ethical questions. Thus, why do we assume there is an "order" about the world which science is able to discover, or why do we think we should be "good" anyway?

Ogden argues that we can only think that such questions mean anything because we already possess a pre-reflective, pre-thematic conviction about the ultimate worthwhileness of existence. We are only able to operate at all as if life were not meaningless; and God may be defined as the objective ground in reality of this subjective confidence. In Ogden's terms, even the arguments deployed by atheists on behalf of "engagement" in the world support this view of God's reality (cf. Ogden, op.cit:120-43, on Sartre).

The third stage in Ogden's argument is that the God in whom belief is unavoidable is not the God of traditional

metaphysics, but of what he calls "neo-classical metaphysics", by which he means the God of process philosophy. It is here that Ogden finds room for a genuine relatedness of God to everything that happens in the world. "Relation", "process" and "becoming" replace "substance" and "being" as the fundamental structural properties of reality. God can be said to be **eminently** relative, as to his actualized forms of being, while retaining an objective absolute independence as to his identity *in abstracto*. This model, Ogden thinks, does justice to the distinctively Christian dialectical conception of God's transcendental otherness than the world and his real incarnational involvement in it.

The detailed exposition of a "process" model for God lies well outside our scope (Robinson himself went on to favour such a model in his Exploration into God (1967)), but Ogden's approach leads us to make two comments here. Firstly, we affirm his very clear perception of the issue which Christian Radicalism struggled to articulate: that the conditions of modern secularity require a way of thinking God which relates him genuinely to the events and interests of **this world**, while preserving a "critical distance" which avoids the slide into forms of naturalism.

But secondly, we raise a serious question mark against any *apologia* that makes belief in God **inevitable**. Ogden's talk of "ultimate worthwhileness" represents, at the crucial point, a flight from reality which puts the claim to be offering a notion of God fully compatible with modern secularity under severe strain. If it is true that religious people operate on the basis of Ogden's "ineradicable confidence in the final worth of things", is it also the case that the Gospel has nothing to say to those whose lot in life makes such serenity harder to come by? The **struggle** to believe seems lacking from Ogden's account.

iii. Langdon Gilkey: Contingency, Relativity, Temporality.

A second interested observer of the radical scene, Gilkey in his large work Naming the Whirlwind: the Renewal of God-Language (1969) attempts to provide for the dimensions of experience Ogden seems to leave out. Gilkey intends his book to be a philosophical prolegomenon to a contemporary Christian theology. He takes as his point of departure the efforts of Altizer, Hamilton, van Buren and the Jewish scholar Richard Rubenstein to develop in their various ways a theological method which can do without talk of God. His argument is that the genuine insights of radical theology do eventually demand the use of God-language if they are to be forged into a coherent system.

A basis for such language may be found, Gilkey suggests, if we meet the "secular mood" on its own ground and ask whether there are features of the secular way of thinking and perceiving the world (the "mind-set" or unthematized "frame" of thought which is usually held to render God-talk problematic) which might invite the use of religious categories to thematize them. The bulk of the book undertakes a long investigation into the characteristic modern attitudes or dispositions of contingency, relativity, temporality and autonomy. The first three are experienced as negative, potentially threatening constraints upon men, but the latter as the source of hope and liberation (Gilkey, 1969(b) offers a summary).

Gilkey's main argument is that the way in which each of the elements is experienced as a feature of pre-reflective "ontic awareness" by modern people, regardless of how they may be intellectually rationalized or "contained" at more reflective levels, creates a pressure towards questions which the mental frame set up by those elements alone is powerless to comprehend. Sometimes, we feel compelled to ask about the source and ground of our conditionedness, in the sense that who we are and what we mean seems to be **given** to us. Or, we

experience the threat of our own limitations; or wonder about the whence of our values; or become aware that all our rationalizing finally runs out on us, into mystery. In this way talk of God may arise as the source of a disturbance in our perceptions, as the Subject exerting the pressure we receive as Objects, as the calling-into-question of the rudiments of our secularity. (Gilkey, 1969(a):313; Gregor Smith, 1969:ch.7).

These moments of questioning, Gilkey says, may become the occasions of "hierophany", when the dimension of ultimacy breaks into common experience. This is a more comprehensive position than Ogden's, because it includes as a real possibility the experience of meaninglessness, the collapse of the ultimate context of meaning into confrontation with the "void", as yet another occasion for the manifestation of the sacred. It is undoubtedly more adequate than Robinson's narrow concentration upon personal relationship as the *locus* for the disclosure of the divine. It attempts to seize upon both the positive and negative moments of secularity in a way which comes closer to acknowledging the dialectical elements in the Christian way of talking of God. But it is still subject to the general criticisms we now wish to bring against all these attempts to by-pass the representations of religion in bringing home the reality of God to modern people.

iv. Critique.

The first of three major criticisms of these attempts to construct a kind of religious phenomenology of secular experience suggests that they are unrealistically culture-bound. In the words of van Buren (1963:68), "one wonders where the left wing existentialist theologians have found their 'modern man'". Van Buren's criticism relates specifically to Ogden's Christ without Myth, where language about the Cross as a "constantly present eschatological event" causes van Buren to wonder whether a man who habitually thinks in such terms will be likely to analyse "secular experience" in a manner

corresponding to the experience of **ordinary** people. The criticism is of wider application: the evidence is simply not present that the "pre-reflective ontic awareness" of modern man is as Ogden and Gilkey (and Robinson, more superficially) make it out.

Cox (1968: 91-4, 261-3) advances a similar criticism by arguing that both Eultmann and Tillich belong essentially to an earlier generation, an intellectual *élite* with roots in the liberal nineteenth-century *Bildungsschicht*. This generation lived through the major convulsions of the crumbling of Christendom and the decay of liberal theological idealism. It is they, and not pragmatic modern man, who suffer the "cultural *Weltschmerz*" necessary to bolster up a theology of "ultimate questions". But the emerging generations do not have to clear a space for religious awareness in a secular experience from which God seems to have departed. Instead, they look outward, expecting that if God is to be confessed at all the basis for doing so will come through practical and dynamic involvement together in the events of history (cf. van Peursen, 1967).

Both van Buren and Cox over-estimate the purposive practical-mindedness of modern people, and ignore the evidence for the persistence of a manifold confusion of religious ideas and the fragmentation of cultural life at mass levels. But the point stands that there will have to be a far greater everydayishness about the contemporary confession of God than most of the radicals allowed (although this idea was present in Bonhoeffer). To put it another way, the kindling of the religious imagination can only be achieved on the basis of a fairly unglamorous and cool appraisal of the contemporary social facts: this is what secularity properly demands.

Secondly, as we have already indicated in our treatment of Ogden, it will not do to set about proving to the unbeliever that he believes in God *malgré lui*. For it is never **necessary**

to interpret any experience in a religious manner, since the classification of something as religious depends upon its incorporation within a particular cultural system which is oriented to the transcendent; and it is always open to any individual to choose **not** to place his experience in such a context.

Furthermore, even if it were agreed that certain experiences **did** seem to point to a dimension of ultimacy or transcendence, this would still not necessitate speaking of "God" simply on that account. Ogden, for example, approaches God's reality along lines far removed from the Biblical categories which traditionally shape the confession of God in personal terms within the Christian tradition. But, at a particular point in the text, he suddenly begins to refer to God as "he", without explicit justification (on this see Kee, 1970:42f.) Belief in God is only made inevitable if you **define** God in a way which makes him more or less analytic in the concept of experience itself.

But God has meaning within the framework of particular religious traditions, and not as an extraction from experience of any kind. And so our third criticism of "secular" approaches to theism is that all the theologians who propose them are Christians, who for the purposes of the exercise pretend not to be. The analyses of Robinson, Ogden and Gilkey all proceed **from faith**.

Since it is explicitly admitted by Gilkey, at least, that the "experience" under analysis is a pre-reflective, unthematized ontic condition, it can only be the analysis of the "secular experience" of a **man of faith** which is offered, which is therefore not universal.⁷ There is a "hidden agenda" involved: the theologians see and interpret the world in the way they do, even when they are doing it "non-religiously", because they are participants in a religious tradition which

inescapably shapes the way they think, precisely because it moulds their **pre-reflective** mental frame.²³

The point we are making is this: God is confessed in a certain way in, through and with everyday "secular" experience by certain persons because of the religious tradition which predisposes them to do so. By birth or by conversion (as we might say, by being once or twice-born believers), they have become socialized, acculturated, acclimatized: the tradition is the air they breathe, or the ocean in which they swim. They are "in their element". This understanding can embrace both the strictest neo-Orthodox insistence upon the objective givenness of God and Revelation and the largely unreflective and habitual religious observance of those who have been brought up within, or indeed only on the fringes of, a particular tradition. In the words of John Macquarrie:

We believe in the midst of this ambiguous world because we have found in it a tradition of faith...which has made sense of some of its puzzles, and has offered a way of life that is both laid upon us as a demand and is at the same time supported and empowered by a grace that comes from beyond our little human resources (1967:109; ~~emphasis mine~~).

The analysis of secular experience will not yield any generalized or universal indicators of the reality of God, but only such as form part of the ontic awareness of the person conducting the analysis. But this is not a cause for dismay. For what we have is a wide range of particular instances of religious orientation, from the austere demands of Barthianism to the confused and tentative half-belief of the occasional churchgoer or folk-religionist, all socially objectified and made visible through the medium of religious practice. Together these provide the basis for a possible programme of "faith seeking understanding" under contemporary conditions, the goal of which would be a thematized, i.e.theologically formulated, statement of the doctrine of the God who is thus confessed (cf.Lindbeck, 1980:38ff, 114; Ward, 1977).

Religious traditions express an orientation to transcendence, which always stands in a double relation of affirmation and denial toward the prevailing order. The secular theologies we have looked at so far have striven with considerable difficulty to define the transcendent element in an analysis which tries to treat secular experience as in a more or less undifferentiated way the arena of God's disclosure. In the next section, we turn to investigate a number of attempts to specify just where the crucial, critical "break" represented by the transcendent is to be located.

3. *The Quest for Transcendence.*

i. Thomas Altizer: the *Coincidentia Oppositorum*.

Altizer's position constitutes a kind of limiting case in the discussion of how radical theology sees the transcendent being located in a secular doctrine of God, because on the face of it his theology claims to be a "Christian atheism" committed to the radical denial of transcendence in all forms. Employing a heady blend of Hegel, Blake and Nietzsche, Altizer attempts to construct a systematic theological rationale for the collapse of transcendence, and turn "death of God" from a cultural mood, or a subjective experience, into a historical and cosmic event forming the linch-pin of a kind of anti-metaphysic (see Altizer, 1967 and 1968; Ogletree, 1966:ch.4; K.Hamilton, 1966(b):64-75; Kee, 1970:81-99).

The nub of Altizer's contribution can be put in terms less calculated to shock than those he normally employs. On the basis of a Hegelian notion of the dialectical self-negation of Spirit, Altizer invites us to take the kenotic movement of the Incarnation with utter seriousness. Here, once and for all, the "primordial", transcendent God of religion, who was Spirit, emptied himself into flesh; and so, with the Crucifixion of Jesus, God literally died. The death of Jesus means for Altizer the passage from a particular into a universal incarnation, so

that Christians are now called upon to seek an "epiphany of the eschatological Christ" in the immediacy, openness and profanity of the secular, in "what lies before us", "in every human hand and face", a favourite phrase of Altizer's.

This means that, for Altizer, the secularity of the present age, in the extreme sense of being radically without religion, unholy, profane, marks the first historical instance of the full affirmation of the implications of Christianity. He calls upon believers to join in embracing and immersing themselves in profane, secular life, in a determination to carry through the complete dialectical negation of whatever vestiges of a "primordial sacred" remain, including those preserved in traditional religion, which continues to worship the "decaying body" of a God who has long since passed out of the spiritual form into the body of humanity. In the end, the new form of the sacred will emerge in the new humanity, through the final "coincidence of the opposites" (a phrase from the religious phenomenology of Mircea Eliade, another major influence upon Altizer).

Altizer's position, then, is neither conventionally atheistic nor entirely lacking in a transcendent perspective. For he intends to affirm as forcefully as possible that God is **here**, and nowhere else. Further, he insists upon the immense **risk** involved in letting go the last remnants of the old idea of the sacred, and **really** affirming the world as it now is, not just for its own sake but for the sake of an eschatological form of the sacred whose appearance is anticipated. In all of this Altizer is very far from being a "secular theologian"; but there are still severe difficulties in the way of accepting his position as a Christian possibility.

The problems mostly arise out of Altizer's refusal to specify in either concrete or practical terms what his rather rhapsodic Christian embracing of the profane actually involves.

How, for example, does the Christian Yes-saying to the world differ from the world-affirmation of the kind of pragmatically-minded, rather unimaginative secular man such as van Buren always has in mind? Altizer's stance does seem to imply some kind of uncritical quietism towards secular culture, in which everything that appears to deny the very substance of the Christian hope has to be the more wholeheartedly accepted, in order that this acceptance may somehow eventually lead to its being transformed into its opposite.

With Altizer it is as though, in the dialectical movement of faith, the moments of the dialectic were taking place successively rather than simultaneously and reciprocally. In other words, we are now in the phase where God has completed his own self-negation as Spirit, and it is now up to man to respond in a total affirmation of flesh. But this is precisely what faith will not permit us to do univocally and unambiguously; for in every act of seeking to grasp and affirm the world, its order and meaning and our place in it, faith issues a "Yes, but..." which impels the pursuit of something more than what is directly and empirically given. Altizer's approach entails the complete postponement of any such dialectical reversal until the next, and unpredictable, eschatological phase comes into being.

ii. Gordon Kaufman: Limit as Personal.

Kaufman's influential essay on transcendence (1967) seeks to sharpen the kind of perspective already found in Ogden and Gilkey, by making more room for the essential *caveat* or *proviso* placed by faith upon all analyses of experience as the ground of talk about God. Kaufman's proposal is basically this: talk of God and of transcendence arises when what **ultimately** limits all human endeavour and possibility is understood by means of a **personal** analogy. That is, religious ideas are not invited by just **any** experience of human limitation, but only when what sets limits to our powers, our willing and acting,

and constricts our horizons, is conceived as similar to our being restrained by the conflicting or competing wills or actions of others.

For when we encounter other persons, we recognize we are up against something irreducible, non-manipulable, because radically other than ourselves. Our world-view is invariably called into question whenever we permit the thought to enter in that we have to **share** the same world with others. Other selves are not **available** to us to be fitted as constituent parts in our construction of reality: they possess constructions of their own. A perceptual shift occurs, which is the inbreaking of transcendence, when we see that what is true about the intrusion of other persons radically qualifies the whole of any "sewn-up" world-view we might have, seen as a totality.

Kaufman's proposal reverts, in a sense, to the territory of "personal relationship" marked out by Robinson, but in a more suggestive way. For religious faith is lived out not alone but corporately; and the processes whereby opinions and ways of seeing the world are repeatedly called into question and qualified by successive encounters with others, go to nourish and build up faith. Out of such experiences springs the recognition of God as one who both confirms and criticises the believer's present resting-place in the world, and grants a kind of security which is gratefully received in return for a promise to pursue further possibilities which lie, as yet, beyond the believer's horizon.

Other ways have been suggested of incorporating a creative disjunction or perception of the extraordinary within the ordinary, by escalation of the ordinary towards certain non-negotiable limits (van Buren, 1968(b); Wren-Lewis, 1964(a); Gregor Smith, 1966:124). Nevertheless, these ways still only lie at the very edges of what the Christian message has to say to the contemporary secular situation, and do not yet fulfil the

aim of Christian Radicalism of producing a proclamation of the Gospel of God which can actually reach secular man where he is.

iii. Alistair Kee: the Alternative Way.

Coming right at the end of our period, Kee's The Way of Transcendence: Christian Faith without Belief in God surveyed most of the previous attempts to express the Gospel in secular terms and found them wanting. There are two particular merits in Kee's position: firstly, he does not try to present a **religionless** approach, but instead argues that religious practice itself will have to incorporate the ideas he is proposing. Secondly, he insists that **transcendence** is the vital concept to be retained and given expression, rather than any definition of God existing independently of the practice of a specific religious way of life.

Kee argues that "what theology is basically on to", as he puts it, is that there is found to be "an insurmountable obstacle to man insofar as he pursues his own ends, but equally, a never-failing source of power to pursue quite different ends" (Kee, op.cit:200). The important difference among men today is whether they choose to pursue the "way of immanence", meaning, in New Testament terms, "the broad way that leads to destruction"³, the uncritically accepted way into which they have been socialized, or the alternative "way of transcendence" exemplified by Jesus. This way compels a man to be critical of given realities:

In choosing the way of transcendence, we make a value judgment that things are not as they seem. We are disputing reality. We are disputing what the nature of man really is (ibid:228-9).

In short, the content of the transcendent is the vision of an alternative set of possibilities for the world. To put it another way, there is another world, and it is this one, but changed.

Kee thinks that, in future, some who are committed to the way of transcendence in Jesus may want to push through to a confession of God as the ontological grounding for such faith and for the striking over-againstness and self-authenticating quality of the life it invites, but most will not. "Belief" will cease to be a relevant category for questions about God; God is not someone who is believed in, but lived under, acted upon and responded to. Kee, in fact, ends his book by shelving the ontological question completely: anyone who finds the way of transcendence to be valid and rewarding, but then goes on to ask **why**, has missed the point.

But we do not think this is so. For, given the forms of religious culture, in ritual and image and practice, which can carry the orientation to a changed world to which Kee refers, the commitment he wants to see will lead to the confession of God, by way of the worship of God. That is, it is less a case of a rational **decision** to believe, than a discovery that, with God, to think him is to know him, in practice. There can be no concept, worked out in advance, of a God which a person might or might not then come to know. The way in to all that can be meant by "believing in" God is through worshipping, praying, and trying to pursue the religious way of life.

What Kee's account does make clear is that there are many people who desire to follow the way of Jesus because they find in it the pattern of a life and a society which surpasses the world that now is, but who think their following of that way will have to be "non-religious" simply because the religious culture of the churches available to them fails to demonstrate the transcendent quality which attracted them to Jesus in the first place. There is, therefore, no escaping the fundamental problem of religion as the vehicle for expressing and embodying intimations of transcendence and the meaning of God.

iv. Harvey Cox: The Future.

One more approach to transcendence within the ambit of the radical theology requires our attention. While the debate about The Secular City was under way, Cox turned to the work of Ernst Bloch for help in articulating the way he saw God related to present secular history, in response to critics who had accused him of simply dissolving God into the movement of social change. For Bloch, in his *Prinzip der Hoffnung*, man is cardinally the creature who **hopes**; and Bloch attempts to posit an objective correlation between the "*Traum nach vorwaerts*" in which man engages and the actual structural and historical possibilities for the world. That is, man's dream is not just an empty or arbitrary one.

Cox suggests that a biblical theism might well provide the link sought by Bloch between the persistent dream of the ideal and the historical realities. He writes:

If we can affirm anything which both defines and transcends history it will be the future as it lives in men's imagination, nurtured by his memory and actualized by his responsibility (Cox, 1966:197-203; see also Cox, 1967).

The relation of the future to the present is rather precisely one of transcendence, insofar as temporal continuity is combined with unpredictability and un-determinedness. The future can be imagined, provisionally planned for, dreamt about, and conceived in the most ideal and perfectly fulfilled terms. It is given to us- but it still has to be worked at. The future comes out of the unknown, but also develops from the present and the past. As a model of the transcendent, the future is thoroughly secular, because it is the future of the world; but it is inescapably religious, because it promises another world.

It is, of course, not to the theology of Christian Radicalism that we should have to look to find the most fruitful lines of development of the concept of futurity.¹⁰

But the idea of a creative vision of what might be, which can be assembled from the materials of what already is in such a way that there is a compulsion to turn what **might** be into what **will** be, is an important one which was at least incipient in some of the contributors to the radical theology (cf. in popular terms Phipps, 1966:171-2; Holloway, 1972:62-9; Woollard, 1972:66-7).

We have seen, in this section, how attempts to convey the meaning of theism through accounts of secular reality which incorporate some means of standing over against that same reality and judging it, questioning it or marking it as extraordinary even in its ordinariness, introduce a dimension which makes them somewhat more successful than approaches which simply aim to find grounds for talk of God in secular experience as it is. But this dimension of transcendence still requires a cultural vehicle for its expression, which is why we still need to focus more explicitly on Christian Radicalism's attitude to religion. We have already seen that this was problematic in Robinson, whose prior commitment to "religionlessness" disabled him from gaining due assistance from the resources of his own tradition when searching for the contemporary meaning of God and transcendence.

4. Religion, Transcendence and God.

i. The Dialectical Character of Christianity .

We begin this section by applying to the specific case of Christianity the sociological understanding of religion put forward in Chapter IV. The Christian tradition fills out and objectifies the orientation to the transcendent with the content of a very particular vision, that disclosed in Jesus Christ. Out of this is confessed a God who declares and demonstrates his radical relational involvement with and affirmation of the world, while at the same time standing beyond it and beckoning men and women towards a salvation

which consists of a more perfect, eschatological and hence transcendent fulfilment of its potentialities.

Radical theology was unable to perceive this dialectical pattern. It did not see that the "other world" posited by religion, as a "sacred cosmos" (Berger), "general order of existence" (Geertz) or "super-empirical transcendent reality" (Robertson), precisely because it comes to manifest a "uniquely realistic aura of factuality", cannot in the end leave the world be. The main traditions of understanding the social functions of religion, in terms of integrating the social group around a legitimated concept of social order, and providing constructs of meaning in the face of situations which would threaten it, do not merely support a socially quietist and uncreative role for religion.

For these unitive and assuring functions are necessary to undergird the purposive activity of the religious group within their social world, **even such activities as are designed to change it**. To put it another way, the critical and prophetic functions of religion are ironically reliant upon those mainstream functions which in themselves appear more likely to uphold the *status quo*. Hence a dialectical tension appears, which we are saying is typical of all religion, allowing for the likelihood of the category "religion" being one which owes its origin to a Judaeo-Christian context of understanding (see *supra*:78). As Barbara Hargrove writes:

This is the tension based on the common tendency, in dealing with matters of ultimate concern and sacred character, to want to preserve them in their exact form because they are too holy to manipulate. This is contrasted with an appreciation of the sacred cosmos as the repository of unreached ideals and untapped power, out of which may come at any time the impetus for major change leading to a better realization of those ideals (Hargrove, 1979:59).

The Christian religion is characterized by a sharpening of this tension to the very highest degree. The more the

situation of faith within the world becomes precarious, the greater the pressures to defend those symbolic constituents of the sacred cosmos which hold together the diminishing religious group, underline their identity and offer rationales for their increasingly threatened status. But, conversely, the requirement also becomes the greater for new creative initiatives to pose a prophetic challenge to the world.

It is important to identify this as a tension inherent within religion, and eminently so in the Christian religion. It does not lie between "religion" and "Christianity", or "religion" and "faith", nor even between "good" and "bad" faith, or "authentic" and "alienating" religion. This is not to say that no such value judgments are possible: an undialectical religion may well be alienating and a vehicle of bad faith. But, there must be no dismissal of, for example, a religion which legitimates as inevitably opposed to "faith", "true Christianity", or any other term implying unqualified approval.

Radical theology displays a clear tendency to dismiss religion as inimical to the spirit of Christian faith, along the lines of Bonhoeffer rather than Barth (*supra*:68). Sometimes it distinguishes between "true" and "false" (idolatrous or inauthentic) religion, and then equates "true Christianity" with the former. Such a course is doubly removed from social realities: firstly, it is faulty in its judgment upon religion in general, and secondly, it is unrealistic in supposing that what it sees as "true Christianity" could be fully realized in socio-cultural form. With these considerations in mind, we may now look quite briefly at a number of approaches to religion in and around the ambit of Christian Radicalism.

ii. Altizer: Religion as Regression.

In the case of Altizer, the entire basis for any kind of identifiably separate religious culture whatsoever has been nullified in the decisive events of Incarnation and Cross. His

position emerges as a kind of neo-primitivism in which the category "religion" is no longer relevant to the circumstances. For Altizer, any religious movement referring to another world, an alternative order or a transcendent possibility is a disastrous regression to a pre-incarnate form of faith. Religion is a backward movement toward spirit, whereas Christianity looks forward to a contemporary and hitherto unknown epiphany of the sacred through a dialectical affirmation of the profane.

The logic of Altizer's position is self-contained, and its practical insufficiencies have already been mentioned. But the judgment upon religion is one-sided, for the analogy of backward and forward movements might just as well be applied to the perpetual dialectical tension of religion. In New Testament terms, faith moves between the poles of *hē archē* and *ta kaina*, or again, *to prōton* and *to eschaton* (Minear, 1965). The rituals of a Remembrance Day, for example, anchor the sacrificial deaths of the war-dead in a frame of timelessness which forever affirms the values for which they fought, but simultaneously look to a day when wars shall be no more. Only the God who has been "our help in ages past" can likewise be declared "our hope for years to come".

iii. Wren-Lewis: Religion as Neurosis.

The view that religion is a "neurotic" condition is taken over by Wren-Lewis (1964(a)) rather loosely from Freud. Without relying very extensively on the details of the Freudian understanding, Wren-Lewis argues that religion sees mankind as needing to bring itself into line with a "theory", a hypothetical cosmic order behind the scenes where truth is located. As a result, religion paralyzes creative endeavour in the world and holds its subjects in thrall to supposed "occult powers". It fails to create the conditions of love and reconciliation for which it is supposed to stand, because it is not experimental, pragmatic and open. It predetermines the game

and then prevents people from playing it for fear of breaking the rules.

This does not mean that Wren-Lewis sees no need for the activities of worship:

We need a Church, a practical religion...[but] the traditional forms of worship, from the Quaker to the Catholic, are too loaded with the neurotic associations of the past to be of any use at all (art.cit;44).

His own experience of the Church was doubtless a damaging one; but, unfortunately, what he calls "neurotic associations" are part of the very fibre of the religious enterprise. You cannot have experiment, pragmatism and openness without "theory", continuities and givenness. Some of the uncreative, uncritically accepted "occult powers" of today's religion are, after all, the still live embers of yesterday's experimental religious openness. The church Wren-Lewis "needs" will never be found; at least, not for long.

iv. The Pelzes: Religion as Bogus Certainty.

Werner and Lotte Pelz, whose book God is No More is one of the more idiosyncratic products of Christian Radicalism in Britain, make another wholly negative appraisal of religion. They treat it as an easy way out, a means of abdicating responsibility for making moral decisions in the *novum* of the moment and for living authentically in relation with one's fellows:

Religion gives us the feeling of ultimate security, offers us something definite to believe in, persuades us that we know what we believe and convinces us that we really believe what we think we believe...Religion also gives us the opportunity to experience the 'joy of fellowship' of shared beliefs and convictions on comparatively inexpensive terms...Religion justifies us in all we do- *c'est son métier*- for even when it admonishes us in our failures, it does so only by letting us know what we should have done...Religion is the apotheosis of the 'law'...(W.& L. Pelz, 1963;106f.)

The Pelzes' alternative, a breathless and exotic state of being continually captivated by the maddening elusiveness of the words of Jesus, is certainly far more exciting, on the face of it, than mere workaday religion. But the Pelzes want to cut themselves off completely from the existing communities of faith, the undertow of religious subculture and the necessary securities of routine and familiar tradition. They assume that decisions taken almost automatically, on the basis of deeply ingrained, socialized-in symbols and values, **cannot** be authentic, cannot embody the true "mind of Christ". Such assumptions are likely to make the reality of God more, and not less, remote from the perceptions of ordinary "secular" people.

Further reference to the issues raised by the Pelzes' critique of religion will be found in Chapter XIII *infra*, on the ethics of Christian Radicalism. Here, however, we wish to balance the treatment by including two more moderate views by sympathetic commentators on aspects of the radical scene.

v. Daniel Jenkins: Religion and the Crisis of Faith.

Religion, as man's aspiration after God and as his response to him, thrusts him into a realm beyond the superficial appearance of every day. It makes him aware of the claims of another world than that conditioned by space and time and of other purposes than those which present themselves naturally to him in the midst of his secular occasions. It sets a question mark against all his buying and selling, his marrying and giving in marriage, and asks him, 'What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' (Jenkins, 1962:71).

Here is a contributor who shows himself very much more aware of the transcendent dimension of religion and the critical tensions it introduces into the perception of reality. Indeed, this passage of Jenkins somewhat overstates the case; for it is manifestly **not** true, for example, that the Christian religion "sets a question mark" against marriage for the vast majority of those who seek religious endorsement of the contract.

Rather, religion signs, seals and delivers it and bestows upon it a quality of sacredness which a civil ceremony alone cannot do. This, indeed, is a good illustration of just one phase in religion's dialectic.

But elsewhere, Jenkins puts it more subtly, in terms of the relation between religion and faith:

The mark of a good church order is...the extent of its ability to keep thrusting the church's religion into the crisis of faith, and to keep doing this even while it is surrounded by all the precious fruits of faith (ibid:46).

Faith, Jenkins here recognises, as the originating and underlying disposition involved in the religious life, inevitably produces its religious expressions as the cultural channels through which it is conveyed. Far from being an encumbrance or an obstacle to faith, these embodiments are "precious fruits" which are able, in their turn, to produce yet more faith in those who make use of them. The fruits only go bad and lose their value when they no longer serve to enable this process of faith-producing-religion, religion-producing-faith (cf. Morris, 1964:ch.6; Macquarrie, 1967:74f).

It is the arrangement of the Church's worshipping life and activities which is ultimately responsible for seeing to it that this continuum occurs, through which the idea and the reality of God as both with us and beyond us is kept alive and transmitted over time in culture and society.

vi. Allan Galloway: Cult and Culture.

Galloway's account of religion, from his 1967 publication Faith in a Changing Culture, illustrates well the resources available in the work of Tillich on religion, upon which Robinson completely failed to draw in Honest to God (see especially Tillich, 1956 & 1957). The Christian tradition provides the elements for seeking a disclosure of the holy both through what is, and through a vision of what ought to

be, which have historically been polarized into the typical forms of Catholic sacramentalism and Protestant ethical-prophetic religion. But the polarization is merely a reifying and "freezing" of either moment of a dialectic.

It is possible for religion to become so isomorphic with the contours of a culture that it retains no leverage for stimulating social change; that is a familiar enough danger. But it is also possible for a stance of strenuous resistance to the contemporary ethos to leave a religion with little more than an idolatrous fixation upon past forms, structures and dogmas.

Galloway views the task of the religious cult- all the unambiguously and visibly "religious" trappings of the whole Christian system- as that of mediating between these positions. The cult, in its orientation upon the transcendent object, serves to prevent the religious ultimate, the fulfilment of the world that is the promise and call of God, from becoming totally assimilated to secular culture. But it is also the only medium for bringing the transcendent into vital contact with the culture in which it must seek realization. Religion continually negotiates the knife-edge of this dual role.¹¹

vii. Conclusions.

We have argued in this chapter that it is unhelpful and misleading to suppose that the way to a repristination of theism under secular conditions lies through "religionlessness". This applies, not only to the more extreme idea of a faith literally without worship or sacred objectifications, as in Altizer, but also to the more guarded sense favoured by Robinson, which looks to the retention of a form of organized religion shorn of its "other-worldly" orientation. To return for a moment to Robinson's view, he writes:

The purpose of worship is not to retire from the secular into the department of the religious, let alone to escape from 'this world' into 'the other world', but to open oneself to the meaning of the Christ in the common, to that which has the power to penetrate its superficiality and redeem it from its alienation (Robinson, 1963a:87; emphasis mine).

Insofar as Robinson is clearly right to disapprove of religion as "escape" or "retirement", he fails to see that the achievement of the aim we have emphasised in the passage above depends upon a proper understanding of those religious representations of "another world" which he is so keen to abolish.

For the Christian religious tradition carries an extensive agenda of double-edged symbols which simultaneously declare **both** that we and the world are affirmed and cared for, rooted in a principle of order and structured by meaning, **and** that neither we nor the world can lay claim to ultimacy and static is-ness, but are called to change, future fulfilment and final transfiguration.

Bonhoeffer's speculations about religionlessness cannot be made into grounds for letting the Church off the hook, when its formal provisions for religious activity fail to engage with the large majority of the people. We cannot conclude that cultural conditions simply make it impossible for people to be religious any more; we have to ask what is amiss with our (i.e. the Church's) religion, and how it might again become the vehicle and the concrete means for crystallizing, sharpening and summoning into action those perceptions which alone can both undergird and change the world in the way the Gospel demands.¹²

The other ramifications of this basic conclusion, that the reality of God comes first and foremost through his being confessed, worshipped and (imperfectly) obeyed within the

provisions of a living religious tradition, are all matters which will receive more extensive comment later on.

Firstly, we accept the view that a secular society which differentiates the specialist sub-system of religion can have advantages for the promotion of the healthy and distinctively Christian tension we have been discussing (cf. Ling, 1963; Gardner, 1965; Casserley, 1965). We need to grasp the religious opportunities relative isolation offers, and neither to bemoan secularization with the conservative Christian, nor to urge compliance with its premises after the manner of some less subtle pronouncements of the radicals. But this is a programmatic issue for Chapter X.

Secondly, our position means taking all manner of "fringe practices" around the penumbra of the Church much more seriously than Christian Radicalism was inclined to do. Policies which assume a situation of post-Christian heathenism and concentrate exclusively on the "commitment" approach to the core religious minority, are wasteful in their stewardship of the religious resources of the people. Folk religion is far too much of a living, chaotic, confused and persistent force for the Christian churches to be able to afford **not** to assume responsibility for it.

For religion engages in sacred world-construction, embodied in ritual, symbol and social form: and the Church cannot hope to promote that construction which is impelled and informed by the vision of Jesus, without seeking to disentangle and understand the complex and compromised items of its own cultural heritage which appear dimly and distortingly reflected in the hall of mirrors constituted by the religious universes people actually sustain (see Martin, 1967; Hickling, 1968; Vidler, 1962; Habgood, 1983:ch.5).

Thirdly, the renewal of liturgy is really not just an in-group preoccupation of the churches. For the language and ritual of liturgy must perform the double function of making

the praise of God spring directly from a genuine relatedness to the secular concerns of day-to-day living, and opening up the critical gap between the ordinary and everyday and the constraining vision of the transcendent out of which God acts and speaks. We shall allude further to this in the closing chapter of the thesis.

Finally, this chapter supports a conclusion which is general throughout the thesis and will be restated more fully at the end. It is a plea for ecclesiological realism. The radical theologians tended to envisage ideal congregations bearing little relation to any existing ones, and to reject the existing ones for their cosy other-worldliness, or dismiss them as irrelevant to the task of secular mission. But a secular theology cannot retreat from dealing with concrete realities at the very point where the primary tangible, historico-cultural embodiment of theological meanings is to be found. The ecclesiology of Christian Radicalism was, for the most part, sadly out of touch with the churches.

Throughout our discussion we have spoken freely of the specifically Christian content of transcendence which sets up a particularly acute tension between the religious legitimation of certain world-orders and the critical offer of creative alternatives. There is one important approach to a secular theology found within Christian Radicalism which we have not covered in this chapter, because it merits separate treatment in a chapter of its own.

This approach places in centre-stage the "specifically Christian content" to the exclusion of all other theistic possibilities, by focusing upon the human figure of Jesus of Nazareth as all that is contained in, or could possibly be meant by, Christian talk of God. It is to this Jesucentric tradition that we turn in the next chapter; and we shall argue that it does not provide a convenient way of by-passing the

questions which we have maintained in this chapter are raised by our sociological understanding of religion.

NOTES.

1. There has been no shortage of very able critiques of Robinson exposing the shortcomings of his proposals vis-a-vis orthodoxy, or as a piece of systematic theological scholarship. Among these are the reviews by Herbert McCabe and H.E.W. Turner, and the article by David Jenkins, in The Honest to God Debate: 142-54; 165-80; 194-206; Ian Ramsey's strictures on Robinson's understanding of religious language, in Christian Discourse (1975:61-90), and Mascall's surgical dissection in ch.3 of The Secularization of Christianity. But we are more concerned with why the book fails as an experiment in secular theology. Since our detailed discussion of secularization in theological understanding does not come until Chapter X, we are using the term "secular" provisionally in this chapter to mean "pertaining to this one, experienced world as the sole substantive reality there is."

2. In Honest to God Robinson's interweaving of the discussion with references to Martin Buber seems rather abruptly to interrupt the flow of his general reliance on Tillich. However, Robinson wrote his doctoral thesis on Buber, and he explains more fully Buber's considerable influence on him in the Prologue to Exploration into God, under the title "Quest for the Personal". This is why Robinson's "secular" theology is so thoroughly (and inadequately) only a "personalist" theology.

3. Even in ch.4 of Honest to God, where the model of union with the Ground of Being as Love is "Christologized", the ambiguity remains as to whether Robinson is making a claim for something generally true of experience, or saying that Christ actually introduces something that was not there before. Thus he says that Jesus empties himself of himself as man, in order to disclose the God who is present "at depth": "For it is making himself nothing, in his utter self-surrender to others in love, that he discloses and lays bare the Ground of man's being as Love" (75). But then he generalizes: "For at this point, of love 'to the uttermost', we encounter God, the ultimate 'depth' of our being, the unconditional in the conditioned" (76; emphasis mine). It is never clear whether this new mode of relationship can be secularly disclosed regardless of its being present, or not, within the Christian community, or whether the explicitly Christian input is required in order to bring it into being. David Jenkins (art.cit:203-4) has shown that what Robinson wants to say about Jesus requires more weight to be given to traditional conceptions of the transcendence of God in order to be coherent.

4. It may appear as if all this is a heavier critical treatment than the theological flimsiness of Robinson's book is worth. But it should be remembered that we are interested in the curious disproportion between the immense impact of the book at the time and the small significance accorded to the radicalism of the sixties in the Church of today. The important theological questions are not confined to an academic analysis of what Robinson has put on the page.

5. The "Schleiermacher tradition" originally meant clearing a space for religious experience as something *sui generis*. Schleiermacher, in his On Religion - Speeches to its Cultured Despisers (1799), claimed that religion "resigns at once all claim on anything that belongs either to science or morality". He meant that while religion is unable to pronounce upon what we can know about the material world, and cannot prescribe unilaterally what we ought to do, nevertheless it has its proper sphere of validity in the area of how it feels to exist in the world. By "feeling" (*Gefuehl*) is meant a pre-reflective condition of ontic awareness, about which religion begins to reflect; and when it does so, it concludes that the essential nature of this awareness is one of being "absolutely dependent". In relation to any conceivable object or circumstance in the world, man knows himself to be partly free (autonomous), partly dependent; but in "piety", the balance tips wholly on to the dependent side (see Jenkins, 1966:25-55). The difference between Schleiermacher and the development of his tradition in the theologians we are examining here is that they, sensitised by a century and a half of "projectionism", sociological and psychological reductionism and other theories keen to demolish the claim that there is such a thing as religious experience in its own right, prefer to examine what aspects of the entire range of normal experience might justify the use of religious talk about them.

