

## **Toward a Method of Knowing Spirit**

© 2001 James S. Cutsinger

Published in *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 14:2 (1985)

---

*Truly we cannot limit reality to something whose existence even the dullest and most superficial person has neither the desire nor the possibility of denying. Surely there is more. Just as there are scientific instruments to establish a "more" in reality in the sphere of the material world, so too without instruments, but not without the higher development of spirit, there are experiences which grasp . . . eternity.*

Karl Rahner<sup>1</sup>

It is often useful to be reminded of something that is already well known. When addressing the question of method, such a reminder seems especially important. For in asking about method and in framing a methodology, we are concerned above all with assumptions: with what, in particular, is assumed to be known, and with the problem of how to proceed from the already-known to the as-yet-unknown. In the case of contemporary academic theology, the need for reminders is uniquely acute, in proportion as it is uniquely ironic. For in today's theology, what is best known is the fact of how little is known. And it is of this, I suggest, that we need reminding.

When I speak about a lack of knowledge, I am referring pre-eminently to the knowledge of God, to what Edward Farley has called "the problem beneath the problem of theological method."<sup>2</sup> I am referring, that is, to the problem of whether, in speaking of God, we speak of reality at all. The history of increasing doubt during the modern period has been rehearsed so many times that it would be superfluous to do so here. That claims, once staunch, have been abandoned; that whole worlds of discourse, once mapped with eloquence and an almost geometrical precision, have been surrendered; that a certain unity of vision, embracing both fact and value, has been divided—all of this and much more is so familiar as to be trite. The causes of these several intellectual retreats have been equally rehearsed and are universally taken for granted: modernity's distrust of all heteronomous authority, the historical-critical examination of sacred texts, the dominance of science and of scientific expectations regarding fact. Were we to pick a single name, an eponym, with which to epitomize these several causes and with which to

emphasize the many effects of doubt regarding God, we could do no better, perhaps, than to pick the name of Kant. And again, we would be speaking about the obvious.

As observed before, however, to be reminded of the obvious is often very useful. “Truths, of all others the most awful and interesting,” Coleridge recognized, “are too often considered as so true, that they lose all the power of truth, and lie bed-ridden in the dormitory of the soul, side by side with the most despised and exploded errors.”<sup>3</sup> The chief use to be made of these introductory reminders in this context is to call attention to a certain uniformity in current methodologies—to call attention to the fact, specifically, that virtually every contemporary theological method takes as its starting-point how well we know how little we know. However obvious the point, however universally accepted the fact may be, our recognition of this truth would profit from a clear, uncompromised expression. Let us say candidly, then, that theologies today, no matter how disparate, are at one in their willing ignorance. Despite their distinguishing features, theological methodologies are more alike than different, for they are nearly all axiomatically sceptical about man’s knowing God. To use the earlier mentioned name, one could say also that they are nearly all axiomatically Kantian. One remembers, among many other representative texts, Kant’s asseveration in his *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*: “In religion,” Kant unabashedly declares,

as regards the theoretical apprehension and avowal of belief, no assertorial knowledge is required (even of God’s existence), since, with our lack of insight into supersensible objects, such avowal might well be dissembled. . . . Indeed, the *minimum* of knowledge (it is possible that there may be a God ) must suffice.<sup>4</sup>

Now Kant’s pronouncements—that supersensible insight is humanly impossible and that cognitive minimums must therefore suffice—have as we know profoundly affected the entire spectrum of modern and contemporary theological thinking and have helped to provide theology today, especially perhaps in its Protestant forms, with its often unthinking limitations and exclusions. Post-Kantian theologians, at least in their weaker moments, have consistently displayed a dogmatism about belief, or rather unbelief, far more heteronomous in its claims than anything traditional. The basic tenets of the critical philosophy concerning the “dialectical” nature of transcendental speculation have themselves too often been imposed in the form of external authorities, asserted but unestablished. To be sure, the tradition said that certain doctrines were true and must therefore be believed. But in saying “must”, it was expressing a conditional, and it knew it. The doctrines must be believed *if* one was to be a faithful member of

the church, *if* one was to be saved. Modern theological authorities, however, have gone a step further, for the Kantian “must” has too often become an assessment of incapacity. People simply cannot believe as they once believed, it is declared—or at least the better educated cannot. They are unable to believe by virtue of their modernity itself, because of their place in history. And there can be no going back.

