Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:

https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology

https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb

PayPal https://paypal.me/robbradshaw

A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jtvi-01.php

JOURNAL OF

THE TRANSACTIONS

OF

The Victoria Institute

OR

Philosophical Society of Great Britain

VOL. LXXXIV

1952

LONDON:

PUBLISHED BY
THE INSTITUTE, 21, LOWER BELGRAVE STREET, WESTMINSTER, S.W.1

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

907TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

HELD IN THE CAXTON HALL, WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, 18TH FEBRUARY, 1952.

REV. PROF. E. O. JAMES, M.A., D.LITT., PH.D., D.D., F.S.A., IN THE CHAIR.

THE AIMS AND SCOPE OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

BY THE VERY REV. W. R. MATTHEWS, K.C.V.O., D.D., D.LITT., DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S.

SYNOPSIS.

I. THE PRESENT POSITION OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION: its rejection from the side of Philosophy and from the side of Theology.

II. THE PROBLEMS OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION:

1. *Phenomenology.* Is there a dialectical development? Some reflections on this.
2. *Epistemology.* The nature of religious knowledge and the importance of Myth and Symbol.
3. *Metaphysical.* The "proofs" of Theism. Their general character.
4. *Cosmological.* The Relation of God to the World.

III. CONCLUSION: The special questions which arise and the contact of the Philosophy of Religion with Theology. A modest exhortation to Theologians and Philosophers.

I.

ONE who deals with the Philosophy of religion is confronted at the outset with the need to vindicate the real existence of his subject. No one, of course, could doubt that, in one sense, the philosophy of religion has a substantial being, for there are numerous massive volumes in which it is expounded, but, alas, these monuments of learning and ingenuity are no proof that the problems to which they are devoted are genuine problems, or that the purpose of their reflections is capable of fulfilment. After all, the books which have been produced on Astrology, if collected together, would fill a vast library, yet, for the most part, they are the products of illusion and concerned with questions which are either insoluble or unmeaning. Any

contribution which they have made to human knowledge has been fortuitous, the by-product of a futile quest.

A generation ago it would have been unnecessary to begin with an apology for the subject. Then the philosophy of religion held the field as the summit of religious and philosophical thought. It even threatened to push theology itself into the background and claimed to speak the final word on most of the controverted theses of the divine, nor was any philosophy considered to have said anything of permanent value unless it had dealt with the place of religion in the intellectual and spiritual life of man. Today the situation is radically different. From the side both of theology and of philosophy the attack comes, the one repudiating the assistance offered and the other excluding religion from the circle of philosophical topics. Any acquaintance with the history of thought will be sufficient to suggest that the present depreciation of the philosophical approach to religion is nothing more than a passing phase. Within Christianity, for example, there have been, from the beginning, two opposite views of the legitimacy of philosophy for the believer. St. Paul seems to be on both sides of this controversy—at least he provides memorable texts for either party. He has harsh words about " philosophy and vain deceit " and of the " wisdom of this world " which puffs up. But, on the other hand, he claims to speak a wisdom among those that are perfect and to have a *sophia* which unravels the mysteries of the world. In the famous passage in Romans where he asserts that " the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity " he provided the text on which the Scholastic philosophers are never tired of dwelling as the charter of their enterprise to found theology on a rational basis.

This bipolar relation to reason runs like a thread through the whole of Christian thought. The Greek Apologists were concerned to show that Christianity is the divine wisdom and they present it as the true philosophy. " Those who have lived lives with reason," says Justin Martyr, " are Christians even though they were accounted atheists, such as Socrates and Heraclitus." But the great Latin Apologist, Tertullian, takes the opposite view with his customary violence. " What has Athens to do with Jerusalem ? " he asks, " What agreement can there be between the Academy and the Church ? . . . *Nobis curiositate opus non est post Christum Jesum, nec inquisitione post evange-*

lium" (*De Praescript. Haer.* vii). This is a strain which we hear again even more stridently from Luther when he denounces reason as the "devil's whore." Nor of course is the assault from the side of philosophy a new thing. The sceptical tradition has a long history and it has always denied that there can be any rational account of religion, except in the sense that religion can be shown to be irrational. Hume's scepticism embraced the concepts of religion no less than those of science and, quite consistently, his works on religion are a *Natural History of Religion* and a *Dialogue*, the purpose of which is apparently to show the incapacity of reason to reach any conclusion at all on the ultimate reality. At the present moment both Tertullian and Hume, who have so often been refuted, are very much alive, and one is tempted to wonder if any point of view which has been stated by a sincere mind, either in theology or philosophy, is ever finally left behind. Sooner or later, in a slightly different form, it will be discovered again.