6. To illustrate, Wren-Lewis contends that the religious authorities who opposed Galileo were not merely being reactionary. They simply could not conceive that anything as mundane as what you could see through a telescope could be of any relevance to the ultimate truth, "how things really are".

7. Gregor Smith has argued that this is the case with Anselm's ontological argument (Smith, 1966:59-64). Although the letter of the argument involves the use of pure discursive reasoning, *Christo remoto*, to arrive at the concept of God, what the

spirit of it amounts to is the recognition that, from within the perspective of faith, to think God is to know and encounter him. In the process of *fides quaerens intellectum*, there can be no conceptualization of God (essence) which leaves open the question of whether the concept is instantiated (existence).

8. This is perhaps the only way in which Barth's insistence upon the absolute determinative objectivity of revelation and Word can be made sense of, for Barth seems to be offering a monumental analysis of how things appear from within the pre-rational experience of a particularly heightened Protestant type of faith; a being grasped from beyond, critically apprehended by a compelling Word, and forcefully dislodged from the perceptual centre of one's own universe. The Barthian *analogia fidei* would otherwise appear to provide us no means of hoisting ourselves on to the epistemological platform from which, with Barth, we might survey the world from God's point of view; or else, the only way up would be at the expense of our historical particularity, and hence our proper humanity.

9. Matthew 7:13.

10. See e.g. Moltmann (1979:15-16): "The vision of a qualitatively new future of history can become a transcendent horizon which opens up and stimulates the process of transcending towards a new historical future... [This vision] already puts its stamp on the way history is experienced and moulded here in the present". Moltmann of course worked out his eschatological understanding (*Theology of Hope*, 1967) in dialogue with the work of Ernst Bloch. Pannenberg (1969) has constructed a transcendental ontology in which futurity replaces categories of substance for talk of God, who appears as "the power of the future". Metz (1969) views the capacity of mankind to envisage and take responsibility for the future as a crucial link between the Gospel's understanding of the world in faith and hope, and the process of secularization as the world's coming-to-itself in its worldliness. Robert King (1974:104ff.) thinks that the notion of the future is the concept of transcendence most likely to make sense to the modern secular mind. Robinson (1967:101ff.) has given Biblical grounds for thinking God in terms of the one who goes before, the Summons, he that lies always ahead of us.

11. Blackham (1966) has given a classification of types of religion designed to show the kinds of alliances, cultural, political, popular and ecclesiastical, into which the basic drive of faith enters in changing configurations through history.

12. Activities like informal small-group worship, house-group study and chaplaincy-type involvement in factories or hospitals may look like "religionless Christianity" to the clergy, who are imbued with the ethos of ecclesiastical life, but for lay people, as for our approach here, they are still very much religion; a chastened religion seeking occasion for its symbols to bud into renewed vitality. Armstrong (1964) draws a parallel between the self-styled "secular Christians" and the Gnostics of the early Christian centuries, who saw themselves, the *pneumatikoi*, as having progressed beyond the "merely religious" *psychikoi*. But, Armstrong says, it belongs to man's humanness as a social being to objectify in symbols and to institutionalize. Without a programme of transcendental religion to accompany it, Robinson's idea of the secular Christian life would only evaporate into "living a decent life". David Jenkins wrote in an article in *Frontier* in 1968, "To whom do we pray?" that our problem is not how to become religionless but that our existing religion is "neither here nor there": neither keyed in to actual concrete concerns, nor really revelatory of the compelling power of the transcendent.

CHAPTER IX: CHRISTIANS AND THE HUMANITY OF JESUS.

When the question of an objective, transcendent God is judged too problematic, for the time being, to be capable of solution, the radical theologian has recourse instead to the person of Jesus of Nazareth. For Jesus, despite whatever dogmatic conundrums Christian history may have erected around him, remains at least a historical individual of a certain character. The empirical availability of Jesus, while scarcely without its difficulties, was an assumption made easier for the theologians of the 1960s in virtue of the post-Bultmannite "new quest of the historical Jesus", which asserted that some continuity between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith was essential to the rational integrity of the kerygma.'

The theologians we are considering largely accepted the principles of the "new quest", to the effect that despite being Christologically and kerygmatically interpreted through and through, the Gospel accounts do yield the portrait of an individual possessing certain highly distinctive and striking features which account for the kerygma taking the form it did. They believed, therefore, that they were justified in appealing to the human Jesus as the ground of a secular form of faith.

1. Van Buren and The Secular Meaning of the Gospel.

i. General Observations.

We shall begin by discussing Paul van Buren's The Secular Meaning of the Gospel as the most sustained attempt to construct a "theology" without God but decisively focused upon Jesus. We shall concentrate upon the use made of the figure of Jesus by van Buren and others in their Jesu-centric accounts of faith, and then offer a critique stimulated again by our sociological understanding of religion. To lay the groundwork for a more specific attention to Jesus, we need to consider certain general problems of van Buren's work.

The heart of the matter concerning Jesus is found in chapters 5 and 6 of The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, and especially pages 117-45 (page references being to the 1963 SCM "Cheap Edition"). In order to be in a position to approach these, we give a summary analysis of the preceding contents.

Van Buren acknowledges his indebtedness to Bonhoeffer at the very beginning of his book. He intends to offer a contribution to the quest for a "non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts": and the way he intends to do it is by means of an analysis of what people **mean** when they use the language of faith. It is an exercise in *fides quaerens intellectum*, where the *fides* belongs to a "secular man" who is himself not a little puzzled about what his religion is really all about. This means that van Buren can be exempted from the criticism we made of Robinson, Ogden and Gilkey, about purporting to be offering an analysis of secular experience without recognizing that this is only such experience as it appears to a religious man. Van Buren never claims to be doing anything other than interpreting **faith** to those who find themselves professing it.

He illustrates the background to his problem from Antony Flew's sceptical version of John Wisdom's parable of the gardener (which shows how religious assertions which seem at first to be about actual states of affairs can die "the death of a thousand qualifications"), and from Bultmann's programme of demythologizing (van Buren, *op.cit*:3-6). Bultmann's solution to the problem of theological meaning will not do, van Buren says, because it can be attacked from both sides.

The "right", typified by Barth, claim that it empties the Gospel of all its distinctive revelatory particularity, while the "left", represented by Ogden, criticise it for irrationally wanting to hang on to the uniqueness of the Christ-event (*ibid*:7-12). But van Buren thinks that the proposals of right and left alike depend upon rarefied and Pickwickian uses of

language, which only mystify the would-be believer about what is actually meant.

But the philosophical school of (mostly British) language-analysts may enable us, van Buren contends, to understand better what the Christian means when he uses the language his religion bequeaths to him. This school

...challenges the Christian to think clearly, speak simply, and say what he means without using words in unusual ways, unless he makes it quite clear what he is doing (ibid:15).

Any meaning disclosed by this method would be what van Buren means by a "secular meaning of the Gospel", for it would be the fruit of the believer's self-understanding on the basis of "certain empirical attitudes" which the modern culture obliges him, willy-nilly, to adopt (ibid:19-20).

All of this is laid out in van Buren's careful Introduction. Part One of the book proceeds with the ground-clearing part of the programme. First a *résumé* of patristic Christology is provided, with an adept account of the problems involved in the categories of Chalcedon and the efforts of "Biblical theology" to deal with them. Van Buren offers his own earlier attempt at reconstruction in terms of "a Christology of call and response", with Jesus as the one who was seen and confessed to be perfectly obedient to the call of Yahweh. However, he concludes, this is still "sadly mythological, in form if not in content" (ibid:55).

In chapter 3, therefore, he moves on to consider in detail the existentialist offer of a demythologized understanding, largely through Ogden's proposals for improving upon Bultmann. He lists five crucial objections. In particular, Ogden insists on resorting to quixotic circumlocutions for "God" such as "experienced nonobjective reality", which are no more comprehensible than the word "God" itself. Moreover, he parts

company more or less finally with the plain historical events surrounding Jesus of Nazareth.

So, in chapter 4, van Buren turns to the linguistic analysts. He tells us that attempts to eliminate "objectifying" language about God and distinguish properly Christian talk of God from mere "religion" will not do, because there is still much more in common between "the Gospel" thus interpreted and the "religion" that is rejected, than there is between either of them and the attitudes of the truly secular man. The question is, just how is the word "God" being used, in either case?(*ibid*:81-84).

To begin to discover an answer, van Buren offers the insights of R.M.Hare on faith as a "blik", I.T.Ramsey on models, qualifiers and cosmic disclosures, T.R.Miles on "silence qualified by parables", and R.B.Braithwaite on the use of religious assertions as moral assertions, or declarations of intent to behave in a particular way. He informs us that he intends, from now on, to adopt a non-cognitive "blik" conception of faith, and to see how fruitful this can be in elucidating the meaning of theological utterances (*ibid*:97ff).

Whereas the philosophers in question have usually applied their method to the problems of "natural theology", van Buren intends to bring it to bear upon the distinctively Christian statements of faith which concern Jesus of Nazareth: how do such statements function in the lives of those who use them? Armed with these tools, van Buren comes to the major part of his thesis. We may omit consideration of chapters 7 and 8, which try to show how his approach can do justice to the traditional language of dogmatic Christology, and, more sketchily, to the whole of systematic theology, and concentrate attention upon chapters 5 and 6.

ii. Exposition.

Van Buren begins chapter 5 by arguing that to speak of discovering meaning in the Jesus of history is not impossible, despite the difficulties about empirical evidence, because the idea of "meaning" in history is always an expression of something which is **discerned**, and to which one is **committed**, from the standpoint of the present. The meaning does not reside objectively and undialectically, so to speak, in the *bruta facta* (cf. Gregor Smith, 1966:125-31).

Next, van Buren proceeds to to his examination of the historical Jesus, paying his respects on the way to the "new quest". His own preferred result of the quest is the characterization of Jesus supremely in terms of a radical and remarkable kind of freedom:

Although he is presented as a faithful son of his parents, he is also shown to be free from familial claims. He followed the religious rites and obligations of his people, but he also felt free to disregard them. In miracle stories he is even presented mythologically as being free from the limitations of natural forces...he did not rest the authority of his teaching on tradition...he called his hearers to be without anxiety for the future concerning clothes, food or shelter, and he supported his words with his own conduct...He did not leave it to God to forgive men their sins; he did it himself...His freedom...is evident in his making no claims for himself. He seems to have been so free of any need for status that he was able to resist all attempts by others to convey status on him...He was free from anxiety and the need to establish his own identity, but he was above all free for his neighbour (van Buren, *op.cit*:121-3).

The concept of freedom, van Buren thinks, is a useful one because it is empirically "earthed": "it appears to have 'cash value' in the realm of human conduct" (*ibid*:123).

However, the identification of the historical Jesus as a man of particular freedom does not in itself constitute faith. In van Buren's view, what stands between the merely historical human figure and the confession of faith in him is the event

of Easter, which therefore becomes pivotal to the rest of his argument. On the face of it, this is an immense challenge to the empirical standpoint; but van Buren has to say that "something happened", because the entire behaviour of the disciples was radically transformed from that which would have ensued upon Jesus' death.

Although Peter's claim, "He is risen", may be "linguistically odd", Peter's claim to have had some kind of experience is incontrovertible (ibid:134). As for the **interpretation** put upon the experience, its validity may be tested by the ensuing life of the one who made it. So, in the end, van Buren interprets Easter as a "discernment situation":

The history of Jesus, which seemed to have been a failure, took on a new importance as the key to the meaning of history. Out of this discernment arose a commitment to the way of life which Jesus had followed (ibid:132).

The most that can be said empirically about the mechanism by which this transference of the manner and motivation of Jesus' life to his followers took place is to use a metaphor- that of "contagion": "It carries the sense of our 'catching' something from another person, not by our choice, but as something which happens to us" (ibid:133).

Having thus set out his interpretation of the events reported in the Gospels, van Buren goes on to expound what, on this basis, the secular meaning of the Gospel would be. The first part of chapter 6 argues that it is basically the expression of a historical perspective, one which claims universal significance for the particular historical individual Jesus of Nazareth, by testifying that his is the freedom which sets free. A believer who confesses, "I have seen the light", means that from his encounter with the story about Jesus he has acquired a wholly new perspective upon himself, his way of life and indeed the whole world. Although he will express his faith in terms of what **God** has done and how **God** has been

disclosed, van Buren suggests that the "empirical anchorage" for these claims, firstly in the history of Jesus, and secondly in the believer's own actions, is sufficient to account for whatever meaning is intended by them (ibid:140).

Returning to the linguistic philosophers, van Buren shows that his interpretation is in line with Hare's conception of a "blik", amplified to some extent by Ramsey's stress on the crucial moment of discernment which requires commitment (Easter), and the ethical dimension underlined by Braithwaite. Neither Hare nor Braithwaite **alone** is judged adequate to say all that van Buren desires to do about the experience of faith.

Following an attempt to demonstrate that the concept of commitment to a way of life formed and shaped by the freedom that was seen in Jesus can deal adequately with all those New Testament formulations which use the word "God", van Buren ends chapter 6 by summing up his approach in two principles:

(1) Statements of faith are to be interpreted, by means of the modified verification principle, as statements which express, describe or commend a particular way of seeing the world, other men, and oneself, and the way of life appropriate to such a perspective...

(2) The norm of the Christian perspective is the series of events to which the New Testament documents testify, centring in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth (ibid:156).

These two principles provide points of entry into the criticisms of van Buren's thesis we now wish to pursue.²

iii. Critique.

The first of our five criticisms takes its cue from an ambiguity already present in the Introduction to The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, over what precisely the role of linguistic philosophy in this "conversation from faith to faith" is meant to be. Van Buren's book can easily be read as the attempt of a committed linguistic empiricist to ascertain what remains of traditional Christianity once the

verificationist's axe has been wielded upon it (as Mascall, 1965). But van Buren is most anxious not to commit himself explicitly and in advance to the **truth** of the philosophy he is employing. The logic of his argument is not intended to be, given the truth of a modified logical positivism, what can be made of Christianity?

The key to what he **intends** lies in the rather vague phrase, "certain empirical attitudes", which recurs throughout the book (xiii-xiv; 20; 83; 102; 106; 110; 127; 155-6; 193; 195). The explanation is given very late in the day, on p.195: "We have made use of the method of certain linguistic analysts because their method reflects the empirical attitudes which appear to us characteristic of secular thought".

In other words, what is **assumed** is the prevalence among modern men and women, believers included, of a largely pre-reflective "mind-set" which only treats what lies concretely to hand as "really real". Linguistic philosophy is then fastened on as that critically reflective intellectual system which most nearly thematizes and brings to rational expression the distinctive cast of the modern mind-set. Our first criticism, then, is simply that this is not made clear enough by van Buren at the outset.

But, secondly, van Buren does not in fact carry out the project in as open-ended a fashion as the vague and undoctrinaire idea of "certain empirical attitudes" would lead us to expect. He intends to conduct an enquiry into how theological assertions such as "Jesus is Lord" are **used** by believers. This is in line with the modified version of the verification principle, which admitted that propositions which fell neither into the category of analytic or tautological truths, nor into that of synthetic, empirical judgments, might nevertheless be deemed meaningful if it could be shown how they were used in their particular field of discourse, or "language game".

Van Buren claims, in adopting the "use principle", to be following the Wittgenstein of the Philosophical Investigations (ibid:14-17). However, when he comes to the detailed discussion of theological language, van Buren asserts that

...the empiricist in us finds the heart of the difficulty not in what is said about God, but in the very talking about God at all. We do not know 'what' God is, and we cannot understand how the word 'God' is being used (ibid:94).

Now it is very odd that van Buren should decide, in advance of the application of the "use principle", that he cannot see how the word "God" is used, and therefore vow not to use it!²³

What has happened is that van Buren's "empirical attitudes" have turned out to be more doctrinaire than they look, since they apparently rule out even the possibility that talk of God, oriented to the transcendent, may be intelligible. It appears that van Buren's **underlying** sympathies are with the "other" Wittgenstein, he of the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, who urged that some things lay entirely outside the competence of language to deal with intelligibly, and "whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must remain silent".

Van Buren, then, has drastically limited the scope of uses which theological assertions are to be **permitted** to have, before he begins his enquiry into the uses he thinks they **do** have. We have had to get clear these rather philosophical criticisms of van Buren in order to be able to proceed on a firm basis to the points which relate much more closely to our fundamental standpoint, that a "secular theology" should take proper account of the available evidence of religion as a social reality.

The third criticism is, therefore, that van Buren's method results in a reduced and one-dimensional account of the way the figure of Jesus actually functions for religious believers. Van Buren will allow no conception of a transcendent "other world" or sacred order to enter into his "secular" account of

Christianity. As a consequence, he fails to grasp the subtle and dialectical relation evidenced in the way **this** man is confessed liturgically as not only friend and brother, but also Lord, Judge and Saviour.⁴

For both the characteristic form of the Christian's telling of the story of Jesus, and the content of the response to it, are given through the story's being told as the story of what **God** has done. Jesus is confessed in a manner which is wholly bound up with this confession of God. God is not an arbitrary or disposable addition, giving a religious but empirically redundant gloss to a story otherwise intelligible in purely secular terms. Van Buren's struggle with the nature of the "blik" disclosed in Jesus, and with the manner of its transmission, labours under self-imposed constraints which will not permit him to say what needs to be said.

The point, which can be explicitly stated as our fourth criticism, is that the "transcendence factor", which implies some kind of a metaphysic, is inescapable throughout what van Buren is trying to say, and nowhere more so than in the Easter metaphor of "contagion". Van Buren writes:

The man who says, 'Jesus is Lord', is saying that the history of Jesus and of what happened on Easter has exercised a liberating effect upon him, and that he has been so grasped by it that it has become the historical norm of his perspective upon life (ibid:141).

But this begs all the crucial questions. What is the precise connection between van Buren's talk of being "grasped" by the history of Jesus, rather than just choosing to live by its inspiration, and traditional language about "grace"? (Macquarrie, 1967:22). Again, unless the perspective drawn from Jesus is to be an entirely arbitrary one, which some may "catch", and others not, the believer is surely forced to ask about the **ground** of the perspective: why **Jesus**, in particular? (cf. Baelz, 1964:59-60; Kee, 1970:182; K.Hamilton, 1966(a):54).

The fact is that the trail that begins from van Buren's "contagious freedom" leads back unmistakably into the religious tradition about Jesus, which in turn insists on linking every man-statement about Jesus to correlative statements that transcend the purely human. This means that, as a fifth and very important criticism, we have to say that van Buren's secular theology, constructed on strictly empirical grounds, is not after all true to the social reality of faith. For the "contagion" analysis does not do justice to the complexity of Christian religious practice and experience available to scrutiny.

This weakness is clear when we look for some concrete filling out by van Buren of the content of this crucial "freedom" in terms of an actual quality of social life in the world. Van Buren says little more than this:

He who says, 'Jesus is Lord', says that Jesus' freedom has been contagious and has become the criterion for his life, public and private. As Jesus was led, because of his freedom, into the midst of social and political conflict, so it is with one who shares his freedom (van Buren, *op.cit.*;142).

In terms of what van Buren has actually given us, this "conflict" is highly problematic. For he has not allowed for a religious tension between the upholding and legitimating of the prevailing order as undergirded and cherished by divine grace, and its challenging and undermining in the name of a vision of the divine future. He has not drawn the picture of a world that is both loved and affirmed by God, and hence also by the Christian, but at the same time judged and called to repentance. Nor has he placed much emphasis upon the fate of Jesus, who in embracing the neediness of the world also died at the hands of a godless world.

Van Buren's programme would appear to offer only the possibility of a selective *imitatio Christi*, embodied in certain ethical prescriptions, and with a vaguely optimistic hope of

their successful fulfilment by suitably enlightened secular believers. But Christian ethical programmes must never be identified wholly and without remainder with the will of God. "If there is no sense of the transcendence of God's will over our particular ethical decisions, then there is no escape from the self-righteousness which ends up by identifying my cause with God's will and my opponent's with the devil" (Newbigin, 1966:71-2).

Gregor Smith's judgment upon van Buren was that "we are offered here a piece of liberal cake, somewhat stale, indeed, but freshened up by the sauce of empirical verification" (1966:190). The avoidance of this fate by a self-styled secular theology, including one focused upon the human figure of Jesus, lies in making room for transcendence, even within the secular categories. In the next section of this chapter, we examine three further contributions to radical theology which uphold such a focus, in order to see whether and where the transcendent component in the orientation of the Christian community upon Jesus is maintained.

2. Radical Theology and the Person of Jesus.

i. William Hamilton: a Form of Lordship and a Style of Life.

Hamilton's sensitive little book, The New Essence of Christianity, first appeared in America in 1961, before the "death of God" controversy broke. At this stage, Hamilton employed the term "death of God" to express the "felt sense of God's absence" which was the experience of the contemporary Christian. He registered his unease about the acknowledgement of an objectively present, transcendent deity less on account of the onward march of science and technology, or any supposed "empirical attitudes", than in the face of the problem of suffering.⁵ He describes the contemporary experience of faith in this way:

Our experience of God is deeply dissatisfying to us, even when we are believers. In one sense God seems to have withdrawn from the world and its sufferings, and this leads us to accuse him of either irrelevance or cruelty. But in another sense, he is experienced as a pressure and a wounding from which we would love to be free. For many of us who call ourselves Christians, therefore, believing in the time of the 'death of God' means that he is there when we do not want him, in ways we do not want him, and he is not there when we do want him (Hamilton, op.cit:63).

This is the background against which Hamilton's approach to Jesus is worked out, which he presents in chapter 3 of the book, entitled "Jesus the Lord".

Hamilton appeals to the Christian's peculiar understanding of the Lordship of Jesus in the attempt to find answers to three sorts of questions arising out of this ambiguous experience of God. The first is the epistemological question of God, corresponding roughly to van Buren's formulation of it: if you want to know about God, all you can do is point to Jesus.

The second is the quest for salvation, which Hamilton interprets as the desire for meaning: "the New Testament story of God acting in Jesus is primarily a story of your life, in which forgiveness and freedom are offered to you" (ibid:70).

The third is the question about what we should do, which is answered not in abstract terms but by indicating the concrete person of Jesus Christ who is the will of God (in line with Bonhoeffer's Ethics).

Hamilton embarks upon a study of the various titles attributed to Jesus in the New Testament, focusing in the end upon *Kyrios*, the major confessional form of the early Church. He highlights two important tensions in the ascription of the title "Lord" to Jesus. The first lies between exaltation and lowliness, as the one who was "in the form of God" emptied himself of power and divinity, and the Master became identical with the Servant.

The second is that between presence and absence: the victorious Lord who reigns in glory now, over against the one who has gone away, but will return in triumph. Only by absorbing and meditating upon the dialectical meaning of Lordship as present humiliation, Hamilton says, can the Christian make sense of his experience and fashion a faith which is responsive to the circumstances of the time.

To say that Jesus is Lord is to say that humiliation, patience and suffering are the ways God has dealt with the world, and thus are also the ways the Christian...is to deal with the world (ibid:102-3; contrast van Euren's parallel statements of what is meant by the one who says, 'Jesus is Lord', *supra*).

The present form of Jesus' Lordship is that of suffering, service and hiddenness: the form to come will be victory and power. Only the recognition of this truth can prevent us from lapsing into either of two extremes: a "pietistic otherworldliness", which gives up on the world for the sake of a retreat into the ark of personal salvation, or a "crypto-secularism", which represents a premature and foolish celebration of a maturity not yet attained, nor attainable (ibid:110).

Hamilton completes his study by suggesting that what this orientation upon the strange Lordship of Jesus produces is a "Christian style of life", which is rather less than a complete catalogue of ethical principles, but more than a theologically abstract manner of speaking. It is "a way of standing before God and the world, a posture...that is prior to...and basic to, any and all actions and decisions" (ibid:115-6).

He goes on to offer a sketch of the features of such a mode of being-in-the-world. It involves a certain reticence or reserve in dealings with others, granting the other the right to be himself in his own "personal space". It requires a combination of tolerance and anger, forbearing with human failing and flaw, yet hating all that falsifies, spoils and

degrades. It renounces the desire for anything more than toleration for ourselves from the world; and it defends "goodness"- gentleness and sensitivity, humility and self-effacement, and all opposition to coercion, pompousness and injustice.

Finally, at the end of the book, Hamilton explores further the polarity between resignation and rebellion, including that between the conformist and the "beat" styles of life. He defends the possibility of a "concealed break with culture" as an alternative to both of these styles. The Christian, in particular, is in many respects a conformist rather than a rebel, because he acknowledges the extent to which he is indebted to the secular culture which has made him who he is, and the extent to which that same culture owes its forms to past Christian influence. But as such he can also make the concealed break, which entails the refusal to "give his heart to" the culture in which he is immersed, because he knows there remains a provisionality and an incompleteness about it.

Although much of this is neither new nor worked out in detail by Hamilton, it does offer more promise of a secular understanding of the Christian's orientation upon the figure of Jesus than does van Buren's model. For it emphasises how faith operates in the perceived gap between the brute realities of experience of the world and an initially vague and unfocused sense that things should be otherwise (cf. Weber, *supra*:98ff). It then analyses the Lordship of Jesus in strongly dialectical terms, particularly in relation to the vocation of the Christian to be in and with the world in its present sufferings, while committed to actions calculated to alleviate them.

However, there are still limitations: Hamilton's case is put in individualistic terms, with little exploration of what it might mean for the whole Christian community to express a

style of life congruent with the Lordship of Jesus it confesses. There is little opportunity of regarding all the manifold and marginal evidences of Christian interest present in society in this light.

For Hamilton can make little sense of the Church, its preaching, worship and sacraments, being even disposed to regard Bonhoeffer's late writings as "the beginning of a systematic attempt to face the theological task by doing without a special doctrine of the church" (Hamilton, *op.cit*:102). Our own discussion of Bonhoeffer (Chapter 3, *supra*) indicates that we do not consider Hamilton to be right; and later in the chapter, we shall try to apply a dialectical understanding of the Christian orientation to Jesus to the social reality "church" as it is presented to us.

ii. The Pelzes: the Compelling Words of Jesus.

Werner and Lotte Pelz's God is No More can certainly not be described as an essay in scholarly theology. Its publishers called it "a prophetic, passionate, tempestuous book, which will infuriate some, delight others, and leave everyone in some way affected". The work is well-nigh unreadable *en masse*, but an effort of the imagination may appreciate it as a poetic or visionary exercise, or perhaps a devotional experiment. It is an attempt to by-pass all dogmatic debate and all traditional authority concerning the understanding of Christ's person, in favour of opening one's life imaginatively and existentially to the impact of the **words** of Jesus as reported in the Gospels.⁶

The words of Jesus are found by the Pelzes to be baffling, compelling and radically disturbing:

The words of Jesus are always 'before us', never grasped, understood, fulfilled; always to be grasped, to be understood, to be fulfilled, Jesus did not leave a complete and coherent system of teaching (Pelzes, *op.cit*:14).

They are not meant to answer intellectual problems, but to fire the imagination and challenge the heart to embrace the possibilities of living life to the full.

We respond to his words when we begin to live as people who hope that they shall live, who believe quite simply that life is worth living, that death does not devalue it (ibid:16).

The Gospel is about incredible human possibilities, about breaking through the superficial and woefully limited mode in which life is ordinarily lived:

What the words of Jesus promise us is, in the strict sense of the word, incredible. We can not believe it. On the other hand, they promise what, above all else, we would like to believe; 'He that believes in me shall live, even though he die' (ibid:20).

Jesus' words demand response, decision and commitment: it is an urgent matter whether a man remains upon a broad and attractive way that will destroy his potential and uniqueness, or opts for the dangerous adventure of the way commended by Jesus. "No other man has insisted like Jesus on the absoluteness of decision. None has dared, as he dared, to tie up our decision with his person" (ibid:22).

Most of the book applies the overall approach to various aspects of traditional Christian teaching drawn from the life and sayings of Jesus: justification, salvation (wholeness), love for neighbour, forgiveness, freedom from Law, the Kingdom. It would be possible to uphold a relatively orthodox theism and Christology, and to read God is No More merely as a summons and stimulus to deeper commitment and more radical personal engagement with the implications of Jesus' teachings. But what the book, in its curious way, does achieve is the recognition that a faith conceived in secular terms and oriented upon Jesus as a human individual cannot, on that account, be simply a one-dimensional and moderately liberal ethical programme.

For the Pelzes' vision is riven through and through with paradox and creative disjunction. Jesus is presented, for example, as an artist, who in the very act of representing the world and its familiar objects, turns out to be drawing an altogether strange and extraordinary landscape in which the angles of vision are unfamiliar and the contours curiously unrecognizable (ibid:54-60). In this, despite their negative evaluation of "religion" (see previous chapter), the Pelzes offer a distinctively religious analysis, for the sacred cosmos is precisely one which, while ostensibly beginning from the objects and representations of this world and offering them transcendent sanction, ends by turning upon the world and exercising constraint and discomfiting influence upon it.

Needless to say, however, whatever the value of these insights on the theoretical level, the practical value of the Pelzes' programme is almost negligible, because the call to radical reorientation upon the words of Jesus is in no way related to the concrete social realities which condition the way people, including Christian believers, have to live their lives. Our third example of a Jesu-centric theology in this section seeks to apply itself quite explicitly to these conditions.

iii. John Vincent: the Search for a Secular Christ.

Vincent, the radical Methodist and one-time follower of Karl Barth, displays a reaction against both of his major past influences in his search for a secular theology of strongly socio-political orientation. He argues, in Secular Christ (1968; see also Vincent, 1964 & 1965) that traditional theology has been much too fixated upon the merits of Jesus' **death** in effecting our individual deliverance from a condition of personal sinfulness, into a state of regeneration and readiness for the world to come. But Jesus also lived a significant, secular **life**: secular in the sense of being lived thoroughly in and amidst and for the world and its everyday

people, and involving teachings and actions which, when stripped of the theological mystifications of a developing ecclesial context, do yield specific secular, indeed political, content.

According to Vincent, this "secular Christ" is a more appropriate guide to contemporary Christian living than "secular man". Here Vincent parts company with other radical theologians, who want to be "secular" without remaining strictly "Christian": "though Robinson talks of 'the holy' as 'the depth' of the common', this still needs to be 'Christologized' (answering the question, 'What depth?')" (Vincent, 1964:304). It is not just a case of embracing the secular, but of discovering Christ in it, taking care that he remains recognizably the real Christ and not, for example, dismantling the concrete Gospel into existentialist abstractions.

For theology, says Vincent, must start from secular Christology, which is predicated on the assumption that "if Christ is now what he was in the days of his flesh, it is by his **deeds** not his 'spirit' that he may be expected to reveal himself to us" (Vincent, 1965:25). Neither "knowing God" nor "meeting Christ" should be understood primarily as the fruit of a devotional programme. The issue is whether, if "God was in **Christ** reconciling the **world** to himself", there are not "certain lines of action, techniques and methodologies" manifest in secular history, which demonstrate the truth of this theological statement (ibid:25-6).

The appropriate model for the relationship of the Christian to Christ, Vincent argues in Secular Christ, must be the dynamic one of "discipleship". The "moments" of Christian discipleship, derived from the features of Jesus' "secular Lordship" displayed in his whole ministry, are service, healing, the discernment of God at work in others, and lastly suffering.

This theology of discipleship was being worked out by Vincent in tandem with a radical pastoral and missionary programme in the Rochdale Methodist Mission, and bears the marks of fragmentary, contextual thinking, allowing ontological questions to remain, for the present, in abeyance. But the interpretive way of doing theology in the concrete context is what we have also been arguing for; and Vincent's attempt is striking for its insistence upon coming to grips with real situations, and telling the story of the **whole** Christ in such a fashion that the vivid details of the man are not lost amid the supposed "timeless truths".

Nevertheless, certain reservations remain. Vincent envisages a smaller, more committed "core" congregation involving itself corporately and officially as **the Church** in the social programmes he recommends. He remains ambiguous about the status of actually existing congregations which are usually far from clear-cut in this way, as well as about the situation of those who "profess and call themselves Christians" without regularly attending corporate and official worshipping activities at all. The Christ he discovers in the secular world is perhaps one who is too one-sidedly to be discerned in the endeavours of political radicalism, and too little in the inconspicuous permeation of all culture with the self-effacing values of the Gospel.

But we must now go on to sum up our criticisms of these attempts of radical theology to bring to the fore of theological reflection the orientation of the believer upon the human figure of Jesus, and to propose some suggestions for an alternative approach.

3. *Conclusions: The Church and the Twofold Presence of Christ.*

i. "Christ existing as the Church".

Our main criticism of the materials we have examined in this chapter is that they fail to take seriously the givenness and actuality of Christian presence in society as it lies before us in, and around the peripheries of, the Church's life. For the Christian cult is always and everywhere centrally concerned with Jesus. In the case of the most precisely and fully articulated ritual expression of a Catholic Mass, it may be Jesus the bleeding sacrificial victim; in the folk-religious intimations of a parent sending a child to Sunday School, Jesus the Friend of little children. But whatever the less enlightening aspects of each of these, neither can be said to have nothing whatever to do with the Jesus of the Gospels. These, along with much else, form part of the secular evidence for the meaning of the Christian's confession of Jesus in the context of his confession of God.

Van Buren wrote an article entitled "What do we mean by an 'empirical investigation of the Church'?" (1968(a)) in which he asked what would be empirically available to the complete outsider who wished to be shown the meaning of the various theological designations of the Church. He argued that we should ask what it is about the concrete social experience of the individuals who collectively make up the Church that has made it feasible for them to speak of it theologically in the way they do. This is in line with Bonhoeffer's chosen designation of the Church as "Christ existing as the Church" (see *supra*:60f). That is, if Christians speak of the Church as in some way representing the continuing modalities and tensions of the presence and activity of Jesus in the world, what is it about the social reality "Church" which might justify such talk?

What is presented, first of all, to the casual observer is an institutional body, an organization within society, staffed and serviced by a professionally-trained ministry, and a more or less (often less) clearly defined clientele of lay persons who avail themselves of the services of the institution, and also, in some cases at least, offer their own services to it. Some of them consider their service still to be in operation throughout the time when they are not **directly** involved with the institution, i.e. probably from Monday to Saturday.

If, then, we are to speak theologically of this social phenomenon as that which has evolved over time as the form of the community which considers itself to be carrying on a continuity of response to Jesus, and indeed to be the prolongation of his work in the world, we ought to seek patterns of congruence between the modes and forms of being in the world exhibited by this community, and those depicted of Jesus by the evangelists.

Jesus' ministry displays a tension between continuity and radical change (C. Williams, 1969:102-116). Jesus may be interpreted as the wandering rabbi, charismatic teacher, exorcist and healer, in continuity with Jewish tradition, a product of his cultural environment and incomprehensible except in the context of his time. The Church, too, may conceive itself as isomorphous with its cultural setting, seeking as its mode of confessing Christ to continue to work his works and to "stain" society with the particular attitudes and ethical stances for which he stood.

But this same Jesus set himself very sharply apart from the contemporary religious establishment, so much so that his increasingly shocking remarks and actions led to hostility and eventual execution on charges of subversion. Moreover, the Church escalates from acknowledgement of attachment to **this** great teacher and his proposals for a way to live, into the

confession that **this** man, in his dreadful dying as much as in his living, bodies forth the very ways and nature of God, *pro nobis* and for the world. Even the orientation upon Jesus' humanity cannot rest content with a humanity that remains undifferentiated and fully self-evident and self-explanatory.

So the Church moves between two poles. At the one end, Christian presence merges imperceptibly with society at large, until social historians find it a taxing task to locate precisely where "Christian influence" has or has not been at work.

At the other, the highest degree of institutional over-againstness appears, in which the Church perpetually divides itself off from the taken-for-granted order and assumes the role of irritant towards it, urging it to self-criticism in the light of the transcendent.

If the Church is not simultaneously shading off into the immanence of a culturally ambiguous form of Christian presence, and reaching up to a point of transcendent separation, it is not embodying an adequate congruence with the mode of being in the world of the Jesus it confesses.

But all reference to "the Church" in the foregoing reduces to so much gaseous talk devoid of contact with reality, unless we go on to ask just **who** in the Church gives expression to these manifold aspects of Christ. It is here that the polarity between a thoroughly secular laity that sees its task chiefly as the more or less silent witness of being Christian amidst a secular occupation, and a professional clergy acting as a kind of "service industry" to the religious institution, comes into its own. For a wholly undifferentiated Church could not do justice to the full scope and creative tension of the way Christ is confessed by the Christian community.✓

ii. Jesus, the Clergy and the Laity.

Christian Radicalism was much concerned about the clerically-dominated image of the Church. The members of the Keble Conference Group, for example, with John Robinson among their number, believed that a genuine, visible and credible response to the human figure of Jesus today would have to look to a rejection of any essential distinction between clerical and lay statuses (Robinson, 1963b; 1965;54-60).

The analysis we have given suggests that Robinson's eagerness to abolish the "clergy line" was insufficiently thought out. For although the calling of the **whole** Church to represent and reproduce the presence and activity of Christ in the world is clearly inhibited by the bogus elitism which is encouraged by the maintenance of a clerical "in-group", the answer cannot simply lie in pretending that the clergy have no specific or **different** function to perform, other than to exercise representatively the ministries which are potentially the calling of all Christians.

Robinson's desire for a "levelling" of the whole Church into a one-dimensional reality indiscriminately constituting "Christ's Body" is not really upheld by the arguments he advances. For example, he affirms the words of Hans-Ruedi Weber of the W.C.C., that "the clergy are the helpers of the whole people of God, so that the laity can be the Church". He even cites the view of Yves Congar that the laity are those for whom the secular arena exists and is valued for its own sake, while the clergy view it specifically in the light of a religious idea and vocation. But these conceptions imply different roles for the two parties making up the Church (for a similar confusion, see the Reports of the 1968 Lambeth Conference, which were clearly influenced by the radical theology of the decade).

The matter is liable to be confused by the existence of certain highly clericalized lay persons who conceive of their

Christian obligations largely in terms of the service of the sanctuary (or, in a different tradition, attendance at endless prayer-and-praise meetings), together with clergy who like to seize every opportunity to dismiss their "religious" functions as really the least essential part of their job (cf. Robinson, 1963(b):19-20; Phipps, 1967:51-54; Morton and Gibbs, 1964:20).