Rudolf Bultmann is boldly instructive in this respect. “It is impossible,” he writes, in that now famous passage from his essay “New Testament and Mythology,” “to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles.” More briefly and less evocatively, he writes in the same essay, making a similar point, “Now that the forces and the laws of nature have been discovered, we can no longer believe in *spirits*.”<sup>5</sup> Bultmann’s views are reflected, to pick but one example, in the work of Harvard theologian Gordon Kaufman. Distinguishing the modern point of view from the traditional, Kaufman writes, “The treatment of the concept of God as though it referred to some sort of object or entity was characteristic of much traditional theology. . . . It was taken for granted that the name ‘God’ refers to a ‘real being’.” Today, however, Kaufman continues, “We simply do not have access to a theological ‘object’ in this sense at all. . . . This way lies both obscurantism and chaos.” We must recognize instead that “whatever ‘God’ is finally shown to mean and however true or valid or useful talk about God proves to be, this word does not, and logically cannot, name some reality given directly or immediately in perception or experience.”<sup>6</sup> Here again one finds the dogmatic limits and exclusions of modernity, presented as though they were impenetrable and inescapable.

Now certainly, Bultmann and Kaufman do not exhaust the entire range even of Protestant theology, nor perhaps is their (in these passages) rather presumptuous tone typical of all theologians. Nevertheless, the assumptions, thus expressed, are clearly shared by other post-Kantian methodologies which might otherwise be dissimilar. For most of the “Kantians” in our midst seem agreed that theological thinking cannot be based on a direct, intelligible, cognitive experience of God as an objectively real, spiritual being.<sup>7</sup> In assembling this particular collection of adjectives, I am of course combining the preceding quotations and proceeding beyond any of the explicit statements of either theologian. It would appear, however, that the synthesis is true to the intentions of Bultmann and Kaufman both, and it is certainly of help in understanding the uniformity or unanimity of assumptions beneath by far the greater part of theological thinking in

our time. Consider the various, most influential theologies today. And consider also the several components of the preceding proposition: direct, intelligible, cognitive, objective, real, spiritual. In virtually no case does one find a contemporary theological methodology which attempts to remain faithful to all of the components simultaneously. Some theologies stress the philosophical and epistemological intelligibility of their work, their commitment to the demands of reason, but to the exclusion of direct experience. Some prefer to emphasize experience, in the form of existential encounter, for example, but often to the exclusion of any claim to real knowledge. And some methodologies stress both experience and cognition, but to the exclusion of God as an objectively actual spiritual being.

Proponents of contemporary methods will naturally resist so hasty a grouping of so many diverse points of view, and of course the differences are not to be minimized. Nevertheless, in spite of important distinctions on one level, a fundamental similarity remains. Whatever one's post-Kantian method, "It seems a matter of consensus," as William VanderMarck has observed, "that human knowledge and experience are restricted to the human world."<sup>8</sup> This, then, is the obvious truth of which we need reminding. Virtually no current theological method is willing to base its work on the human being's direct, intelligible, cognitive experience of an objectively discernible, spiritual or supernatural reality. And well none should, of course, since fidelity to Kant seems the touchstone of our period.<sup>9</sup> For according to Kant, "Men are conscious of their inability to know supersensible things."<sup>10</sup> It is thus that we today seem united in knowing well how little we can know, and our methodologies consistently reflect that fundamental, pervasive ignorance. As Hans Dieter Betz remarks:

For Modern scholarship . . . there seems to be no way whatever to "teach the way of God truthfully". As a theologian, I can only state this as a fact, without regret and without resentment. The discoveries made in the last centuries were real discoveries and have created the conditions of modern life which nobody can escape. It would be too bad if theology were the only department in the university where the old values and the lost world of yesterday were remembered in a mood of nostalgia and lament.<sup>11</sup>