From the theological side the value, or even the possibility, of a philosophy of religion is called in question by the school of Neo-Protestants of which Karl Barth is the chief leader. This is not the place to give any account of Barth's system, which is worked out with immense learning and dialectical skill. It is enough to observe that he starts from the same position as Tertullian and Luther. The fact of revelation supersedes the labours of philosophy. Revelation cannot be submitted to the judgement of human reason; the word of God must not be made subservient to the thought of man. Moreover, so radical is the corruption of human nature that it is incapable of judgement on the truth of God. Revelation comes into history and not out of it. Our only recourse, and our only duty, is to listen to the word of God.

The rejection of all philosophical introduction to theology, which is based by Barth on the Bible, is based by an important group of philosophers on logic. The Logical Positivists are certainly in the tradition of David Hume, but they have gone one step further. Hume never explicitly denied that propositions of a religious kind such as "God exists" have a meaning, but this is precisely what the Logical Positivists deny. All, or at any rate most, of the statements which are made in the sphere of religion are neither true nor false; they are devoid of sense, they are "nonsense" propositions. Here again we may not linger on this topic or discuss the special doctrine of verifica-

tion on which this drastic criticism depends. It is sufficient to observe that the theory is the latest instance of the purely empirical approach to the problem of knowledge and one more evidence of the fact that empiricism, when taken in earnest, leads to an unlimited scepticism.

It is surely a strange thing to find that two tendencies of thought, which start from so widely different premises and are inspired by such opposite motives, should converge, but it is plain that both alike would restrict the area of the reason to very confined limits. On grounds which are as unlike as they could very well be they dismiss the constructive power of thought as illusory and scoff at the efforts of the human mind to know reality. This would be a disastrous conclusion for the study of the philosophy of religion, which is the attempt to understand the subject matter of religion by means of rational enquiry. Nor, I think, could anyone who has any acquaintance with history regard the result as a cheerful one. It would be a depressing thought that all the wealth of intelligence, and all the ardour, which have been devoted to the question "*An Deus sit*" have been either nothing but a piling up of error and sinful pride or might as well have been given to the discussion of whether a Jabberwock is a Boojum.

II

We will not now undertake the long and difficult task of a defensive war on two fronts by a direct refutation of the theological and logical theories which seem to question the possibility of any philosophy of religion. It will be more useful to approach the problem in a positive manner and to give an outline of the form which a modern philosophy of religion must take. I shall, therefore, proceed to state the topics with which, in my view, such an enquiry would be bound to deal and the questions which arise under each. It may be that one result of a survey of the ground will be to show that some at least of the problems deserve to be considered even by those who take a sceptical view of the limitations of human intelligence.

1. The first section of a modern philosophy of religion must be devoted to Phenomenology—that is to an attempt to reach a rational understanding of the object with which we are dealing. Religion, beyond question, exists: it exists, so to speak, in two modes—as a fact of history and as a kind of experience of many

individuals. It has an objective existence in the development of human culture and a subjective existence as a state of mind with which some human beings, if not all, are acquainted. The chief aim of a phenomenological enquiry is to consider the phenomena with a view to discovering what kind of coherence or structure, if any, they manifest as a whole. Though this research is, of course, closely related with the science of comparative religions and with the psychology of religion and must make all possible use of their conclusions, it is not identical with them. It seeks an interpretation of them which will enable us to relate the phenomena with the rest of our experience and perhaps disclose their significance for our understanding of the world. We might compare this section of the philosophy of religion with the philosophy of history. Evidently there could be no philosophy of history which was not based upon the researches of historians, but the philosophy of history is not history.

There is perhaps another analogy: just as the historians are apt to regard the philosophy of history with suspicion, so the students of comparative religion and the psychologists not infrequently suppose that their sciences are capable of dealing with all the problems that arise. The answer to both is the same. There are questions raised by history which history cannot answer and there are questions raised by the scientific investigations of religious phenomena which cannot be answered by the methods of science.

It is hardly necessary to observe that this phenomenological department of the Philosophy of Religion has increased in scope and importance in modern times, owing to the immense growth of our knowledge of the religions of the world. Though the great masters of old times were not ignorant of the existence of other religions than their own—the Scholastic philosophers of the Middle Ages, for example, could never forget the teaching of the false prophet Mohammed or the pagan background of Aristotle—yet they were under no constraint to find any coherent structure or significance in a long historical development which embraced all races of mankind.

At the outset of our phenomenological enquiry we encounter the troublesome question of the definition of religion. It may well seem necessary that, in surveying the phenomena of religion, we should have some criterion, such as would be supplied by a definition, to distinguish religious phenomena from other kinds.