But the specifically clerical role is to attend in the widest sense to the nurture and provision for "true religion" among the congregation and the community. This should include the liberty for the minister, as a servant of the institution not beholden to other authorities in the world, to express a mind which insists on the priority of the transcendent in the pursuit of what is good, true and desirable.

This means that the situation in which the clergy are accused of being "out of step" with the laity by being more radical, more critical or more open to change than the latter are is basically a sound one. For the clergy's position involves being more openly and explicitly Christian spokesmen than it is often open to lay people to be. While the presence of Christ under "secular incognitos" (Munby, 1963:86-9) is a crucial mode of influence of the Gospel in the world, it is all the more important that there should also be those who represent a presence which is **not** incognito. A specialized clergy should be ready to assume this role.³

To put this in the perspective of what has gone before in this chapter, we may sum up the position in this way. The institutionally visible Church, with its servants and services, which is conceivable in detachment from its body of members, has grown up in such a way as to hold together, in rite, symbol and cultural form, the two poles of the Church's confession of Jesus.

The immanent pole alone, at which the Christian layman does his best to live out the demands of faith in the context

of unfaith, cannot suffice to achieve the whole presentation of the dual thrust of Jesus' ministry, i.e. its hiddenness in and continuity with the world, and its radical opposition to it.

The transcendent pole typically both grants hope and gives offence: hope of an ultimate grounding of all things in the will and purpose of Jesus' heavenly Father, and offence because it reveals to the world that its deeds are evil, and summons it to repentance.

The social presentation of "Church" as institution and members, clergy and laity, serves to express these intrinsic dualities of the presence of Christ and the secular meaning of the Gospel. Some further reference to the concrete problems facing the clergy on this understanding will be made in our concluding chapter.

In this chapter, however, we have examined attempts to construct a secular theology around the focal point of the human figure of Jesus, and have found them wanting with respect to the dialectical way in which that figure actually functions within the Christian religious tradition. We have worked out our criticisms in relation to our sociological understanding of religion as the cultural expression of an orientation to transcendence.

Far from by-passing the problem of the "other world" and supplying the basis for a one-dimensional form of secular understanding of the Gospel, the Christian's orientation upon the person of Jesus contains all the dialectical force of world-affirmation and denial we expounded earlier in more general terms. We concluded this chapter with some suggestions about how a secular-based theology might try to understand the presence of the Church as a social reality in terms of the presence of Jesus, embodying a dialectical message of transcendence.

All of what we have said so far is either qualified or called into question by the particular problems for faith and Christian life attendant upon contemporary social and cultural circumstances: i.e. the problems of secularization. It is therefore to the proposals of radical theology for coping with these that we turn in the next two chapters.

NOTES.

1. In brief, Bultmann's erstwhile pupils became dissatisfied with his refusal to consider anything but the bare "that" of Jesus to be relevant to the Christological proclamation. The transference of the kerygma of Jesus, i.e. what Jesus preached, to the kerygma about Jesus, i.e. the preached Christ, must necessitate an interest in the "who" and the "how" of the historical Jesus, as justifying the remarkable transition which occurred. See e.g. Gerhard Ebeling's "conversation" with Bultmann in Theology and Proclamation, 1961; G. Bornkamm, Jesus of Nazareth, 1960; and J.M. Robinson, A New Quest of the Historical Jesus, 1959.
2. Detailed critical discussions of the book are found in Mascall, The Secularization of Christianity, 40-105; Richard, Secularization Theology, 39-44, 76-121; Ogletree, The 'Death of God' Controversy, 39-59; and Kee, The Way of Transcendence, 174-84. Van Buren gives an account of his position to Ved Mehta in The New Theologian, 50-56.
3. This is where van Buren's use of Ian Ramsey, bracketing him together with Hare and Braithwaite, is so tendentious, since Ramsey devotes so much of his work to analysing precisely the "logically odd" functions of the word "God" and other items of the theistic vocabulary.
4. Kee, op.cit., notes van Buren's similarity to Braithwaite in this connection. For Braithwaite, in his much over-exposed lecture on "An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief", also claims adherence to the use principle, but proposes to treat religious assertions as moral assertions on the basis of the old verification principle, viz. religious assertions are meaningless if treated as in some way *sui generis*. Since the only difference between the two types of assertion, on this score, is that religious assertions are associated in the mind of the asserter with a particular set of stories, Braithwaite is completely at a loss what to say about religious worship, in which the stories certainly appear to take on wider and more complex forms of significance (cf. Mehta, op.cit:59-60 for a report on the unusual circumstances of Braithwaite's reception into the Church).
5. Hamilton makes telling use of Camus' allegorical novel La Peste in order to make his point. Father Paneloux, faced with the suffering and death of innocent children in plague-stricken Oran, preaches two sermons. In the first the disaster is traditionally interpreted as a judgment and a call to repentance. But the second is much more chastened and perplexed, and does not dare to assert easy, or indeed any, answers, but holds fast solely to the tortured body of Christ on the Cross.
6. The Pelzes are aware of the historical-critical problems of authenticity, but feel that the unique quality of the sayings overwhelmingly imply a single, remarkable and seminal mind; op.cit:13. The taste for Werner Pelz's rhapsodic style may be acquired from his two short articles in Prism for April 1963 and The Listener for October 10th, 1963.
7. Behind these remarks may be discerned the formal Roman Catholic doctrine of the Church as hierarchy and as fellowship; while the ultimate reality of the Church is fellowship, the *sanctorum communio* of men and women with God and with one another in Christ, the existence of such fellowship is dependent on, and formed by, the antecedently existing hierarchical institution which is "Mother Church". We are not accepting here any ontological priority of "the Church" (hierarchy) over the "faithful" (particular persons), but endorsing it as an inevitable distinction to be recognized in any attempt at a realistic secular-based understanding of the Church. See Congar, Lay people in the Church, 1957.
8. There are grounds here for looking afresh at the ideas striven for by Coleridge and Eliot in their respective "clerisy" and "community of Christians". Munby (1963:65-6) rightly observes that these ideals are not workable in contemporary society in the sense of a culturally directive and recognized central role for such a "clerisy". But our point is that there is a need for specialized expertise to help the community at large to perceive, and grow to practice, what the Christian religious vision involves. This also means that the clergy should be competent and interested in critical theological thinking, something which is problematic in contemporary theological colleges, where many ordinands downgrade or distrust critical theological scholarship.

CHAPTER TEN: THE AFFIRMATION OF THE MODERN WORLD.

This chapter deals with the attempt of Christian Radicalism to construct a theology which can be affirmative rather than hostile towards the world, even to the point of interpreting contemporary social and cultural change as a continuing outworking of the implications of the Gospel. Our critical analysis applies the perspective upon secularization established in Chapter Five above: in particular, the twofold distinction of socio-structural and cultural processes. In the former, the differentiation of successive institutional spheres of life, each with its autonomous area of expertise and jurisdiction, leaves the religious sector as one such specialised sphere among many, with no claim to special authority over the others. In the latter, the decline of an overarching religious framework by which the whole of society might understand the whole of life leads to cultural fragmentation amid a free market of religious options.

The bulk of the discussion will be devoted to Harvey Cox's ambitious attempt to claim the processes of modernity as gain for the Gospel in The Secular City. Following our critique of Cox's thesis, we shall examine more material which displays the range of theological attitudes to secularization within the ambit of Christian Radicalism, before going on to extract the issues requiring clearer critical attention if a more viable stance towards modernity on the part of the churches is to be achieved.

1. Cox and The Secular City.

i. General Observations.

The Secular City, subtitled Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective, was written as a study resource for a series of student conferences held in the U.S.A.

in 1965 (according to the Preface of the Revised Penguin Edition of 1968, from which all citations are taken). This fact does much to account for the brisk, popular style of the book, and its proliferation of neat slogans and sweeping generalizations, features of which Cox was well aware. Despite this, the work does offer a quite elaborate and in its time original theological argument, which aroused a great deal of controversial attention when first published.'

It is, of course, an intensely American book, buoyant with the heady optimism of the American Dream, which even managed to survive the assassination of Kennedy and only faltered seriously with the growing disaffection over Vietnam and the eventual *debacle* of Watergate. As such it is undoubtedly very dated; and yet, beneath the frothy enthusiasm it does manage to present almost every significant aspect of the quest for a theology of secularization, and therefore a fairly detailed exposition here will serve us well in laying out the issues requiring critical treatment in such a theology.

Cox's procedure is best understood as an attempt to describe the modern world and its culture, and then to interpret it theologically to itself in a manner diametrically opposed to the more commonplace theological **denunciations** of "secularism" (Richard, 1967:58ff). That is, Cox does not come with a prior theological position and prescribe to the world, on that basis, how it ought to be. Rather, he is concerned about how the world already is: for it is in danger of leaving theology and the Church behind, so that an effort is required on the theologian's part to comprehend what is going on, and to formulate a response before it is too late.

For Cox, this response must involve demonstrating that the categories of the Gospel do provide adequate tools for understanding contemporary society. That is, he refuses to accept that **this** era is somehow fundamentally alienated from

the Christian message in ways that earlier ages were not. Influenced by a neo-Orthodox belief in the essential givenness of the Gospel and the Biblical revelation, Cox is convinced that these **must** in the end override mere cultural relativities. The "offence" of the Gospel cannot possibly reside either in its unintelligibility, or in the resistance to it occasioned by socio-cultural factors alone.

Cox, then, intends to show that there is a "radical sameness of direction" in both the evolution of cultural history and the implications of the Judaeo-Christian revelation (Richard, op.cit:153). It is not a facile monocausal relationship, but the Biblical tradition supplied the impetus for certain "enabling conditions" necessary for the crucial changes to occur. In this way Cox is offering a kind of Weberian analysis of the relation of Christian ideas to material interests in the propagation of social change.

The tradition of theological and ecclesiastical resistance to the processes of modernity, which Cox sets out to overthrow, is of course one with a very long pedigree, dating from long before the secularizing influences of the post-Medieval era began to make themselves felt. This can be very briefly indicated from three pieces of evidence. To begin with, the *saeculum*, or this present age or generation, was from the earliest Christian centuries contrasted unfavourably with the *eschaton*, or the age to come, conceived as radically discontinuous with the present world. The "secular" came to refer to "that which pertains to this world alone", this world which is passing away, and hence something inferior to the sacred or spiritual.²

The term "secularization" itself was first used to refer to the expropriation of Church-owned land and buildings by the newly-emerging nation states in the post-Reformation period. Here too, then, the Church had reason to regard the advance of

the secular as being against its interests. The gradual outworking of the secular state principle would deprive it of a direct controlling interest in numerous areas of social life, and this would be interpreted as the abandonment of those areas to "the world", and hence to corruption and decay.³

Finally, during the nineteenth century, those who promoted the systematic exclusion of religious considerations from all policies governing public affairs and institutional structures did so out of openly anti-religious commitments. The Victorian "secularists", of whom Charles Bradlaugh and G.J.Holyoake were the most famous, urged the practical irrelevance of all theological ideas to matters of empirical importance. The real concerns of this life, they held, were immediate, pragmatic and aimed at this-worldly fulfilments, both bodily and intellectual. This demanded that each sphere of secular expertise should be free to develop and pursue its particular practical ends without fear of religious interference.⁴

Cumulatively, then, the tradition of Church opposition, first to the "secular" as a theological concept, and then to "secularization" as a socio-cultural process, was very substantial. Cox needed to establish a very compelling basis in both sociological analysis and theological hermeneutics in order to challenge it.

ii. Exposition.

In his Introduction, Cox formally summarizes the character of contemporary society in terms of the complementary processes of secularization and urbanization. The questioning of traditional world-views as a phase of intellectual history (since the Renaissance) is clearly bound up, Cox wants to show, with the rise of science and the rational polity of the modern state. These latter have in their turn encouraged the growth of cities, and the experience of city-dwelling reciprocally influences the world-view of the

people in an increasingly secular direction. The social and intellectual processes mutually react upon each other.

Thus Cox's definition of secularization runs as follows:

Secularization is...the loosing of the world from religious and quasi-religious understandings of itself, the dispelling of all closed world-views, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols...the discovery by man that he has been left with the world on his hands, that he can no longer blame fortune or the furies for what he does with it (Cox, op.cit:15-16).

He expresses the interdependent relationship with urbanization in this way:

[Secularization] occurred only when the cosmopolitan confrontations of city living exposed the relativity of the myths men once thought were unquestionable (Cox, op.cit:15).

But also,

[Urbanization] became possible in its contemporary form only with the scientific and technological advances which sprang from the wreckage of traditional world-views (ibid).

Putting together the two phenomena gives Cox his controlling image for understanding modern society, "secular city". As secular, society does not look to religion to sacralize and stabilize the social order, and so traditional religious representations of reality become confined to the options of private life. As city, it encompasses a plurality of traditions and emphasises short-term, pragmatic ends, such as technological and bureaucratic means can achieve. Cox proposes to characterize the secular city in terms of what he calls its *manière d'être*, a largely unreflective or intuitive orientation to the world, shared by a generation. (ibid:19).

The age of the secular city is dubbed by Cox the "technopolitan" era, which ensues upon the earlier "tribal" and "town" epochs. Remnants of each of these earlier forms of society persist in the midst of *technopolis*, but are destined to disappear. In particular, religious life has been closely

wedded to "town" culture, for which a more familiar word is of course "bourgeois" (ibid:26).

But the emerging technopolitan culture demands an alternative understanding of religion and the implications of the Gospel; and this is what Cox, having established his sociological analysis of contemporary life, now sets out to provide. His thesis follows the argument of Friedrich Gogarten, to the effect that secularization is "the legitimate consequence of the impact of biblical faith on history" (ibid:31).¹⁵ He begins by supporting Gogarten's distinction between "secularization" and "secularism":

Secularization implies a historical process, almost certainly irreversible, in which society and culture are delivered from tutelage to religious control and closed metaphysical world-views...Secularism, on the other hand, is the name for an ideology, a new closed world-view which functions very much like a new religion (ibid:34).

A proper theological understanding of secularization is necessary in order to prevent it being misconceived and distorted into secularism. Cox outlines three "dimensions" of secularization, each with its source and justification in Biblical faith.

The first interprets the doctrine of Creation as the "Disenchantment of Nature". In radically separating God from that which he creates *ex nihilo*, and in granting to mankind in the *imago dei* a cardinal position of responsible dominion in the world, the doctrine of Creation evacuates the stage of nature of all divinities and mystical totemic liaisons with humanity, and in principle supplies the enabling conditions for the growth of science and technology. The created world is subjected to the rational control of man.

Cox's second dimension treats the Exodus as the "Desacralization of Politics". It is not so much the Exodus as such, as the whole Old Testament tradition of prophetic

opposition to sacral kingship that Cox has in mind. Christians have carried on this tradition by their refusal to confess the Lordship of anyone but Jesus. This desacralization of political authorities frees the political arena and the State of potentially totalitarian sacral claims: politics and state powers become properly limited to the practical achievement of proximate, instrumental ends for the good of the communities they serve.

In his third piece of analysis, Cox refers to the Sinai covenant as the "Deconsecration of Values". This seems highly inappropriate on the face of it, but Cox means that the prohibition of images introduces a spirit of perpetual protest against, and relativization of, all human constructs of meaning and value-systems, insofar as they lay claim to ultimate status. The idea of a consensual world-view providing the source of cohesion and identity for a social group, even an entire nation, is challenged by the Gospel, according to Cox. For any such system depends for its effectiveness upon its power to hold the group in thrall to a tribalism which defines it **over against** some alien group. But Christian faith demands that man must rise above such tribalisms and break down the barriers they erect, a process which is hastened by the cosmopolitan culture of the secular city (ibid:35-50; cf. van Leeuwen, 1964).

Having laid out the elements of his theological interpretation of secularity, Cox pursues his imaginative effort of describing modern society and culture through the stencil of "secular city", in terms of its socio-structural "shape" and cultural "style". The shape comprises anonymity and mobility, suggested by the images of the telephone switchboard and the cloverleaf interchange respectively. The style involves pragmatism and profanity (perhaps, better, "profaneness"), typified by the figures of John F. Kennedy and Albert Camus (ibid:chs.2 & 3).

Cox proceeds to find grounds for defending each of these characteristics of modernity usually regarded as inimical to Christianity. He argues that much religious denunciation of the so-called "faceless anonymity" of the lifestyle of the city is based upon a misguided nostalgia for a communitarian past, which confuses the property of Christian *koinonia* with the social structure of *Gemeinschaft*.

On the contrary, Cox says, a carefully preserved anonymous distancing in the multiple purely functional relationships of urban life is essential in order to permit a person to develop the more intimate "I-Thou relationships" of his choice within the private sphere. The freedom to choose where one's true personal commitments lie represents, Cox suggests, a triumph of Gospel over law, "a liberation from some of the cloying bondages of pre-urban society" (ibid:60), such as being doomed to have one's identity defined solely in familial terms.

Cox is a little more guarded about the merits of mobility. However, he implies that high social mobility as a concomitant of an increased pace of social change likewise represents an enlargement of human possibilities, a broadening of horizons. Although this can be highly damaging to traditional, "socialized-in" religious orientations, it is in keeping with the Biblical notion of a pilgrim people and a non-localized deity. Wherever the Christian religion "puts down roots", Cox argues, as in the grand medieval synthesis of Christendom, it loses its distinctive genius and becomes needful of reform and renewal.

In the cultural features of pragmatism and profanity lie the real reason for undertaking the whole exercise of secular theology. For here secularization really bites, and begins to form its own pre-reflective mind-set or intuitive mode of perceiving the world. Here, it really does present a crucial

challenge to traditional forms of religious representation. Cox writes:

By pragmatism we mean secular man's concern with the question 'will it work?'. . . The world is viewed not as a unified metaphysical system but as a series of problems and projects. By profanity we refer to the secular man's wholly terrestrial horizon, the disappearance of any supramundane reality defining his life (ibid;73).

For a theological rationale for pragmatism, Cox turns to the idea of C.A. van Peursen (1967) that the present age is a "period of functional thinking", succeeding the earlier mythological and ontological periods. This functional approach, Cox argues, corresponds to the Hebrew concept of Yahweh's **truth** (*emeth*) residing in the consistency and dependability of what he **does**. Christian faith, too, is concerned to **do** the truth, or to **walk in** it, rather than to look towards some detached ontological realm of the changeless and timeless. However, Cox is also concerned to warn against the perversion of functionalism into "operationalism", a world-view which would deny the value of anything that could not be accounted for in terms of quantifiable usefulness.

Cox's endorsement of pragmatism provides him with a stick with which to beat the existentialists, whose preoccupation with "ultimate questions" he believes to represent a morbid hankering after a time when the erudite philosopher with his grandiose metaphysical speculations commanded more respect and influence than he does today. This is why he ends chapter 3 by preferring the theology of Barth to that of Tillich.

However, the attack on existentialism does make Cox's choice of Camus as the typical "profane man" a little hard to justify. The nub of his argument is that here was a man who, with no time for traditional theological niceties as a way of deflecting attention from the real problems of human living in the world, was ready to face those problems head-on, in utter honesty, and engage with them in a most concrete way. Profane

man is compelled to be an atheist if belief in God amounts to a get-out, an abdication of human responsibility and maturity in the world.⁶

Apart from chapter 4, which seeks to show by means of thumb-nail sketches of four cities worldwide that secularization is not just an American or a Western phenomenon, this concludes Cox's main exposition of the theology of secularization. It is our view that the **general** thesis of the "sameness of direction" of the implications of at least a Protestant understanding of Christianity and the social and cultural development of the Christian West has been substantially proven in sociology from Weber onward. To some degree, therefore, as Berger (1973:132) put it, "Christianity has been its own gravedigger".

There is, moreover, a wealth of individually suggestive ideas in The Secular City that we should not wish to undervalue: for example, the possible positive function of anonymity and the warning against identifying Christian fellowship with pre-modern communitarianism. But we have to direct our criticisms at Cox's thesis as a complete package, and a recommendation to the churches for a better way of responding to the challenges of modernity; and when we do this, a number of questionable points emerge.

iii. Critique.

Firstly, then, there is an apparent absolutization of the present in Cox's argument. He is concerned to approve historical relativism as a fruit of Biblical faith, but relaxes this perspective noticeably where modernity is concerned. In the past, Christian faith has had a culturally creative and influential role, which has not been adequately theologically understood. Cox wants to contribute to the present understanding of it, but without leaving open the possibility that a future culturally influential role for faith may once

again bring about unforeseen departures from the present state of affairs.

It is important to notice that Cox's view relies heavily upon a negative evaluation of the "Christendom era" as a false road temporarily trodden by Christianity in its assumption of socio-cultural form. He regards Christendom, with its zenith in the High Middle Ages, as a fatal resacralizing process, running counter to the Biblical trend. The dismantling of the medieval sacral society, right down to its present-day vestiges in such phenomena as the dual role of the English Sovereign as Head of Church and State, has been a welcome return to the true path. Cox's statement that these vestiges "amuse Britons vastly", but that "no-one takes them the least bit seriously" (op.cit:43) betray in him an insensitivity to the power of historical religious imagery, however (and cf.on "Christendom" Richardson, 1966:42-3; Casserley, 1965; Barry, 1969:ch.2; Newbigin, 1966:17-18, 124ff; Cupitt, 1977).

Here we have a reading of history which depends upon the rejection of Christendom as un-Christian, even as Wilson's secularization thesis turns upon the myth of a "golden age" of religion. But the processes that brought Christendom into being were the conditions for the **survival** of Christianity at all during the Dark Ages. What Cox ignores is that the Gospel will be engaged in a perpetual process of seeking what social embodiment it can, given the conditions obtaining round about. Whatever embodiment it achieves, it will equally be compelled to judge, distancing itself from it and seeking to affirm the transcendent perspective afresh. Christian faith is ever in danger, in assuming concrete historical form, of becoming its own dialectical opposite; but this inherent tension cannot be resolved unilaterally by affirming one form *in toto* and denying another.

Thus, the medieval Christian society may be judged now to be a premature and proleptic realization in highly imperfect terms of what in fulfilled form belongs only to the *eschaton*; but it cannot be judged an "aberration". The open, pluralistic, differentiated secular society may likewise be judged as an experiment in realizing the human freedom and fulfilment promised in the Gospel, but it cannot be treated as the "arrival" (*adventus*) of what is yet to come (*adventurum*).

Secondly, there is an ambiguity about Cox's eagerness to offer to secular man a theological explanation of his secularity. For this is the one thing the truly secular, pragmatic man will have no need of (K.Hamilton, 1966(a):97-102; 1966(b):53). Cox never **really** commits himself to the position of the secular man as his starting point: rather, he thinks he has something to offer him, without which his secularity remains incomplete (cf.Segundo, 1977:10-13). In this way, although covertly, Cox admits that a **total** theological justification of **utter** secularity cannot be made.

The problem of the "secular interpretation of Biblical concepts" cannot be solved as readily as would appear by simply translating them without remainder into a non-religious context. There has to be some residual meaning or "overspill of promise" (Moltmann, 1967) in the religious terms which prevents their being exhausted as they are emptied into secular contexts of application. Otherwise, we should be left with a specialised religious institution with no conceivable use for its particular specialism; in the words of Alasdair MacIntyre, "a religious language, which survives even though we do not know what to say in it" (Edwards and Robinson, 1963:226).

Thirdly, Cox does not acknowledge sufficiently the problems of the adaptationist stance toward contemporary culture which he advocates. For people's religion is **already** to a considerable extent a cultural artefact, even if it is one

which prescribes opposition to the prevailing culture as its proper mode. Where Christian faith is being confessed, and an attempt is in progress to practise it, within a secular culture, however imperfectly understood by the believer, the flourishing of that faith is unlikely to be furthered by secularizing it: it is more likely to wither away altogether.

For the practice of Christianity must retain within its symbolical apparatus and theological rationale the stimulus for that "critical gap" or "concealed break with culture" (W.Hamilton, 1966:139ff), if faith is to retain its capacity both to affirm as meaningful, and to criticise, the order in which it finds it must operate. Despite Cox's desire to see theology and Church life move out into the culture of *technopolis*, there is a strange isomorphism with bourgeois culture about his position which makes it difficult to envisage where, and how, in his Church a word of God could be heard which would not be identical with a word from man.

Fourthly, and following from this, the question poses itself rather sharply, **whose** faith is this secular faith, which is free from provincial tribalisms and faces the world in mature personal responsibility? For when Gogarten's essentially dogmatic theological position is made into the basis of an ostensible analysis of sociological realities, it cannot but appear incurably utopian, or even élitist, contrary to Cox's intentions. For who are the secular city-dwellers who are freely able to enjoy this level of anonymity and mobility, and to rejoice in it all as gain for the Gospel? Are they not the few who can afford to live in the secular city while feathering at the same time a rather less secular nest to which to escape in their leisure time? Or those with the educational achievements which enable them to make fair game of the city's impersonal demands, and to beat them into their own service?

It would be easy to argue, for example, that the vast inner-city housing areas of the present time are ten times as much the hives of a particularly vicious form of tribalism as ever the close-knit rural village communities were.

Again, the cities are the main locus of working-class culture, and this culture retains more strongly than any other the old communal patterns of relationship (or the instinct for them), while rejecting the religious participation which once accompanied them. But Cox's analysis requires us to believe that this kind of religiously-based community life was a misconception of the true application of faith, even though its breakdown has been immeasurably damaging to urban life.

All of this suggests, finally, that it is over-optimistic of Cox to suppose that "secularization" can be so readily welcomed while "secularism" is denied. Gogarten's position operates on the basis of a radical distinction between the proper realms of faith and the secular respectively: just as Bultmann's theology emphasised the radical eschatological other-worldliness of faith, so Gogarten brought out the corresponding truth that faith allows the world to be itself in all its secularity. Man's works in the world do not have religious value, since justification is by faith alone, but can stand in their own right as expressions of the rational dominion in the world to which man is called (Schrey, 1981:21-27). Given the inalienable right of each domain to its own proper rationality, the two realms are seen to belong inseparably together, each relying on the other for its completion. In this way, true secularity depends upon the presence of true faith, and vice versa.

But Cox wants to have only one domain, giving a wholly secular meaning to faith itself. Therefore, he should accept the sociological realities which come with such a stance. One of these is undoubtedly that the spread of secularism is a concomitant of the processes of secularization, and what Cox

has left himself unable to supply is a sufficient basis upon which to **combat** secularism, even though he theoretically wishes to do so. He wants to speak positively of the gradual assertion of the autonomy of the secular (secularization), while criticizing the compartmentalization of religion and the waning influence, or irrelevance, of the churches and religious thinking in other areas of social life (secularism). But this cannot be done on his terms.

What is required is a stance which, firstly, is prepared to accept and look in the face the **fact** of differentiation, which as the fruit of a process which itself has its roots in the outworking of Christian faith, now leaves the Church appearing as that institution which represents the religious division of life.

Secondly, this stance needs to capitalize upon this separated, specialized and increasingly marginal position in order to call into question certain developments within the secularization process, by measuring them against their Gospel origins. In brief, Cox wants to **affirm** the secularizing processes but **challenge** their marginalizing effect on religion by urging the Church to reclaim them for its own theology; we think the more feasible option lies in **accepting** marginality but **criticising** the processes.

In the next section, we shall follow up the issues of the structural marginalization of the Church and the effects of cultural secularization in relation to some other writings of our period tackling the same questions as Cox from different points of view.

2. Religion and Secularization: Ideals and Ideologies.

i. Munby and The Idea of a Secular Society.

Another work which lay at the positive pole of a radical theological response to secularization was D.L.Munby's The Idea

of a Secular Society. Munby did not claim that the fully secular society had already been achieved, but he did present the idea as something desirable, and attempted, like Cox, to give theological justification for such a judgment. He also sought to tackle directly the problem of a specialized religious institution in such a society.

For Munby, a secular society is one which "explicitly refuses to commit itself as a whole to any particular view of the nature of the universe and the place of man in it" (Munby, op.cit:14). It is pluralist and tolerant, not seeking to impose a uniform world-view or value-system, and respecting the right of individuals to whatever private beliefs they choose, subject to no harm being done either to others or to collective interests. Its official institutions have carefully circumscribed, practical aims, which they achieve by rational means, such as the scientific collection and analysis of data, and dispassionate team-work free from "vested interests". The society projects no "official images" of itself.

Munby's account does not try to applaud secularization while deploring secularism. Rather, he accepts that the open, pluralistic, in no way religiously legitimated society will not display much interest in locating God in particular circumstances or values. "We are not to look for the hand of God in any particular fields of experience. He is in all or none. Providence is universal or nowhere" (ibid:71). Munby points out that the hiddenness of God, or the dialectical tension of his presence-in-absence, has been a common theme of devotional literature through the centuries. Today, more than ever:

There is no separate sphere of 'religion' where God is to be found. If there is no such separate sphere, if God is a hidden God, he is equally a God who is everywhere in the ordinary, everyday world (ibid:75; cf. *supra*, on Bonhoeffer;69).

Thus far, then, Munby's position is rigorous in its insistence upon a thoroughgoing secularity. The Church has no right at all to try to "clear a space" for religion, or to suggest that any of the autonomous institutional spheres requires religious interpretation or justification in order to function aright. God neither favours some quarter of the social system at the expense of another, nor adds anything materially to any of them in such a way that they can be said to "need" him. Given this very strict understanding of the secularity of the secular society, Munby has cleared the ground for asking what the possible role of a separate and specialised religious institution might be. For obviously it is **not** somewhere "where God is to be found" in a way he is not found elsewhere.

Munby has laid bare the constituents of the problem very uncompromisingly, but finds great difficulty in solving it because he is so determined to treat the secular society he has described as **unequivocally** a good thing. So, he is less than expansive about the purpose of the Church. He wants to see it "redirecting its efforts" towards "lay institutes and centres where ordinary people can discuss their everyday problems" (ibid:88). Meanwhile, the job of Christians is to work out what "is the proper pattern of sanctity in the world of politics and people" (ibid:89): this, presumably, because Christians are those who are committed to seeing this secular and seemingly godless society as being God's, and existing in, with and before God. But why, on Munby's terms, should such a perspective be desirable at all?

The problem is that Munby was deliberately responding to Eliot's Idea of a Christian Society, and behind it Coleridge's Church and State, by disputing Eliot's claim, from the wasteland of the inter-war years, that a so-called "neutral society" must relapse into paganism unless it be Christianized. Munby's liberal distaste for élitism caused him to shun Eliot's concept of a "community of Christians" made up of those intellectually

and spiritually gifted leaders, clerical and lay, who would shape and inform the national culture. Nevertheless, Munby hazarded the suggestion that all practising Christians, in their everyday lives, might "guide others as a 'clerisy', because others copy them, whether knowing it or not" (ibid).

Munby was here recognizing that something needs to be done about secular culture, but his determination to welcome the secular society in all respects made it impossible for him to make this recognition explicit and plain. Today, we may feel a greater kinship with Eliot's inter-war waste-land than with Munby's post-war optimism. One fact is inescapable: if there is any importance at all in maintaining the Christian cultural perspective, then where practising religious commitment is reduced to a small minority of the population, this small group inevitably have the responsibility laid upon them to become the informed, alert and critical front-line of Christian socio-cultural presence- élitism or not.

To sum up, Munby desires both to celebrate the sufficiency of a secular society and to assert the continuing importance of religion within it. We should say that, if one aspect of Munby's ideal society is that religion is no longer required to bolster it up, then religion may instead periodically emerge from its corner in order to call the society's assumptions into question (cf. Jarrett-Kerr, 1964:24). Newbiggin (1966:126-37) has listed at least three such cherished assumptions of Munby's which religion cannot leave untouched.

Munby says that a secular state "deflates the pretensions" of such potentially "sacral" authority-figures as judges. But Newbiggin asks whether the exalted symbolic status and respect accorded to such figures (notwithstanding the possibility of corruption and abuse) does not express society's belief that

law is not merely a matter of arbitrary expediency, but of vital consensual convictions about right and wrong.

Munby is hostile to "ideologies" as unreflectingly accepted overarching rationales shaping attitudes and behaviour. But Newbigin, quoting André Dumas, suggests that ideologies "have been, and still are, the great moral force of the contemporary masses" (Newbigin, op.cit:134).

Munby shares in the radical theologian's distaste for "pietistic" religion. But Newbigin argues that an inward, personal dimension of religion can offer a strong defence against the collapse of religion into culture, and thus preserve a critical distance from secular society for one who remains fully involved in it.

These, of course, are excessively brief suggestions bordering on extremely large issues. We employ them here simply to illustrate how the assertion of a continuing role for explicit and visible religious practice in a thoroughly secular society involves being prepared to accept that aspects of that society and its culture raise critical questions. Then, only religion offers the potentially independent standpoint from which to face them honestly.

ii. Adolfs and the Ideology of a Secular Culture.

Both Cox and Munby approach secularization through a description of certain key features of social change in post-medieval western societies. They emphasise particularly the withdrawal of successive areas of institutional life from ecclesiastical control, the rise of the modern secular state and the development of science and technology, all interpreted as the fruit of Biblical faith.

But they neglect those culturally-based approaches which always make the question of secularization much more problematic for the theologian. The precise delineation of the extent of secularization in a given society becomes far more difficult, as the work of David Martin shows, and the

possibility of an unambiguously positive theological response is also greatly reduced (see Shiner, 1965).

Justice cannot be done to the secularization question by looking solely at the public, socio-structural level of the specialization of institutional functions and their emancipation from religious control. A theology which attempts to capitalize on these processes runs into difficulties precisely at the point where it has to reconstruct the role of religion in the secular society. This is because the claim to be doing theology in tandem with secular social realities all too often fails to face honestly the highly problematic reality of religious life produced by such a type of society.

Some theologians, however, were interested in depicting what they saw as the developing cultural ethos of the time. That is, they thought that the features of "modernity" were gradually producing, at a more or less subliminal, unreflective level of mass awareness, a secular mind-set or orientation upon the world which would exclude those dispositions toward the sacred or the transcendent with which religion traditionally had to do (C.Williams, 1966:40-41; Barry, 1969:12; Lloyd, 1964:17-20).

One such analysis was provided by the Dutch Catholic theologian Robert Adolfs, who combined the influence of Protestant radical theology with commentary upon Vatican II in his books The Church is Different (1966) and The Grave of God (1967). Adolfs describes the phenomena of what he calls "rapidation" in recent world development, giving some substance to the frequent claims of radical theology that this was a time of "rapid social change" (Adolfs, 1967:44-61). He cites the development of urban life in areas of the non-Western world where this had previously not occurred, the rise of computer technology, the growing economic interdependence of nations and the spread of the communications media.

Adolfs then goes on to set out, in the form of a list of brief popular aphorisms and mottoes, the content of the "dominant ideology" which is encouraged by factors of modernity such as these. For whereas the secular society, as Munby argued, may be one which espouses no official ideology or philosophical rationale for its aims and structures, it nevertheless embraces, or causes people unsystematically and non-articulately to embrace, a wide range of "pseudo-myths" about what is true, desirable or possible. Among the cultural assumptions noted by Adolfs are such things as these:

With the help of work, science and technology, mankind makes progress;
progress is greater welfare;
welfare is the consequence of satisfying our material needs;
man's spiritual needs (culture and religion) must be looked after in the private sectors of society...
success (financial, political or in one's career) means happiness...
all uncertainties must be eliminated...
everything must be so arranged that it can be regulated or controlled...
anything that cannot be measured or calculated is valueless...
questions that cannot be answered must be avoided...
people who don't fit into our society are anti-social or inferior...
what cannot be discussed (the ineffable, the mysterious, the symbolical) must not be discussed...(Adolfs, op.cit;79-80).

Now Adolfs is as eager as any radical theologian to affirm that element of secularization which achieves the liberation of mankind from the bondage of sacral systems which hold people in thrall to "principalities and powers" believed to dominate the world, and stifle human creative action. But he perceives the threat of a renewed bondage to a potent hidden ideology, capable of even greater dehumanizing effect.

Today, of course, it has become almost as fashionable to denounce the dangers of modernity as it was to celebrate secularity twenty years ago among the Church's self-styled *avant-garde*. But it will not help us to swing uncritically from

celebration to denunciation: either way, the reality of the Christian's dialectical involvement and implication in both positive and negative facets of secularization is not faced.

Adolfs has offered us a clear, characteristic portrayal of the distinctive mentality of a secular culture, which must be allowed to qualify the attempts of Cox and Munby to reclaim secularity for theology and the Gospel. In the concluding section of this chapter, we examine three crucial areas in which this qualification must occur.

3. Matters Arising: The Limits of the Secular?

i. Secularization and the Misrepresentation of Mass-Cultural Attitudes.

Cultural analysis undertaken from a one-sidedly educated, urbane and professional point of view can easily distort the pattern of actual mass-cultural attitudes. Cox, for example, writes as follows:

Pre-secular man lives in an enchanted forest. Its glens and groves swarm with spirits. Its rocks and streams are alive with friendly or fiendish demons. Reality is charged with a magical power (Cox, 1969;35).

In similar vein, Colin Williams writes of the "period of myth" proposed by van Peursen:

[It sees the world as] rather like an enchanted forest, alive with magical and frightening forces, and in which primitive man makes no clear distinction between his life and the life-forces penetrating the world (C. Williams, 1966;22).

Both writers accept that mythical and tribal attitudes are not a thing of the past. They are not so naive as to suppose that all modern, western men and women are secular, technopolitan, functional thinkers. But they fashion their descriptions tendentiously, so as to highlight the alien, irrational, **primitive** character of the so called tribal or mythical culture. Reading them, we are made to feel that such

attitudes **must** be merely archaic survivals among the less enlightened sectors of the population.

However, a less tendentious reading might produce a different effect. For example, secularization has made no significant inroads at all upon the expectation of religious officiation on the occasion of death (cf. Bowker, 1973:ch.4). A fully consistent secular theology could really have very little patience with the taking up of the Church's time in performing burials and cremations; for these doubtless reflect at a folk-religious level a profound attachment to a mythical view of the soul, heaven and hell, of the powers of life and death and all the paraphernalia of a residually sacred universe.

But there is absolutely no avoiding the fact that every person at a funeral, brought into contact with what is otherwise the secular culture's greatest *tabu*, is faced with the disturbing truth: tomorrow, it could be **me**. In the secular age, that statement is no less true than ever it was. The example serves to illustrate that the intimations underlying the confused and confusing mish-mash of residual religious practices need not be so "primitive" or immature as the secular theologians are apt to represent them to be.