So much by way of reminder. It is time to proceed to the major point and central thesis of this essay. The thesis, informally expressed, is simply this, that when things are going badly, one should stop, take a fresh and discerning look around at just what *is* going on, and then, if possible, try something different. Of course, the premise, so cavalierly put, that things are in fact quite bad, is bound to be a matter of some dispute. Those who are content with some present method will understandably disagree with so pessimistic an assessment. And yet surely even

such challengers will be willing to acknowledge the profound disorganization in contemporary theological thinking; and they will undoubtedly agree accordingly that the state of theology today, with regard to unity of purpose at least, leaves much to be desired. The often, and loudly, lamented multiplicity of conflicting viewpoints on the current scene—constructive, processive, positivistic, linguistic, Thomist, liberationist, fundamentalist, ecological, hermeneutical, existential, phenomenological (not to mention the theologies of hope, story, and play)—seems proof enough that our methods are not what they should be, for one rightfully expects of a genuine discipline some consistency of aim.

Would we not scoff at a group of astronomers who were unable to agree whether stars should be an appropriate object of their studies? One seems justified in supposing, when consistency of purpose is absent, that common assumptions, rather than their differing applications, may be the problem. If we discovered that the astronomers in question were agreed that telescopes could no longer be used by modern man, we would perhaps then better understand the conflicts within their discipline. Left only with the naked eye, some investigators would continue searching the heavens and making descriptions and predictions as was done in older times, some would abandon the search altogether as too lamentably inexact, and the rest of their colleagues would arrange themselves at various points between according to how much each felt could still be said about the traditional concept “star”. Supposing that the problem with theology today may be like that of these astronomers—that agreements rather than differences are the most fundamental difficulty—I have been directing our consideration toward theologians’ most obvious agreement, their nearly unanimous deference to the Kantian *ipse dixit* concerning the limits of human knowledge. Now, true to the platitude that, when things are bad, one should try something new, I would therefore propose, as the first order of business for contemporary religious thought, a thorough re-assessment of the epistemological consensus, and thus a willing suspension of our belief in Kant. Let us, for a time at least, risk the experiment of questioning our agreement. To be precise, let us attempt to consider seriously the possibility of a supersensible insight into the reality of spirit.

The idea of supersensible knowledge is bound to conjure thoughts of the occult, the esoteric, the gnostic, and theosophical—all the wraiths so long suppressed. It is certain especially to seem pretentious. Have we not put away all such cognitive arrogance? The lesson we were to have learned irrevocably was one of humility. For the Protestant theologian in particular, a

measure of skepticism was to have become *sola fide*'s trusted confidant. Bultmann, again, provides an excellent example:

We can believe in God only in spite of experience, just as we can accept justification only in spite of conscience. . . . There is no difference between security based on good works and security built on objectifying knowledge. The man who desires to believe in God must know that he has nothing at his own disposal on which to build this faith, that he is, so to speak, in a vacuum. He who abandons every form of security shall find the true security.<sup>12</sup>

All post-Kantians would probably not be willing to limit theological inquiry to such a vacuum. And yet nearly all of them would agree with Bultmann that the search for knowledge, the quest especially for supersensible knowledge, is not only preposterous, but presumptuous and pretentious—a sort of defiance, which the faithful man must eschew at all costs. Kant himself, after all, had denied knowledge precisely in order to make room for faith. We would do well to focus upon this point. Indeed, the weight of this entire essay rests here. The approach to a method of knowing spirit which I am here proposing will never receive the encouragement it deserves until all of our suspicions concerning the spectre of “gnosticism” are exposed, confronted, and understood. How carefully we assess the matter of spiritual pride, how honestly we evaluate the charges, is therefore crucial to how open we ourselves may become to the possibility of so very disreputable a form of knowing.