But it is notorious that no definition among the hundreds proposed has met general acceptance and the whole frontier of religion is as vague as were the present frontiers of Central Europe at the end of the war. Certainly this is inconvenient, and it is worse than inconvenient, for it leaves open more than one important question, e.g. that of the relation between religion and magic, but we ought not to be surprised at this situation, for it obtains in all the universal and characteristic modes of human experience. Thus the philistines have found reason for satire in the fact that philosophers are always discussing the nature of philosophy and thereby laying themselves open to the comment that it is no wonder they make so little progress when they are uncertain what they would be at. The truth is, of course, that the nature, the scope and the method of philosophy are the problem of philosophy itself; when we have taken up our stand on them we have already determined our answer to most of the other questions that arise. In the same way, the real nature of religion is the central problem of the philosophy of religion, and when we have solved it, we shall have solved, in principle, all the rest. We must be content, therefore, in the mean time with the reflection that, in a general way, we know a religion when we see it and recognise a religious experience when we have it, just as we know when a man is trying to talk philosophy.

It is not my purpose in this paper to offer any discussion, still less any solution, of the problems, but rather to lay them out in a systematic way and to give a preliminary sketch of the country to be explored. I pass on then to two topics which seem to me to be suggested by the phenomena, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say to topics which enable us to put the problem in a more definite form.

If we ask what we mean by discovering coherence or significance in a large and varied group of phenomena, I think the first answer which will occur to us is that we are looking for some dialectical development in them. By "dialectical" I mean a process that exhibits some intelligible internal principle which enables us to grasp the process as one whole. Thus, a series of phenomena which occurred in a haphazard manner would be the opposite of dialectical, but so too would a series which was explicable wholly by external causation. It is my firm conviction that religion does manifest this dialectical character, but it would obviously be out of place here to enter into the somewhat

complex argument needed to substantiate this conclusion. I will add some remarks upon the importance and the consequences of this point.

One who maintains the dialectical character of religious development is not, of course, committed to the view that all religion is good or true in its measure, nor is he bound to hold that any religion whatever has the potentiality of leading on to the higher and truer stages. It is possible to hold, as in fact I do hold, that the opposing forces of the actual world, which we may include under the name "contingency," have often overwhelmed the dialectical process, distorted it, or held it up, so that of some religions it would be true to say, "It would be better had they never been." It may be, and I believe it is, true that only along one line of development has the process been carried to completion.

It is tempting to deduce more than can properly be inferred from the dialectical development of religion. Thus it has been supposed that, assuming the dialectic could be sustained, we should have an assurance that the whole was not based upon illusion. There is, I think, an element of truth in this contention. It would appear more probable that a long-continued and coherently elaborated experience was an experience of Reality than that it was the age-long explication of a figment, but I do not know that one could prove that the second alternative was logically untenable, any more than one could demonstrate from the coherence of our perceptions the reality of an external world. There is no logical contradiction in the conception of the dialectical development of an illusion. But this is not the most important limitation to the consequences which might be drawn from the dialectical character of religion. How can we show that the completion of the process is itself some form of religion? Might it not be the case that religion, when fulfilled, vanishes into something else? Perhaps after all it is a schoolmaster to lead us, not to Christ, but to Socrates.

This brings us to the second topic which I think falls under the heading of Phenomenology. The possibility that religion may, as a result of the working out of its inner dialectical nature, be absorbed into something else is precisely the issue which has been discussed in many idealist philosophies in connexion with the theory of the Forms of the Spirit or of the Absolute Idea. The relation of these Forms, Art, Religion and Philosophy, to one another has been variously interpreted by these thinkers

and their arguments have a direct bearing on the philosophy of religion. The important question for us is whether religion is a permanent and distinctive form of the Spirit or a temporary and hybrid phase of the Spirit's unfolding. Hegel, perhaps, may be regarded as ambiguous on this, though there seems little doubt that he intended both Art and Religion, the Thesis and Antithesis of his final Triad, to find their truth, that is their explicit nature, fulfilled in Philosophy. Croce is definite on the matter; he holds that Religion is simply imperfect philosophy, philosophy working with images rather than concepts and, therefore, an unstable combination of Art and Philosophy. This controversy, which may seem at times to be conducted on a plane of such high abstraction that it can have little relevance to actuality, is really concerned with the whole problem of the future of religion, for, if we accepted Croce's view, we should be committed to the conclusion that religious phenomena, and the religious experience, are not rooted in the nature of mind or spirit and therefore may be expected to fade away as the thought which is incarnate in humanity becomes more and more self-conscious. Evidently this would have serious consequences for the Philosophy of Religion and it is not surprising that many writers on the subject have dealt with the question at length. It happens that three eminent philosophers who have recently been called from this mortal scene have expressed themselves on this topic. R. G. Collingwood was, I think, with many reservations, in agreement with Croce, while A. E. Taylor and W. E. de Burgh held, on the contrary, that religion stands as an independent Form. The thesis which I am prepared to defend is as follows:— It is not certain that the triadic structure of the dialectic is true; there may be, for example, other Forms, such as morality, which should be included; but admitting for the sake of the argument, that the three Forms of the Spirit are Art, Religion and Philosophy, I should maintain that Religion, in its ideal development, could be conceived as including the other two far more easily than either of them could be conceived as including religion.