For the most part, secularization has led neither to the demise of religious orientations, nor to their transformation into a mode of creative world-affirmation and responsible secularity, but to sheer religious confusion. Nowhere in the radical theologies do we find a simple admission of this fact, still less any attempt to come to terms with it and urge the churches to take responsibility for it.

Alasdair MacIntyre wrote of the attempt to welcome secularization in the name of "true Christianity", "it is also a matter of the gap between the churches and the rest of the population in respect of the intelligibility of religious utterance and behaviour" (MacIntyre, 1968). We should perhaps

rephrase this, "between the radical theologians and the rest of the population inside and outside the churches". As MacIntyre went on to say, theological rationales for the existing state of affairs **might** constitute an ideological concealment of the social facts.

ii. Secularization and the Disappearance of Ultimate Questions.

We have seen that Cox, together with in their various ways van Buren, van Peursen and Wren-Lewis, took up Bonhoeffer's remark about so-called "ultimate questions" no longer carrying existential conviction with modern man. As a result, they argued, religion and faith could not be made to depend upon them. We have to raise the question whether the disappearance of a particular **form** of such questions necessarily implies that they will not recur in some other guise.

As an example, we may take Lesslie Newbigin's criticism of A.T.van Leeuwen's Christianity in World History. Van Leeuwen argued that the spirit of Christian faith was invariably one of prophetic protest against "ontocracy", by which he meant an understanding of the world-order in terms of sacral authorities, values and meanings structured into permanent givenness. Christian faith broke the pattern of ontocratic society, and refused the claim to absoluteness advanced by any system of **ultimate** meaning.

But Newbigin asked whether such a continual repudiation of ultimates, however theologically justifiable, was possible in practice: could actual societies sustain such a position **structurally**? "Questions about personal destiny, about the meaning and purpose of human life, will always be asked" (Newbigin, 1966:39).

Newbigin's point was that every culture must have some kind of philosophical fall-back or assumed indefectible bedrock

to which it will point when every empirically testable answer to such questions fails to meet expectations. It may be necessary, in a secular society, to look beneath the surface of the public structures in order to discover where those non-negotiable limits of argument reside for individuals and groups. Does the outline of a secular mentality given by Adolfs, above, support Bonhoeffer against Newbiggin's confidence that the questions will continue to be asked?

Bonhoeffer, obviously enough in view of his personal circumstances, was not writing as an optimistic secular man with over-rosy expectations about human possibilities and an underestimation of the limits set by human fallibility and sin. He was simply aiming at matter-of-factness: of course the onward march of technology and scientific knowledge makes people resonate less deeply to questions of the form, "what is the meaning of life?" "what is authentic existence?" "how can I overcome my finitude?" and so on. Many ordinary people today will respond with a shrug of the shoulders: "I take life as it comes", "leave that to the philosophers", "it's all beyond me!" But the questions may be put in a different form: "Why is the world in such a mess?" "Can things get any better?" "What sort of a life will there be for our children when they grow up?" The reactions to such questions may be less non-committal.

Religious categories, however, are just as necessary in the end to articulate any answers. Christianity is very much to do with the hope of a better world, even where, in popular and traditional religious practice, this has been projected as a different world, "heaven", to be entered individually after death. A secular culture which is pragmatic and instrumentally-oriented may well not ask its ultimate questions in the habitually abstract philosophical way, but it will flounder if it is supplied with no means of asking or answering them at all. ~~And these means are invariably religious means.~~

iii. Secularization and the Rebound of the Sacred.

A cultural understanding of secularization conceives of the advance of secular categories of understanding, conventions, mores and mentality as being at the expense of sacred ones.⁷ It is not, as we have seen, that the secular simply squeezes out the sacred, as though the two were mutually exclusive ways of approaching the world. Rather, the health of the relationship between the two poles of the sacred-secular continuum is damaged. Instead of a creative tension, there is a dangerous imbalance.

To use a crude analogy, the sacred and secular poles may be regarded as the opposite ends of a flexible or elastic cord. If one end, the secular, is stretched further and further, the cord will eventually snap unless a counter-pull is being exercised by the sacred. If this is activated, a rebound will occur which, although traumatic at the time, ultimately has the effect of restoring the original healthy tension. The question at issue is whether the continuing advance of secularization is to result in further fragmentation as the sacred-secular continuum in society and culture breaks entirely, or whether the churches can marshal the resources of religion in order to restore the proper dialectic.

The presence of the sacred, or of a set of sacred representations, within a secular culture serves to maintain a healthy tension in a number of respects. Firstly, it mediates between the prevailing culture (by its use of culturally familiar forms) and notions of what is **finally** true, good and perfect. It refuses to let the culture rest satisfied with present conditions and prevents the decline of ultimate ideals into culturally immanent, and thus idolatrous forms (cf. Galloway, 1967).

Secondly, it stands as a permanent reminder to secular society that, while the desacralizing of the world of nature, State and social order is indeed congruent with the

implications of the Gospel, the eschatological condition of the full disclosure of the holiness of the secular- the *kainē ktisis*, the new creation- has not yet been achieved (cf. Davis, 1966:11-20, 54ff).

Thirdly, it prevents any human programme from being identified wholly and without remainder with the work of God (cf. Lash, 1973). It insists that the highest and best of human projects is never enough to achieve the vision which inspired it. Moreover, every such project will fall prey to some corruption from within, in the very process of passing from vision to concrete reality.

iv. Conclusions.

In this chapter, we have attended to the proposals of secular theology for understanding contemporary socio-cultural change as a legitimate outcome of the Gospel, and thus enabling the churches to welcome it. We have explored the difficulties set in the way of these proposals by two particular aspects of the secularization process: the differentiation and marginalization of the religious institution itself, and the confusion and fragmentation exhibited by the secular culture. We perceive in Cox and those who broadly support him a desire to affirm the secularizing processes wholeheartedly on theological grounds, while still finding room for a role for the churches which effectively denies their marginality. We think it more realistic to face up to this marginality, but to seek to make use of it to mount a critique of certain aspects of the secular culture.

In our view, Christians do well not to forget the original locus of the word "secular". It referred to the present world-order **qualified** by the fact that it is, in relation to God's promised future, never final, never fulfilled in itself, never beyond question. There was a quite proper foundation for the Church's reluctance to rid the idea of "secularization" of certain pejorative connotations. This was not always simply

evidence (though sometimes it was and is) of an entrenched stance towards what was assumed to be the rise of irreligion, and as such the Church's sworn enemy.

The fully secular society is, to use the accurate phrase of von Weiszaecker (1964), a kind of "Christian heresy". It emphasises and freezes into false permanence one side only of the complex truth of the social implications of the Gospel. It remains the responsibility of contemporary Christianity to retain an ambiguous, critically-distanced stance towards its own socio-cultural fruits. Such a distance is actually provided to the Church by the problematic fact of the unwilling institutional differentiation which has led it into marginality.

Our position, therefore, differs from the radicals' typical judgment that secularization is good and must be affirmed, but secularism is bad and must be rejected. As to the affirmation of secularization as a fruit of the Gospel, we conclude as follows: insofar as this is true, it requires the acceptance that aspects of so-called secularism are likewise inevitable "fruits" tied into the process. This alerts us to the fact that the Gospel's fruits in concrete socio-cultural terms can never be unambiguously judged to be sound and proper. There is always a fresh process of reviewing, criticising and even rejecting fruits in the light of the selfsame Gospel. This does not mean attempting in the process to deny that these were really "true" fruits at all.

As for the denial of secularism, we comment thus: this denial is only realistic if it is nuanced to single out those components of the prevailing ideology which are developing in a line radically inimical to the Gospel. This involves the Church in recognizing its own inescapable complicity in the production of them. Therefore, an attitude of humility and compassion, not just hostility and denunciation, is called for.

Further, the Church cannot begin to combat or criticise anything that belongs to the secular unless it heightens, maximises and makes effective all that symbolism of the sacred and transcendent which is the distinctive property of its own institutional life.

The theoretical position attained in this chapter has not directly addressed the problem of specific, concrete action by the churches designed to make visible in a secular context the real **meaning** of the Gospel, of talk of sin and salvation, grace and fellowship. For Harvey Cox, for example, a theology of social change was intended to precede a theology of the Church; and all we have said in this chapter invites the question, what should the Church do?

Christian Radicalism paid much attention to this question, which is treated extensively not only in The Secular City and Robinson's The New Reformation?, to name two leading contributions, but especially in the documents stemming from the studies on "The Missionary Structure of the Congregation" emanating from the World Council of Churches. This "secular mission of the Church" is the topic of our next Chapter.

NOTES.

1. However dated, the book is a great deal more lively and stimulating to read today than Honest To God, the naivety of some parts being compensated for by the suggestive insights of others. The most cogent immediate responses are gathered in The Secular City Debate, edited by Daniel Callahan (1966), in a deliberate imitation of Edwards' Honest to God Debate. A good extended discussion is in Richard, Secularization Theology, 132-64; a trenchant review article is P.J.Lee, "Whose City?" in the Scottish Journal of Theology for 1966:328-40. Cox is discussed as part of the sixties' ferment in K.Hamilton, What's New in Religion?, 93-106; ch.3 of Woollard, Progress: a Christian Doctrine?; and ch.1 of A.M.Ramsey, God, Christ and the World.
2. Saeculum was a temporal term, cf. French siècle century. However, the contrast between "this age/world" and "the age/world to come" served to blur the distinction from the spatial term mundus. The New Testament use of Greek αἰών and κόσμος is comparable. See J.A.T.Robinson, "The Christian Society and This World", in On Being the Church in the World, 9-22; A.Loeb, Secularization, 150-55; Gregor Smith, Secular Christianity, 141-49; Richardson, Religion in Contemporary Debate, 40ff; Macquarrie, God and Secularity, 43f. The radical distinction between the two ages is of course followed through classically in theology in Augustine's conception of the two "cities" and the Lutheran doctrine of the two "Kingdoms", both of which as a result show an immensely contemporary interest in the relationship between faith and this world. See Charles Davis, Theology and Political Society, 32-35.
3. These statements about expropriation are of course highly generalized. In England, the peculiar political nature of the Reformation, which eventually led to a Revolution involving conservative and radical religious parties, followed by a restoration of a moderately reformed ecclesiastical system and a monarchy still closely allied to it, resulted in the political process of secularization being halted at an intermediary stage. In France, by contrast, the eventual Revolution very decisively involved a confrontation of religious and secularist parties, and a fully secular state resulted in which even today anti-clericalism is more widespread than in England. See Martin, A General Theory of Secularization.

4. For example, Holyoake believed that the masses required education and the material means of living a properly human life, not dogma and supernatural palliatives. Good hospitals could do more for the sick than priestly ministrations. A Davy lamp would protect a miner where prayers would not. Where the world remained unexplained, science would continue to work upon it. In the meantime, no matter for there was plenty to be getting on with, and to enjoy, without troubling about mysteries. On Holyoake and Bradlaugh, see Susan Budd, Varieties of Unbelief. Nineteenth-century secularism became the basis for the twentieth-century Humanist Movement; see Colin Campbell, "Humanism in Britain", in A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain, vol. 2, 1969, and the same author's Towards a Sociology of Irreligion, 1971; also in the context of the sixties, W. Strawson, Teachers and the New Theology, ch. 3; Blackham, Religion in Modern Society and in Objections to Humanism, 1966; R. Hepburn in Religion and Humanism, published by the BBC in 1964; and popularly, F. Brown, Living Before You Die, 1973.

5. On Gogarten see Gregor Smith, Secular Christianity, 150-56; S. P. Schilling, Contemporary Continental Theologians, ch. 5; H. H. Schrey, Säkularisierung, 21-27. The reliance of Cox and others upon Gogarten's Verhängnis und Hoffnung der Neuzeit: die Säkularisierung als theologisches Problem (1953) is somewhat eclectic and out of context. Gogarten, like Bultmann, started out as a dialectical theologian but parted theological company with Barth in the thirties. His understanding of secularization as the "historicization" (Vergeschichtlichung) of human existence, although taken up accurately by Gregor Smith (see *infra*, Ch. XII), does not really agree with what Cox is trying to say. For Gogarten, it is faith as a creative mode of historical being-in-the-world that overcomes the dichotomy between (empiricist) objectivity and (existentialist) subjectivity. Only in faith can man allow the objective world to be freely itself in its full historical secularity, because faith as the gift of God frees man to be himself in the world, liberating him from domination by it and for responsible action in it. Gogarten's position depends upon acceptance of a radical version of the Lutheran "Two Kingdoms" doctrine, and seeks to understand how faith avoids either confusing or falsely separating the two realms, of God and of the world. On these terms, Cox's theology is actually a case of their deliberate confusion. See H. H. Schrey, Reich Gottes und Welt, 1969:101-4.

6. Cox is not blind to the irony of choosing Kennedy and Camus as his representatives of the secular spirit; two men who both met death prematurely, violently and in seemingly meaningless fashion. In the very midst of pragmatic secularity, the existential predicament raises its head!

7. The phenomenological aspect of this sacred-secular continuum point of view owes much to the history-of-religions school represented particularly by the work of Mircea Eliade. See Wicker, Culture and Theology, 211-221. Altizer also belongs to this tradition, having been strongly influenced by Eliade; but he wants to force the swing of the pendulum wholly on to the "secular" side of the continuum, in order to bring about a catastrophic shift in which the eschatological sacred will appear. This deliberately reverses Eliade's perspective of an eternal return of the sacred. Altizer, then, demands that Christians take a fearful risk in giving up everything to the onslaught of total, profane secularity, and just waiting to see what happens. This position is very much bound up with a sort of optimistic American Messianism, which has had a sorry fate since Altizer's day; see R. L. Shinn, Man: The New Humanism, 149, 157.

CHAPTER XI: THE SECULAR MISSION OF THE CHURCH.

This chapter seeks to evaluate those radical programmes which applied the overall theological affirmation of the modern, secular society to the understanding of the Church's missionary task. The aim of such programmes was to reconceptualize that mission, and the salvation which it sought to bring, in secular-social terms, and to consider the institutional structures necessary for the Church to accomplish a mission reinterpreted in this way. On the basis of the double-edged stance towards secularity recommended in the preceding chapter, we raise a number of questions against both the desirability and the feasibility of this reconstruction, and suggest factors which need to be taken into consideration if the Church is to have any hope of fulfilling its mission under the constraining conditions of contemporary social reality.

1. Colin Williams and the "Church for Others".

i. General Observations.

The main ecumenical debate about the meaning of salvation and the nature of the Church's mission, and the relationship of evangelism to social justice, did not develop until the 1970s and came to a head at the Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1975. As such, the debate falls outside the scope of this thesis. However, the precursors of these increasingly politically-oriented ecumenical statements lie clearly to hand in the secular theologies of the previous decade. Here, certain theoretical foundations were laid concerning the regeneration of the Church's social presence and proclamation in order to speak to, and be effective in, a global society construed as increasingly and irreversibly secular.¹

The worldwide studies of the World Council of Churches on "The Missionary Structure of the Congregation", initiated at the

Delhi Assembly of 1961, culminated in the 1967 Report, The Church For Others. This in turn strongly influenced the thinking of the Fourth Assembly of the W.C.C. at Uppsala in Sweden in 1968. The Council also sponsored an important Conference on Church and Society in Geneva in 1966, which was notable for its espousal of a form of Christian humanism as the proper formulation of the nature of God's mission in the world.²

For a body of writings expounding the theology promulgated through these councils and studies we turn to the work of the Australian Methodist theologian, Colin Williams. He joined the National Council of Churches of the U.S.A. in 1963 as Director of the Department of Evangelism, in order to oversee and co-ordinate the emerging findings of the "Missionary Structure" study groups. The immediate fruit of Williams' work in this area was the two study books, Where in the World? and What in the World?. The later paperback Faith in a Secular Age sought to relate the studies more explicitly to the theology of secularization. In 1969, Williams' study of The Church in Lutterworth's "New Directions in Theology" series took a broader view in setting the developing W.C.C. ecclesiology against the background of more traditional models.

ii. Exposition.

The first major feature of the theology of the W.C.C. is that the term "mission" refers in the first place to what God is doing **in** the world at large, and not to something the Church is sent to do, as it were, **to** the world on God's behalf. This position differs from the theological affirmation of secularization we saw in Cox, who wanted to retain (somewhat problematically, as we argued in the last chapter) the idea that the secular world was somehow **incomplete** without its theological rationale, still seen in a fairly neo-Orthodox manner as **given** to the world. Williams sees a "radical shift in focus" to a position where "the world sets the agenda" quite unambiguously (Williams, 1969:ch.1).

This is because God's mission is before all else one of "humanization". It is a matter of bringing about the conditions in the world whereby mankind can come to enjoy the full potentialities of their creation and calling. "The vision of the ultimate reconciliation and unity of the whole of creation in Christ" (Williams, 1965(a):27) is interpreted chiefly as the breaking down of all those walls of partition which do harm to the prospects of a manifestation of the family of man. The mission of God is therefore thoroughly secular, and also political, in the sense that it concerns public, social-structural and material issues and not merely private and interior dispositions (cf. Metz, 1969:114).

Having established the priority of mission as God's work in the secular field, the Council's theology goes on to conceive of the Church's role as participation. M.M. Thomas, a leading Asian theologian, writes:

The work of Christ in his Kingdom is discernible in the secular and political revolutions of our time, and...the church's function is to discern it and witness to it and... 'to participate in God's work in a changing world' (Thomas, 1968).

The Uppsala Assembly of 1968 put it this way:

Do missionary priorities place the church alongside the defenceless, the abused, the forgotten, the bored? Do they allow Christians to enter the concerns of others, to accept their issues and their structures as vehicles of involvement? Are they the best situations for discerning with other men the signs of the times, and for moving with history towards the coming of the new humanity?

Passages like this, which abound in the published documents of the W.C.C., exhibit certain frequently recurring rhetorical turns of phrase. The mission of Christ is characterized in terms of "struggle". The Church is called upon to "discern what God is doing in the secular". It is to be wherever the new age is "emerging". It must allow its forms to "develop around the shapes of the world's need".

The model for the Church which fits this theology of participation is that of the **servant** of the world. The Church possesses no independent or specialized status of its own, but must simply be prepared to adjust and adapt to changing situations as the need requires. For example, wherever organized action is occurring designed to give a disprivileged or oppressed group an opportunity for creative responsibility for their destiny for the first time, or a movement is under way to reconcile two previously warring and mutually suspicious social groups, **there** one should expect to find a group of Christians organizing itself into an effective agency for offering the resources of Christ to the new situation.

Williams writes characteristically:

It would seem that if the church is to be the servant of God's mission, it must (like Christ) be sensitive to the points of disjunction in the world, and be so structured that it focuses the obedience of the Christian community at these points of need (Williams, 1965(a):31).

In contrast to the traditional, static definitions of the Church in terms of certain "marks" or "notes", or as the community where the Word is preached and the sacraments duly administered, in this theology the Church only becomes, properly, Church "where the people of God are taking servant shape around the needs and hopes of the world- as servants of Christ and therefore as servant of men" (Williams, 1969:31).

This Servant Church may simply have to "be there" before it can decide or dare to speak a word. It must be free for the mission of "Christian presence in the new shapes of human existence in the structures of our time" (Williams, 1966:114; cf. on "being there", *ibid*:12, n.2, and Cox, 1969:104). This silent presence is itself a form of secular engagement, because it is directed towards understanding:

We must be the listening church before we can be the speaking church. We must discern the shapes of need and hope before we can take the shape of servant love and before we can point with any accuracy to the hidden work

of Christ as he continues to work in history now
(Williams, 1969:32).

Further, the Church is in no way to be concerned about its own numerical increase. The ancient dictum, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, must be reformulated in a secular age to express the truth that, in the Church, God has given to the world a community whose task is to spell out to it, and in its own life embody before it, the true nature of the salvation which is even now being manifested in the world at large.

Hence the mode of the Church's witness is invariably one of *pars pro toto*, in which the size of the "pars" in relation to the whole of a society is a historical and cultural variable, and in no way relevant to the essence of the mission. Neither the medieval *corpus Christianorum* nor the present-day *diaspora* situation is to be taken as a **norm**. Neither, after all, is a function of the progress of God's secular mission, nor of the extent of the dissemination of salvation. The purpose of the few, if it be a few, being elect is solely that the many may be saved, which is by no means the same thing as joining the Church (H.R.Weber, 1963; Williams, 1966:101-3).

In view of these considerations, it is not surprising that Williams prefers the New Testament images of the Church as light, yeast and salt, to those speaking of aliens and exiles, a pilgrim people on a passage to a different world. For the "separated" life of the Church, represented in its traditional forms, is only secondary and preparatory to its life of servanthood and engagement (Williams, 1965(b):38ff).

In addition, he gives more weight to the "yeast" image, which is to do with change and hidden transformation, than to "salt", which concerns rather the preservation sound and wholesome of what already is (Williams, 1969:142-6). The preservation of past forms after they have become almost wholly dysfunctional has done serious damage to the Church's ability to engage constructively with the secular mission of God. For

The church is the church as it is renewed day by day, dying to the limited forms of the world's past and rising to the freedom of serving Christ as he opens up the world's future (ibid;49),

The emphasis on dysfunctional structures clearly relates to the background of all the World Council's thinking in the ecumenical movement.³ However, the feature most prominent in Williams' analysis is a strong statement of the inadequacy of the locally-based residential congregation for the fulfilment of the Gospel mission, as secularly understood, in the contemporary social situation. There are at least three reasons for this inadequacy.

Firstly, it is argued that the geographical parish no longer reflects in any meaningful way the actual clusters and configurations of communal and associative attachments within which people live their daily lives.⁴ This is the reason for the development of a range of "para-church" agencies such as Boards for Social Responsibility or Mission and Unity, industrial, hospital, prison and other chaplaincies, and institutions and academies for the provision of study and discussion resources in the new specialized areas confronting the Church. Nevertheless, says Williams, "the real church is still looked upon as the local church" (1965(a):8), a situation which will not do.

For secondly, local residence congregations are increasingly divided along class, racial or other cultural lines. They testify in their segregated lifestyle and mentality to precisely those worldly "separations" which it is the claim of the Gospel to destroy:

Does not a church pattern which structures Christians within residence communities tend to deepen those worldly separations rather than bring the uniting reconciling power of Christ to bear in such a way that these worldly barriers collapse and Christ's ultimate purpose is revealed? (ibid;28; cf.9-12),

A third ground for distrust of the residentially-based structure is that it highlights the isolation and privatization of the nuclear religious community brought about by structural differentiation. For the religious group, feeling itself threatened by marginal status and the encroachments of a secular culture, reacts by preserving its distinctiveness by means of an increasingly strict, if implicit, set of criteria for belonging (Matthes, 1966).

For example, it may be that certain groups in society are subject to a greater degree of marginality than others in terms of their exclusion from the secular, material and economic processes which make up the "heart" of society- the elderly, married women, young children, members of unprestigious, old-fashioned middle-class occupations. Such marginal groups, being strongly represented in church congregations, will be classified by society at large as "more likely to be religious". The congregation which is thus composed will then perpetuate this state of affairs by the way in which it unintentionally defines the requirements for "being a good Christian".

There is, then, in the theological position we have been examining here a far-reaching "follow-through" from missiological reconstruction into the reordering of organizational church life. Our task now is to raise questions against four areas of this analysis, arising out of the critical impact of our sociological understanding of the nature of religion and the processes of secularization.

iii. Critique.

We begin by questioning the wholesale reinterpretation in secular-social terms of the salvation offered in the Gospel, which stems from the Council's decision to define mission at the outset as God's humanizing work in the secular arena. The New Testament presents salvation in terms of a tension between accomplished fact and yet-to-be-consummated reality.⁶ There is

a persistent polarity between the **present** confrontation of individual persons with the Gospel in a summons to repentance, and the **eschatological** dimension of the salvation of the whole creation, issuing in the "new heavens and new earth". This polarity provides no precise place for salvation achieved through secular structures, although of course this is far from saying that the salvation of persons does not entail a commitment to the criticism and alteration of certain structures.

Williams is not unaware of this problem. He warns of two dangers inherent in his secular missiology: the Church may simply be defined as wherever God's redeeming work is being done, regardless of the presence or otherwise of explicit Christian faith, and the "equivocal character" of the signs of Christ's presence in the world will fail to be noticed. We can, he says, misuse Christ's gift, turning the opportunity into "demonic directions" (Williams, 1965(b):41-2). However, Williams does not develop this point. On his own previously established terms he cannot do so: for the underlying commitment to "religionlessness" and approval of secularization would have to be modified by such a development.

But we would argue that the Christian perspective insists that we not only **can** but **will** misuse the gifts offered by Christ via the medium of secular progress. Every movement to realize salvation in present, this-worldly terms is "end-stopped" at some point by the rebarbative insufficiencies of humanity spoken of in religious language as "sin". It makes no difference if the causes of such imperfections of behaviour are themselves held to be structural rather than somehow "innate in human nature". For alternative, "less sinful" structural arrangements must still be maintained by some apparatus of authority, entailing the risk that the cycle of exploitation and injustice will begin again: "*La revolution dévore ses enfants*".

These dilemmas of a secular-social interpretation of salvation lead us to raise questions in a second area, which is that of what precisely it is for which the Church is specialized. What contribution do Christians bring, in their activities of participation in the secular mission of God, which necessitates speaking of theirs as a distinctive influence at all? The World Council of Churches' Division of World Mission and Evangelism, meeting in Mexico in 1963, confessed its difficulty with just this issue:

If the restoration and reconciliation of human life is being achieved by the action of God through secular agencies, what is the place and significance of faith? If the church is to be wholly involved in the world, and its history, what is the true nature of its separateness? We were able to state thesis and antithesis in this debate, but we could not see our way through to the truth we feel lies beyond this dialectic (quoted Williams, 1965(b):34).

The unpopular "way through", which the radical theologians were unable to see because of their prior theological commitments, must be that in a secular society the Church is primarily specialized for **religion**. But once this is properly understood, as we have argued the radicals did not understand it, the reasons for rejecting such an answer begin to fade. For the Church, by its ritual provision, its sacred symbolism, its teaching ministry and, indeed, its mere presence, is responsible for guarding, fostering and inculcating a distinctive orientation to the world which it believes to be essential for creative human thriving.

This puts the Church's incursions into the realm of direct social action into rather a different light. They are entirely justified in terms of the response of the Gospel to perceived need. But they ought to be conceived as temporary, emergency projects, designed to fill the breach until the secular society assumes its proper responsibility of providing a professionally specialized and adequate agency to supply the need in question. This is by no means a defence of shoddy work and dilettantishness in the Church's engagement with social

issues (cf. Anderson, 1984). It simply says something about the theological spirit in which projects should be undertaken.

For example, a church-sponsored local community programme to help the unemployed might quite properly be dubbed "amateur" in a sense devoid of the connotations of "amateurishness". For such a project to assume an air of permanence and professional all-sufficiency could encourage the secular authorities to abdicate responsibility for the **material roots** of the problem. They could "leave it to the voluntary bodies, since they're doing such a good job". In that case, the Church would forfeit its right to go on criticising the secular powers in the name of the transcendent vision of the Gospel.

Needless to say, this point of view does not envisage a time when there would no longer be any such emergency projects for the Church to undertake. There will always be those about whom no-one else cares. Even areas of need once supplied, it seemed, adequately by secular agencies can once again show serious signs of lack of provision as the secular society's inevitable failings begin to emerge. But we are simply claiming that this kind of attitude to the Church's social obligations surely belongs to the logic of accepting secularization as a fruit of the Gospel.

Meanwhile, every local church will have a sufficiently demanding task in fulfilling its specifically **religious** service. This involves the continual celebration, exploration and commendation of that godward orientation without which cultural confusion will continue to spread, more or less subliminally, within the community, followed by the atrophy of human potential. If the idea of entering a church for a service of worship is a very alien thing to most people in a parish, the Christian response should not be to retain that for the few who have acquired the taste for it, and concentrate instead upon "secular" forms of outreach to the rest.

Radical theology answered this question mainly in terms of the shortcomings of the residence congregation, and it is to this that we turn for the third aspect of our critique. We have certainly to grant the charge of inertia and unproductive in-group fighting among many such congregations. But we cannot accept the simple diagnosis, that the failure of residence "structures" to reflect contemporary patterns of social life is to blame. For a major factor is the cultural confusion and fragmentation with regard to the role and function of religious practice which accompany the processes of secularization that Williams, like Cox, is keen to welcome.

The *ad hoc* groupings forming around a perceived social need which are envisaged by Williams and the W.C.C. appear to betray a still more questionable potential than the structures they are intended to replace. It is that of an elitist, two-class Christianity, as some of the "parables of missionary obedience" listed in What in the World? show (e.g.88-9). The ineffective and sub-Christian local congregation is contrasted very sharply with the specialized, non-residentially based pressure group, which is really "where the action is".

Against this, we set the parish arrangements which encourage the ideal of all Christians in a given geographical area worshipping and witnessing together (at least in the case of the Church of England). These arrangements remain **in principle** the basis for a powerful counter-trend to the specialization and segregation of Christians along other lines. For although some areas are soci-culturally homogeneous, the majority are not. There is room, in fact, for the distinctive witness of the mixed local congregation, whose boundaries are fluid, and the professionally specialized ministries sponsored by the antecedent institutional face of the Church.

For the Church has a dual level of engagement, both with the local community and with the public structures. For the

latter, a strong sense of "membership" is required, giving expression to the critical over-againstness of the Gospel. But for the former, it is a sense of "the parish" which takes priority: the Church is conceived as being of, for and in the community it serves, without clear boundaries with it (Wickham, 1966). To be sure, every local congregation will have its "core" of more explicitly, overtly committed people, which could be construed as an inevitable kind of elite. But, unlike the action-groups proposed by Williams, in this case the dialectic between critical commitment and community acculturation is upheld **within** the congregation, and not destroyed by the extraction of the "engaged" sub-groups from it.

These observations encroach upon questions which will receive further attention in the next chapter. But for now, our final criticism of Williams' position is a rather more general one. Throughout the radicals' proposals in this area, we note a failure to acknowledge the sheer implicatedness of Church and Christian faith in both negative and positive fruits of attempts to embody the Gospel in social terms. Williams and the W.C.C. tend to write as though it were possible to reconstruct the role of the Church from "scratch", or to adjudicate upon its past performance from a position of present detachment. But this is not so.

In the case of secularization itself, the same set of coordinates out of which emerged a prodigious programme of humanization, such that the modern West assumes as of right standards of living and criteria of humane behaviour undreamed of a few centuries earlier, has also made religious faith so problematic that the cultural basis of that whole programme now comes under threat.

What we most value and what we most abhor are so closely interwoven and even interdependent that the Church ought at least to think very carefully before remodelling its structures

along the lines of some emergent social pattern hastily interpreted as an epiphany of the coming Reign of God. This is not an argument for always leaving things as they are. The Church is very good at that, but it is also inclined to conceive of change in terms of adaptation to prevailing social trends. Neither way is in keeping with the transcendent orientation of the Christian message. The Church has a charter to care, to understand, to criticise, to explore alternatives, but not necessarily just to be up-to-date. It must retain some leverage, within its institutional make-up, for delaying the baptism of each new secular candidate for the status of social embodiment of the Gospel.

In the remainder of this chapter, we look beyond the bounds of the writings of Williams and the W.C.C. for further thinking about the potentialities and limitations involved in a contemporary reconstruction of the Church's mission.

2. The Possibilities and Constraints of a Secular Mission..

i. The Avant-garde of God?

Harvey Cox outlines the general theoretical structure of an ecclesiology in chapters 5 to 7 of The Secular City. It is set in the context of his concern to exhibit the historical sweep of secularization as the concretization of the Gospel. Therefore, it takes up the problem of the need for a continuing religious agency in a society where the desired process- the coming of the Secular City of Man- appears to be occurring anyway.

That is why Cox says that a theology of social change must precede a theology of the Church. Such a theology is required, and so is the Church, in order to avoid two opposite errors: the removal of the concerns of religion and the idea of God's activity entirely out of the socio-political arena on the one hand, and the indiscriminate identification of all manner

of human projects with the work of God on the other (Cox, op.cit;119-120).

Cox claims that his use of "secular city" as an interpretive image for contemporary social change is analogous to the way the coming of the Kingdom of God is understood in the tradition of *sich realisierende Eschatologie*. It is an "emergent reality", the final fulfilment of which always lies beyond any temporal horizon, and contains potentialities not yet concretized into historical realities. These reservations do not entirely square with the fully-fledged theological affirmation of secularization that Cox was eager to convey in the earlier part of his book.

Against this background, Cox proposes four elements of a theology of social change, which together lay out an agenda for the churches:

The "catalytic" act means showing the world why decisive action for change is now necessary. It is achieved by preaching into the "critical gap" between aspects of the prevailing order and that which is promised, and even now beginning to appear. In effect, it is a call to repent.

The interpretation of "catalepsy" means unmasking the reasons why people in fact fail to act in order to enter upon their rightful inheritance in the Gospel. It is a process of removing the "false consciousness", or "bad faith" which prevents them from perceiving the truth (ibid:129-30).⁶

The "catharsis" is an interpretation of conversion, wherein a man "comes to himself" and sees clearly for the first time, assuming his responsibility in the world.

The "catastrophe" is the coming of the new order which results from men and women engaging creatively with their adult calling under God.

According to Cox, the Church is now called upon to perform these actions because the process of secularization has

set in motion the ongoing social changes which are needed for people to be able to change their view of the world (ibid:132). In other words, the Church must see to it that the great opportunity does not pass the world by. It must prevent the newly emerging technopolitan classes from falling away from the liberty they are beginning to grasp. It must tell the world what the time is (cf. Wieser, 1968), and interpret the signs, so that people are enabled to enter into the freedom and fulfilment which modernity offers to them.

The Church, therefore, is "God's avant-garde", a term Cox borrows from Hoekendijk. It achieves this calling in three ways:

Kerygma means proclaiming, in effect, Cox's version of Gogarten's secularization theology of the Gospel-given freedom of man.

Diakonia means working to make whole the character and community of the emerging city: for example, the Church must involve itself in potential problem-areas such as race-relations and homelessness.

Koinonia means the Church's demonstration in its own common life that the message of the Kingdom is true.

Additionally, the Church exercises the ministry of "cultural exorcism", which consists in combating the malignant persistence or re-emergence of sub-Christian tribal or small-town mentalities and structures in the secular city, and easing the passage of the people successfully into the city's rewarding new lifestyle.

Cox's Church is therefore both a sign set up before men of what God is bringing to pass in the world at large, and a midwife assisting at the birth of the new, and ensuring a safe and speedy delivery. Cox is very slightly more equivocal than Williams about the interpretation of secular social action as the prior mission of God in the world. For he permits to the

Church the dual role of simply pointing out and interpreting what is going on, **and**, as the need arises, putting it right when it threatens to deviate from God's intentions. But there is no room in Cox's analysis for the Church's dual role to extend to **resisting** aspects of the advance of modernity.

The activities itemised by Cox under the notions of catalysis, catalepsy, catharsis and catastrophe are an important summary of the Church's critical functions. But Cox only sees them as operating in order to awaken men to their destiny in the emerging new age, whereas we should want to say that they can also operate to free men from a false fixation upon the supposed merits of that age, treated as absolutes. The critical process works both ways.

Moreover, Cox is too much of a "catastrophist" in supposing that existing Christian communities can be propelled abruptly into this new understanding of their role. For, as we have said earlier, the operation of these critical functions remains dependent upon the persistence of certain traditional continuities which grant confidence and stability.

This deficiency in Cox is symptomatic in the brief fourth part of The Secular City, entitled "To Speak in a Secular Fashion of God": he concludes that for the present we may have to remain unable to use the word "God" at all, but does not consider the possibility that the sacred symbolism still present in the Church's visible life and liturgy- its actual **religious** being- may offer any help.

We have to look elsewhere, therefore, for a treatment of the realities the Church must face in any attempt to revitalise its missionary activity.

ii. The Church of the Diaspora?

In his Religion in a Secular Age, the Catholic writer John Cogley draws upon some ideas of Karl Rahner in setting out the

choices facing the churches. We must accept, he argues, that the forces of modernity threaten religious faith in such a way that we must **fight** to maintain it. It is simply not possible for all that secularization entails to be enlisted by the believer as gain.

Secondly, we must also accept the coming of a specialized "diaspora" Church, which is to say a minority of worshippers scattered through the community. The clergy can expect no privileged status; Church and State will agree on some sort of peaceful co-existence which will inevitably leave the Church either compromised or limited in its activities to some extent. It is necessary for the churches to face and come to terms with these facts before they can hope to develop a response which embodies a dialectical relationship of co-operative engagement with, and critical distance from, the social tasks called forth by the secular society.

We should note that this does not mean a spirit of wearied resignation to an unwelcome fate. Rahner has distinguished, in this connection, a category of things which "ought not to be", yet "must be" (cf. McBrien, 1966:124ff; Williams, 1969:25-6). The contemporary Church's diaspora situation "ought not to be", in the sense that it appears to contradict God's ultimate purpose of bringing all men to salvation through Christ by allowing many to live out their lives with neither contact with living faith nor real interest in Christianity. But the historical and sociological causes which have led to the present situation are so compelling that we have to conclude that for the limited **present** purposes of the history of salvation, God wills that it must be so.

The "acceptance" that is called for is treated by Adolfs as part of a "kenotic" model of the Church. He believes that the Church needs to make a conscious decision to choose the kenotic way, which means renouncing all pretensions to social prestige or expectations of the right to dictate to society or

"lord it over it", as well as all fashionable attempts at "adaptation" which may mean the loss of distinctive religious contents. The kenotic Church may have to be content simply to "be there", serving and witnessing and continuing to symbolize the transcendent, riding out the storm, so to speak, and awaiting the possible (but not guaranteed) reappearance of a more widespread cultural dissemination of religion at the other side of the crisis (Adolfs, 1967:ch.4).

These proposals offer a temperate analysis of the mood or spirit in which contemporary Christian social engagement will have to be undertaken. They combine an acknowledgement of the need for the secular relevance and serving aspects of mission with an emphasis upon the continuing strength of the Church's institutional resources, its religious culture, in a time of smaller congregations. We would put together these emphases by saying that the key to the Church's secular mission is a proper understanding of its religion, and that the undertaking of that mission depends upon a gracious acceptance of the very real constraints under which it labours at the present time: constraints which were also present, but too often not taken into account, in the sixties.

iii. Conclusions: the Rejuvenation of Religion?

The contemporary situation of the Church, as something that "must be" although it "ought not to be", qualifies the way in which the Church pursues the "ought to be" which is the ultimate goal of its mission. For the secular and religious elements belong inseparably together in the concept of salvation which the Church proclaims. However, in present circumstances, certain ways of expending the Church's energies- for example, undialectically political ones- would be ultimately wasteful.