It is important to recognize that the question of pretentiousness is really a question of time and place. This fact cannot be stressed enough. Where we moderns seem so laudably humble, the tradition was certainly often not. Where we tend toward a cognitive humility in our respect for the Kantian limits, earlier theologians were moved more by a cognitive aspiration, which appears to us as either foolishness or pride. That thinkers once sought to know more, that thinking was less embarrassed by its powers, is clear. And yet, however modest we may seem, we surely have our own forms of pride as well. But our pretentiousness is otherwise. Ours is a methodological arrogance, which, as we have already been reminded, would treat present human experience, within the “critical” limits, as the standard of all cognitive validity. Jacob Needleman observes:

We often hear it said that the natural-scientific revolution and its continuing development have meant the humbling of man, that modern thought from Galileo through Darwin and Freud and the existentialists differs dramatically from the ancient and medieval in that it removes man from his exalted place in the universe. But this is a superficial observation, for the truth is quite the reverse. The root idea of the ancient and medieval systems was, in this regard, the exaltation of man's *possible* development and transformation. But

modern science exalts man's *actual* natural state. Unable to glimpse the possibilities of inward human development, it exalts ordinary knowledge, by which is meant the knowledge that belongs to man in his ordinary natural state.<sup>13</sup>

Methodologically, the tradition seems selfless by comparison. Present, ordinary experience was for it no norm; present experience, the fallen self, was to be changed. These differently placed expressions of humility and pride tend naturally toward opposite theological results. Take a single example from the Christian tradition. In the case of Cyril of Alexandria, a combination of what we might call cognitive aspiration and methodological humility resulted in the expansion of the actual into the possible. Present experience, present knowledge, present assumptions about God and the universe were called into question by the possible range of intelligible being. Consider, in the controversies which came to a head at the third ecumenical council of the church at Ephesus in 431 A.D., Cyril's readiness in rejecting the better logic and the common sense of Nestorius and his willingness to complicate, if not to compromise, the very nature of the divine reality so as to see more deeply the full range of Christ's possible significance. "This is the sense in which we confess one Christ and Lord," Cyril could therefore write:

We do not worship a human being in conjunction with the Logos, lest the appearance of a division creep in by reason of that phrase "in conjunction with". No, we worship one and the same, because the body of the Logos is not alien to him but accompanies him even as he is enthroned with the Father.<sup>14</sup>

In the case of the typical post-Kantian theologian, on the other hand, a combination of cognitive humility or modesty and methodological pride has resulted in the reduction of the possible to the actual. Nothing exceeding or subverting present forms of human experience is considered theologically permissible. Here, too, we can see the Christological effects. What Cyril of Alexandria had thought was real must be regarded today, we are told, as myth. Frances Young writes accordingly:

As Christian believers . . . we work with . . . what we can only describe as "mythological" or symbolic models. . . . To call them "mythological" is not to denigrate their status, but to indicate that they refer to realities which are not only inaccessible to the normal methods of scientific investigation, but are also indefinable in terms of human language, and in their totality inconceivable within the limited powers and experience of the finite human mind.<sup>15</sup>

Because of our restricted cognitive powers, "a literal incarnation doctrine," claims Young, "is straightforwardly incredible to the majority of our contemporaries."<sup>16</sup> Schubert Ogden concurs with this analysis of the present situation. "A Christology of reflection," he contends, "involving as it does the same human understanding involved in any other kind of critical reflection, is

exactly like everything else human in being thoroughly conditioned both socially and culturally.”<sup>17</sup> The implication which Ogden draws is most familiar. Traditional doctrines, in this case those pertaining to the person of Christ, must be translated into a form consistent with our present, typically scientific, understanding of the world. Thus, the possible range of intelligible being is called into question by the currently respected limits of human knowing. Christ must no longer be conceived in the supernatural categories of the tradition as the consubstantial unity of the Logos and a human being, for such language is incredible, if not meaningless, to modern man.