2. We are thus naturally led to the second great group of problems with which a modern philosophy of religion may have to deal—those relating to Epistemology. The Phenomenological enquiry has already brought us to the verge of this territory, because we cannot pursue the question of the relation between religion and philosophy without asking ourselves whether they

do not differ precisely in respect of the kind of knowledge which they seek. Though there seems to be little ground for Croce's view that religion is always nothing but an explanation of the world expressed in images, since it leaves out very much which is evidently essential in religion as it exists and has existed, we must I think agree that religion, in all its phases, has a cognitive element. The knowledge which religion claims is certainly not of that apodeictic character which philosophers have sometimes, perhaps extravagantly, supposed they possessed. It believes; but belief, whatever else it may be, is a kind of knowing. The more spiritual religions have often summed up the highest blessedness by the phrase "to know God." No one who understands what he is talking about would imagine that knowing God is the same as knowing about God, but evidently it is a higher and more satisfactory kind of knowing, to be compared with that knowing of another person which we enjoy when we have the sympathetic insight of love. But this more satisfactory kind of knowing presupposes some of the lower kind, of knowing about. Could we love anyone about whom we knew nothing at all? An Apostolic writer has put the case with regard to God with admirable lucidity: "He who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those that diligently seek Him." Religion, it seems, is rarely or never a purely subjective and individual experience, though apart from subjective and individual experience it does not exist. Even the most solitary mystic has come from some community and shares in some tradition which furnishes him with the symbols and the thoughts on which his spirit feeds. Religion, as we can study it, is always an experience expressed and shared. The shared experience which issues in belief is condensed and transmitted in the doctrines and dogmas which are the common heritage of the community and enable it to carry on a spiritual life which has continuity, though not identity, from generation to generation.

The expressions of religious belief are, as Croce observes, almost entirely in the form of symbol. The earlier type of religious wisdom is the myth and the characteristic feature of religious thinking is that it is mythological. It is true that in the more advanced religions the cruder and more anthropomorphic type of myth is reduced and the merely symbolical form of expression predominates, but myth, it seems, is never wholly excluded, nor is it easy to distinguish very clearly between myth and symbol.

The problem which confronts us here is not only perplexing but goes very deep and, like all fundamental questions, is difficult to formulate accurately. I suggest that the question is really one which affects the whole theory of knowledge and is simply this: are there aspects of reality, or apprehensions of reality, which can be formulated, presented and expressed only in the language of poetry, or on the contrary must we hold that truth can be conveyed and presented only in concepts and logical propositions? In other words, we must raise the question whether there is any ground for the assertion that a poem may be true, true not only in the sense that it tells us something about the experience of the poet which could have been told in no other way, but something about reality, about the whole of which our experience is a part. I think it would be hard to exaggerate the importance of this issue in general, but it is plain enough that it is of great moment for the philosophy of religion. The language of religion is poetry. It is a sign of the narrow intellectualism of this age that, when one makes a remark of this kind many people, and even many religious people, suppose that one means religion is false. There is an opposition in their minds between *Wahrheit* and *Dichtung* and they cannot conceive the distinction between imagination and fancy.

We must note further that an additional complication is introduced into our problem by some recent studies of the kinds of knowing. Ernst Cassirer would tell us that symbolism pervades all human experience and that it is never possible to transcend this condition by obtaining a point of view from which we may determine the truth-content of any complex of symbols. Man is best defined as "*animal symbolicum.*" If this conception of the essential nature of human response, as contrasted with animal reaction, is true, the distinction between religious and philosophical thinking cannot lie where Croce and others have supposed—in the difference between symbolical and conceptual thought—and we should have to regard them as two complexes of symbolical representation. I do not venture to express any opinion here on the nature of philosophical thought, but I cannot altogether pass by the question whether the thought associated with religion is wholly symbolical. Perhaps in Cassirer's sense of the word it is, but not, I believe, in the more usual meaning of the term. The expression of religious faith in creeds is often a mixture of myth, symbol and

concept. Thus in the Nicene Creed there is embedded among the poetical language concerning the Creator and Him who came down from heaven the word *homoousios*, " of one substance," which comes from the more rarefied atmosphere of logic and metaphysics. At the same time, an examination of such a document as the Creed of Nicea illustrates the predominant and determining part which symbolical thinking plays in religion and theology. It would be quite impossible to translate it into terms of concept, of Descartes's " clear and distinct ideas," without emptying it, not only of most of its emotional effect, but also of the greater part of its meaning.