This means that, when we argue that the Church's obligation is squarely to do with the promotion of religion, we have to steer clear of the vacuousness and escapism that such

a claim can seem to imply. We have to be prepared to meet the cry of John Vincent about the effect of the typical "religious" sermon upon its habitual hearers:

The congregation disperses with a sense of uselessness, of the futility of doing anything. 'Salvation' must be something completely unrelated to the ordinary business of living. I have decisions to make, responsibilities to fulfil, kindnesses to show; I have my wretched temper to control, my kids to try to do the best for, the man next door to try to treat as a neighbour. And none of it really matters basically. None of it has anything to do with 'salvation'...It seems to be about nothing. And I can't do anything about it. Have faith? But that isn't easy. For me to have faith would be hard work- and we are not supposed to rely on 'works'...

Thus has many a congregation become the stolid, unchangeable mass that confronts the preacher (Vincent, 1965:28-9).

Later, Vincent suggests that one reason, at least, for declining congregations is sheer boredom: churchgoing just gives people nothing to do, no real challenge to take up, and is somehow not expected to make any **difference** to anything else (ibid:33-4). Obviously this is not the whole story about the contemporary decline in official religious participation, but it is important at least from one point of view.

For in an age with no coherently Christian milieu and fewer and fewer "socialized", habitual Christians, the more "evangelical" variety of conversion is likely to become, in one form or another, increasingly the mode of individuals' entry into active church life. This mode of conversion induces, inevitably, high expectations that religious practice will **change** things, will be worthwhile, will present a task and a challenge. We end this chapter, then, with an attempt to describe the substance and the style of the action to which the Christian's religion must call him.

This task, beginning from its religious heart, which is emphatically primary, involves the depiction, display and proclamation of a compelling world-view, oriented to the

transcendent and given its shape by the radical alternative possibility for the world disclosed in Jesus Christ. Only a coherently thought out religious world-view of this kind can combat the deleterious effects of a cultural secularization which is reducing personal and private systems of meaning and value to a range of fragmentary and ineffective soft options, and eroding the possibility of many people attaining to any world-view or personal philosophy whatsoever. This way there lies no prospect of salvation.

The resources of the Christian tradition are there to be drawn upon by believers as a living reality through the cycles and symbols of their practice of faith, in however uncertain and compromised a fashion they do this.

But the same believers also live in the midst of the world, about which they are called to be unremittingly and compassionately realistic. The Christian vision, with its dialectical pattern of transcendence, offers the opportunity of such a combination of involvement with distancing, compassion with clear-sightedness. The Christian's mission will always move between the polarities of the religious and secular (for one example of this in practice, see Phipps, 1967:64ff; 92ff).

Great patience and discrimination is required for the Christian to move between these two poles, for the Christian way in the secular situation is always diffuse and indirect. But sometimes such secular involvement will lead to others coming to see how the Christian's vision of the redeemed world he sees in Christ really does make a practical difference to the way he conducts his affairs, and to the possibilities he sees for persons in society. Then, a small step has been taken towards reversing the cultural debilitation in which cheapjack world-views jostle in a market free-for-all and critical truth counts for little or nothing.

This twofold mission of direct witness to the saving vision which alone can transform human history, and indirect involvement through secular channels, has been termed by Charles Davis (1966:76) the "two-pronged advance of grace". The religious advance, involving explicit proclamation of Christ and the summons of men and women to personal faith, takes priority. But the secular, involving the Christian in working together with all those of good-will who desire to see greater justice and human fulfilment, may well precede, as well as following from, the religious movement of the mission.

Only in this way can the Church face up to the reality of its own social marginality as a fruit of secularization, without resigning itself to a stance of undialectical confrontation and denunciation of the world. Only in this way can it begin to present a cogent critique of the false and harmful effects of secularization, rather than seeking to regain a spurious relevance by adapting to change at the expense of the critical edge of its message.

But we still need to relate all of this to the faith of actual Christian believers moving in their social context, if talk of "critical edge" is to have any practical meaning. We must therefore go on, in the next chapter, to an examination of the character and modality of faith which the Christian Radicals believed would be demanded by the requirements of maintaining Christian commitment in a secular context.

NOTES.

1. On these later developments, see the W.C.C. Bangkok Consultation of 1973, Salvation Today, and the commentary of the same title by Pauline Webb; on Nairobi, Kenneth Slack, Nairobi Narrative, 1975; and for a summary of the issues, R.J.Sider, Evangelism, Salvation and Social Justice, (Grove Books) 1977.

2. In addition to Williams' books, this discussion has also drawn upon Shinn, Man: The New Humanism; Thung, The Precarious Organization: 64-68; and the following articles; R. Jeffrey, "No Frontier", in *Frontier*, 1967; J. Matthes, "The Mission of the Congregation", *Frontier*, 1966; M.M. Thomas, "Issues Concerning the Life and Work of the Church in a Revolutionary World", *The Ecumenical Review*, 1968; L. Newbigin, "Recent Thinking on Christian Beliefs: Mission and Missions", *The Expository Times*, 1977.

3. The W.C.C.'s commitment to ecumenical advance means that in its thinking corporate church involvement in secular evangelistic initiatives assumes a vital importance (Williams, 1966:105-6). It is the same world which is faced by all the churches with all their cherished theological differences; and hence a fresh realization of the proper secular arena of mission cannot but advance the cause of unity. Van den Heuvel even distinguishes the "secular" as a separate understanding of ecumenicity

(1967;ch.6); unity arises out of the common task of serving God's secular mission of the Gospel, and will emerge as diverse groups of Christians seek together the appropriate structures for accomplishing this. Unity comes through doing, and not primarily discussing.

4. This is in keeping with the work of the French "religious sociologists" in developing the concept of the "*zone humaine*" (Boulard, 1960).

5. By grace we have been saved, yet we still await our redemption; cf. Ephesians 2:8 and Romans 13:11; 2 Corinthians 6:2 and 1 Peter 1:9.

6. Cox's insight here links together the Marxian notion of "bad faith" and the need for "conscientization" to remove it, with the Biblical motifs of "blindness", "deafness" and "hardness of heart" as causes of people's failure to respond to the Gospel when they hear it; Isaiah 6:9-10 and Mark 4:11-13 *et par*; Isaiah 29:10-11 and Romans 11:8; John 12:40; Acts 28:25-27. Cox's dialogue with Marx wavers between the discipleship of a "liberationist" position, as here, and something rather at odds with that, but much more American, which is the commendation of a kind of universal entrepreneurialism as the proper form of the Christian's secular maturity.

CHAPTER XII: CRITICAL FAITH AND TRADITIONAL CONTINUITY.

This chapter focuses on the desire of Christian Radicalism for a more critical, open and creative expression of faith within the churches, in accordance with the mood of a secular age. The radicals saw much contemporary religious life as an unhealthy denial of this mood. Faith was conceived in terms of assent to certainties; the Church's attitude kept Christians in a state of immature dependence, fostering dishonesty about the problems of faith and excluding enquiring outsiders because they could not fulfil the stringent conditions of belief required for membership. Therefore, there was a desire to rethink the nature of faith and its operation within the believing community, in order to work out a form of Christian existence which could engage with the cultural conditions of the time.

With this topic, what we have tried to say so far about the dialectical nature of religion and the attitude towards secularization this invites for the churches comes down to its fundamental sphere of application. That is, it relates to actual Christian believers seeking to live as Christians within the life of the Church and their secular community. The discussion applies our sociological understanding of the distinctive features of church-type and sect-type religious institutions, and of communal and associational styles of religiosity, to the critical attempt to put into a concrete, living context what radical theology wanted to say about faith.

Our theological focus in this chapter will be upon the work of Ronald Gregor Smith, which offers Christian Radicalism's most detailed and substantial attempt to expound the nature of faith and how it is lived within a secular context.

1. Gregor Smith, Secular Christianity and the Working of Faith.

i. General Observations.

In his Introduction to Smith's posthumously edited and published The Doctrine of God, Allan Galloway wrote that "Ronald Gregor Smith may well be the most important English-speaking theologian of this generation" (Smith, 1970:9). A glance at Smith's career brings to light the anticipation of the major concerns of radical theology in much of his work:

As early as 1937, he made the first English translation of Martin Buber's I and Thou, a work whose personalist approach to the doctrine of God found wide influence, including of course as a sub-theme of Honest to God.

At SCM Press, he published the English edition of Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison, and went on to propose Bonhoeffer as the clue to the formulation of a "this-worldly transcendence" in his own book, The New Man, in 1956.

His 1960 work J.G.Hamann: a Study in Christian Existence found in this neglected 18th century German philosopher a precursor of the contemporary reaction against pure empiricist rationalism in favour of an emphasis upon the existential reality of faith as lived out within the stream of history.

As translator of some of the later works of Kierkegaard, Smith was also acutely aware of the need to preserve an inwardly unconditional, dynamic and critical faith without falling thereby into an ultimately unhealthy isolation from the objects of the tradition (as the Dane did in his hatred for "Christendom").

Smith was perhaps the only theologian associated with the radical movements of the sixties to benefit from a thorough immersion in the work of Bultmann, Gogarten and the whole antecedent traditions of dialectical and existentialist theology in Germany. His work never lost the spirit of restless searching after the adequate exposition of the inner nature of faith as experienced by the one who is gripped by it, which

already characterized his early work of Christian spirituality, Still Point (1943).¹

A word is needed here in justification of the inclusion of Smith within the camp of Christian Radicalism, since as a highly sophisticated and serious theologian with profound attachments to Continental thought he would appear to stand somewhat apart from those we have considered in detail up to now. Galloway is willing to describe him as "the pathfinder of that movement in theology which culminated in the Honest to God debate" (Smith, 1970:10), but he hesitates to associate Smith too closely with what he calls "a brash and rather self-satisfied tendency in much recent theology" (ibid). He appears to have in mind the American death-of-God episode, and possibly also Cox and the radical secularizers, since he suggests that Smith's name became wrongly linked with theirs in virtue of the "accident" of the title of his Secular Christianity.²

Nevertheless, the subjects of Smith's essays and lectures, especially those collected in The Free Man (1969), suggest (when one looks also at the various occasions upon which they were delivered) that Smith was not unwilling to "move in the circles" with which this thesis is concerned.

He acknowledges these links in the Preface to Secular Christianity, and again towards the end of the book where he criticises van Buren's The Secular Meaning of the Gospel. He refers in The Doctrine of God (123-4) to a radio dialogue in which he took part with van Buren in 1966. He alludes to recent indications that the problems he is addressing have been widely felt, and refers in particular to Robinson and William Hamilton (Smith, 1966:207). And he explicitly draws attention in The Doctrine of God (37) to the relevance of his own reflections to "certain confused stirrings within the churches today".

The threefold structure of Secular Christianity most neatly sums up Smith's abiding theological interest: the parts are entitled "Faith", "History" and "Secularism". We do not claim here to be offering a complete study of Smith's theology, but intend to focus our attention upon the first of these divisions. Smith's exploration of the structure, content and experience of faith supplies a stimulating contribution to the debates of radical theology and to their continuing relevance. We shall not limit our discussion to the argument of Secular Christianity, but shall draw upon Smith's other works, with particular reference to his programmatic summary of his position in The Free Man (137-55), "Faith in a Secular World", and to chapter 1 of The Doctrine of God, "Faith and Doctrine".

ii. Exposition.

The essence of Smith's position may be put quite simply, to the effect that faith is neither primarily an object, doctrine or tradition, nor merely a subjective experience, but is through and through historical. What does this mean?

Smith makes it clear that he is speaking of **Christian** faith, and that he considers it justified that the Christian faith soon came to be referred to as simply "faith", or as "**the** faith"; that is to say, it has a claim to be regarded as faith *par excellence* (Smith, 1966:25). He summarizes thus:

What I am suggesting is that we try to understand faith on its own terms, that is, in terms of how it has really come to be, how it has arisen. And about the basic nature of this coming-to-be I suggest there can be no doubt: faith has always arisen as the response to historical events (Smith, 1969:142).

This relation of faith to historical events has to be expounded in two ways. Firstly, faith only arises at all as the direct consequence of certain events in history, the historical message of God in Christ. This revelatory act of God in history does not lie there as an object awaiting discovery, which might be understood and may or may not produce faith.

Rather, faith is what it enacts and generates, so that the encounter with the history as a revealed message is already faith.²⁹

Secondly, the ongoing form and content of faith continue to be taken from the same historical events. The shape of faith's outward life, the nature of its commitments, the decisions it makes, are all constituted by the originating historical reality (1966:26-8).

This second sense in which faith is historical may be better understood if we look more closely at Smith's understanding of "historicity". He tells us that:

History may be described as the field of human decisions, or more precisely as my personal acting in making my world into the world which God desires of me,,.
History is what men decide in the light of their self-understanding (1969:143; 1966:126).

It is peculiarly constitutive of man that he is a historical being, because he alone realizes himself, constructs his world, interprets his experience, through perpetual processes of choice and decision born of encounter with other persons, reflection upon the past and projection of possible futures.

History, for Gregor Smith, is not something going on "out there", into which a man may or may not launch himself. "Real history" is not a kind of meta-history independent of particular individuals, which can provide a mesh through which to sift the chaos of discrete events so that only the definitive meaningful pattern emerges and what first appears unplanned and shapeless reassuringly turns into a "grand design". "Real history" is what happens to us, "as a personal task which is to be realized ever anew, in the multiple decisions of our individual life and in the changing circumstances of our public and social existence" (1970:119, and see the whole of ch.4).

In other words, the "happening" is not merely something imposed from without, about which we can do nothing:

For the happening to you of a historical event happens as a part of a continuing dialogue between your present and the whole of a past which is accessible to you. It is this dialogical element, the dialogic of history, which is paramount (1966:86-7; cf. Altizer, 1968(d):136).

Happening, encounter, interpretation, decision: history really is, Smith insists, entirely open and undetermined, and our own responsibility. We are **in** history, and **make** history, and **are** history: for there is no-one else. This is by no means to put Smith in the death-of-God camp; rather, faith's historicity becomes the matrix for all talk of God, so that God cannot be conceptualized in isolation as an object, an imposition or addition to the human universe.

It is the contribution of Christianity to have laid bare and interpreted for man the proper meaning of his historicity:

Man in his historicity is properly disclosed in Christian faith. It is the unique and signal achievement of Christian theology to affirm man in his authentic life as a free and responsible person (1970:141).

Following Gogarten, Smith argues that justification by faith means that man's being, so to speak, left with the world on his hands is turned from a potential nightmare into a vision of opportunity and hope. In Christ God has set forth the possibility and promise of a new man, who lives without fear in the uptake of his responsibilities, ready to recognize that the world and its history are his. In this way secularization may be seen as a fruit of the Gospel, though not necessarily individual instances of modernity (1966:151ff).

For faith clings to its originating paradigm in Christ, a paradigm which includes the Cross. Faith can never discard its historicity by leaping ahead to a supposed over-all answer about human destiny and what will inevitably come to be. Faith must operate on what it has to go on in the present moment,

making its decisions for the now, dealing with the personal encounters, the demands and social realities, which presently rise up before it. Faith meets those situations on the basis of the continuing "dialogic of history", the "unity in relation" forged in the believer's experience between the materials of the originating tradition and the continually repeated and renewed commitment and trust (1966:44-46). The power of those originating events is this:

In principle, yes; the end has come in Christ. But also, paradoxically, this end is not yet; we live now in the time of God's patience with the world, in which by faith we may continually overcome the old world and live towards the new. In this sense there is a real future, which is now recognized by faith as the future which God offers, in the complete humanity which he has already offered in Christ (1969:143).

What conclusions about the working of faith does Smith draw from this understanding of its historicity? We wish to make five points. Firstly, Smith treats faith as a mode of existence, a way of being in the world, and pre-eminently as *fides qua creditur*. His perspective is that of one who finds himself existentially grasped by faith, and wishes to describe and define what he has without objectifying it away into a sterile and alien thing. He quotes Carl Michalson, the American existentialist theologian: "Christian faith is not a teaching about God but a mode of existence" (Smith, 1970:76; cf. Michalson, 1964:14).

We recall that Smith is concerned by his notion of historical faith to rescue faith from being dichotomized into either externalized assent to an objective *corpus*, or wholly subjective and individualistic feeling. In the terms of the traditional subdivision of faith into *notitia*, *assensus* and *fiducia*, Smith believes that there has been a damaging over-emphasis upon *assensus*, compounded by a misleading interpretation of *notitia* in quasi-scientific terms, as though faith's "knowledge" were verifiable in just the same way as empirical fact.

At the Renaissance, the time of the great discovery of human autonomy, the power of reason and the beginnings of a historical understanding of existence, the Church made a disastrous mistake in responding with a massive reassertion of heteronomous authority, stressing the immutable givenness of dogma and the use of criteria of doctrinal assent for judging the genuineness of faith (Smith, 1956:51ff). The Church and civilization, as Smith puts it, went separate ways, a course not decisively altered by the Reformation, despite the rediscovery of a radical doctrine of justification by faith.

The result has been ever-increasing strains and tensions between what appear to be the public, official requirements of faith and the quality of faith-experience as a historical reality available to would-be believers. For many, the tension is resolved in the direction of a damage-limiting exercise of "assent" which effectively seals off the compartment of faith from the intrusion of a modern, critical reason, lest it wither away under the assault. Smith calls this "fundamentalism", but he is not thinking only of the extreme conservative wing of evangelicalism.

Smith therefore insists, secondly, that doctrine is secondary to faith: "I regard doctrine as having a real but limited function in the life of Christian faith" (1970:25). The Christian should make every effort to acquaint himself with, and to comprehend, the documents, creeds and doctrinal formulae which go to make up his tradition. Without them the historicity of his faith could possess neither substance nor any clear direction.

But the obedience of faith, and the demand with which it inexorably confronts the believer, is not firstly towards doctrines but towards a Lord who is encountered only under the shifting and non-negotiable patterns of historical existence. The question is, "How am I, how are you, related to such past

events of the Christian tradition?...How am I related to past events for my eternal salvation?" (ibid:26).

The traditions in themselves do not answer these vital questions. Put simply, we may say that although they may be true, they are not yet the truth. To claim that they are would be once more to drive a theoretical wedge between the objective existence of certain so-called historical actualities or facts possessing an intrinsic salvific significance, and faith's interpretative appropriation of them. But today this is precisely the dichotomy that will not do (cf. on this Smith's attitude to the Resurrection in 1966:97-106).

It is bound to fall into either an alienated religion of uncritical assent to propositions adduced to be somehow independent of evidence, on the one hand, or a desperate resort to a variety of modern cults and mysticisms, mercifully shorn of historical particularity, on the other. A living faith that stands in critical relation towards the tradition out of which it lives and upon which it feeds, is in Smith's view the only viable option for the present time.

Such a faith, in the third place, cannot help but be a "faith seeking understanding". This is because it is pre-eminently a historical event, in which the past history and the glimpsed future come together in personal acts of obedience and decision. The one who has faith knows that he lives, acts and thinks under the constraint of a paradigmatic set of events which drive him to understand himself, his historical context and his world in the light of them; and the object of such a process of understanding extends to the traditional forms themselves in which the faith is expressed:

Faith is recognized as both illuminating man's pre-reflexive self-understanding and as guiding man's reflection upon his new existence in faith. Faith, in brief, becomes material for man's reason to work upon and can be regarded as the substance by which man's essential rationality is displayed (1970:73).

Whereas the retreat into subjectivism represents the embrace of irrationality, those types of orthodoxy for which propositional assent is primary partake of the wrong kind of rationality. It is a heteronomous kind, based upon the assimilation of the truth of faith to a by now outmoded model of the truth of science, namely that of a complete and coherent order or system, out there awaiting discovery and leaving a man no choice but to submit to it once discovered (cf. Barr, 1980).

But insofar as secularization means the bringing into conscious and operative acceptance of the historical nature of human existence, the view to which Smith is committed, a faith that does not seek its understanding critically in the stream of history, but tries to get it ready-made from some given and changeless source, cannot be authentic.

Faith then, and fourthly, possesses its own rationality, which is intrinsically reflective and critical. In particular, Smith illustrates how faith stands in a critical relation towards three modes of concrete embodiment with which it is inevitably bound up, namely religion, secularism and "Christendom", by which is meant "the effects or deposits of Christian faith in historical structures, experiences and ideas" (Smith, 1966:194). Such forms and structures are

...the inevitable partners of faith, and just as there can be no 'pure' theology, and no absolute or permanent form of faith, separated from the untidy, ambiguous and distorting forms of man's historical existence, in all its vicissitudes, so faith is bound to be expressed, and thus communicated, in these same forms (ibid).

The parts of this argument are subtly interdependent. Smith is saying that even the radical secularity of the modern world requires the understanding and the critique of faith to keep it true to itself. "It is only by an acknowledgement of faith in God that the historical reality of man can be authentically forwarded" (1969:148).

But where in the modern world is the explicit social expression of such faith to be found? Only in the forms of religious life- but these, too, come under the critical scrutiny of faith, lest they fail, after all, to serve the cause of true secularity, and merely succeed in calling men out into an ecclesiastical heteronomy. Precisely because of the historicity of faith, there is no way to be free from these dilemmas: they are the theological equivalent of the sociological dilemmas of institutionalization (cf. Davis, 1980:122ff. for the Hegelian background to this problem of criticism).

Smith's position is summed up in a striking paragraph worth quoting in full:

For the forms and structures of religion and secularism and Christendom are never able to express directly the historical freedom which is the heart of the existence of faith. For they partake of necessity, of fate, and of a constant temptation to misunderstand their own place and possibilities. They contain within themselves the movement leading to their self-destruction, and the destruction of all that is joined to them; the movement into a false and premature autonomy, away from freedom, from the possibility of truly personal life, from the world of Thou to the world of It, from the decision for the open future to the decision for a closed and self-contained existence (Smith, 1966:204).

If this were the last word, then this clash between "the Spirit and the historical products of the Spirit", as Smith puts it in The Doctrine of God, would leave us no alternative but to resign ourselves to the authoritarianism of tradition, or else to await the coming of the Spirit "out in the wilderness", with no expectation that his coming could have any relevance to our concrete existence in the real world (1970:45). But it is not the last word, because (and this is our fifth point) faith can be master in its own house:

It is the nature of faith to be supremely personal and self-conscious; but at the same time conscious of its source, of its history and of its goal...everything that comes to us out of the tradition must come under the scrutiny of the responsible, free and faithful enquiring mind...nothing in the tradition is the master, but

everything is the servant of faith. And faith in turn is a gift, the gift, of the Spirit (ibid:45-6).

So Smith comes back to the essential priority of faith, which, in the inescapable fact of one's having it and confessing it, and in its ineluctable presentness to the pre-reflective awareness, and in the demand it makes, always lies before us as the fundamental matter of all theological discussion. This faith lives in the knowledge that it is unfinished, its possibilities not foreclosed, the promise from which it ventures forth still containing undisclosed horizons of newness for the world.

Faith is both *anamnesis* and *prolepsis*, always living out of what has accumulated before it and towards what is promised ahead of it. It recognizes "not that God is swallowed up in human history, but that human history ends in God" (ibid:179). Finally:

The theology of faith is a theology of the Cross, and thus a *theologia viatorum*...The form of Christ in the world is the way the man of faith goes- in the society of faith, certainly, that is, in company with others- but not knowing whither he goes; except for this one certainty, that the way is the way of God and to God (1966:204).

Before we end this exposition, we should draw attention to the few hints Smith gives about the form of the believing community, and the structural supports he considers necessary for maintaining a faith understood in this way. For he admits that practical considerations have taken very much of a back seat in his overall account of the working of faith.

He accepts the term "prophetic fellowship", proposed by Gibson Winter, for the front-line of any vital and viable church presence in the contemporary secular context. Neither the "cultic body" nor the "confessional assembly" (the typical Catholic and Protestant forms respectively) will possess much relevance in the world without the prophetic fellowship. "Essentially they are engaged in theological reflection in the context of a call for action" (1966:198).

Smith finds examples of such fellowships in the Frontier movement of lay Christians, in various factory and business fellowships and chaplaincies, and in the European Evangelical Academies. They "bear the burden and the hope for faith today" (ibid:199).

As far as the suburban residence-church is concerned, Smith sees a need for "pastoral counselling" directed at the release of local people from what he calls their "illusory world". (He refers in particular to "the women who dominate the styles of suburban life".)

To serve these changes, Smith wants education for the ministry to be remodelled. It would be preferable for the training of ordinands to be undertaken in a university rather than a separate seminary context. Best of all would be for there to be no distinctive colleges or faculties devoted to such training at all: instead, ministers might be trained within the much more open interdisciplinary atmosphere of something like a "religious studies" department.

Finally, Smith expects to see the Church in its institutional presence become more humble, less assertive, less inclined to lay claim to all the answers or to proselytize:

Faith... carries no equipment, and peddles no wares, which it may offer to the passer-by. Its only way is to carry in the body, that is, in the historical existence in the world which it both maintains and endures, the marks of Jesus (ibid;200).

So Smith is attracted to Bonhoeffer's *disciplina arcani* as the private and unostentatious observance which nourishes and sustains faith. Outwardly, before the world, Christians have only themselves and their earnest, critical engagement to offer as a witness.

iii. Critique.

Our critique of Smith's analysis of faith will be briefer than some of the critical sections of previous chapters, because we believe there is much that is penetrating and

indispensable in the way in which he tries to convey the texture, the "feel" of faith's historicity.

We welcome his sustained attempt to provide a robust theological framework which is constructed around the heart of the matter, i.e. that there is faith, that people confess it, try to live it and practise its religious expression in increasingly unpromising circumstances.

We affirm his analysis of the "dialogic" or dialectic by which faith mediates between past and future in the historical present. We agree with his conception of the double relation of faith to its traditions in living from them and seeking expression through them, while at the same time standing critically over against them.

Nevertheless, we have to register certain criticisms, which are substantially variations upon a single theme. When we consider Smith's analysis as a blueprint for a secular form and understanding of faith which might become the basis of the actual mode of life of existing religious collectivities, we notice a significant **retreat** from the concrete in his account which means that we cannot accept it as it stands.

Smith's definition of history solely in terms of the field of human decision and personal action is, ironically, insufficiently "historical". It gives too little room to non-human or material factors experienced as confronting or constraining individuals and radically qualifying or limiting their powers of decision or action. Such factors are not miraculously removed when a person begins to act in the power of faith. To say that faith is historical must include, therefore, the notion that faith struggles with a recalcitrant or oppressive material environment which threatens, at every turn, to annul its own force and deny its vision.

This is not to say that Smith's account of the achievement of a contemporary secular faith lacks a sense of

struggle. But it is largely an **intellectual** struggle, whereas for many today (as we said in the previous chapter when discussing "ultimate questions") the issues are couched in quite other terms. Smith's taking over of Gogarten's idea of faith setting a man free for responsible action in the world bears too many marks of a privileged intellectual environment. It conceals a similarly premature approval of the technocraic era to that found in Cox, only put in much more abstract terms (cf. re. Gogarten, Davis, 1980:36-9).

Smith retains, in common with John Robinson, the personalistic bias they both learned from Buber. This over-emphasis upon the category of the personal (which Smith also sees as the locus of a secular form of transcendence, cf. 1966:121-4) can lead to a blindness to other social realities. When Smith says that faith simply operates with what it has to go on in the present moment, in response to successive personal encounters, he may be offering an adequate account of the behaviour of individuals, but falls short of a feasible programme for churches.

In sum, there is a shortage of concrete social context in Smith's analysis. Even when he **does** turn to the question of church structures, however briefly, it is only to emphasise aspects which are at present highly peripheral to the mainstream of religious life. This is not to deny their importance; it is merely to say that Smith's understanding of faith scarcely addresses itself directly to the spectrum of existing religious social reality, as anything that claims to be a secular approach to faith must surely do.

What we have therefore to go on to do in this chapter is to look for an analytical structure which can throw light upon the ways in which faith works and is brought to expression within the forms and styles of religious membership and commitment.

Smith's dialectical understanding of faith involves the idea of two poles between which faith moves, that of its past and its traditions, and that of openness and futurity. In practice, the concrete realizations of faith may well not embody the whole of this complex understanding. Rather, different modes and styles of faith give expression separately to one moment or the other of Smith's dialectic. In the next section, we look at some attempts of Christian Radicalism to devise twofold models of the Church's life which can contain these alternative modes of faith.

2. Faith and the Believing Community.

i. Leslie Paul: Natural Group/Pressure Group.

In his Report on The Deployment and Payment of the Clergy, Leslie Paul observed that the Church exists in a double reality of "natural group" and "pressure group". Where there is religious decline within a culture, he argued, a polarization is likely to occur. The natural group is in danger of degenerating into a weak and inarticulate vehicle of social custom, whereas the pressure group assumes an increasingly sectarian stance.

Paul evidently regards this latter development without further examination as a bad thing; he believes, presumably, that a sectarian Church will become turned in upon itself and shed, with a sigh of relief, any burden of responsibility for the health of the wider community. But we believe that the matter has to be treated with greater subtlety: a more sectarian type of institutional form may well be quite inevitable, but this need not mean that the membership adopt a wholly exclusivist style of religious association.

The faith of Paul's natural group is certainly historical, in the sense that it lives out of its traditions and operates in close, indeed mostly unconscious relation with the rhythms and decisions of daily life. It is not there to be talked about, verbally "witnessed to" or argued over.

It is not primarily dogmatic or confessional, although within the cycle of regular worship it tacitly and uncritically accepts the doctrinal standards and credal beliefs which are therein preached or set forth in ritual and symbol. It performs as the unreflective grounding for a way of life which is only likely to be articulated, if at all, in unglamorous and vague terms of "decency", "right living", "trying to be good", and so on.

For the natural group, the "tradition" which nourishes faith is the historic Christian tradition as it has snowballed along through the centuries of cultural contextualization, picking up sundry extraneous materials along the way. But for the pressure group the tradition is very definitely conceived as a kind of pristine "New Testament Christianity", persisting, if sometimes well-nigh swamped by culture, throughout the centuries of change.

The faith of the pressure group is conscious of itself as a specific religious commodity, categorically not shared by all. It is historical in the sense that it strains towards the future with the expectation that something new is just around the corner. It is prepared to risk past certainties in responding to what it perceives to be the present call for decision.

Such faith always sets up healthy tensions within a religious body which, by natural institutional conservatism, leans more to the "natural group" style. It is the irritant within the system which mounts a perpetual protest against the ossification of faith which the necessary processes of institutionalization threaten to produce.

ii. Colin Williams: Institution/Event.

In his study, The Church (27), Williams borrows from F.J. Leenhardt's Old Testament studies the "Moses motif" of *institution* and the "Abraham motif" of *event*, and applies them

to the Church. For Williams, the Church as "institution" speaks of continuity, stability and orientation to the past. It represents the horizontal dimension of what is meant by speaking of the Church as kept by God's grace and indwelt by the Spirit.

The "event" motif speaks of change and crisis, of pressing ahead into a future fulfilment, of the vertical dimension of the Church's perpetual answerability to the call of the Spirit who holds it in being.

The meaning of this theological language is disclosed in the actual modes of faith which are visible for all to see. Williams believes that contemporary socio-cultural change demands above all the prioritization of the "event" character of the Church. He looks, therefore, to the self-conscious, informed and critical faith of small special-interest groups to achieve this; and he is even prepared to accept that contradictory and conflicting structures may have to be present in the one Church at one and the same time, in order to maintain an adequate expression of the Gospel (Williams, 1969:151-6; on "event" cf. Barth, 1964; and against "institution", cf. Brunner, 1953).

Williams' endorsement of pluriform structures is in our view quite correct; but his use of the term "institution" to denote the expression of just one side of the dialectic of faith is problematic, since there can be no faith which does **not** require institutional expression if it is to continue through time and possess any kind of lasting socio-cultural influence. Moreover, Williams does not tackle the question of how these distinctive modes of faith relate to the dividing-line between those who do and do not worship regularly in churches: he simply appears to regard the distinction as existing **within** or possibly **between** congregations.

iii. Robinson: Latent Church/Manifest Church.

Robinson wants to take an optimistic view both of the possibility of an explicit and critical faith-commitment existing in the ordinary congregation, and of the presence of "incognito" faith outside it. His terms, "latent" and "manifest" Church, are taken over from Tillich, but Robinson gives them a rather more directly empirical application than Tillich.

The manifest Church is "the dedicated nucleus of those who actively acknowledge Jesus as Lord and have committed themselves to membership and mission within the visible sacramental fellowship of the Spirit" (Robinson, 1965:48). But the latent Church is an indefinite historical group: it has neither distinct boundaries nor organization, ministry and sacraments, but nevertheless expresses the genuine spirit of commitment to Christ in its style of life. In Tillichian terms, it "actualizes the New Being" (ibid:47).

In Robinson's view, it is not the task of the manifest Church to "seek out" the "fringers" and the potential members, and bring them in. Its task is to enable them to encounter Christ and express their faith by their manner of life, wherever they are. However, earlier in the same chapter Robinson has also said that the Church (i.e. the **manifest** Church) erects too many doctrinal barriers, which prevent people from coming in (ibid:38ff). This view would seem incompatible with the contention that it is no business of the Church to be concerned about whether people come in or not.

Robinson's way of putting the issue in fact reveals a confusion about what the real alternatives are. If the congregation is conceived wholly in terms of commitment to service in the world, motivated by a strongly associative type of faith, then it will require strict demarcations and vigorous internal disciplines, in order to sustain such faith. But it will be immaterial whether this faith proves attractive to

outsiders, since its purpose is not to spread the faith but to serve the world.

But if the Church is concerned that others should share in the perspective upon life bestowed in the tradition centred on Jesus and brought to expression in worship and service, it cannot settle for this solution. It will have to live, rather, with "fuzzy edges" and an unsatisfactory level of ambiguity about the faith of some of its members. It will have to seek means of holding together the forward-looking, experimental faith of the committed with the surrounding, much less articulate community religion, without idealizing either.

iv. Newbigin: Congregation/Segregation.

From within the very different experience of the Christian community as a small missionary body within an alien culture, Newbigin (1966:109ff.) points out that every congregation is by its very nature at the same time a segregation. What was already apparent in a Hindu context is of value in analysing the Western situation where Christendom continues to be dismantled.

For those who choose to attend Sunday worship with any regularity are a small minority, often heavily self-selecting along lines of class, age and sex. All the indications are that, allowing for the complications introduced by the Christendom situation and by short-lived attempts to make religious attendance compulsory, a really vital, practising religious commitment has always been the preserve of a few.

In other words, there is really no need to take special measures to mark out or separate the religious congregation, by means of strict criteria of membership or any other policy. The congregation segregates itself, draws apart, not by strict doctrine or confessional exclusivism in the first place, but by meeting at all, by worshipping, by being "church" visibly before the rest of the world. This Newbigin could see through the greater clarity brought about by extraction from the

ambiguous Western context. In the modern society, the purely sociological status of the Christian congregation as a "sect" is more or less a *fait accompli*, regardless of the fact that some regular worshippers exhibit greater levels of critical commitment than others.

The question, therefore, is what the sect-like body is for. It should not meet (in the way a simple religious society might be content to do, though obviously this is not true of all such societies) for fun or for its own sake, but for the world and, more tangibly, for the immediately surrounding community. For the congregation will **know** these people, meet them and have dealings with them; they will be mutually constitutive of one another's history.

There is no getting away from the basic duality of separation and involvement, gathering and scattering, "come" and "go", in the given forms of religious participation. But this duality is not the same thing as a division between those who are and are not interested in the Gospel, nor between those who do and do not have faith. Self-confessed atheists and unbelievers remain comparatively few.

v. From Twofold to Threefold Model.

What is the contemporary position, as the Christian Radicals perceived it, in the light of these twofold models? First of all, the radicals once again attempted to cope with what they saw in sociologically unrealistic ways. Sometimes they wanted to cast all Christians in the role of religious "virtuosi", to use Max Weber's term for the committed élite.

Sometimes they conceived of the surrounding society as having become almost wholly de-Christianized, in the interests of a renewed aggressive role for the churches; at other times, they denied the distinction between Church and society as the residue of a passing, and unlamented, "religious" view of the world.

Their understanding of the structural embodiments of faith did not solve the dilemma of how it might avoid, on the one hand, evaporation into the historical movement of an ultimately ambiguous secularity, or on the other, alienation from the real world in a fixation upon utopian ideals.

We need to look again at the socio-culturally given forms and patterns with which the present Church must come to terms. In the case of the Church of England, these include a persisting, symbolically rich but in actuality very loose alliance with the very highest levels of the national public structures, a small and increasingly sect-like body of committed worshipping members, and a large pool of "adherents" shading off into the masses who still vaguely put "C.of E." against "Religion" on official forms. This is the situation which the Church has to marshal in order to organize the several levels and modalities of its witness.

This pattern suggests that a threefold understanding of the overall cultural and institutional matrix of faith is necessary in order to do justice to what is there. It is, in particular, the contribution of the antecedently institutional face of the Church, as a professional and specialist religious body offering its "goods and services" to a public clientele, which fills out the twofold analyses we have just examined. The Church as a concrete social organization mediates between and regulates the relationship of faith in its communal and unreflective, and its more associatively explicit modalities (cf. the threefold model of Gibson Winter in L.Paul, 1968:80ff).

We take up, therefore, the three levels of the public and visible institution known to all as "the Church", the "core" congregation, and the "fringe" of nominal adherents, as the basis for an outline of the social and cultural presentation of faith with which to conclude this chapter.

3. Conclusions: Community, Congregation and Institution.

i. The Faith of the Community.

When we speak of "the faith of the community", we mean the faith that is exercised as a result of the dissemination of Christian influence culturally. It is the faith which comes of the sheer fact that the Church is **present**, locally, socially and culturally, and continues to promulgate a set of values, a way of looking at the world, an account of life's mysteries, born of the fact of the presence of Jesus of Nazareth in history.

The faith of the community is not in the first place a matter of going to church, but of drawing upon the spiritual capital invested in the culture by the Christian religion. The process of secularization has been stripping the culture of these assets in a damaging way, which is one reason why sterile polarization in matters of conflict, and widespread mass apathy and cynicism over political choices, are so characteristic of the present time.

To speak of the faith of the community is to raise, in a sense, the question of the perfectibility of folk religion, of salvaging essential Christian values and perspectives from it. There are, to be sure, severe difficulties about this, to the extent that some consider it a vain hope (Wylie, 1965; Reed, 1978:94,112; cf. Segundo, 1977:ch.8).