The chief point here, of course, is not Christological, but methodological. Two radically different approaches to the same doctrine have been compared, not to defend the results of either, but simply to encourage our asking the obvious question, Who can say which is more pretentious, which more dangerously encourages the demands of the fallible human ego? It is clear, of course, that one must always avoid the projection of subjective fantasies and illusions and the dialectical obfuscations that Kant so insistently warned against. But it seems equally clear that wonder and awe must not be stifled and that the intuition of possibilities should be promoted, not discouraged. Today’s theologian, no longer looking for miracles, no longer discoursing on the nature and function of angels, would certainly not, like Augustine, write: “We may do our best to conjecture from the blessings which God showers on good and bad alike in this life of trouble, how great will be the joy . . . which is beyond our present experience.”<sup>18</sup> Post-Kantians are instead more circumspect. Present experience is their limit, the test of credibility, and conjecture is to be avoided, for there is something, they feel, not only arrogant, but undemocratic as well, about the attempt to move beyond our common sense. But what if there *is* something beyond—something, moreover, which could be apprehended even now if only approached in the proper way? If there is, and if it could be, theologians today may never know, because they are not even asking the question. Once again, the point is certainly not to defend specific traditional “conjectures”, including those of Augustine, but simply to recommend the openness, the unrestricted expectation, with which he engaged reality.<sup>19</sup> For there seems little doubt that his wonder has gone out of style.

G. K. Chesterton’s thoughts on humility and its proper place are even more appropriate now than when he wrote them:

What we suffer from to-day is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction, where it was never

meant to be. . . . The truth is that there is a real humility typical of our time; but it so happens that it is practically a more poisonous humility than the wildest prostrations of the ascetic. The old humility was a spur that prevented a man from stopping; not a nail in his boot that prevented him from going on. For the old humility made a man doubtful about his efforts, which might make him work harder. But the new humility makes a man doubtful about his aims, which will make him stop working altogether.<sup>20</sup>

Spiritual pride is undoubtedly dangerous. With that fact we must all agree. But then so is intellectual sloth. In avoiding the first temptation, as academic theologians have done so successfully for the last two centuries or so, we need always to beware the opposite vice as well. In this, it appears, we have often failed.

I have treated this potential objection to supersensible knowledge at such length in order to emphasize one of the most important prerequisites for a genuinely alternative theological method, a method willing at least to respect, if not to encourage, the challenges to Kantian orthodoxy. Indeed, as I have already indicated, I believe it to be perhaps the most significant prerequisite of all. For suspicion seems to be our central problem. Academic misgivings and mistrust regarding the knowledge of spirit continue to threaten nearly every form of opposition to Kant and his successors. Suspicion and its resulting restrictions, not impartial criticism, appears to be the greatest obstacle of all to the theological consideration of supersensible reality. Not the results of careful investigation, but an almost universal unwillingness even to begin investigation in the first place, has made the pursuit of a spiritual theological methodology virtually impossible. And yet, if the argument here is valid, this suspicion or scholarly mistrust concerning the cognitive results of spiritual discipline or claims to supersensible insight often has little to do in principle with the substance of the claims themselves or with the nature of the reality which they aim to disclose. Our mistrust, couched in the comfortable, methodologically self-sustaining language of Kantian critique, reflects instead a kind of academic embarrassment. So many have for so long agreed that human knowledge is limited to the world of the natural senses. What will one's colleagues think?

As I hope my readers will have begun to see, however, defending the contemplative and spiritual insights of the tradition against the charge of pretentiousness is, on one level at least, quite simple. If only we would dare to expose contemporary thinking's own, more subtle forms of immodesty, then perhaps the supersensible would begin to seem less odd. This, then, is the first, indispensable step toward the serious consideration of spiritual knowledge: A method of knowing spirit, however complex and problematic its complete development might prove,

requires first a dramatic revolution in current theological procedure and a complete reversal of the placement of our humility and pride. Instead of methods of correlation or programs of demythologization and their like, which leave the actual state of cognitive affairs untouched, one would be asked to substitute a thorough critique of present experience itself. Common perceptions and current expectations would be put to the test, as the teachings of tradition, Christian and otherwise—especially those concerning spiritual development—were given a guiding role. Such a programme would clearly depend most upon our careful, methodologically modest answers to a single, fundamental question: the question of whether present human experience, limited as it seems to our sublunary realm, can be expanded or extended in a rationally consistent way and made conformable to the reality of spirit.