It may be suggested that the nature of religious knowledge, and particularly the function of myth and symbol in it, present a fundamental problem which needs more consideration from philosophers than it has yet received. The topic has not, however, been entirely neglected, for apart from Cassirer, to whom I have already referred, we have the masterly study of symbolism by the late Dr. Edwyn Bevan and an important chapter in Professor Urban's *Language and Reality*. But perhaps most remarkable of all is the contribution of Berdyaev, who explicitly maintains the legitimacy and necessity of mythological thinking both in philosophy and theology.

3. Pursuing our enquiry into the nature and logical order of the topics with which the Philosophy of Religion should deal we now come to the third group—the Metaphysical. Here of course we arrive at the point where the central problem comes up for consideration. Here the decisive word must be spoken concerning the truth of the religious view of the world and the objective foundation of its alleged insight. It is not to be wondered at that the so-called " proofs " of the existence of God have loomed so large in the reflections of religious thinkers so that they have often seemed to occupy almost the whole field. The Ontological, Cosmological, Teleological, Moral and Aesthetic arguments have to be examined, not only in themselves, but in their relation with one another. In this preliminary sketch of a philosophy of religion we cannot do more than offer some general remarks upon the arguments as a whole.

In my opinion, the place which the discussion of the arguments for the existence of God occupies in the exposition of a philosophy of religion is a matter of great importance. It is not simply a question of convenience of statement or rhetorical elegance, it affects our judgement of the arguments themselves. Too often

they have been approached *in vacuo*, as if they were without historical roots. I venture to think that we shall not properly understand them unless we have first studied the phenomenology of religion and the questions which arise immediately out of such a study, because it is only when we have that background that we are able to realise the real character of these arguments. They are not speculations which are thrown up by the restless curiosity of the human mind; they are attempts to answer a question which is forced upon the thinker, not only by the particular aspect of experience from which he takes his logical start, but by the age-long experience of the human race. They are elaborated not in an empty world but in one in which religion is a continuing fact.

I do not believe that any of the well-known arguments can be stated in a way which is apodeictic. If by demonstrating the existence of God we mean producing a train of reasoning which compels the assent of all who understand it, I doubt whether that can be done and I am tolerably certain that it never has been done. Perhaps it would be better to regard the arguments as various ways in which an hypothesis is sought to be verified, but there are difficulties about this which may be a cause of misunderstanding. The hypothesis, in this case, is not strictly analogous with hypothesis as employed in the scientific method, because the God-hypothesis, if the term may be allowed, is not an hypothesis to explain a limited set of phenomena, or to solve some definite problem, but an hypothesis to explain the whole of phenomena. Further, we must remember that the hypothesis of God is, as we have seen, not one which we invent *ad hoc*. We find it, nor can we be indifferent towards it. It comes to us with the weight of centuries of human thought and emotion behind it and we cannot disguise from ourselves the fact that our choice to adhere or not to adhere to it is not only a matter of intellectual satisfaction but may be a choice between life and death, or at least between hope and despair.

Can anything be said that is not merely banal on the arguments for the existence of God of a purely general character? Probably not; but I will venture on one remark. It seems to me that they all have the same form, or perhaps rather they all pursue the same road. In so far as there is any argument to be based upon the fact of religious experience, I suppose it would be that the existence of God, or of the Divine, makes sense of the experience more completely than any possible

alternative. In much the same way the other arguments, taking one or other of the aspects of our total experience, try to show that, if we think out its implications to the end, we are brought to the conception of Deity. In Mr. Bertrand Russell's book on Leibniz he reproaches that philosopher for bringing in the idea of God to get him out of difficulties. It is apparently, in Russell's view, a serious defect that the philosophy of Monads will not make sense without the idea of the Supreme Monad. I have never been able to see the justice of this criticism. How else, may we ask, could the existence of God be shown on philosophical grounds ? And further, what more impressive argument could there be than the discovery that, at the end of every research into the universal characters of our experience, we find the hypothesis of universal mind forced upon us ? So I think the various arguments really proceed. We may begin with thought itself, and then we have the Ontological argument ; we may pass on to thought striving to understand things—the outer world—and there emerges the Cosmological argument and its child the Teleological Argument ; we try to make sense of our ethical life and stumble on the Moral argument, or of our apprehension of beauty and the Aesthetic argument appears. But there is one presupposition on which all these arguments depend. We must take the experiences from which they start, I will not say at their face value, but at the value which, on reflection, they claim to possess. Thus, there can be no Ontological argument unless we admit that the end of the intellect is truth and that truth is not an illusory value ; if the moral argument is to start at all, we must take our moral consciousness in deadly earnest and not explain it away ; we must believe that there are purposes which we ought to promote at any cost to ourselves and deeds which we ought to die rather than do ; we must not dissolve out æsthetic experience into something else, but accept the deliverance of our hearts that there is in the world beauty which we did not make and which is altogether adorable and worthy of love. All this, after all, is only another way of saying that the philosophy of religion is deeply concerned to maintain the reality of the eternal values.