But folk-religionists at times prove capable of great steadfastness and courage, visionary dedication to altruistic ideals and pastorally sensitive counsel. The young mother nursing a child with leukaemia; the disabled man who undertakes a gruelling long-distance run to raise money for famine relief; the widow who is known by the whole neighbourhood as the person to go to in time of bereavement: all these will provide rationales for their actions and attitudes which plainly bear the mark of Christian "acculturation".

It is the faith of the community that provides the means of coping to the woman whose mother dies suddenly without warning, and who interprets the comforts of the funeral in continuity with those offered by a cup of tea with a friend. Similar faith gives some expression to the confused grief and anger and numbness of a whole town stricken by some natural disaster, when the Bishop is expected to preach at a special service. Men, who are usually so much more alienated from religion than are women, suffer greatly from their inability to find any frame of reference within which to deal with the emotions, fears and questions raised by such occasions.

But does such faith have anything at all to do with a secular Christian faith as Gregor Smith expounds it? Positively, we can say this: such faith is, as all faith must be, pre-reflexively operative in connexion with a given, subjective way of life. It is practical and personal, but not doctrinal and articulate. It is sustained in continuity with its own traditions, and these, though scarcely pure, are nevertheless thoroughly interwoven with the images, ritual and symbol of professing Christianity. When this faith comes under threat of extinction, as it now does, the fabric of social life is severely ruptured.

But this is not the whole story. Quite apart from the many points at which community faith runs out into the bolstering of restrictive tribalisms, it possesses its own shortcomings. Broadly, it cannot be critical: lacking in propositional, dogmatic content, it wants the basis for self-reflection. It offers means for coping and acquiescing in the world, but leaves things precisely as they are, having no resources out of which to seek change. It relies heavily upon its dialogue with the past, but has little sense of a compelling vision for the future to spur it on to greater efforts. Christianity cannot do without the faith of the community, but it can never rest content with it.

ii. The Faith of the Congregation.

The faith of the congregation is continually summoned to transcend these limitations: it is called to become a critical faith (cf. Davis, 1980:74). About this there are four points to be made. Firstly, we are not splitting apart congregation and community faith into two conflicting alternatives. The committed Christian in the congregation possesses, at bottom, a sympathetic attunement to, and familiarity with, the faith of the community, because he is also a part of it and has his share in its faith. There are times when the Christian finds himself falling back upon community faith as a kind of subliminal horizon of faith, because all critical and dynamic resources seem to be failing him.

At other times, the stimulus to worship and to pray may come to him from some profound sense of brotherhood with his neighbours or his workmates, the expression of whose community faith at a particular moment of crisis or of joy comes to him with the freshness of the Gospel. The faith of the community is fully present in the congregation also: but problems occur insofar as **only** a form of community faith is to be found there.

For secondly, the faith of the congregation needs to be a critical faith precisely in that it is able to recognize and value fully its own indebtedness to its traditions, and at the same time to stand apart from them in critical distance. As far as the Christian tradition is concerned, in its credal, doctrinal and ecclesiological forms, the congregation should be both well-informed, knowledgeable and respectful, **and** open-minded and questioning.

Insofar as the future lies with more and more uniformly committed, "converted" rather than "socialized" Christians making up the congregations, the structural supports of firmness and clarity about traditions will be particularly necessary. But to affirm the central importance of dogmas, creeds and confessions, and the history of theology and Church,

all the orthodox traditions, is not at all the same thing as the demand for uncritical assent to them (cf. Lindbeck, 1971; Kaesemann, 1969).

Thirdly, to admit the critical principle is not to preempt the fruits of the critical process. The faith of the congregation should support the existence of some who are more conservative, and some more progressive, than others. This is what we should expect, given a range of temperaments and cultural backgrounds. The peaceful and, better still, the productive co-existence of such groups is a vital issue.

Without an admission of the principle of a critical faith, however, there is no hope of a creative relationship here. Such a faith steps into the tension between religion as the legitimation of order and provider of meaning, and religion as the promise of the new and disturber of what is, and seeks to maximise the contribution of each.

The faith of the congregation, then, has to value and understand what it has received, and not be afraid to experiment beyond it. In this way it exercises Smith's "dialogic of history" in its explorations and commitments. It recognizes that the Church does not provide its final resting-place, but conserves the resources of a tradition which offers the possibility of fresh ventures for imprinting the pattern of Christ upon the world. It supports and invites (fourthly) flexible and plural structures for the Church.

These are seen, for example, in the small groups or *ecclesiolae* formed within larger congregations for fellowship or study and discussion, or for the fulfilment of some project of service to the community. These may need to reproduce a sacramental structure, in order to indicate that what they are doing is "church", and not just a functional subdivision of "the Church" (cf. Williams, 1965(a):64ff; Rahner, 1974:108-18).

Then there are the alternative provisions for worship which can cater for the latent need or desire to express religious faith which may be in process of coming to birth in members of the community. The centralized, Sunday liturgical forms may not be appropriate to express this, especially where the persons concerned have been highly alienated from the historical traditions of the Church. A Church which engages in critical talk but retains an entirely monolithic appearance is easily capable of drawing the sting of its own critical perceptions and merely finding a "niche" for them within the spectrum of its institutional being (Cox, 1968:241).

iii. The Faith of the Institution.

All that we have said here cannot hold together without some concept of an "antecedently existing Church". We recommended earlier (Chapter IX) that a secular-based understanding of the Church should accept that what is **presented**, in terms of social reality, is a distinction between "institution" and "members". To put it another way, "church" **means**, popularly, a certain building, religious officials, a hierarchy of appointed ministers, the religious subdivision of the institutions of state, services, ceremonies, good works- as well as a rather ill-defined group of religious people.

The faith that is given expression through this institutional face of the Church is of crucial importance, because the institution is there for the community at large, and there for the congregation as well.

It is there for the community, because it offers the religious provisions and services which cater for the need of the population for religious expression through a variety of ritual performances and symbolic presences.

It is there for the congregation, because it supplies the resources of both tradition and theological expertise which go towards enabling the committed believers to accomplish their critical task.

The faith of the institution is visibly wedded to traditions and conventions which threaten to drain away its vital force into the cultural background. But it is also possessed of the ability to mount critical and reflective campaigns from within itself which can bring it into conflict with the world and reassert, sometimes surprisingly, its dependence upon the transcendent. Neither community nor congregation-faith can attain to its proper form without it.

We shall give just two indications of what is practically required for the maintenance of the faith of the institution in creative internal tension and in integrity towards community and congregation alike. Firstly, just because the institution guards and administers the tradition in its received "deposit" form, but does not close its doors to those for whom propositional belief is less than complete or certain, public worship is very important to it. This is because worship, which is predicated very largely upon ritual activity and symbolic expression rather than purely intellectual doctrinal precision, offers the possibility of an assent to the tradition which is not merely *assensus* but *fiducia* too, an act of the whole self towards Christ in which the articulation of dogma is not primary, and therefore avoids being intrusive (cf. Panikkar, 1973:83; Robinson, 1965:44; Vidler, 1962; Sykes, 1984:285, 246).

Secondly, the institution makes available the resources for the building up of a critical faith within the congregation. This means the provision of educational materials, study aids and specialist teaching ministries, but also more than this. The presence and support of the institution can guarantee the stability and continuity of faith necessary to enable a small and potentially defensive, beleaguered congregation to treasure and cherish its tradition, not with a protective and reactionary attitude, but as a partner in the critical dialogue which accompanies action.

Where the small congregation's options for action seem paralyzed by the material obstacles resulting from a relatively disprivileged social situation, institutional backing should be available to help overcome them: for the Church as an organization in society shares a certain privileged place in the authority-structures of the social fabric with an independence enabling it to side with those who do not share the privilege.

We have argued that the full expression of Christian faith as a historical mode of existence requires the creative holding together of the communal attachment to familiar traditions, persons and interpretations of the world, with the critical detachment born of being gathered apart by association with others possessed of faith, and sharing with them in religious worship and fellowship. This faith will accept that its adherents remain in a minority, but will not rest content, seeking to persuade others through the activity of its own critical perspectives.

Some people will claim that this is asking too much: for "human kind cannot bear very much reality". But the way of faith is not easy, and perhaps the Church's greatest sin is when it permits it to appear as though it is. Issues in contemporary church life relevant to the possibility of implementing the normative position argued for here will be indicated in the closing chapter of the thesis.

During the sixties' ferment, the most potent practical illustration of this problem was afforded by the debate about Christian ethics, or the so-called "new morality". As a mode of life, faith in the concrete context inevitably implies ethical demands. Here, the relative value of inherited traditions and critical alternatives becomes a particularly acute problem for Christians. It is to this that we now turn as the final theological topic of Christian Radicalism.

NOTES.

1. On Smith's work see further Ray S. Anderson, Historical Transcendence and the Reality of God, 1975; A. Munro's unpublished Ph.D Thesis, The Concept of the Wholly Other God and Secular Theologies, 1970; and the essay collection edited by E.T. Long, God, Secularization and History, 1974. In this latter, see especially Long's essay of the same title for a general account; W. McKane on "Tradition as a Theological Concept", which relates Smith on tradition to the Old Testament "tradition history" and the theology of von Rad; and I. Nicol on "History and Transcendence", which relates Smith on history to R.G. Collingwood's theory of historical understanding.
2. In the Bibliography on radical theology compiled for the British edition of their Radical Theology and the Death of God, Altizer and Hamilton call Smith's Secular Christianity "a disappointing book". This may be due to Smith's scrupulous refusal to engage in the more shrill kind of polemic, or to the breadth of his sources, which he treats with care and judgment, so that the overall impression is always one of tentativeness and caution, despite his ability to be caustic when he feels it necessary.
3. Munro (op.cit.) chides Smith for not making it sufficiently clear that his use of the word "history" is dependent upon the German sense of *Geschichte* rather than *Historie*. Smith actually deals with this debate on pp.78-88 of Secular Christianity. When he speaks of faith resting on "historical events", he does not mean it is dependent upon what "facts" may be established as a result of scientific historical research. Thus he can say, "So far as historicity is concerned, *historische* fact, it is necessary to be plain; we may freely say that the bones of Jesus lie somewhere in Palestine" (op.cit:103). This throwaway remark created an uncharacteristic surge of theological publicity for Smith, who was, needless to say, accused of "not believing in the Resurrection". Without going into the whole complex debate among the Bultmann school, we simply point out that Smith only applies the name "history"- i.e. *Geschichte*- to significant past events which have been carried into the present in virtue of their continuing existential significance for human agents. Events which are "historical" are such that my world and yours are different now from how they would have been if they had not occurred. Thus Smith approves the formula of Gogarten, "history as the presentness of the past" (Smith, op.cit:85; 1969:143; cf. Altizer, 1969(d):136).
4. This understanding of pastoral counselling by Smith envisages for it a function rather similar to that of Critical Theory as propounded by the Frankfurt School. That is, it involves demonstrating that a person's world-view is ideologically false because it has been formulated under conditions that work against that person or group's true interests; under conditions of uncoerced rational freedom, they would not accept such a world-view at all. When this false basis is revealed, the person(s) concerned will be emancipated into an attitude which enables them to take action to change their situation (cf. also Cox's "theology of social change", outlined in the previous chapter). The application of Christian faith as a critical theory is a large issue just beyond the boundaries of the material we are studying. It was introduced particularly in the thought of Liberation Theology, which in so many ways carries forward the concerns of the Christian radicals in a more systematic manner. See Davis, Theology and Political Society, ch.4; R. Geuss, The Idea of a Critical Theory, 1974; R. Siebert's essay in Concilium for January 1974; T.W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society" in Prisms, 1967:19-34; and a so far unpublished paper by R.H. Roberts, "Spirit, Structure and Truth in the Church".
5. Winter's threefold model of cultic-confessional-prophetic bears similarities with a number of others. Daniel Jenkins in The British: Their Identity and Their Religion, ch.6, suggests the typology of "chaplaincy, conventicle, cathedral" to indicate the specialist "secular" ministries, the small committed congregation and the institutional Church as available for the community. John Tiller in his Report A Strategy for the Church's Ministry, p.76, employs the terms "cell, congregation, pilgrimage" to indicate the small *koinonia* group, the larger worshipping body and the church without clear boundaries dispersed into its mission in the world. Stephen Yeo in his Religion and Voluntary Organizations in Crisis sees the development of voluntary organizations, including the churches, into large-scale, centralized universal agencies, more exclusive sects putting quality before quantity, and outward-looking activist pressure groups. None of these classifications is quite the same as the analysis we are giving, which tries particularly to indicate the special relationship of the more high-profile visible public institutional form to each of the other social expressions of faith.

CHAPTER XIII: ETHICAL MATURITY AND THE FAITH-COMMUNITY.

Within the entire episode of Christian Radicalism in the sixties, the issue of ethics in the form of the so-named "new morality" was one of the most publicly controversial. It forms the topic of this last of our six chapters of detailed examination of the theological themes of Christian Radicalism. The scope of the chapter, however, must be very strictly limited indeed, since we are obviously not in a position here to take up adequately the crucial theoretical issues in Christian Ethics in their own right. We are concentrating only upon the questions which emerged from the radicals' debates about morality. This means that the particular context is the problem of the relative merits of adherence to inherited and familiar traditions and rules, on the one hand, over against critical and open thinking in response to the changing demands of the moment, on the other, in Christian moral action.

Because such action occurs within the context of overall religious participation and membership, the sociological backdrop to our discussion continues to be that of the previous chapter. The structure of this chapter is slightly different from that of the previous five, being somewhat shorter. We deal firstly with the contributions of some participants in Christian Radicalism to the moral debate, and then advance our criticisms, together with our proposals for a more constructive way forward on the issues facing the churches perceived by the radicals, in the second part of the chapter.

1. Secularization and Situationism: Profiles of the New Morality.

i. Robinson and Fletcher.

We begin by turning again to John Robinson, who devoted chapter 6 of Honest to God to "The New Morality", as well as

writing elsewhere on ethics with a popular eye to the contemporary scene. Robinson considers that he scarcely has to argue the **need** for a reformulation such as he is proposing. It is simply a matter of the Church catching up with what has been going on all around it:

The wind of change here is a gale. Our only task is to relate it correctly to the previous revolution we have described and to try to discern what should be the Christian attitude to it (Robinson, 1963(a):105).

The matter is quite simple. Just as the modern world increasingly has difficulty with the notion of a God conceived in objective terms as a being "out there", so too it cannot accept the idea of unalterable moral principles, emanating **from** that same "metaphysical beyond". In the public mind, the most widespread images of such an approach to ethics would probably be firstly, the Ten Commandments, inscribed on their tablets of stone and on the actual stone or woodwork of many churches; and secondly, the magnificent edifice of Roman Catholic moral teaching, perceived as a monolithic unity rather than as the complex and subtle mass of casuistry it has actually become.

But Robinson declares that "the sanctions of Sinai have lost their terrors." For "'why shouldn't I?' or 'what's wrong with it?' are questions which in our generation press for an answer" (ibid:109). The "supranaturalist ethic" simply belongs to an age which is dead or dying, bound up with the "religious" interpretation of the Gospel. Robinson, as before, rules out in advance any solution which takes up the given forms of **religious** social reality as a possible clue to how the Christian ethic operates in the concrete situation.

The solution he does propose is compounded from the familiar employment of Tillich in the service of "depth" and "ground", and the "situation ethics" of Joseph Fletcher. Robinson quotes Tillich in support of "theonomy", transferring the reference from culture to ethics:

...a position in which the transcendent... is encountered in, with and under the 'Thou' of all finite relationships as their ultimate depth and ground and meaning. In ethics this means accepting as the basis of moral judgments the actual concrete relationship in all its particularity (ibid:114).

Since, as Robinson has argued in earlier chapters, this "ultimate depth" is disclosed in Jesus, the "man for others", as Love, Robinson is able to recommend "utter openness in love to the other for his own sake" as the supreme moral criterion. Love, as he puts it, "has a built-in moral compass, enabling it to 'home' intuitively upon the deepest need of the other" (ibid:114-5). The pattern of the argument here is familiar, being entirely congruent with Robinson's earlier proposals for a reconceptualizing of traditional theism, and as such it comes under the same criticisms we have already mounted against those (*supra*, ch.VIII).

However, what is new here is how Robinson brings together his radical love-ethic with the "casuistry of love" or "agapeic calculus" advanced by Fletcher, whose position was available to Robinson at that stage only in summary essay form.' Without making his theological dependence upon Tillich as explicit as Robinson does, Fletcher argues that "only one thing is intrinsically good, namely love: nothing else at all". Hence, "the ruling norm of Christian decision is love: nothing else" (Fletcher, 1966: chs.3 & 4).

His position attacks what he calls "intrinsicism": the idea that the "right" and the "good" are qualities or commodities which lie somehow objectively in the order of things, and with which it is our duty to align our actions (ibid:64-8). Rather, "love's decisions are made situationally, not prescriptively" (ibid: ch.8) ²; and thus, a decision made on the basis of love, which appears to contravene some supposed moral law, is not to be treated as "the lesser of two evils", or as a "forgiveable sin", but positively, as a good, for there is no **other** "good" which it somehow contradicts.

This is the position which Robinson embraces more or less without qualification: "nothing can of itself always be labelled as 'wrong'" (Robinson, op.cit:118). He is at pains to point out repeatedly how shocking, dangerous and difficult the situational approach may seem (ibid:109, 117, 118-9). It is shocking, because it differs so sharply from what is taken for granted as the Christian ethical position. It is dangerous or difficult, because it demands a much greater maturity and places a far greater responsibility on the moral agent:

Love's gate is strict and narrow and its requirements infinitely deeper and more penetrating,, what love's casuistry requires makes,, the most searching demands both upon the depth and integrity of one's concern for the other,, and upon the calculation of what is truly the most loving thing in this situation for every person involved (ibid:119),

Here Robinson hints at a point made more starkly and succinctly by Fletcher. Whereas, he says, some critics complain that situation ethics is too hard, because many people want and need better and firmer certainties, this is just what he is fighting against:

They want the Grand Inquisitor,,. But there is no escape for them. To learn love's sensitive tactics, such people are going to have to put away their childish rules (Fletcher, op.cit:140; cf. van den Heuvel, 1967:147-8).

The conviction, that in a secular society people ultimately have no choice but to embark upon the hard road to an ethic of maturity, surfaces in a variety of ways in the work of other exponents of the "new morality".

ii. H.A. Williams.

For H.A. Williams it is above all what he sees as the deceitfulness and dishonesty of traditional morality which is unacceptable. Williams experienced this particularly in conjunction with certain Catholic styles of penitential devotion, and developed his contrary position under the impact of personal submission to Freudian analysis. These influences permeate his essays in Soundings, "Theology and Self-

Awareness", and in Objections to Christian Belief, "Psychological Objections", and also the sermons in The True Wilderness. Williams sees a great capacity for self-deceit embedded in the human self; and regards much religious activity, especially that based upon strict moral principle, as a series of "artful dodges" calculated to perpetuate the concealment of the truth from the agent.³

Much of what passes for Christian moral uprightness remains, in Williams' view, firmly located **this side** of the crisis of death to the old self and rebirth to new life of which the Gospel speaks. For where this is truly occurring, it is both morally painful and exhausting, and ultimately transformative. It is transformative because it radically shifts all the ethical perspectives and priorities: at the yonder side of the crisis, for example, the kind, helpful and generous behaviour of a recognized Christian may strike a false note, lacking a certain personal spontaneity and authenticity. But an unpremeditated act of selflessness on the part of someone quite immoral in conventional terms can inspire a response of praise to God.

We fail utterly to press on to the transcendent perspective just so long as we prefer the notion of a God who issues the rules and expects us to keep to them to one who penetrates to the farthest recesses of the wrong that is in us with a shattering honesty, but then accepts with an overcoming love. Williams, then, sees salvation very much in terms of true self-revelation; and the only final criterion of the moral worth of an action lies in whether or not it furthers this process.

This accounts for the extreme and improbable nature of the examples he adduces: for example, both he and Fletcher cite the film, Never on Sunday, in which a prostitute so manages her liaison with a young sailor that he is liberated from the self-doubt and instability brought about by his fear of sexual

failure. The transference of such cases into the concrete context of normal Christian ethical decision-making as a part of the life of faith is, of course, intensely problematic.

But one who perceived the same questions as Williams, and more, without his naive air of one who has just been bowled over by a new cause (i.e. psychotherapy) was Monica Furlong, in her diatribe against all that was unbending, insensitive and complacent in the Church she felt compelled to stay in: With Love to the Church.

iii. Monica Furlong.

Furlong agrees with Williams that, too often, "Christian morals appear to represent a safeguard against the force of [people's] own desires" (Furlong, op.cit:43). There is a whiff of dishonesty about the way in which ecclesiastical moral pronouncements assume the possibility of a rational, dispassionate settlement of all questions:

Since the clergy rarely admit, either publicly or privately, to having problems of their own, intelligent observers are left with the impression of a body which seeks to organize the moral stakes without being honest enough to declare its own interest (ibid:49).

She relates this point particularly to the much-vaunted "Christian teaching on marriage" and its unhappy and unsatisfactory counterpart, "the Church's attitude to divorce". In sum, traditional morality appears to be too blunt an instrument to handle the delicacies and vulnerabilities of flesh-and-blood human predicaments.

Furlong also draws attention to two other points, which complete the catalogue in favour of a **new** morality, to which we shall shortly be responding. The first of these is the tendency of Christian moral judgments always to "err on the side of caution", lest potentially dangerous ideas be let loose among people unable to handle them.

Few would echo explicitly the telling comment of the bishop who said, "we must always remember that the ordinary man is looking for any excuse to commit fornication" (ibid:32). But Furlong is convinced that the underlying implication is common enough: never trust the people. Perhaps, indeed, the image of rock-like moral certainty conveyed by the Church institutionally and reflected in a paler form by its members, who are made to feel that here is something definite and solid to hold on to and live up to, does provide a certain personal security and a point of reference, something dependable in a morally bewildering world. But Furlong questions whether this is really the Christian faith at all.

Her doubts support the contention of secular humanists that Christian morality is infantile and inconducive to ethical maturity (cf. the discussion in Jarrett-Kerr, 1964: ch.4). The allegation is serious, for an earlier generation of optimistic liberals assumed that Christianity would at least persist as a profoundly humanistic ethic, even if metaphysical religion were to wither away. Now, on the contrary, it is Christianity's manifest ethical content, at least as refracted through the churches, which comes under attack. Under the conditions of secularization, even morality is no longer a department in which the Church can lay claim to specific competence and the right to be heard. The supposed moral example given by Christian people looks more and more like moral childhood persisting in a society grappling with a complicated and painful ethical adulthood.

Furlong's final point is that this is increasingly damaging for the Church itself, because it denies the compassionate understanding and graciousness for which the Gospel of Christ is supposed to stand. It contributes to the exclusion from the churches of just the persons who need this Gospel.

It is not enough to claim that judgment, as well as mercy, is a constituent of the message. For judgment, in Christian terms, implies critical involvement, the facilitation of the crisis in the individual and in society, which generates change. Judgment "from on high" will not do. As Robinson writes, "there can for the Christian be no 'packaged' moral judgments- for persons are more important even than standards" (Robinson, 1963(a):120).

But Furlong sees all too much evidence in the Church at large of the priorities being put the other way round. People suffer exclusion (exclusion which is felt, even if not officially enacted as church policy) because their marriages have failed, or because they are homosexual, or because they have spent time in prison. The voice of the Church is louder and more united on issues where a clear rule seems to be readily available than it is on the intensely problematic issues thrown up by contemporary circumstances. Furlong writes:

It is customary for the Church and for Christians to fire away in a hit and miss manner at contemporary morals and attitudes, repeatedly ignoring the way Christians have abrogated their responsibility and by their lack of charity, knowledge, culture and compassion, have hastened the disintegration of society (Furlong, op.cit;20).

A differentiated, secular society will have little use for the religious specialism if this is how it looks to the outsider: capable of sustaining a cosy "home circle" type of moral decency but either naive or intolerantly rule-bound on wider issues.

So can religious commitment engender ethical maturity at all? We proceed to this question by way of our critique of the situationist position of the radicals, and place it in the context of the manner of ethical decision-making contingent upon the modes of faith and religious belonging in the believing community.

2. Critique and Alternatives.

1. Rules, Traditions and Structural Constraints.

We offer, first of all, a critique based upon the nature of three limiting phenomena presenting problems to the radicals' proposals for a situationist ethic. The first concerns the nature and status of rules: for Robinson himself concedes that a radical ethic of love

...cannot but rely, in deep humility, upon guiding rules, upon the cumulative experience of one's own and other people's obedience. It is this bank of experience which gives us our guiding rules of 'right' and 'wrong', and without them we could not but flounder (Robinson, op.cit:119-20).

Similarly, Fletcher asserts that

...the situationist enters into every decision-making situation fully armed with the ethical maxims of his community and its heritage, and he treats them with respect as illuminators of his problems (Fletcher, op.cit:26).

These are important concessions which modify the would-be iconoclastic tone of much of what is said about the new morality.

For example, the "bank of experience" or "maxims of the heritage" clearly tell Robinson that sexual relationships outside marriage are wrong. Nevertheless, his ethical theory makes it impossible for him to lay this down as a rule. Instead, he applies great ingenuity to describing the kind of case in which such relations **might** be right; but the criteria he produces are so strict that they would almost certainly never be fulfilled (Robinson, op.cit:119).

In a rather similar way, the controversial Report, Towards a Quaker View of Sex seeks to outline the conditions which would have to prevail in order to justify an unmarried couple's sharing in a sexual relationship. It arrives at something very close indeed to the content and intention of the marriage vows: but where such conditions obtain, "common law" accepts this in

any case as a *de facto* marriage. The force of the **rule** which is meant to embody how love works in concrete situations is here upheld (P.Ramsey, 1967).

This much indicates that rules are not so easily escaped. But there is a second point: for even with their concession to inherited wisdom, neither Robinson nor Fletcher really gives full weight to the **automatic** nature of much moral action. That is, much of the time "ethical decision-making" is scarcely an apt phrase for what actually goes on (Cook, 1983:78ff). In practice, the agent confronted with a situation requiring moral choice- unless it is a **very** unusual and complex one- does not deliberate, weigh pros and cons, and consider the demands of love. Reaction and response come on the basis of a largely pre-reflective tradition composed of a quite unsystematic array of criteria. Some of these will certainly be derived from the Christian Gospel, via its embeddedness in the cultural background.

The point is parallel to the case of "community faith". Morality lives off its traditions, the accumulation of conventional wisdom which has percolated down to so subterranean a level of culture that it rarely surfaces in the form of conceptual awareness. Such cultural deposits are bound to contain a proportion of folklore items going back to an underlying pagan past, which may or may not be comparable with the ethical ideals which Christians see as disclosed and embodied in Jesus.

So far as secularization dissipates and fragments the cultural heritage, the Christian input may cease to play any overall leavening and enlightening role, and habitual moral judgments may become less humane. For only long-term Christian influence has allowed certain ideas of "moral decency" to become so taken-for-granted.

Christians, therefore, cannot afford to ignore or disparage that habitual socialized-in level of morality which is the fruit of long processes of Christian acculturation. As a result, faith recognizes a further set of considerations governing moral judgments which the radicals undervalued. Moral apprehension is corporate in nature: the individual does not simply decide and act alone and unilaterally, but judgments are made both out of and toward the community. Moreover, this means that moral attitudes operate under structural constraints. Ethical maturity cannot demand "autonomy", if by this is meant a kind of individualistic bid to stand clear of all possible determining factors and assess the options in the cold light of reason. As Jarrett-Kerr puts it:

Man is more than a spectator, merely making selections from what he sees, on the basis of which he can act. He is also a subject, and that means accepting (freely accepting) authority. He is comrade, needing and finding fulfilment in fellowship. He is also participant, needing commitment (Jarrett-Kerr, *op.cit.*:119).

Christian moral judgments need to take into account the insight of the Gospel into our interdependence, our involvement in and with one another's circumstances and their causes, and into what mutually restrains our choices and limits our well-being: "we are all in it together" (cf. Strawson, 1969:143). A healthy and supportive "community ethic" is essential, expressed as it may be more in the tangible terms of "good neighbourliness" and citizenship than in abstract principles, or, indeed, divinely-sanctioned laws (see e.g. Moore, 1974: ch.4; Clark, 1982). But faith equally wants to supply the resources for transcending such an ethic, and it is here that we turn to the more positive part of our discussion.

ii. The Access of Transcendence.

Where can the access of the transcendent perspective of faith into the ethical stance of the Christian community be identified? It is the task of the explicitly confessing congregation to ensure that such a perspective is kept alive

and repeatedly set against the achievements of a cultural realization of Christian ethical ideals. The first point of entry of the transcendent lies in the surpassing of mere rules and conventions. The congregation is called to recognize and value its own deep indebtedness to the moral environment which surrounds and sustains it, but with the possibility of detachment.

For traditional moral codes are capable of very serious malfunctions. Good neighbourliness can turn into a parochialism in which charity both begins and ends at home. All too easily, an entirely well-meaning desire to protect, say, the ideal of marriage (which, after all, because it is difficult deserves to have its value highlighted) leads to an ostracizing of the divorced. Deep-seated and otherwise quite justifiable convictions about law and order can produce a reluctance to contemplate even the possibility of rehabilitation- even redemption, in religious terms- where erstwhile offenders are concerned.

But the Church moves in its ethical thinking between the poles of that reliance on traditional givens, communally transmitted and oriented to the past, which it has itself been responsible for inculcating and must therefore acknowledge, and the vision of a future in which such ethical provisions, largely aimed at achieving the best possible arrangements in an imperfect world, will give way to "the freedom of the sons of God". In the liturgical recitation of the stories of Jesus, in prayer and reflection and fellowship, the congregation should be repeatedly brought up against this transcendent possibility. Christians will then not rest content with rules (cf. Newbigin, 1966:138-45).

The second point of entry for transcendence is in the excelling of a purely personal and privatized morality in the direction of the Gospel's universal scope for the world. Here,

too, faith takes its cue from existing realities, because there is an irreducible inwardness about religious commitment which is the province solely of the individual who confesses it. Thus, the privatization of religion which is a product of secularization represents to some extent a return to basics. Unless individuals choose to worship, pray and serve in response to the inner pressure to do so, Christianity has become a dead thing. In the same way, Christian ethical formation is nothing without its individual personal basis: in that sense, the song which runs "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me" proclaims a true insight.

But because the Christian religion calls together a community of believers who have to come to terms with the fact that none of them is independent of the rest or absolutely free to practise their religion in the way they choose, the congregation is driven to ask beyond itself about the structural relations of the wider society and the world. Where secularization is resulting in an increasingly associational style of faith among the *diaspora* of believers, it is particularly important that communal links with the world should be maintained and made the material of discussion and witnessing activity by the group.

Where this does not occur, the congregation becomes just another associational group, held together by the sectional interest of "religion"; and it is noteworthy how such groups lack any global interest in ethical questions. "Fellowship" tends to devolve into an ethic of personal "niceness" with no earnestness about the predicaments faced by all those who do not belong. The congregation needs to be kept abreast of what is going on in the world, and helped and encouraged to discuss it and support selected causes of action, so that its ethical awareness may be constantly driven out to fresh challenges. Introversion is the blight which strikes too many congregations with pettiness and tunnel vision.

Finally, a living and critical faith seeks to transcend the categorical distinction of ethics from religion, but not by reducing the latter to the former (van Buren, 1963:197-8), nor by playing down the moral content of faith (Gregor Smith, 1966:34).

The materials conserved within the religious cultural system of Christianity offer the possibility of interpreting one's world, and making one's choices, around the orientation to a transcendent vision filled out Christologically as a perfected and fulfilled version of the world. God, as in this sense the future of the world, is confessed and worshipped as the guarantor and pattern of this ultimate good. The quests of religion and of ethics come together at this point: whoever is under obligation to seek and to serve God, is thereby enlisted in the ethical cause.⁴

In this way, Christians can respond positively to all those for whom religion is pre-eminently a matter of observing the decencies of humanly sympathetic living, while celebrating the hope of that which alone will mark the end- the *telos*- of all such efforts.

The exponents of the new morality correctly perceived the need for an ethic of maturity which would not leave Christians high and dry in adherence to an outdated and inflexible heteronomy, unable to cope constructively with contemporary moral problems or compassionately with persons.

However, they were misled by their determination to produce a "non-religious" ethic freed from the dead weight of rules into a failure to produce proposals which could ever be practicable in terms of the given shapes of Christian faith-community. We have tried to suggest, in line with our analysis of the distinctive styles of religious commitment and belonging, what would be required for these deficiencies to be made good.

With this discussion we have come to the end of our detailed treatment of the major theological themes of Christian Radicalism. We have dealt with the theological topics according to the pattern of three basic issues, namely the nature and role of religion, the relationship between Christianity and secularization, and the problem of the institutional embodiment of faith within the life of the religious community. To each of these, we brought the critical stimulus of a sociological understanding. In Part Four of the thesis, we sum up the theoretical findings of the foregoing chapters, and then give some indication of the relevance of these to certain ongoing debates within the churches at the present time.

NOTES

1. Fletcher's Situation Ethics (1966) did not appear until after Honest to God. See further discussion in P. Ramsey, Deeds and Rules in Christian Ethics, 1967; P. Baelz, Ethics and Relief, 1977; ch. 9; D. Cook, The Moral Maze, 1983: 69-73; H. Thielicke, in eds. Thielicke and Schrey, Faith and Action, 1970: xlii-xlix; N.H.G. Robinson, The Groundwork of Christian Ethics, 1971; B. Hebblethwaite, The Adequacy of Christian Ethics, 1981. For Robinson's view see further his Christian Morals Today, 1964; and for typical conservative reactions to him, J.M. Morrison, Honesty and God, 1966; ch. 6; and O.F. Clarke, For Christ's Sake, 1963; ch. 5.

2. The term "situation ethics" was used by Pope Pius XII in 1952 in a statement, Acta Apostolicae Sedis, denouncing an "existential", non-prescriptivist ethic which might be able to "justify" actions contrary to the teaching of the Church. In 1956 the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office dubbed it the "new morality" and banned the teaching of it in Catholic seminaries and academies. Thus, from the first, situation ethics was bound up with the question of the authority of faith and the admissibility of the critical principle.

3. Williams, of course, is not a figure to be taken entirely seriously as an exponent of situationist or any other kind of ethical theory. But the dilemmas of his own life, as recounted in his unfortunate autobiography Someday I'll Find You, testify to the relevance of the theological problems he perceived in the Church's ethical life-problems from which he himself, as a child of the ecclesiastical system, was unable to find any escape, except into the monastic existence of Mirfield. He is a victim of the state of affairs he criticises, even if his positive proposals are often ludicrous.

4. Thielicke has criticised the ethic resulting from the Lutheran doctrine of the Two Kingdoms as lacking in precisely this eschatological acumen. For this point of view sees traditional ethics as a necessary compromise, an ordinance for the Kingdom of this world in which sin still infects every human endeavour. But an ethic which is in effect a holding-operation against the worst effects of "fallenness" cannot help but be, at the same time, the expression of the same condition. There is therefore the need for a "not yet" ethic to goad the traditional into dissatisfaction with itself (Thielicke and Schrey, *op.cit.*; and Schrey, Reich Gottes und Welt: IXff).

PART FOUR: CONCLUSIONS.

CHAPTER XIV: RETROSPECTIVE.

The two chapters which form this concluding part of the thesis have each a distinctive purpose and style. The first is theoretical, aimed at recapitulating the arguments marshalled and positions reached in the foregoing chapters. The second is more practical in tone, and indicates areas of contemporary church life in which the debates of twenty years ago, and the judgments upon them we have made, continue to have relevance.

In this first concluding chapter, then, we retrace our steps over the body of the thesis thus far. The sections of the chapter are prefaced by the numbers of the successive earlier chapters as a guide to how the argument was developed.

Part One of the thesis constructed the frame within which the investigations which followed were to be carried on.

I. The point of departure of the thesis was an interest in a series of theological episodes and controversies in the life of the churches during the nineteen-sixties, which we termed "Christian Radicalism". These related debates and events are of particular fascination because of the high level of public attention to theological issues and church affairs they attracted. The phenomenon of Christian Radicalism was characterized by a simultaneous concern for theological reformulation and for reform and renewal in the life and structures of the Church, and by a sense of the close inter-relatedness of the two.

The overarching interest of the Christian radicals was in "secularity". They wanted to find a presentation of Christian theology and the Gospel which would be intelligible and relevant to modern, secular-minded people, and they perceived that this would also entail a fresh, secular understanding of the Church, as the bearer of that Gospel.

These interests raised three sets of questions which were absolutely fundamental to Christian Radicalism. Firstly the nature and functions of **religion** were queried, in asking whether a non-religious interpretation of Christianity could be found. Secondly, the proper attitude of Christian theology and the Church towards **secularization** came under review, as to whether wholehearted affirmation rather than confrontation was possible. Thirdly, there was a search for an operational form of **undogmatic faith** which might engage constructively and critically with secular realities.

The radical theologians were concerned to express an understanding of theological ideas that would be relevant to secular social realities. Further, they wanted to follow this through in a restructuring of the Church, as the place *par excellence* where theological meanings assume tangible historical and social form. In view of this, we proposed that a fitting critical perspective on the radicals' work could be found in the discipline of the sociology of religion, which is particularly concerned with the concrete social forms in which religious meaning comes to expression.

II. To draw upon sociology for the critical perspective of a theological thesis, it was necessary to establish a theoretical and methodological position on the relationship between sociology and theology. Rejecting approaches which would allow either discipline to dominate the other, or merge the two together, or maintain a total mutual immunity of the one from the other, we proposed that a Weberian model of sociological activity was most suited to fruitful interaction with theology.

Such a model does not reduce the sociological analysis of religious meaning to a matter of social functions. It pays attention to the subjective meaning of actions and beliefs for the agents, and recognizes the complex dialectical relationship between ideas- specifically, religious ideas- and material factors in the processes of social change.

It was also necessary to adopt a corresponding understanding of theological activity. The theologian is engaged in a critical, hermeneutical discipline, reflecting upon the Christian tradition which is given to him as his basic material, as it engages and has engaged with changing social and cultural contexts. The theologian himself is the product of a tradition and an environment, and so his bringing of the resources of the tradition to bear upon a situation in order to speak to it of God is only one moment of a dialectic.

In the other moment, he and his tradition are only properly understood in terms of past relationships with the context. The theologian is committed, because he is a product of the tradition in the past, a present participant in its life and one who desires to see it more effective in the future.