The present essay, as its cautious title suggests, intends only to raise this question. Providing a good answer would entail, if not the actual construction of a spiritual-theological method, then at least the careful description of how to do so. This author is prepared for neither task. On the other hand, he recognizes that a true test of the preceding suggestions can be performed only upon concrete details and in light of specific ideas. The reader naturally wishes to know more. What is to be done exactly? Where might one start? It is fine to criticize one's colleagues and to speculate about alternatives in abstraction, but a definite constructive program is certainly required as well, if only for the sake of balance. At the risk of concluding this essay with so very little as to have better said nothing, I would venture, therefore, a single constructive suggestion, which should at least hint at a possible direction for the method here envisaged.

I would recommend, to be precise, that theologians begin to cultivate the metaphysical, epistemological, and anthropological insights of the *philosophia perennis*, the “perennial philosophy”, first discussed in the West explicitly as such by the Renaissance Neoplatonists, but now expounded, with special reference to the problems of our time, by such scholars as Huston Smith and Seyyed Hossein Nasr.<sup>21</sup> There appears to be a growing movement, especially among students of comparative religion, which is dedicated to the rehabilitation both of mystical and contemplative traditions and of the esoteric ontology which gave them life. Theologians, I believe, would do well to become a part of this continuing discussion and to follow the example set by colleagues in philosophy like Jacob Needleman and Borna Bebek, who are attempting to approach the esoteric and perennial, not only as intellectual historians, but as practitioners of a living school of thought.<sup>22</sup> For what these men and others like them claim to have found is

precisely the key to the opening of the human self beyond its present cognitive capacities, the expansion of the actual into the possible, encouraged throughout this essay. It is important to emphasize, of course, that my recommendation here is not intended to constitute a defense of either the “primordial tradition” or its chief expositors. At their best, these concluding observations are maieutic, rather than apologetic.

A more adequate anticipation of the aims and resources of a spiritual methodology must wait for other contexts. Suffice it to say for now that, in all of this attempted alchemy, in whatever specific forms it might take, whether perennial or otherwise, the theologian’s primary conviction must remain the one expressed by Edward Farley, when he writes: “Faith’s realities have not simply flown away; they have been obscured by the emergence of a certain kind of human being, civilization, historical consciousness, all of which are attended by an insistence on playing the games of intellectual inquiry by some very narrow rules.”<sup>23</sup> Reductions of all sorts have had their way too long. It is time, I have argued, for expansion. The often patronizing tone of the post-Kantian, who would proclaim that no one may know what he himself does not, simply must be resisted, if for no other reason than that of the modesty on which he so much prides himself.

The opening reminders may be recalled once more. Whatever their more subtle quarrels, and however dissimilar their methods may seem, theologians are today united by the limitations they accept, in knowing so well how little they know. It is important now to add, however, that what has been throughout this essay a largely pessimistic and disapproving observation may yet provide a foundation for the alternative method here suggested. In the theological unanimity of our time, which has so long proved an obstacle to spiritual inquiry, there lies after all, although ironically, the means for our moving forward. For in what we do not know, there is always implicit what we can. The demarcation of a boundary, whether epistemological or otherwise, necessarily requires some knowledge, no matter how minimal, tacit, or implicit, not only of this, but of the other side as well. Let us hope that this undeveloped implication of the modern concern for cognitive limits can become as methodologically fruitful as it is surely logically irresistible. Our own pretentiousness exposed, we simply cannot continue to think as we have, decrying the foolishness or arrogance of tradition. Theologians must struggle to realize instead that, in knowing what they do not know—in their *ignorantia docta*—they have the perfect

opportunity, in company with contemplative students of all ages, not to say they cannot or that others must not know the world of spirit, but to begin to act and think as though they might.

---

<sup>1</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. by William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 272.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Farley, *Ecclesial Man: A Social Phenomenology of Faith and Reality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1971), 67.

<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 142 n.

<sup>5</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 5, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), 23, 26, 41.