4. The final section of our projected Philosophy of Religion would be devoted to a group of problems which might be called cosmological. I shall do little more here than enumerate them, because they are obvious enough ; at least the questions are

obvious, though not perhaps the answers; nor do I think that the order in which the problems are considered is of such moment here as it is in the other sections. The supreme problem under this cosmological heading is, of course, the relation of God to the world. Indeed it is doubtful if that phrase is correct, for to speak of a relation of God and the world, is at least on one possible view, an error. The possible theories on this subject all seem to be variations of three themes. The world may stand in relation with God as His creation, or it may be an emanation from Him, or it may be identical with Him—that is, the whole of being, considered as a whole, may be the divine. In these phrases, which are so easily spoken, lie the deep causes of division which have sundered the higher religions from one another. Though their examination and criticism lie well within the sphere of the philosophy of religion, we are obviously drawing nearer to the realm of theology and the calm of philosophy begins to be disturbed by its discordant cries. Yet the discussion of the being of God cannot be severed from that of the nature of God and that again must be closely related with the cosmological problem. Here, I think, would naturally come the full treatment of the problem of evil in its threefold forms of sin, suffering and error.

We draw still closer to theology when we raise the final question—the possibility of revelation. If we have seen reason to believe that God exists and that He is the Creator, we have before us the probability that He would communicate with men. How is this possible, and what kind of evidence might we expect of such communication? Those revelations which are the basis of the different theologies all profess, in some way, to be given through history, through human experience of a certain character, and through personalities of a peculiar quality. We shall not have finished our task until we have tackled the meaning of history and the place of personality in the cosmos in the light of our metaphysical convictions.

III

Thus I have, I hope, shown how a philosophical consideration of religion spans a large space. Beginning where the sciences of comparative religion and psychology leave off, it takes a high mountain path through epistemology and metaphysics, and leaves us where theology begins. A map cannot prove anything,

but I shall have wasted my time and yours if I have not succeeded in suggesting that the philosophy of religion attempts to answer some real questions of high importance. Even if all the questions should be in fact unanswerable, we shall be the better, though not the happier, for knowing why this is so, but if in fact they are soluble we shall be both wiser and happier for finding the answers. I believe that the theologians would be well advised to pay more attention than they do to the philosophical prolegomena to their own studies. The philosophy of religion has, I believe, a value in itself, but even supposing that it can reach no conclusions which are useful to theology, it is a branch of research which, by its very nature, is bound to be aware both of the progress of secular knowledge and of the development of religious thought and practice, and therefore could preserve theologians from their besetting temptation, that of retiring to a sacred enclosure remote from the thought and the culture of our time.

I feel comparatively safe in addressing a word of exhortation to theologians, because after all they are accustomed to it, but I scarcely dare to speak in the same strain to philosophers. Yet I will express an opinion which has been more and more taking hold of my mind in these years of confusion, material, political and moral. Is it not a grave misfortune that at such a time so many philosophers have given up the attempt to grapple with the great problems which centre upon the nature of man and his place in the universe? That ambition to grasp with the mind the whole of things and to penetrate its meaning, which is always frustrated yet never fruitless, will certainly revive. There will be another constructive era in philosophy. When it occurs we may be sure that the problem of religion will be central, for how could such philosophers fail to see the need of interpreting this strange propensity of man, to believe in a Reality which is unseen, to worship and to seek a peace which is not of this world?

Discussion.

Rev. Prof. E. O. James (Chairman) said: In opening his survey of the present position of the Philosophy of Religion, Dr. Matthews has been wise, I think, to call attention to the "flight from reason" which has become a disquieting symptom of an irrational and fundamentally sceptical age. To eliminate the judgment of human reason from the interpretation of divine revelation, as do the

Barthian theologians, or, like the Logical Positivists from the side of philosophy, to dismiss as "nonsense propositions" all concepts and phrases incapable of empirical verification, is to destroy the *raison d'être* alike of theology and philosophy, and can only have disastrous consequences for both disciplines.

Similarly, I welcome the word of warning that he has uttered in my own field of inquiry. It is all too easy for those of us who are primarily concerned with religious phenomena as a universal aspect of human culture to concentrate our attention on the function of religion as an essential part of social mechanism—a means of enabling human beings to live together in an orderly arrangement of social relations—to the exclusion of the fundamental concepts and realities that lie behind these processes. If the only true purpose of religion is to maintain a social order—to hold together society as an integrated whole—then Nazism or Marxism might be calculated to serve equally well and probably much more effectually. To be vindicated, religion must rest upon a transcendental basis verifiable at the threefold bar of reason, history and spiritual experience.