Sociology analyses the complexities of these past and present relationships of religious tradition to social and cultural context, and indicates the social constraints and limitations under which any future, renewed realizations of the meaning of the Gospel tradition will have to operate. We advanced the recent work of David Martin as a specific example of this type of understanding of the relationship between sociology and theology.

III. Given the main theoretical concerns of Christian Radicalism and this way of approaching the sociological dimensions of a "secular theology", the peculiar attraction of the writings of Bonhoeffer for the radicals becomes clear. For Bonhoeffer was throughout his career interested in what might be termed the "horizontal projection" of theological meanings, outward into concrete social relations, and correspondingly in the sociological nature of the Church. He recognized, in other words, the intimate relationship between abstract theological questions and the concrete structures of church life.

Secondly, Bonhoeffer's enigmatic prison writings appear in this light as the attempt of a theologian who knows himself to be the product both of a particular religious tradition and an

emerging secular world to reflect upon what this means for the Gospel he is charged to expound. He wants to explore the projection of theological meaning into the secular, sociological dimension, while struggling with how to retain the inalienable Gospel content which can still speak to the secular from over against it.

As such, Bonhoeffer's concerns not only foreshadowed those of Christian Radicalism but also suggested subtleties about the problem of the religious group within the secular society, and the dialectical nature of the Christian's relation to modernity, which the radicals who followed him did not always take up. We set out in Part Two of the thesis to develop tools from the sociology of religion to enable us to explore these subtleties and deficiencies, in our ensuing critical analysis of the radicals' theology.

IV. We argued in favour of treating religion as a cultural system, expressing by means of its beliefs and imagery, rituals and conventions and social embodiments, an orientation to the transcendent. Such an approach leaves the way open for examining all those cultural manifestations which commonly count as "religion" within a given society, and only then proceeding to ask about the social functions they perform.

By the "transcendent", we meant a sacred order, in the nature of "another world", bearing a double relation to the everyday world of empirical reality. Firstly, the transcendent provides the basis of order and meaning for the world as social groups and individuals experience it. It stabilizes and affirms the world, granting metaphysical legitimation and sanction to its institutions and offering an ultimate rationale for its problems.

But secondly, because it appears as a fulfilled or perfected version of this world, the transcendent (that which "surpasses", "excels", "lifts up") gains the power to act back upon the world as a constraining influence, summoning religious people to action for change.

Religion, therefore, presents a dialectical tension between the legitimation and the criticism of the world of the religious group, which in modern societies is unlikely to comprise the society as a whole. The religious believer gains from his religion an assurance, an identity and an answer to the threat of meaninglessness, deriving from the givenness of a metaphysical anchorage for the social order and the cohesive stability of his social group. But he also inherits a set of values, a vision and an ideal the world which prevent him from resting completely content with the *status quo*.

V. The sociological debate about secularization is vital to the understanding of the effect of contemporary social and cultural conditions upon religious life. However, the presence of almost diametrically opposed views within sociology forbids us to assume that the process is at all simple, unilinear or monocausal. We proposed an analysis along two lines, focusing upon the socio-structural and cultural processes respectively.

Within the structural organization of society, a process of differentiation, resulting in the autonomous, specialized professional competence of institutional spheres, has involved the religious as much as any other sub-system of society. The Church, deprived of its direct authority over other areas of institutional life, is seen increasingly as the organization with special professional responsibility for the religious sector of life. As such, this differentiated role is also a rather marginal one, since the functional centre of secular society makes little reference to religion in furthering its rational, instrumental ends.

Secondly, at the cultural level, desacralizing processes have removed the right of any overall world-view to claim ultimate authority for itself. The Christian religion is no longer called upon to fulfil the function of sanctioning the cohesion of society and legitimating its values. Although this potentially liberates religion to fulfil a more creative role, cultural secularization also has its damaging and debilitating

side. The decline of any strong cultural infrastructure leaves many people in ignorance and confusion, devoid of any serviceable and constructive world-view at all.

Secularization, therefore, even to the extent that it represents one line of socio-cultural realization of the Christian Gospel, cannot but be intensely problematic for religion. It is neither simply religious decline nor religious fulfilment, but invites religious life into a precarious interplay between limitation and opportunity.

VI. What we had said so far could not be applied without reference to the circumstances of actual participants in the religious culture. It was necessary to ask how faith itself, as the inner disposition or mode of life which comes to expression through religion, is operative in the concrete context. For faith has to achieve historical continuity of expression by means of institutional form, and there is always ambiguity and compromise in the sociological patterns under which faith is embodied and lived out.

Two basic dualities can be observed. Firstly, a church-type of religious membership is conceived as available for all, with an antecedently existing religious institution offering its services to the community at large. But in a sect-type of membership, only the covenanting together of the religiously committed few brings the institution into being at all, and thus a high degree of distinctiveness over against the world is maintained.

Secondly, a communal style of religiosity represents the religious sub-culture created by every religion in its successive stages of socio-cultural embodiment. People are born into it and seek to live out what constitutes for them a pre-reflectively "religious" way of life according to its conventions and values. But an associational style of religiosity sees religious commitment much more in terms of people associating together for very specifically religious activities in the pursuit of explicitly religious ideals.

There is a clear affinity between the direction of the processes of secularization and the sectarian and associational options within these dualities. Insofar as a more sectarian style of religious membership becomes sociologically inevitable, the group needs to take particular responsibility for regenerating the communal religious culture in which it is set. Insofar as religion is practised more and more in an associational way, a counter-balance lies in the heightening of emphasis upon the church aspect of the continuing religious institution, in its antecedent social presence.

These were the sociological materials which were brought to bear as critical stimuli as we moved on in Part Three to undertake our main investigation of the theology of Christian Radicalism.

VII. The thematic examination was prefaced, however, by an attempt to demonstrate how the main sets of questions to which the sociological instruments were directed were present, implicitly or explicitly, in the debates, events and controversies which largely made up the overall episode of Christian Radicalism. This was in support of our view of theological activity as arising critically at the points of intersection of religious tradition with changing socio-cultural context.

For Christian Radicalism was not a fully-fledged theology set out in systematic treatises; often it did not even possess academic respectability. Yet in a mostly pragmatic, pastoral and occasional context, it uncovered large and important issues for the churches; and substantive concerns often underlay the passing, unscholarly and even trivial debates. It was only against the background of these controversies that the more substantially theological investigation was allowed to proceed.

VIII. Christian Radicalism undertook, firstly, a search for a non-religious approach to the question of God. Robinson and

others attempted to analyse common secular experience in a way which would justify theistic talk about it and render this meaningful to modern men and women who came equipped with no religious predispositions. Recognizing the dangers of an immanent naturalism, the theologians then tried to retain a foothold for the transcendent within this secular analysis. Their overriding concern was that talk of God should be seen to be eminently about **this** world, about concrete realities, and not dependent upon speculations about **another** world, of little conceivable relevance to secular men and women.

These approaches were too quick to discard the social reality of religion as a cultural system as a basis for discovering the secular meaning of talk of God. The theologians themselves were only able to make the analyses of secular experience they did because they were themselves Christians and participants in a religious tradition out of and through which God was confessed, and secular experience interpreted, in a particular way.

In the way in question, the dialectic of religion as both legitimation and criticism of the world-order of the religious group reaches a particularly high critical tension. God is confessed as one who both upholds and grants value to the prevailing order, and yet will not allow the believer to rest content with it. For the Christian, religion is already profoundly to do with this world- precisely, with a promised future order for the world.

A "secular" understanding of God and the Gospel should therefore not seek to **eliminate** religion, but rather to pay closer attention to the given forms of religious expression as an empirically available social reality. It is through these forms within the culture that men and women come to that security and sense of worth in their present world-situation, combined with a commitment to purposive action towards its transformation in the hope of a new world, which is peculiarly characteristic of the Gospel.

So there should be no attempt to reject "religion" as alienating and bad, while retaining, say, "faith", or "Christianity", as good and creative. For Christianity inevitably generates its religious expressions, in and with the tensions of which the believer must seek profitably to live. It is precisely these which keep him- for better or worse- firmly involved and implicated in the world, while unable to be satisfied with it.

IX. Some of the radicals, such as van Buren, judged that the way around the problem of theism for the contemporary secular mind was to focus all attention instead upon the human figure of Jesus of Nazareth as the repository of all that theological language might possibly mean. However, this approach does not, in fact, succeed in removing from the radical the need to grapple with the dialectical tension of religion.

For the way the figure of Jesus functions within Christian religious practice partakes of that same tension. The same Jesus who is treated as the very embodiment of the promised perfected order, the "new creation" and the "new man", also merges obscurely with his own cultural and historical background and dies at the hands of that same social world.

As an alternative way of trying to understand in a concrete way what is meant by the Christian's confession of this man as Saviour and Lord, the sociological reality of the Church might be examined. For this community is confessed as that which embodies and carries on the presence and work of Jesus amid the world; and so, within its institutional presentation and structures, there should be some indications of the same tensions and modalities which characterized the way of Jesus in the world.

X. As well as trying to express the meaning of God in terms of secular experience, Christian Radicalism also sought to re-pristiniate the Christian proclamation by reversing the

prevailing trend of opposition to the processes of modernity on the part of theology and the churches. Cox and others believed that if contemporary social and cultural changes were producing an increasingly secular social system and a secular-oriented type of man to go with it, the Church should ask whether it could affirm, welcome and build upon these processes theologically. It should develop a theological standpoint which could wholeheartedly affirm secularization while still making room for a vital role for the churches in a secular society.

But the sociological perspective suggests it is unwise to attempt to reclaim the entire secularization process as gain for the Gospel. No social consequences of the influence of Christianity upon a culture over time can ever be affirmed unambiguously, because the Gospel always contains a surplus of promise which enables it to criticise its own fruits.

Structural differentiation and the increasing marginalization of the Church are social facts which it will be necessary for the religious institutions to accept before they can consider realistically what a continuing vital role might entail. Such a role will certainly involve the maximising of specifically religious resources in the interests of combating, and not affirming, certain deleterious effects of the secularization of culture.

XI. This criticism, that the radicals did not face first of all the social realities of the situation facing religion and Church under the conditions of secularization, applies particularly to the proposals, typified by the thinking of the World Council of Churches, aimed at recasting the Church's mission in secular-social terms and reshaping its structures to enable it to accomplish this mission. Present practical social constraints urge upon the Church a globally less ambitious, but more effectively specialized role, in which the involvement in secular social action is always tempered and qualified by the context of worship and the religious *provisio* of transcendence.

XII. Faced with the question of institutional religious life under the conditions of modernity, radical theology desired to operationalize the concept of a non-dogmatic, critical and open form of faith. Gregor Smith in particular tried to comprehend the interior texture of the life of faith as thoroughly historical, thriving upon a continual dialogue between its inherited traditions and the undetermined future into which God calls the believer forth. Christian faith should constitute the inner resource by which a man or woman could meet with mature responsibility the changing challenges of the moment, as part of a believing community sustained by a common heritage and a common hope. Smith and others gave some attention to trying to map out the institutional forms which could support and express such an understanding of faith.

While the call for a critical form of mature, secular faith was understandably motivated by the evidence of defensiveness, dishonesty and dependence in much of the existing faith-life of the churches, the blueprint produced by radical theology nevertheless lacked attunement to the exigencies and inevitable ambiguities of institutionalization. There can be no univocal social realization of the critical, future-oriented arm of faith **alone**. Rather, a plurality of institutional forms must embrace both angles of faith's dialectic, including that which is largely unreflectively borne along by communal tradition.

For this reason, a threefold pattern of institutional presentation of "church" needs to be emphasised. There is not only the culturally embedded form of faith which is expressed in the best manifestations of folk-religion (which are threatened by secularization) and the more reflective faith of the increasingly committed "core" congregation, but also the presence of the over-arching religious institution, which is there with its resources and symbolism for both community and congregation alike. The Church needs, for the sake of the vitality of faith, to pay close attention to the health and interaction of all these three forms.

XIII. The concern of Christian Radicalism to promote the "new morality" in the form of a situational ethic betrays a similar insensitivity to the constraints of institutional possibility. For while it becomes the duty of the committed religious congregation to discover and express the **transcendence** of traditional and unreflective rule-based morality through the vision of the Gospel, these less critical forms can never be **replaced**. Nor, in the end, is the perfection of a pure "casuistry of love" something which is fully achievable within the social forms of either Church or world, especially if it seeks to cut Christians off from the compromised and ironic consequences of their own past actions.

Our judgment upon the problems Christian Radicalism sought to tackle is that they were, and are, important, urgent and relevant. The high level of public controversy of twenty years ago showed that difficult theological issues are not only the province of academic studies, but are also present, implicitly if not explicitly, in the problems and concerns that confront the churches at a popular and pastoral level. The radical theologians were committed to the idea that their theological labours should bear directly upon the vital question of the actual living out of the Christian life within concrete social experience under contemporary conditions. As such, theological reformulation was not to be divorced from the empirical structures of church life.

All of this we wish to affirm in the episode of Christian Radicalism. But our study has shown how the proposals for theology and Church advanced by the radicals suffered throughout from a lack of sociological realism: and such a deficiency is clearly serious in any theology setting out to be self-consciously "secular". In our closing chapter, we indicate how the unfinished agenda of Christian Radicalism is closely relevant to issues facing the churches today, which likewise require close attention from a sociological point of view.

CHAPTER XV: TOWARDS AN EMPIRICAL ECCLESIOLOGY?

In the previous chapter we summarized the theoretical positions attained in the body of the thesis, and it is now time to turn to some practical questions. We have maintained throughout the thesis a model of theological activity as arising at the interface between Gospel tradition and concrete social and cultural context. Theoretical theological thinking cannot be divorced from issues facing the empirical life of the churches, as the bearers of the religious cultural systems in, and through which theological meanings come to their concrete expression. The episode of Christian Radicalism lent itself readily to analysis under this type of model of theological *praxis*.

From our vantage point of twenty years on and with the aid of our critical sociological perspectives, we uncovered reasons for the relative failure of the movement to have far-reaching determinative influence upon the subsequent life of the churches. Our conviction remains that, despite the serious shortcomings of the movement, Christian Radicalism sought to tackle urgent questions which have lost none of their force. In the issue of the continuing vitality of religious life and of the churches under contemporary cultural conditions, the story since the sixties has not been so encouraging as to justify ignoring the attempts of that decade to meet the problems.

For these reasons, we end the thesis by indicating areas of present church life in which the unfinished agenda of Christian Radicalism may be seen to have continuing relevance for us. We have entitled these conclusions, "Towards an Empirical Ecclesiology?" This brings out the force of our contention that any theology that has a real claim to be "secular" **must** undertake its reflections in dialogue with given socio-cultural realities, i.e. with what is secularly available.

Of all the traditional divisions of systematic theology, ecclesiology most obviously stands out as that which refers to a concretely existing, historical and social reality. In the area of ecclesiology, therefore, theology has a *prima facie* responsibility to be "secular", i.e. to deal in the interpretation of this-worldly social realities.

This thesis is not itself, of course, an ecclesiology, and this chapter does not elaborate one in detail. There is no exhaustive treatment or documentation in the sections which follow, since we are here stepping outside our main area of study in the sixties. All we are suggesting is that the lessons we have learnt from Christian Radicalism about the requirements for a truly "secular" theology should be allowed to shed light upon certain vexed questions which still confront the churches, and in regard to which, at the present time, an unhealthy polarization of opinion seems to be occurring.

1. Liturgical Renewal.

We have argued that "religion" remains indispensable, because it is through the resources of the religious cultural system that the orientation to the transcendent is transmitted and kept alive through time. Only this orientation generates the dispositions by which a person can both feel confident and at home in the world, and at the same time live in hope of a better world and undertake purposive action towards bringing it into being. The language used in religious worship is therefore of the utmost importance, because as it is used repeatedly and becomes familiar it bears the particular responsibility for inculcating these dispositions into religious persons, ultimately at pre-reflective levels. The debate about liturgical language, therefore, should be about much more than just "ancient" versus "modern".

It is unhelpful and confusing when the supporters of liturgical renewal appear simply as reckless modernizers,

insisting that the language of worship should be as down-to-earth and functional as contemporary secularity demands. It is equally beside the point when the critics of modern liturgies are depicted, or present themselves, as traditionalist diehards, bent upon incarcerating the Church in the sixteenth or seventeenth century and perpetuating its irrelevance in the modern world. The matter is too important to be polarized in this way, especially as it is evident that neither traditional nor modern liturgies are able to make very much headway in bringing to life the meaning of religious worship among those who are far alienated from the churches.

The campaign waged by David Martin against the modern liturgies has been almost wilfully misunderstood by some contemporary churchmen. Martin does tend not to distinguish hard argument from personal religious conservatism sufficiently clearly. But the argument itself is plain enough (e.g. Martin, 1981(b)): we have ended up with too much poor quality modern writing. A great deal is neither truly contemporary (being just the old language "updated") nor capable of resonating with the transcendent. For the outsider, much of it might just as well still be the traditional liturgy, so full is it of theological and ecclesiastical technicalities. But for the regular worshipper, it is often too breezily unpoetic to enliven the imagination.

The language of liturgy must neither keep God at a safe distance by enveloping him in impenetrable mystification, nor encapsulate him neatly in the flat monotone of contemporary media-talk. It must be translucent, letting it at all the crucial points the light of the transcendent which motivates the worshipper to confess **both** that God is here among us in the common secular concern, **and** that we must join "with the whole company of heaven" in worshipping one who is immeasurably greater than that concern.

Liturgical language and rites should facilitate for the participants the healthy religious mediation between the securities of tradition and the summons to change, between legitimation and criticism, between familiarity and creative disjunction. To recognize this need would be to render irrelevant the sterile argument about mere "modernity" of language.

ii. Folk-religion.

The persistence of folk-religion is becoming the cause of a widening breach of opinion, particularly between the more extreme Catholic and Evangelical parties in the Church of England on the one hand and those of the centre on the other. The processes of cultural secularization mean that the folk-religion which does persist is becoming ever more fragmentary, confused and compounded of semi-Christian, semi-pagan or superstitious elements. At the same time, the structural marginalization of the Church is resulting in smaller and more committed core congregations, often composed to a growing extent of "converted" rather than "socialized" Christians.

In these circumstances it is not surprising that many clergy are tempted to cut their losses and opt out of the folk-religious arena. They want an end to infant baptisms, save for the children of committed church members, who, ironically, increasingly decide to defer their children's baptism because they are persuaded of the case for believers' baptism. There is a readiness to speak of our "post-Christian" or even "neo-pagan" society. The Church desires to draw its boundaries much more clearly, and to refuse any longer to allow itself to be "used" by those who have no commitment to it. The congregation is urged to build itself up as a "community", from which base it can move out in evangelistic missions into the godless world around it. There is an enthusiasm for recapturing the spirit of the early Church.

Christian Radicalism experienced difficulty in trying to redefine a vitally necessary role for the churches amid a world whose secularity it wanted to affirm. When it thought in terms of an aggressive role for the churches as God's front-line or *avant-garde*, it did not know what to do about the troublesome residues of fringe and uncommitted members who did not really fit that description of the Church.

Today this problem persists: for understandable though the desire is to go all-out for "commitment Christianity" and to cast off the encumbrances of folk-religion, it is only the much more frustrating, messy and unsatisfactory path which does justice to the social facts. That is, we are not and could not be in either a "post-Christian" or the equivalent of a "pre-Christian" age. Social history cannot be rewritten, and the untidy rubble left by the crumbling of Christendom remains the responsibility of the churches to administer- for no-one else will do it, and real people of flesh and blood are involved.

This is why we stressed the importance of the threefold pattern of Christian presence within culture and society, including as well as the unreflective, traditional patterns of community faith and the commitment of the congregation, the visible institutional presence of the Church as the necessary mechanism for holding the others together. Where local congregations are becoming more homogeneously committed, it is important that they should see that their membership within the antecedently existing institution of the Church requires them to employ their critical commitment in taking responsibility for the community in which they are set. If they do not, even while their own common life becomes more religiously well-defined and fulfilling, the culture of their local community may be suffering still further dissipation and decline. We need to find out how the promotion of a distinct "commitment" Christianity can be compatible with taking folk-religion with the utmost seriousness.

iii. The Clergy.

Christian Radicalism was anxious to get rid of the idea of a "clerical caste" within the Church, with a clergy possessing special powers denied to ordinary lay Christians. What the radicals failed to do was to consider the implications of the Church's givenness and social presence as an institution, whereby the clergy, in virtue of their office as the servants and employees of that institution, inevitably take on roles and functions which distinguish them from the body of unordained religious believers. In other words, a sociologically realistic theology of the Church will accept that, within the total social and institutional manifestation "church", it is the task of clergy and laity together to express the wholeness of what is meant by speaking of the Church as, for example, Christ's Body, or as the instrument of the continuation of his presence and work in the world.

Today's debates about the role of the clergy and the meaning of priesthood, which have been largely stimulated by the issue of the ordination of women, could benefit from this secular approach. For another unhelpful polarization is threatened on this question. On the one hand, some clergy are eager to deny that their ordained status marks them out as in any way different from lay Christians. Their position is marked by such symbolic gestures as the refusal to wear a clerical collar, or a reluctance to take the chair at meetings. They wish to deny the institutional functions which both society at large and their congregations ascribe to them, and become instead persons who are paid simply to "be there". They cannot define their role at all, but simply wait to see what demands each day brings to their door.

But on the other side there is a flourishing movement which seeks to reassert in the strongest possible terms a "charismatic" model of priesthood as an indelible quality which

sets a man apart for life and endows him with powers denied to others. Such a view attempts to avoid the role-confusion of the clergyman by carving out a very definite, unique and circumscribed set of competences for the priest, centred upon his sacramental qualifications. Also, the affectation of particular forms of dress and the expectation of being addressed as "Father" by the laity serve as external badges of this special authority and status. (It is here that the most pathological opposition to the ordination of women is found.) Whatever the undeniable pastoral care and sacrificial service undertaken by priests who see their role in this way, the end product can still only be a passive and docile laity, for the subliminal symbolism of authoritarianism is altogether too strong.

But the present institutional position of the clergy offers no such ways out of tension and contradictoriness. The clergy are supposed to be professionally specialized, yet are expected by their congregations to be jacks-of-all-trades and consequently treated by the world as masters of none. They occupy the position in the Church's spectrum which invites an explicit commitment to transcendence and hence a prophetically critical stance towards society, but most also have a pastoral duty towards conservative congregations they may not dare risk upsetting. They are resource persons available for all, in a society where few desire the resources, except at certain limited stages in the life-cycle.

In the face of these tensions, the clergy's only realistic choice appears to be to "stand and allow the waves of marginality to break over them" (Towler and Coxon, 1979:54). If they do, the strains and tensions inherent in their role could just prove to reflect certain features of Jesus' own career in the world, which although by no means easy, might well be religiously appropriate.

Alternatively, the Church will have to make real headway in promoting limited-range, specialist ministries as its norm for the paid clergy, while authenticating the ministry of indigenous unpaid elders as the pattern of local pastoral leadership. But these proposals cannot be pursued in any detail within our context here.

iv. The Church and Politics.

Theologians may treat it as established that the Gospel has political implications and that religion and politics cannot be absolutely divorced. But within the churches the issue is far from being agreed. The argument that the business of the Church is with the spiritual needs of man, and that it ought not therefore to "meddle" in politics, is still frequently heard. The matter has come to public prominence again recently as a consequence of a number of cases of the Church expressing critical attitudes towards Government policy, notably over nuclear weapons and the plight of the inner cities. Our study of the attempts of Christian Radicalism to recast the Church's mission in secular-social terms suggests two areas of misunderstanding which will still have to be cleared up if clarity in the present debates is to be achieved.

The first concerns the spirit of the Church's socio-political engagements and pronouncements. Critics who maintain that the business of the Church is with religion are, after all, correct in the letter of what they say. Our quarrel with them is that they are mistaken about the nature of religion: for with its intrinsic concern about the quality of life in the world, under the compelling vision of an eschatological state of affairs in which every ideal for the world shall be fulfilled and every deficiency made good, religion is indeed about political- i.e. public and socio-structural- interests.

But the point is that the spirit of the Church's pursuit of these interests must be seen to differ from that of the

competent secular institutions involved. The Church must not appear simply to be trying to do somebody else's job without the proper professional qualifications. For the Church, through its bearing of the resources of the religious culture, must accompany all its social engagements with the dimension of transcendence which is introduced by worship. This dimension will forbid it ever to be **without reservation** on the side of a particular political cause: but it does not prevent it from ever taking sides at all.

The second misunderstanding concerns the standpoint from which the Church issues its judgments and recommendations. For a secular society has no interest in prescriptions simply handed down on the basis of theological principles. The Church's standpoint should rather be that of those who struggle to implement the Gospel under the constraints, ambiguities and ironies of the concrete context. Its pronouncements should take the form of the fruits of critical reflection upon engaged activity, and not commentary from a point of detached observation.

All over the country there are Christian groups who are attempting to do something about a variety of social needs and problems in their local communities. It is upon the experiences and frustrations of these that reports and analyses issued by the centralised institutional Church on current social issues should draw. The secular-social commitments of local church groups are often not regarded as "political" by those involved, whereas the material in official reports seems to ordinary Christians to be "out of their reach", dealing with massive national and international affairs toward which they feel powerless. The existence of this disparity is another instance of how the localised small-group and the higher-level visible and centralised institutional presentations of "church" need, supplement and correct one another-- something which occurs all too little at the present time.

v. Conservatives and Liberals.

Everything that has been said above about dispelling misunderstanding and avoiding polarization depends upon the realization of the committed core congregation as a "critical public" within the Church. But probably the liveliest and most instructive public controversy in the Church of England since Honest to God, that over the Bishop of Durham, David Jenkins, indicates that this kind of critically committed group is very far from having been formed. For many congregations remain woefully ignorant both of the traditions of their Church and its theology, and of the implications of contemporary theological thinking. Moreover, many clergy are content to leave things this way, being convinced themselves that critical theology can seriously damage your faith.

The quality of educational materials designed to train Christians in reflection upon their tradition is actually quite high, with a spate of study courses, practical programmes and basic learning exercises coming from the Church's various educational agencies. But the take-up at parish level is often disappointingly low. The most critical and radical thinkers are usually located within the specialist areas of ministry, whereas parish clergy are much more likely to be conservatives. Some prefer their safe manuals of devotion, with instructions for the faithful about the meaning of liturgical symbolism and the colours, vestments and ceremonial proper to various festivals; others keep to bright and breezy practical guides on how to evangelize and edifying Bible studies innocent of critical questions, full of untroubled certainties and slick answers. Diversity in the Church of England ossifies along sterile "party lines"; and both parties join forces in a polarization of opinion against all those they class as "liberals".

There is in addition to this an uncertainty about the proper place of critical theology within the training of

ordinands (cf. Sykes, 1978:79-83). Theological college students often castigate courses for being "too academic", or swallow just enough theology to pass their examinations before heaving a sigh of relief at no longer having to be bothered, once they get into a parish, with the inconvenient problems theologians insist on raising. An anti-intellectual bias continues to affect the styles of parish teaching ministry; and this, combined with the minister's understandable but unfortunate desire not to introduce even more insecurity into an already uncertain social role, leads to the dosing of the people with the safest of palliatives, and the view that "ideas" are dangerous things they cannot be trusted to handle.

It is true that the short-term successes of conservative and protectionist policies of this kind are quite encouraging. Conservative churches are the ones that grow, and to which eclectic congregations flock. But our study suggests that the long-term prospects are less promising, for these churches are being given no substantial resources for comprehending or coping with the increasingly secularized cultural conditions which surround them. The excitement of conservative revivals waxes and wanes, but the eventual burden of the day for the Christian faith falls upon the health of those institutional and communal continuities and traditions by means of which some kind of cultural transmission of the influence of the Gospel is assured. As long as the Church suffers from a polarization of "conservative" and "liberal" (or critical) theological opinion, the in-fighting causes the neglect of these vital long-term influences.

Christian Radicalism ventured the hope that the positions of mature Christian commitment and critical, open-minded thinking were not mutually exclusive. Apart from the over-zealous desire of the radicals to appear iconoclastic, we think that their intuition was correct: to be "radical" can indeed mean to be both critical and in a highly positive sense

"conservative". To treat the whole of the religious and theological tradition, including the whole complex cultural system which has resulted from centuries of collusion and alliance of Gospel with world, with due respect and earnestness, is not a policy giving *carte blanche* for wildly unorthodox conclusions. But a congregation which has become willy-nilly sociologically sectarian simply cannot afford the theological sectarianism implied by the obstinate exclusion of the critical principle.

vi. Moralism.

Recent ethical debates in the churches have hinted at a new upsurge of misguided moralism among practising Christians, suggesting that few lessons have been learned from the mutual accusations made twenty years ago by participants in the debates about the "new morality". By "moralism", we mean a cluster of related attitudes arising out of the conviction that at bottom things are plain and simple. There is no question what is right and what is not, and there are fail-safe criteria for judging people's actions accordingly. The moralistic man demands straight answers, yes or no, to all strictly meta-empirical questions. He rests his case upon the inviolability of the Either-Or, and is inclined to dismiss the Both-And as so much fudging and woolly thinking.

Today moral issues are becoming painfully complex and new ethical questions are being thrown up by secular science with frightening regularity. In these circumstances, the longing for the old securities is tempting. The most up-to-date modernizing movements in the churches often unite with the most reactionary in condemning, for example, what they see as any "softening" of the Church's stance toward the marriage of divorcees, or any "compromise" of the traditional attitude towards homosexuality, or Sunday trading, or indeed the rights and social status of women.

We have tried to allow for the interaction of the basically conservative and unreflective ethical traditions of the community with the potential for transcendence represented by the worshipping congregation. Participation in a vital religious life should lead Christians to eschew the facile black-and-white distinctions, the polarization of opinion, party sloganeering and glib judgmentalism which vitiate all public debate. Moralism in religion becomes just another variety of the evisceration of real, insightful, humane thinking which contributes to the widespread and deadly expansion of sheer cynicism in contemporary culture. Insofar as a moralistic Church continues to give the impression that the answers are there in the back of the book if only people would be more religious and look them up, it feeds the opposite view of those who simply deny that there are any answers, or that the questions make any sense anyway.

The sociological perspective lights up what a moralistic religion fails to grasp, namely the inevitability of the Christian's, and the Church's, complicity with and implication in the perils and failures of the human project as well as in its glories. There is no simple, untainted translation of the meaning of the Gospel and its images into socio-cultural realities. If contemporary Christianity goes down the moralistic road, it will not be able to speak of God, God as he is in Jesus, involved and suffering and redeeming through and in the midst of all the perplexities of this common human lot. The proponents of the "new morality" perceived the nature of the problem without finding their way to a feasible answer within the constraints of religious social reality. The need is incumbent upon us to do better.

vii. Towards an Empirical Ecclesiology.

We repeat, finally, the title of this whole chapter, in order to draw together briefly some theoretical threads into a tentative synthesis. Its status is purely experimental, but it

may form a fitting end to a thesis which in its very nature cannot be rounded off in an altogether neat and conclusive way.

We have repeatedly characterized the Church as a social reality in terms of two axes of variation. One represents the scale and shape of its social presence, and moves between the poles of the centralised and highly visible institution and a less well-defined local dispersion of Christian influence. The other represents the mode and principle of the Church's activity, moving between the poles of legitimation, as guarantor of order and stability, and criticism, as bearer of the vision of radical alternatives.

Plotting together these two axes of variation produces four "ideal types" of Church presence in society. Each of these could be pushed to an extreme at which the Church would cease, within the terms of this "empirical ecclesiology", to be "church" at all. But a proper balance and creative tension between the four would constitute a flexible area of "optimum church presence and activity" in which the dialectical processes outlined in the thesis could operate.

The four types would be:

a. Centralized institutional presence operating to legitimize and guarantee social order and stability. At the extreme, the Church merely becomes the religious arm of the State and loses the ability to criticise, together with any contact with the interests and needs of the mass of the people.

b. Centralized institutional presence operating to criticise and offer alternatives. At the extreme, the Church may fall victim to the limit to any state's capacity for institutionalizing criticism of itself in this way. Further, as a centrally organized political pressure group or reform movement it may lose the ability to convey the Gospel to those more traditional and conservative than itself.

c. Localized dispersion operating to integrate and stabilize social order. At the extreme, the Church becomes the sacral guardian of the tribalism of a particular group, with consequent loss of the Gospel's cosmic dimensions and of the promise of a new human maturity.

d. Localized dispersion operating to criticize and offer alternatives. At the extreme, the Church devolves into the vehicle of a subversive revolutionary movement, but forfeits all hope of wielding influence within, rather than outside, the structures of power. Again, it risks having to leave large numbers of people outside the Gospel's scope.

The analysis embodied in these ideal types, rough and ready though they are, summarizes the range of considerations governing the effective concrete expression of Christian faith under contemporary social and cultural conditions, which it was the aim of Christian Radicalism to facilitate. This aim could not be achieved with the radicals' prior commitments to the notion of religionlessness, the unqualified theological affirmation of secularity and the ideal of a thoroughly free and undogmatic faith in no way bound to tradition. These commitments, we have argued at length, were sociologically unrealistic.

But the aim remains. The Church still possesses in its tradition and its institutional presence the resources essential to achieving it. Further, contemporary social realities suggest a rich vein of continued interest in the Christian religion, despite the implicit or confused form in which this is often brought to light. If the Church can seize upon the questions we have discussed with the sense of urgency and the commitment to involving the people at a non-academic level which the Christian radicals displayed, together with the sociological sophistication they lacked, it may yet be able to tap the resources for renewal which still lie dormant in the culture and in its own life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS CONSULTED.

- ACQUAVIVA, SABINO S. *The Decline of the Sacred in Industrial Society*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1979.
- ADCOCK, A.C. Religion in a Modern Society. *Hibbert Journal*, vol.64, 1966:141-5.
- ADOLFS, ROBERT. *The Grave of God*. London: Burns and Oates, 1967.
- ADORNO, THEODOR W. 'Cultural Criticism and Society' and 'The Sociology of Knowledge and its Consciousness', in Adorno T.W., *Prisms*. London: Neville Spearman, 1967:19-49.
- ALLEN, J.L. Continuity and Change. *Interpretation*, vol.22, 1968:461-74.
- ALTIZER, THOMAS J.J. *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*. London: Collins, 1967.
- 'America and the Future of Theology', in eds. Altizer T.J.J. and W.Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968(a):24-35.
 - 'The Sacred and the Profane: a Dialectical Understanding of Christianity', in *ibid*(b):142-56.
 - 'Theology and the Death of God', in *ibid*(c):102-17.
 - 'Word and History', in *ibid*(d):124-41.
- ANDERSON, DIGBY S. 'Eating Sheppard's Pie: Hints on Reading the Sociological Gospel', in ed. Anderson D. *The Kindness That Kills*. London: SPCK, 1984:157-70.
- ANDERSON, RAY S. *Historical Transcendence and the Reality of God*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975.
- ARGYLE, MICHAEL. *Religious Behaviour*. London: RKP, 1959.
- ARMSTRONG, C.E. Christianity without Religion. *Church Quarterly Review*, vol.165, 1964:175-84.
- ATTFIELD, ROBIN. *God and the Secular*. Cardiff: University College Press, 1978.
- BAELZ, PETER. 'Is God Real?' in *Faith, Fact and Fantasy*. London: Collins, 1964:45-78.
- *Ethics and Belief*. London: Sheldon Press, 1977.
- BALLARD, PAUL H. *Ministry, Mission and the Social Sciences*. *Baptist Quarterly*, vol.26, 1975:98-105.
- The Question of Church Growth. *Baptist Quarterly*, vol.28, 1980:361-72.
- BANKS, J.A. 'The Sociology of Religion in England', in ed. Brothers J. *Readings in the Sociology of Religion*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1967:61-8.
- BARR, JAMES. 'The Problem of Fundamentalism Today', in Barr J. *Explorations in Theology 7*. London: SCM, 1980:65-90.
- BARRY, F.R. *Christian Ethics and Secular Society*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966.
- *Secular and Supernatural*. London: SCM, 1969.
- BARTH, KARL. 'The Church: the Living Congregation of the Living Lord Jesus Christ', in Barth K. *God Here and Now*. London: RKP, 1964:61-85.

- BAUM, GREGORY. *Religion and Alientation: a Theological Reading of Sociology*. New York: Paulist Press, 1975.
- BECKER, HOWARD. 'Sacred and Secular Societies', in Becker H. *Through Values to Social Interpretation*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1968:248-80.
- BEESON, TREVOR. *The Church of England in Crisis*. London: Davis-Poynter, 1973.
- BELL, DANIEL. *Religion in the Sixties*. *Social Research*, vol.38, 1971:447-97.
- *The Return of the Sacred? British Journal of Sociology*, vol.28, 1977:419-49.
- BELLAH, ROBERT. 'The Sociology of Religion', in *Beyond Belief*. New York: Harper and Row, 1970(a):3-19.
- 'Religious Evolution', in *ibid(b)*:20-52..
- BENTLEY, JAMES. *Cry God for England*. London: Bowerdean Press, 1978.
- BERGER, PETER L. *The Precarious Vision*. New York: Doubleday, 1961.
- 'The Social Character of the Question Concerning Jesus Christ: Sociology and Ecclesiology', in ed. Marty M. *The Place of Bonhoeffer*. London: SCM, 1963:51-80.
 - *Invitation to Sociology: a Humanist Perspective*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966.
 - *A Sociological View of the Secularization of Theology*. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol.6, 1967:3-16.
 - *A Rumour of Angels*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971.
 - *The Social Reality of Religion*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973.
 - *Second Thoughts on Substantive versus Functional Definitions of Religion*. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol.13, 1974:125-33.
 - *The Heretical Imperative*. London: Collins, 1980.
- BERGER, PETER L. and BRIGITTE BERGER. *Sociology: a Biographical Approach*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976.
- BERGER, PETER L. and LUCKMANN, THOMAS. *Sociology of Religion and Sociology of Knowledge*. *Sociology and Social Research*, vol.47, 1963:417-27.
- *The Social Construction of Reality*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967.
- BERRY, DAVID. *Central Ideas in Sociology*. London: Constable, 1974.
- BETHGE, EBERHARD. 'Bonhoeffer's Life and Theology', in Smith, R.Gregor, ed., *World Come of Age*. London: Collins, 1967:22-88.
- BILLINGTON, RAY. *The Coming Non-Church*. *New Christian*, June 1966.
- BIRNBAUM, NORMAN. *La Sociologie de la Religion en Grande Bretagne*. *Archives de la Sociologie des Religions*, vol.1, 1956/2:3-16.