<sup>7</sup> This locution is not intended to suggest that the divine reality should be conceived as spatially discrete, as physically or materially “object-like”, or as in any way one among several members of the same category, even the category “objectively real and spiritual”. There are, after all, non-Kantian reasons for avoiding such conceptions, especially when following the *via negativa*. What I do aim to stress by so speaking is the definiteness and distinctivity of God. Even the most apophatic contemplative would agree that God is real, however much His reality exceeds, or indeed subverts, our own, and however circumspectly, therefore, we must use the predicate. And even the most “pantheistic” of cataphatic seekers recognizes that the divine being is absolute, that its infinite expression and universal presence, far from compromising, instead more clearly manifest the uniqueness of its mode of being. Kaufman is right: traditional theology, even in its mystical forms, understood that “‘God’ refers to a ‘real being’.”

<sup>8</sup> William VanderMarck, “Fundamental Theology: A Bibliographical and Critical Survey,” *Religious Studies Review* 8 (1982), 246.

<sup>9</sup> Louis Dupré agrees with this assessment, that the impact of the critical epistemology has been nearly universal. Among the major conclusions of “Kant’s pioneering work” which have affected “all subsequent philosophy of religion,” Dupré ranks first the following: “Since reliable theoretical knowledge is restricted to the objective, phenomenal sphere, the religious consciousness can expect no direct support of its beliefs from theoretical reason” (*A Dubious Heritage: Studies in the Philosophy of Religion after Kant* [New York: Paulist Press, 1977], 3).

<sup>10</sup> Kant, *Religion* (see n. 4 above), 94.

<sup>11</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, “On Academic Integrity,” *Criterion* 22 (1983), 20.

<sup>12</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), 84.

<sup>13</sup> Jacob Needleman, *Consciousness and Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 29.

<sup>14</sup> “Cyril of Alexandria’s Second Letter to Nestorius,” in Richard A. Norris, Jr. (ed.), *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 134.

<sup>15</sup> Frances Young, “A Cloud of Witnesses,” in John Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 34.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>17</sup> Schubert M. Ogden, *The Point of Christology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 88.

<sup>18</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, trans. by Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), Bk. 22, ch. 21, 1064-65.

<sup>19</sup> Even process theologians, whose methods are so clearly guided by their openness to conceptual re-evaluation, are basically closed to the possibility of perceptual re-assessment and, accordingly, to supersensible experience. Thus, in an early essay, Hartshorne, for example, firmly shuts the

---

door to Augustine's "beyond": "Supernaturalism can say that the beyond is God, its advantage being that the beyond is not definitely known to be other than divine—for it is not, in reality, known at all. . . . It seems plain that the supernaturalist way is [an] obstacle to intellectual advance. It operates beyond the reach of evidence" (Charles Hartshorne, *Beyond Humanism: Essays in the New Philosophy of Nature* [Chicago: Willett, Clark, 1937], 4). As in the case of his fellow post-Kantians, Hartshorne's "beyond" is not only not known, but not knowable—not within the reach of any evidence, even (presumably) evidence of the sort we read of in Augustine's account of his experience with Monica at Ostia (*Confessions* [New York: The New American Library, 1963], Bk. 9, ch. 10).

<sup>20</sup> Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1957), 55–56.

<sup>21</sup> See especially Huston Smith's *Forgotten Truth: The Primordial Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) and Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Gifford Lectures, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

<sup>22</sup> Several of Jacob Needleman's recent works are relevant, in particular *Lost Christianity* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), *The Heart of Philosophy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), and the essay "Man's Nature and Natural Man," in *Consciousness and Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 1982). Bebek's account of "noetic thought", in *The Third City: Philosophy at War with Positivism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), should be required reading for any academic who wishes to take seriously the possibility of a spiritual theological method. Among other signs of the times, a newly constituted program unit of the American Academy of Religion on the subject of esotericism attests both to an increasing interest in such studies and to the concern of many scholars that esoteric, spiritual, and perennialist research be put upon a solid, serious foundation.

<sup>23</sup> Farley, *Ecclesial Man* (see n. 2 above), 22–23.