Concerning the vexed question of a definition of religion I should say that religion is best defined perhaps as an effective desire to be in right relations with a transcendental order of reality regarded as the ground of the universe and responsive to human needs. This relation finds expression in the first instance (*i.e.*, in primitive states of culture) in a ritual technique of sacred actions and modes of behaviour centred in the deepest needs and desires of man—his hopes, fears, passions and sentiments. The transcendent "otherness" with which the human spirit seeks efficacious relations ranges from the idea of a universal Providence, the source of bounty and beneficence, to that of an Ultimate Reality as the eternal ground of the highest evaluation conceivable—goodness, beauty and truth. In establishing a religious relationship with all that is involved in the idea of God, sacred action finds expression and rationalization in the sacred story or "myth."

Now, "myth" is not, as the Oxford Dictionary erroneously defines it, "a fictitious narrative concerning natural or historical phenomena," nor is it, as Frazer asserts, the philosophy of primitive man, a first attempt to answer general questions about the world, or imaginative stories about the doings of gods as in the pseudo-

mythology of ancient Greece. Myth is the expression of fundamental notions about the deepest realities in human experience—the things by which men live. These may be material (*e.g.*, dealing with matters connected with the food supply or the cycle of birth and death in nature or man); or spiritual (*e.g.*, relating to the nature of God and His relation with man and the world); or ethical (*e.g.*, determining the right ordering of human conduct). Therefore, myth expresses and codifies fundamental beliefs and enforces ethical evaluations by formulating reasons for conduct. It is a reality lived. Consequently, every vital religion must have its mythology because myth is the natural language of religion. As the Dean has said, creeds are often a mixture of myth, symbol and concept. This is inevitable because only in these terms can their verities be stated. They are the essential means of giving expression to religious truth and reality. With him I entirely agree that this most important aspect of religious knowledge needs more consideration and elucidation than it has received from philosophers, and I hope that this penetrating exposition of the aims and scope of the Philosophy of Religion will have the attention its importance richly deserves.

Rev. C. T. Cook said: I would like to thank the Dean for a most instructive paper. It is to be feared that the attitude of many Christians to this subject is similar to that of Karl Barth—that the question is a purely academic one and remote from daily life. Yet it has been truly said that every thoughtful man must be in some sense a philosopher; he must have some kind of view of man's place and purpose in the scheme of things. Human nature is so constituted that it will always seek an answer to the ultimate questions. Moreover, we are bidden by the Apostle Peter to be ready always to give a reason concerning the hope that is in us, and in certain circumstances that may involve going beyond a simple testimony concerning our conversion and personal experience of divine grace.

The great Augustine has pointed out that in our Lord's words, "Ask, and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you," we have a perfect expression of the beginning and end of the philosopher's quest. Recently I came across a statement by a nineteenth-century writer, with which I am sure the Dean will heartily concur: "If the theologian do not

become a philosopher, if he do not diligently and intelligently cultivate the knowledge of mind, the knowledge of knowledge, the knowledge of moral philosophy, and the philosophy of religion, he will scarcely attain the place of a trustworthy theologian" (G. T. Ladd).

One would like to know how the Dean would define the term "myth." There appears to be some diversity in the modern theological usage of the word. Dr. Matthews has referred (in his extempore remarks) to mythical elements in the account of the Incarnation, making mention of the phrase "came down from heaven." While we recognize that such popular terminology is a necessary accommodation to our earthly viewpoint, it is nevertheless the expression of a tremendous and historical fact—that at a point in time God did become man in the person of the Babe born in Bethlehem. The word "myth" does not seem to me to be the right word in this connection. The term "symbol" might have relevance to the idea behind such phrases as "coming down" and "taken up," but, here again, we recall how Dr. Edwyn Bevan has stated that it is often difficult in Scripture to know where to draw the line between the symbolical and the literal.

I would like to ask Dr. Matthews about an aspect of this subject which is not precisely stated in his paper, although I think it is implicit in his arguments. I refer to the importance of the faith-principle in all inquiry, by which I mean that in our approach to philosophy, as to every branch of knowledge, we must begin with an act of faith, we must believe in something that is not self-evident. It has been affirmed that every scientific hypothesis is a venture of faith and every philosopher has a hypothesis as his starting point. In other words is it not a fact that we must believe in order to understand ?

It seems to me that this consideration has a most important bearing on the relationship between philosophy and the Christian faith. In his concluding paragraph Dr. Matthews points out that it is almost impossible for philosophers to leave religion out of account. I note in this connection that Principal John Baillie has remarked that "the determining factor in the formation of philosophical systems has again and again been the initial presence or absence of religious faith in the philosopher's heart" (*The Interpretation of Religion*, pp. 38 f.).

Mr. PERCY O. RUOFF said: The Dean of St. Paul's has certainly added charm to his able paper by delivering it in clear and familiar speech, instead of reading it in its more rigid form.