- BLACKHAM, H.J. Religion in a Modern Society. London: Constable, 1966.
- BLAMIRES, HARRY. The Christian Mind. London: SPCK, 1963.
- BLISS, KATHLEEN. We the People. London: SCM, 1963.
- BOCOCK, ROBERT J. Ritual: Civic and Religious. *British Journal of Sociology*, vol.21, 1970:285-95.
- BOLGAR, R.R. The Near Christian. *Theology*, July 1967:291-8.
- BONHOEFFER, DIETRICH. Letters and Papers from Prison. London: SCM, 1953.
- Sanctorum Communio. London: SCM, 1963. (orig. pub. 1927.)
- BOOBYER, G.H. Signs of the Ecclesiastical Times. *Expository Times*, vol. 74, 1963:328-30.
- BOULARD, FERNAND. An Introduction to Religious Sociology. London: DLT, 1960.
- BOWDEN, JOHN. Voices in the Wilderness. London: SCM, 1977.
- BOWKER, JOHN. The Sense of God. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.
- BROTHERS, JOAN. Recent Developments in the Sociology of Religion in England and Wales. *Social Compass*, vol.11, 1963:13-19.
- BROWN, FRED. Secular Evangelism. London: SCM, 1970.
- Living Before You Die. London: SCM, 1973.
- BRUNNER, EMIL. The Misunderstanding of the Church. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953.
- BUDD, SUSAN. Sociologists and Religion. London: Macmillan, 1973.
- Varieties of Unbelief. London: Heinemann, 1977.
- BULTMANN, RUDOLF. 'The Idea of God and Modern Man', in ed. Gregor Smith R. World Come of Age. London: Collins, 1967:256-73.
- van BUREN, PAUL M. The Secular Meaning of the Gospel. London: SCM, 1963.
- 'What do we Mean by an "Empirical Investigation of the Church"?' in Theological Explorations. London: SCM, 1968(a):43-60.
 - 'Is Transcendence the Word we Want?' in *ibid*(b):161-81.
- BYERS, CHRISTOPHER. Secularization and the Parochial Machine. *Prism*, February 1964.
- CAIRNS, DAVID. The Thought of Peter Berger. *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol.27, 1974:181-97.
- CALLAHAN, DANIEL ed. The Secular City Debate. New York: Macmillan, 1966.
- CAMPBELL, COLIN. 'Humanism in Britain: The Formation of a Secular Value-Oriented Movement', in ed. Martin D. A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain 2. London: SCM, 1969:157-72.
- CARRIER, H. The Sociology of Religious Belonging. London: DLT, 1964.
- CASSERLEY, J.V.L. The Church Today and Tomorrow. London: SPCK, 1965.
- CLARK, DAVID. Between Pulpit and Pew. Cambridge: CUP, 1982.
- CLEMENTS, KEVIN W. God at Work in the World: Old Liberal and New Secular Theology. *Baptist Quarterly*, vol.24, 1972:345-60.

- COGLEY, JOHN. *Religion in a Secular Age*. London: Pall Mall Press, 1968.
- COLEMAN, J.A. *The Situation for Modern Faith*. *Theological Studies*, vol.39, 1978:601-32.
- COOK, DAVID. *The Moral Maze*. London: SPCK, 1983.
- COOPER, JOHN CHARLES. *The Roots of the Radical Theology*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968.
- COX, HARVEY. 'Afterword', in ed. Callahan D. *The Secular City Debate*. New York: Macmillan, 1966:179-203.
- 'The Death of God and the Future of Theology', in eds. Marty M. and D.G.Peerman, *New Theology* no.4. New York: Macmillan, 1967:243-53.
 - *The Secular City*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968.
 - *God's Revolution and Man's Responsibility*. London: SCM, 1969.
- COX, J. *Secularization and Social History*. *Theology*, vol.78, 1975:90-99.
- CUPITT, DON. *What is the Gospel?* *Theology*, vol.67, 1964:343-7.
- *Christian Existence in a Pluralist Society*. *Theology*, vol.77, 1974:451-9.
- DAVIS, CHARLES. *God's Grace in History*. London: Collins, 1966.
- *The Church and the Churches*. *New Christian*, 1968.
 - *Theology and Political Society*. Cambridge: CUP, 1980.
- DAWSON, A. *Sociology of Religion: Some Preliminary Philosophical Considerations*. *Church Quarterly Review*, vol.169, 1968:76-86.
- DEMANT, V.A. *Christian Polity*. London: Faber, 1936.
- DOBBELAERE, KAREL. *Secularization: a Multidimensional Concept*. *Current Sociology*, vol.29, no.2, 1981.
- DOBBELAERE, KAREL and LAUWERS, JAN. *Definitions of Religion: a Sociological Critique*. *Social Compass*, vol.20, 1973.
- DOUGLAS, MARY. *Natural Symbols*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970.
- 'Heathen Darkness, Modern Piety' in Douglas M. *Implicit Meanings*. London: RKP, 1975:73-82.
- DURKHEIM, EMILE. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. London: RKP, 1915.
- *The Rules of Sociological Method*. Chicago: University Press, 1938.
- EDWARDS, DAVID L. *A New Reformation?* *London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, 1964:257-66.
- *The Future of the Church of England*. *Modern Churchman*, New Series vol.13, 1969:130-44.
 - *Religion and Change*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974.
- EDWARDS, DAVID L. and JOHN A.T.ROBINSON, eds. *The Honest to God Debate*. London: SCM, 1963.
- EHRlich, R.J. *Some Observations on the 'New Theology' and on Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his Ecclesiology*. *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol.22, 1969:30-59.

- ELIADE, MIRCEA. *Images and Symbols*. London: Harvill Press, 1961.
- ELIOT, T.S. *The Idea of a Christian Society*. London: Faber, 1936.
- FALLDING, HAROLD. *The Sociology of Religion*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill, 1974.
- FENN, RICHARD K. *The Secularization of Values*. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol.8, 1969:112-24.
- *Liturgies and Trials*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1982.
- FERRIS, PAUL. *The Church of England*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964.
- FICHTER, JOSEPH. *Social Relations in the Urban Parish*. Chicago: University Press, 1954.
- FIELDING CLARKE, O. *For Christ's Sake*. Wallington: Religious Education Press, 1963.
- FLETCHER, JOSEPH. *Situation Ethics*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966.
- FORSTER, PETER. *Secularization in the English Context*. *Sociological Review*, New Series vol.20, 1972.
- FURLONG, MONICA. *With Love to the Church*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965.
- GALLOWAY, ALLAN D. *Faith in a Changing Culture*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1967.
- GARDNER, E.C. *Religious Pluralism and the Churches*. *Interpretation*, vol.19, 1965:418-34.
- GEERTZ, CLIFFORD. 'Religion as a Cultural System', in ed. Banton M. *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*. London: Tavistock, 1966:1-46.
- GIBBARD, MARK. *Evangelism in a Secular Age: a Personal Comment*. *Ecumenical Review*, vol.21, 1969:226-37.
- GILBERT, ALAN D. *The Making of Post-Christian Britain*. London: Longmans, 1980.
- GILKEY, LANGDON. *Naming the Whirlwind: the Renewal of God-Language*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969(a).
- 'Unbelief and the Secular Spirit', in ed. Christopher F. Mooney, *The Presence and Absence of God*. New York: Fordham, 1969(b):50-68.
 - *Religion and the Scientific Future*. London: SCM, 1970.
- GILL, ROBIN. *A New Approach to Religions?* *Philosophical Studies*, vol.23, 1975(a):117-28.
- *The Social Context of Theology*. London: Mowbrays, 1975(b).
 - *Theology and Social Structure*. London: Mowbrays, 1978.
 - 'From Sociology to Theology', in eds. Martin D., J.O.Mills and W.S.F.Pickering, *Sociology and Theology: Alliance and Conflict*. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980:102-19.
 - *Prophecy and Praxis*. London: Marshalls, 1981.
 - *Church and Nation in a Secular Age*. *Theology*, vol.87, 1984:243-50.

- GLASNER, PETER. 'Secularization: its Limits and Usefulness in Sociology', in ed. Mitton C.L. *The Social Sciences and the Churches*. Edinburgh: T.& T.Clark, 1972:246-57.
- *The Sociology of Secularization*. London: RKP, 1977.
- GLOCK, CHARLES Y. and RODNEY STARK. *Religion and Society in Tension*. Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1965.
- GLOVER, W.B. Christian Origins of Modern Secular Culture. *Religion in Life*, vol.32, 1963:438-53.
- GOODE, ERIC. Class Styles of Religious Sociation. *British Journal of Sociology*, vol.19, 1968:1-16.
- GOODY, J. Religion and Ritual: the Definitional Problem. *British Journal of Sociology*, vol.12, 1961:143-58.
- GREELEY, ANDREW. Superstition, Ecstasy and Tribal Consciousness. *Social Research*, vol.37, 1970:203-11.
- GREELEY, ANDREW et al. Research and Debate: Theology and the Social Sciences. *Social Compass*, vol.17, 1970.
- GRUMELLI, ANTONIO. 'Secularization: Between Belief and Unbelief', in eds. Grumelli A. and R.Caporale, *The Culture of Unbelief*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971:77-90.
- GRUNDY, MALCOLM. The Death of Secular Man? *Theology*, vol.82, 1979:349-53.
- GUINNESS, OS. *The Dust of Death*. London: IVP, 1973.
- *Towards a Reappraisal of Christian Apologetics: P.L.Berger's Sociology of Knowledge as the Sociological Prolegomenon to Christian Apologetics*. Unpublished D.Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1981.
 - *The Gravedigger File*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982.
- GUSTAFSON, P. A Restatement of Troeltsch's Church-Sect Typology. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol.6, 1967:64-68.
- HABGOOD, JOHN S. Directions for the Church of England. *Theology*, vol.79, 1976:132-8.
- *Church and Nation in a Secular Age*. London: DLT, 1983.
- HAMILTON, KENNETH. *What's New in Religion?* Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1966(a).
- *God is Dead: the Anatomy of a Slogan*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966(b).
- HAMILTON, WILLIAM. A Secular Theology for a World Come of Age. *Theology Today*, vol.18, 1962:435-59.
- *The New Essence of Christianity*. London: DLT, 1966.
 - 'American Theology, Radicalism and the Death of God', in eds. Altizer T.J.J. and W. Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968(a):19-23.
 - 'The Death of God Theologies Today', in *ibid*(b):36-62.
 - 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer', in *ibid*(c):118-23.
 - 'Thursday's Child', in *ibid*(d):95-101.

- HAMMERSLEY, J. Christians in the World. *New Society*, 24.8.67:254-5.
- HAMNETT, IAN. Sociology of Religion and Sociology of Error. *Religion*, vol.3, 1974.
- HARGROVE, BARBARA. Sociology of Religion: Classical and Contemporary Approaches. Arlington Heights: AHM, 1979.
- HARNED, DAVID B. 'Secularization': Plight, Promise or Nonsense? *Virginia Quarterly Review*, vol.46, Winter 1970:61-74.
- HASENHUETTL, GOTTHOLD. Church and Institution. *Concilium*, vol.10, 1974/1:11-21.
- HERBERG, WILL. 'Religion in a Secularized Society', in ed. Brothers J. Readings in the Sociology of Religion. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1967:201-16.
- van den HEUVEL, ALBERT. The Humiliation of the Church. London: SCM, 1967.
- HILL, MICHAEL. A Sociology of Religion. London: Heinemann, 1973.
- HOLLAND, J.A.B. The Debate about Honest to God. *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol.17, 1964:257-78.
- HOLLOWAY, RICHARD. Let God Arise. London: Mowbrays, 1972.
- HORDERN, WILLIAM. Introduction to Theology. London: Lutterworth, 1968.
- HORTON, ROBIN. A Definition of Religion and Its Uses. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol.90, 1960:201-26.
- HOMAN, ROGER. Theology and Sociology: a Plea for Sociological Freedom. *Theology*, vol.84, 1981:328-39.
- HUNT, GILES. The Church: Two Points of View. *Theology*, vol.83, 1980:257-62.
- JACKSON, MICHAEL J. The Rural Church and the Sociology of Religion. *Church Quarterly Review*, vol.164, 1963:94-102.
- The Sociology of Religion. London: Batsford: 1974.
- JACOBSON, N.P. and W.E.WINN. A New Theology for a New Missiology. *Theology Today*, vol.20, 1963:43-52.
- JAMES, WILLIAM. The Varieties of Religious Experience. London: Longmans Green & Co., 1945 (orig. pub. 1902).
- JARRETT-KERR, MARTIN. The Secular Promise. London: SCM, 1964.
- JEFFREY, R. No Frontier. *Frontier*, Winter 1967.
- JENKINS, DANIEL. Beyond Religion. London: SCM, 1962.
- The British: Their Identity and Their Religion. London: SCM, 1975.
- JENKINS, DAVID E. Guide to the Debate about God. London: Lutterworth, 1966.
- Swinging Church Strikes a False Note. *The Times*, 11.2.67 (a).
- The Glory of Man. London: SCM, 1967 (b).
- Living with Questions. London: SCM, 1969.

- The Impossibility and Necessity of the Church.
Crucible, July-September 1974:8-12.
- The Contradiction of Christianity. London: SCM, 1976.
- JONES, R.G. Towards a New Theology of Mission? *London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, 1967:53-63.
- KAESEMANN, ERNST. Jesus Means Freedom. London: SCM, 1969.
- KAUFMAN, GORDON D. 'On the Meaning of "God": Transcendence Without Mythology,' in eds. Marty, M. and D.G.Peerman, *New Theology*, vol.4. New York: Macmillan, 1967:69-98.
- KAUFMANN, FRANZ-XAVER. The Church as a Religious Organization. *Concilium*, vol.10, 1974/1:70-82.
- KEE, ALISTAIR. The Way of Transcendence. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971.
- From Secular City to People's Religion. *New Blackfriars*, vol.56, 1975:60-68.
- KERR, FERGUS. The Church as Social Criticism. *Frontier*, Winter 1968.
- KING, ROBERT H. The Meaning of God. London: SCM, 1974.
- KIRBY, P. Pointers Towards a Popular Church in Britain. *New Blackfriars*, vol.63, 1982:182-92.
- Resolutions and Reports of the LAMBETH CONFERENCE, 1968. London: SPCK, 1968.
- LASH, NICHOLAS. Faith and the Secular. *Month*, vol.6, 1973:403-8.
- LEE, PHILIP J. Whose City? *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol.19, 1966:328-40.
- van LEEUWEN, AREND T. Christianity in World History. London: Edinburgh House Press, 1964.
- LENSKI, GERHARD. The Religious Factor. New York: Doubleday, 1963.
- LINDARS, BARNABAS. The Challenge of the Secular World View. *Theology*, vol.66, 1963:321-5.
- LINDBECK, GEORGE A. 'The Sectarian Future of the Church', in ed. Whelan J.P., *The God Experience*. New York: Newman Press, 1971.
- The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age. London: SPCK, 1984.
- LING, TREVOR. A Religionless Future? *Church Quarterly Review*, vol.164, 1963:199-206.
- LLOYD, ROGER. The Ferment in the Church. London: SCM, 1964.
- LOEN, ARNOLD. Secularization: Science Without God? London: SCM, 1967.
- LONG, EUGENE T. ed. God, Secularization and History: Essays in Memory of Ronald Gregor Smith. University of South Carolina Press, 1974.
- LUCKMANN, THOMAS. The Invisible Religion. New York: Macmillan, 1967.
- 'Belief, Unbelief and Religion', in eds. Grumelli A. and R.Caporale, *The Culture of Unbelief*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971:21-38.
- LYNCH, WILLIAM F. Towards a Theology of the Secular. *Thought*, vol.41, 1966:349-65.

- LYON, DAVID. Understanding Secularization. *Third Way*, July/August 1984.
- McBRIEN, RICHARD P. The Church in the Thought of Bishop John Robinson. London: SCM, 1966.
- Do We Need the Church? London: Collins, 1969.
- McCAFFREY, PETER. Secularization and Atheism. *Month*, vol.1, 1970:159-69.
- McGUIRE, MEREDITH B. Religion: the Social Context. New York: Wadsworth, 1982.
- MacINNES, COLIN. A Godless Nation? *New Society*, vol.48, 29.8.63:25.
- MacINTYRE, ALASDAIR. Secularization and Moral Change. London: OUP, 1967 (a).
- The Well-Dressed Theologian. *Encounter*, vol.28, March 1967 (b):76-8.
 - Secularization. *The Listener*, vol.79, 1968:193-5.
- McKANE, WILLIAM. 'Tradition as a Theological Concept', in ed. Long E.T. *God, Secularization and History*. University of S.Carolina Press, 1974:44-59.
- MACQUARRIE, JOHN. God and Secularity. London: Lutterworth, 1968.
- MALLARD, W. Secularist and Traditionalist. *Religion in Life*, vol.42, 1973:496-507.
- MANNHEIM, KARL. *Diagnosis Of Our Time*. London: RKP, 1943.
- *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: RKP, 1952.
- MARK, JAMES. Bonhoeffer and Man's Coming of Age. *Prism*, Jan.-Feb. 1962.
- 'Crisis for Theology' and 'The Everlasting Gospel', in *The Death of the Church*, papers given to the SCM Conference, 28.12.63-2.1.64 (privately circulated):13-22, 32-44.
- MARTIN, BERNICE. *A Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1981.
- MARTIN, DAVID A. The Denomination. *British Journal of Sociology*, vol.13, 1962:1-14.
- 'Institutional Religion and "Coming of Age"', in *The Death of the Church*, SCM 1964:45-51.
 - The Sociology of Religion: a Case of Status Deprivation. *British Journal of Sociology*, vol.17, 1966(a):353-9.
 - The Unknown Gods of the English. *The Listener*, vol.75, 1966(b):677-9.
 - *A Sociology of English Religion*. London: SCM, 1967.
 - *The Religious and the Secular*. London: RKP, 1969.
 - The Problem of Secularization. *Encounter*, vol.36, April 1971:72-9.
 - 'Church, Denomination and Society' in ed. Hill M. *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain 5*. London: SCM, 1972.
 - The Secularization Question. *Theology*, vol.76, 1973:81-7.
 - The Dilemmas of Contemporary Religion. Oxford: Blackwell, 1978 (a).

- LYON, DAVID. Understanding Secularization. *Third Way*, July/August 1984.
- McBRIEN, RICHARD P. The Church in the Thought of Bishop John Robinson. London: SCM, 1966.
- Do We Need the Church? London: Collins, 1969.
- McCAFFREY, PETER. Secularization and Atheism. *Month*, vol.1, 1970:159-69.
- McGUIRE, MEREDITH B. Religion: the Social Context. New York: Wadsworth, 1982.
- MacINNES, COLIN. A Godless Nation? *New Society*, vol.48, 29.8.63:25.
- MacINTYRE, ALASDAIR. Secularization and Moral Change. London : OUP, 1967 (a).
- The Well-Dressed Theologian. *Encounter*, vol.28, March 1967 (b):76-8.
 - Secularization. *The Listener*, vol.79, 1968:193-5.
- McKANE, WILLIAM. 'Tradition as a Theological Concept', in ed. Long E.T. God, Secularization and History. University of S.Carolina Press, 1974:44-59.
- MACQUARRIE, JOHN. God and Secularity. London: Lutterworth, 1968.
- MALLARD, W. Secularist and Traditionalist. *Religion in Life*, vol.42, 1973:496-507.
- MANNHEIM, KARL. Diagnosis Of Our Time. London: RKP. 1943.
- Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge. London: RKP, 1952.
- MARK, JAMES. Bonhoeffer and Man's Coming of Age. *Prism*, Jan.-Feb. 1962.
- 'Crisis for Theology' and 'The Everlasting Gospel', in The Death of the Church, papers given to the SCM Conference, 28.12.63-2.1.64 (privately circulated):13-22, 32-44.
- MARTIN, BERNICE. A Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change. Oxford: Blackwell, 1981.
- MARTIN, DAVID A. The Denomination. *British Journal of Sociology*, vol.13, 1962:1-14.
- 'Institutional Religion and "Coming of Age"', in The Death of the Church, SCM 1964:45-51.
 - The Sociology of Religion: a Case of Status Deprivation. *British Journal of Sociology*, vol.17, 1966(a):353-9.
 - The Unknown Gods of the English. *The Listener*, vol.75, 1966(b):677-9.
 - A Sociology of English Religion. London: SCM, 1967.
 - The Religious and the Secular. London: RKP, 1969.
 - The Problem of Secularization. *Encounter*, vol.36, April 1971:72-9.
 - 'Church, Denomination and Society' in ed. Hill M. A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain 5. London: SCM, 1972.
 - The Secularization Question. *Theology*, vol.76, 1973:81-7.
 - The Dilemmas of Contemporary Religion. Oxford: Blackwell, 1978 (a).

- A General Theory of Secularization. Oxford: Blackwell, 1978 (b).
 - The Breaking of the Image. Oxford: Blackwell, 1980(a).
 - 'The Sociological Mode and the Theological Vocabulary', in eds. Martin D. et al. *Sociology and Theology: Alliance and Conflict*. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980(b):46-58.
 - 'Comparing Different Maps of the Same Ground', in ed. Peacocke A.R. *The Sciences and Theology in the Twentieth Century*. Stocksfield: Oriel Press, 1981(a):229-40.
 - 'Personal Identity and a Changed Church', in eds. Martin D. and P. Mullen, *No Alternative*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1981(b):12-22.
 - Revived Dogma and New Cult. *Daedalus*, vol.111, 1982:53-71.
 - What Mean These Stones? Tradition and the National Church. *Theology*, vol.86, 1983:171-9.
 - Conservation and Vision: The Nature of Christian Education. *Faith and Worship*, no.16, Summer 1984(a):44-54.
 - 'The Church of England: from Established Church to Secular Lobby', in ed. Anderson D. *The Kindness that Kills*. London: SPCK, 1984(b):134-42.
 - Religious Vision and Political Reality. Centre for the Study of Religion and Society: University of Kent at Canterbury, Pamphlet no.7, 1985.
- MARTY, MARTIN. 'Problems and Possibilities in Bonhoeffer's Thought', in ed. Marty M. *The Place of Bonhoeffer*. London: SCM, 1963:9-24.
- The Modern Schism: Three Paths to the Secular. London: SCM, 1969.
- MASCALL, ERIC L. *The Secularization of Christianity*. London: DLT, 1965.
- Reflections on the Honest to God Debate. *Thought*, vol.41, 1966:181-97.
 - Theology and the Future. London: DLT, 1968.
- MATHEWS, S. The Social Origin of Theology. *American Journal of Sociology*, vol.18, 1912.
- MATTHES, JOACHIM. *The Mission of the Congregation*. *Frontier*, Summer 1966.
- MEHTA, VED. *The New Theologian*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966.
- MENNELL, STEPHEN. *Sociological Theory: Uses and Unities*. Sunbury: Nelson, 1974.
- MENSCHING, GUSTAV. *Soziologie der Religion*. Bonn: Ludwig Roehrscheid, 1947.
- MERTON, ROBERT K. 'Manifest and Latent Functions', in *Social Theory and Social Structure*. New York: Free Press, 1968:73-138.
- METZ, JOHANN B. *Theology of the World*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1969.
- MEYNELL, HUGO. Bread and Stones. *Frontier*, Autumn 1967.
- MICHALSON, CARL. *The Rationality of Faith*. London: SCM, 1964.

- MILLER, WILLIAM R. Is the Church Obsolete? The Crisis of Religion in a Secular Age. *American Scholar*, vol.36, 1967:221-36.
- MILLS, C.WRIGHT. *The Sociological Imagination*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970.
- MILLS, J.ORME. 'Introduction: Of Two Minds', in eds. Martin D., J.O.Mills and W.S.F.Pickering, *Sociology and Theology: Alliance and Conflict*. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980:1-14.
- MINEAR, PAUL S. *Church Renewal and Social Renewal. Interpretation*, vol.19, 1965:3-15.
- MOL, HANS. *Identity and the Sacred*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1976.
- MOLTMANN, JUERGEN. *Theology of Hope*. London: SCM, 1967.
- 'The Future as a New Paradigm of Transcendence', in Moltmann J. *The Future of Creation*. London: SCM, 1979:1-17.
- MOORE, ROBERT. *Pitmen, Preachers and Politics*. Cambridge: CUP, 1974.
- MORRIS, LEON. *The Abolition of Religion*. London: IVF, 1964.
- MORRISON, JOHN M. *Honesty and God*. Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1966.
- MORTON, T.RALPH and MARK GIBBS. *God's Frozen People*. London: Collins, 1964.
- MUNBY, DENYS L. 'The Importance of Technical Competence', in ed. Paton D.M. *Essays in Anglican Self-criticism*. London, SCM: 1958:45-58.
- *The Idea of a Secular Society*. Oxford: OUP, 1963.
- MUNRO, ANDREW. *The Concept of the Wholly Other God and Secular Theologies*. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of St.Andrews, 1970.
- NEWBIGIN, LBSLIE. *Honest Religion for Secular Man*. London: SCM, 1966.
- *Recent Thinking on Christian Beliefs: Mission and Missions*. *Expository Times*, vol.88, 1977:260-64.
- NICHOLLS, WILLIAM. 'On Living in the Twentieth Century', in ed. Paton D.M. *Essays in Anglican Self-Criticism*. London:SCM, 1958:17-31.
- *The Death of God Theologies Today*. *Modern Churchman*, vol.10, 1967:201-20.
- NICOL, IAIN. 'History and Transcendence', in ed. Long E.T. *God, Secularization and History*. University of S.Carolina Press, 1974:76-91.
- NIEBUHR, H. RICHARD. *Christ and Culture*. London: Faber, 1952.
- *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*. Hamden, Connecticut: Shoestring, 1954.
- NISBET, ROBERT. *The Sociological Tradition*. London: Heinemann, 1967.
- NORMAN, EDWARD R. *The Church during the Last Twenty-five Years*. *Contemporary Review*, vol.230, 1977:225-30.
- *Christianity and the World Order*. London: OUP, 1979.
- O'DEA, THOMAS. *Five Dilemmas in the Institutionalization of Religion*. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol.1, 1961:32-9.

- The Sociology of Religion. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966.
 - Sociology and the Study of Religion. New York: Doubleday, 1970.
- OGDEN, SCHUBERT. The Reality of God and Other Essays. London: SCM, 1968.
- OGLETREE, THOMAS W. The Death of God Controversy. London: SCM, 1966.
- OLIVER, IVAN. Current Revivals of Interest in Religion. *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, vol.58, 1984:159-74.
- van den OUDENRIJN, FRANS. Kritische Theologie als Kritik der Theologie. Muenchen & Mainz: Kaiser-Gruenewald, 1972.
- PAGE, R.J. New Directions in Anglican Theology. London: Mowbrays, 1967.
- PANIKKAR, RAIMUNDO. Worship and Secular Man. London: DLT, 1973.
- PANNENBERG, WOLFHART. Theology and the Kingdom of God. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969.
- Signale der Transzendenz. *Evangelische Kommentare*, vol.7, 1974.
- PARSONS, TALCOTT. Essays in Sociological Theory. Glencoe: Free Press, 1954.
- 'Christianity and Modern Industrial Society', in ed. Tiryakian E. *Sociological Theory, Values and Socio-Cultural Change*. Glencoe: Free Press, 1963:33-70.
- PAUL, LESLIE. The Deployment and Payment of the Clergy. London: CIO, 1964.
- The Death and Resurrection of the Church. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968.
 - A Church by Daylight. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1973.
- PELZ, WERNER. On Being a Parable. *The Listener*, vol.10, 1963:541-2.
- PELZ, WERNER and LOTTE. God is No More. London: Victor Gollancz, 1963.
- van PEURSEN, CORNELIS. 'Man and Reality- the History of Human Thought', in eds. Bowden J. and J.Richmond, *A Reader in Contemporary Theology*. London: SCM, 1967.
- PFAUTZ, H. The Sociology of Secularization. *American Journal of Sociology*, vol.61, 1955:121-8.
- PHILLIPS, JOHN A. The Form of Christ in the World. London: Collins, 1968.
- PHIPPS, SIMON. God on Monday. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966.
- PICKEN, S.D.B. Conveying Theological Perspectives in a Secular Culture. *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol.27, 1974:385-401.
- PICKERING, WILLIAM S.F. 'Religion: a Leisure Time Pursuit', in ed. Martin D.A. *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*. London: SCM, 1968:77-93.

- POULAT, E. 'Religious Sociology and its Aims', in ed. Brothers J. Readings in the Sociology of Religion. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1967:151-66.
- PRATT, VERNON. Religion and Secularization. London: Macmillan, 1970.
- RADCLIFFE, TIMOTHY. 'Relativizing the Relativizers: A Theologian's Assessment of the Role of Sociological Explanation of Religious Phenomena and Theology Today', in eds. Martin D.A., J.O. Mills and W.S.F. Pickering, Sociology and Theology: Alliance and Conflict. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980:151-62.
- RADCLIFFE-BROWN, A.R. Religion and Society. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol.75, 1945:33-43.
- RAHNER, KARL. The Shape of the Church to Come. London: Catholic Book Club, 1974.
- RAMSEY, ARTHUR M. Sacred and Secular. London: Longmans, 1964.
- God, Christ and the World. London: SCM, 1969.
- RAMSEY, IAN T. Christian Discourse. London: OUP, 1965.
- RAMSEY, PAUL. Deeds and Rules in Christian Ethics. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1967.
- REED, BRUCE. The Dynamics of Religion. London: DLT, 1978.
- RHYMES, DOUGLAS. 'The Place of the Laity in the Parish', in Layman's Church. London: Lutterworth, 1963:23-41.
- RICHARD, ROBERT L. Secularization Theology. London: Burns and Oates, 1967.
- RICHARDSON, ALAN ed. Four Anchors from the Stern. London: SCM, 1964.
- Religion in Contemporary Debate. London: SCM, 1966.
- ROBERTS, RICHARD H. Spirit, Structure and Truth in the Church (as yet unpublished, University of Durham).
- ROBERTSON, ROLAND. The Sociological Interpretation of Religion. Oxford: Blackwell, 1970.
- Meaning and Change. Oxford: Blackwell, 1978.
- ROBINSON, JOHN A.T. On Being the Church in the World. London: SCM, 1960.
- Honest to God. London: SCM, 1963(a).
- 'The Ministry and the Laity', in Layman's Church. London: Lutterworth, 1963(b):9-22.
- On Being a Radical. *The Listener*, vol.69, 1963(c):334-5.
- The New Reformation? London: SCM, 1965.
- Exploration into God. London: SCM, 1967.
- The Roots of a Radical. London: SCM, 1980.
- RODD, CYRIL S. Some Aspects of the Sociology of Religion. *London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, 1967:128-37.
- ROSZAK, THEODOR. The Making of a Counter-Culture. London: Faber, 1970.
- RUETHER, ROSEMARY R. A Second Look at Secular Theology. *Journal of Religion*, vol.51, 1971:206-15.
- RYAN, COLUMBA. Religionless Christianity. *Blackfriars*, vol.45, 1964:242-57.

- SCHARF, BETTY. *The Sociological Study of Religion*. London: Hutchinson, 1970.
- SCHILLEBEECKX, EDWARD. Theological Reflections on Religious Sociological Interpretations of Modern 'Irreligion'. *Social Compass*, vol.10, 1963:257-84.
- Science and Speaking about God. *Theology*, vol.71,1968:256-67.
- SCHILLING, S. PAUL. *Contemporary Continental Theologians*. London: SCM, 1966.
- SCHREY, HEINZ-HORST. 'Luthers Lehre von den zwei Reichen und ihre Bedeutung fuer die Weltanschauungssituation der Gegenwart', in ed. Schrey H.H. *Reich Gottes und Welt*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969:101-4.
- 'Einfuehrung', in ed. Schrey H.H. *Saekularisierung*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981:1-50.
- SCOTT, THOMAS H. *The Nature of Christian Presence in a Secular Institution*. Unpublished B.Phil. Thesis: University of St.Andrews, 1978.
- SEGUNDO, JUAN LUIS. *The Liberation of Theology*. Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1977.
- SELLERS, J. Theological Belief and Sociological Enquiry. *Journal of Religion*, vol.53, 1973:228-38.
- SHEPPARD, DAVID. *Bias to the Poor*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983.
- SHINER, LARRY. *Toward a Theology of Secularization*. *Journal of Religion*, vol.45, 1965:279-95.
- The Concept of Secularization in Empirical Research. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol.6, 1967:407-20.
- SHINN, ROGER L. *Man: The New Humanism*. London: Lutterworth, 1968.
- SIEBERT, RUDOLF. Religion in the Perspective of Critical Sociology. *Concilium*, vol.10, 1974/1:156-69.
- SIMEY, T.S. The Church of England and English Society. *Social Compass*, vol.11, 1963:5-11.
- SISSONS, PETER. 'Concepts of Church Membership', in ed. Hill M. *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain 4*. London: SCM, 1971:62-83.
- 'The Sociological Definition of Religion', in ed. Mitton C.L. *The Social Sciences and the Churches*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1972:135-50.
- SLATER, PETER. *The Dynamics of Religion: Continuity and Change in Patterns of Faith*. London: SCM, 1979.
- SLATER, T. Modern Sociology. *Irish Theological Quarterly*, vol.6, 1911.
- SMART, NINIAN. *The Religious Experience of Mankind*. London: Collins, 1971.
- SMITH, JOHN E.A. *The Decline and Rise of Religion in Modern Society: a Cultural Approach*. Unpublished M.A.Thesis, Brunel University: 1981.
- SMITH, PETER. Post-Religious Churches. *RIBA Journal*, vol.81, 1974:12-17.

- SMITH, RONALD GREGOR. *The New Man*. London: SCM, 1956.
- *Secular Christianity*. London: Collins, 1966.
 - *The Free Man*. London: Collins, 1969.
 - *The Doctrine of God*. London: Collins, 1970.
- SPIRO, MELFORD E. 'Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation', in ed. Banton M. *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*. London: Tavistock, 1966:85-126.
- STANKS, T.D. *Secularization: Openness to God? Thought*, vol.44, 1969:185-200.
- STARK, RODNEY. *Class, Radicalism and Religious Involvement in Great Britain*. *American Sociological Review*, vol.29, 1964:698-706.
- STRAWSON, WILLIAM. *Teachers and the New Theology*. London: Epworth Press, 1969.
- SUMMERSCALES, W. *Authentic Secularity*. *Theology Today*, vol.20, 1963:329-38.
- SYKES, STEPHEN W. *The Integrity of Anglicanism*. London: Mowbrays, 1978.
- *The Identity of Christianity*. London: SPCK, 1984.
- TEMPLE, WILLIAM. *Christianity and Social Order*. London: SCM, 1976. (orig. pub. 1942.)
- THEISSEN, GERD. *On Having a Critical Faith*. London: SCM, 1979.
- THIELICKE, HELMUT. *The Trouble With the Church*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966.
- THISELTON, ANTHONY C. *Language, Liturgy and Meaning*. Bramcote: Grove Books, 1975.
- THOMAS, M.M. *Issues Concerning the Life and Work of the Church in a Revolutionary World*. *Ecumenical Review*, vol.20, 1968:410-19.
- THOMPSON, R.H.T. *The Church's Understanding of Itself*. London: SCM, 1957.
- THORNTON, MARTIN. *The Rock and the River*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965.
- THUNG, MARY A. *The Precarious Organization*. The Hague: Mouton, 1976.
- TOWLER, ROBERT. 'The Role of the Clergy Today', in ed. Mitton C.L. *The Social Sciences and the Churches*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1972:151-62.
- *Homo Religiosus*. London: Constable, 1974.
 - *The Diagnosis of Disorder*. *Times Literary Supplement*, vol.81, 1982:1045.
- TOWLER, ROBERT and AUDREY CHAMBERLAIN. 'Common Religion', in ed. Martin D.A. *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*. London: SCM, 1968:1-28.
- TOWLER, ROBERT and ANTHONY P.M.COXON. *The Fate of the Anglican Clergy*. London: MacMillan, 1979.
- FILLICH, PAUL. *The Shaking of the Foundations*. London: SCM, 1949.
- *The Religious Situation*. New York: Meridian, 1956. (orig. pub. 1932.)
 - *Dynamics of Faith*. New York: Harper and Row, 1957.

- TINSLEY E.J. ed. *Modern Theology*. London: Epworth Press, 1979.
- TOENNIES, FERDINAND. *Community and Association*. London: RKP, 1955 (orig. pub. 1887).
- TOMKINS, OLIVER. *A Time for Unity*. London: SCM, 1964.
- TROELTSCH, ERNST. *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*. New York. MacMillan, 1931. (orig. pub. 1912.)
- TURNER, BRYAN S. *Religion and Social Theory*. London: Heinemann, 1983.
- TURNER, VICTOR W. *The Ritual Process*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974.
- VIDLER, ALEC R. 'Holy Worldliness', in Vidler A.R. *Essays in Liberality*. London: SCM, 1956:95-112.
- 'Religion and the National Church', in ed. Vidler A. *Soundings*. London: SCM, 1962:239-64.
 - *Twentieth Century Defenders of the Faith*. London: SCM, 1965.
- VINCENT, JOHN J. *New Bottles or New Wine? London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, 1964:299-309.
- *Christ and Methodism: Towards a New Christianity for a New Age*. London: Epworth Press, 1965.
 - *Secular Christ*. London: Lutterworth, 1968.
 - *Starting All Over Again*. Geneva: WCC, 1981.
- WACH, JOACHIM. *Sociology of Religion*. Chicago: University Press, 1947.
- *Types of Religious Experience*. Chicago: University Press, 1951.
- WARD, CONOR K. *Priests and People*. Liverpool: University Press, 1961.
- WARD, KEITH. *The Concept of God*. London: Collins, 1977.
- WEBER, HANS-RUEDI. *God's Arithmetic*. *Frontier*, Winter 1963.
- WEBER, MAX. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1930. (orig. pub. 1904-5.)
- *The Sociology of Religion*. London: Methuen, 1965. (orig. pub. 1922.)
- von WEISZAEBCKER, C. *The Relevance of Science*. London: Collins, 1964.
- WHITLEY, OLIVER R. *Religious Behaviour*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964.
- WICKER, BRIAN. *Culture and Theology*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1966.
- WICKHAM, EDWARD R. *Church and People in an Industrial City*. London: Lutterworth, 1957.
- *Encounter With Modern Society*. London: Lutterworth, 1964.
 - 'What Should be the New Look?' in ed. Hunter L.S. *The English Church: a New Look*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966:144-67.
 - *Conversion in a Secular Age*. *Ecumenical Review*, vol.19, 1967:291-7.
- WIESER, T. *Evangelism and the Death of God*. *Ecumenical Review*, vol.20, 1968:138-45.