He presents a welcome view, both at the beginning and end of the lecture, that, in his opinion "there will be another constructive era in philosophy" with the problem of religion being central, and the need of interpreting the belief in unseen reality.

On page 110 the Dean's argument about St. Paul being "on both sides" of the controversy that two opposite views of philosophy for the believer are legitimate, is dispelled by a reference to what the Apostle wrote. Paul's words are cited "philosophy and vain deceit," and "a wisdom . . . and a *sophia* which unravels the mysteries of the world." But in 1 Cor. 2 the apostle is not contrasting two competing philosophies, strictly speaking, but current philosophies and a revelation "which God hath revealed unto us through His Spirit" (v. 10). The distinction is vital, and is intended to contrast the wisdom of this world that "comes to nought," with the wisdom of God which, he says, "is revealed by His Spirit."

Dr. Matthews adopts a strong position when he affirms that "belief, whatever else it may be, is a kind of knowing." Not so acceptable is his statement, "The language of religion is poetry." Would it not be more correct to say some of its language is poetic in form? It would, for example, be difficult to take a profound book like *Romans*, with its granite cast of argument, and apply to it the term poetic.

The excellent argument on pages 120 and 121 on ontological lines in which the Dean develops the argument "that the philosophy of religion is deeply concerned to maintain the reality of eternal values," is a convincing statement.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS.

MR. E. H. BETTS wrote: This paper sketches, with some completeness of scope, the philosophy of religion. In it, religion is left undefined and a certain haziness marking the philosophy is one of the results. It is submitted to the eminent Author that his Christianity, if not treated by him with such scant respect, would have helped him. And there is nothing logically or philosophically unsound in the method which, for purposes of definiteness, starts with a

working definition, even if after a fuller survey it must be modified or rejected. A rudimentary acquaintance with "religion" gives the following elements for a tentative definition: (1) the universal vague movements or yearnings of the human heart after the Unknown, and (2) the multifarious methods, both true and false, of satisfying or attempting to meet these longings.

But the distinguished writer of the paper wants, at all costs, his philosophy, speculative and reflective; and he ignores or rejects in his interesting labours, all help from revelation. He will not, although an eminent and highly distinguished holder of Christian office, identify himself with Paul the Apostle, Tertullian the Latin Father or Luther the Reformer, not to mention Barth the Neo-Protestant. And, alas, of the Christ of God Himself he makes but one mention—an unfavourable comparison with Socrates in relation to the dialectical development of religion! And yet, if the Christianity from which the writer has received such signal honours of office is true, Christ *is* the *sophia* of God. Again and again Paul insists on this. Nor can it be granted for one moment that he vacillates in such manner as to seem "to be on both sides of the controversy." The wisdom which he spoke "among the perfect" (i.e., the spiritually adult) is "not of this world nor of the princes (*leaders!*) of this world who are on their way to come to naught or they would not have crucified the Lord of glory"—that glory which is the very development, though perhaps not dialectical development, to which our writer's eyes seem so regrettably blinded.

Our Lord said that these things are hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed unto babes. Thus the way to wisdom and understanding proper to maturity is in His eyes, at least, *via* the receptiveness and dependence of the babe.

Mr. F. F. BRUCE wrote: It is a happy combination of circumstances that has brought the Dean of St. Paul's paper in such close proximity to Dr. Jocz's in this year's programme. Either without the other would have given a one-sided view of the problem of religion, but those who have read and digested both will have an all-round comprehension of the problem, and incidentally will realize how intractable a problem it is. It is impossible to accept both theses at once—if we wish to preserve a clear mind—and it is just about as difficult to find a compromise half-way between them. Here, if

anywhere, we are confronted with the *Either/Or* which the theology of crisis persists in thrusting before us, and here at least we cannot reply with a *Both-And*, or even with a *While on the one hand . . . yet on the other.*

For my part, it is a sense of gratitude which I have long felt towards Dr. Matthews that impels me to write. At a time when I was as sceptical as an undergraduate ought to be, a paper of his in the *Hibbert Journal* for January, 1930, on " The Destiny of the Soul " showed me how I might understand and continue to accept *ex animo* the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body. About a year later his *God in Christian Thought and Experience* was my first textbook in the study of the philosophy of religion. And now I must add a further word of thanks for the word of exhortation he has addressed to theologians. To be sure, as he says, we are accustomed to exhortations of many kinds from varied quarters, but the Dean's admonition is specially apposite. Theology has not abdicated her sovereignty as queen of the sciences, even if she does not receive the royal homage that is her due in the same degree as once she did. But she will lose even that which she has, and might as well abdicate forthwith, if theologians succumb to the temptation " of retiring to a sacred enclosure remote from the thought and the culture of our time." It is the prerogative of the Christian theologian to assert the claims of Christ and the Gospel in and over the *whole* of life.