LESLIE DEWART (1922 – 2009)

Canada’s Forgotten Theological Philosopher

“A Review of His Major Works”

Allan M Savage, DTh, DLitt.
TO THE HESITANT PHILOSOPHER

If philosophy’s myths to philosophy’s truth,
Pros and cons with right and wrong,
Traditionalism, existentialism and hidden wonder,
If wisdom, Gnosticism and things unknown;
In all their human thought retold,
But not exactly in the ancient way,
Can please, as in my day,
The wiser youngsters of to-day:

– So be it, and read on!

If not; If studious youth no longer craves,
That ancient light recast,
Plato, Aristotle and Thomas of Aquino,
Spinoza, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger.

– So be it. And may we,
In all our ignorance share the grave,
Where these and all their musings lie!

(With a tip o’ the hat to Robert Louis Stevenson)
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SECTION I

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Giving Dewart a Context

In the course of my presentation of Dewart’s philosophy in this book, I shall note particular insights of two other thinkers, whose religious philosophy I accept as *dehellenized* in Dewart’s meaning of the term. Auguste Sabatier (1839-1901) and Paul Trudinger, (1930-) never employ the term as far as I can determine. Both Sabatier and Trudinger base their philosophical interpretation on experience. Both suggest that one must decide against what one had been taught by religious authorities of their day. Trudinger gives examples from his belief in the Christian Creed and Sabatier gives examples from the philosophy and theology of the Church in his time. For Trudinger, the decision against one’s earlier instruction is a “shift in faith,” not a “loss of faith.” ¹ For Sabatier, “autonomy, in action, transforms authority by gradually displacing its seat. So much the more does authority contribute to the development of autonomy. From their interaction results the progress of humanity.” ² To my mind, both philosophical attitudes, Trudinger’s “shift in faith” and Sabatier’s “active autonomy,” are what Dewart describes as dehellenization of the philosophical attitude, in a positive sense.

Each in his unique philosophical way, Sabatier, Trudinger and Dewart deliberately reach out to others, and share a philosophical desire to improve upon their generation’s philosophical perspective. Sabatier says referring to himself: “If he does all that in him lies to bind up his sheaf, it is that he may give to others an idea of the fertility of the field in which he has labored, and thus attract to it new labourers stronger and more able than himself.” ³ Trudinger remarks, “I write as one who believes that there many more ‘out there’ who have had the kinds of ‘shifts in faith’ that I have

3 Sabatier, Auguste (1899:378).
experienced. ... These people may appreciate having a spokesperson for their position!” And Leslie Dewart (1922-2009) expresses the thought that “it is not out of the question that in the future there should be other attempts, besides mine, to understand the historical causes of the failure of modern philosophy, and attempt to remedy them. And if such attempts reach the correct conclusions that may have escaped me, they should yield more adequate proposals than mine.” The reader will do well to bear in mind that, for Dewart, dehellenization is a philosophical concept equivalent to “un-necessity,” that allows one to determine a future which is not yet created.

What I present in my presentation here is influenced primarily by my Catholic educational background. However, I believe my observations may be applicable, _inter alia_, to all Christian religious traditions. Thus, an ecumenical presumption underlies my discussion as I place Dewart’s dehellenization in a contemporary context.

By the time of the 19th Century, the church in its Catholic and Protestant forms had evolved to be quite different from previous generations. The church after the 19th century needed to address the problems of a new generation or that generation might leave the church, finding it to be irrelevant to its needs. These problems were addressed by Vatican II (1962–1965) in conciliar fashion in the presence of the Holy Spirit as had been done since the Council of Jerusalem circa the year 50. The new world order requires of the church new solutions to its new problems. Briefly put: the ecclesial community needs new skins for the new wine.

Today, the understanding of society and culture put forward by Vatican Council II continues to evolve. In hindsight, we see development, as well as some lack of development in the theological, pastoral, sociological, and psychological insights discussed in the Council’s four sessions. The early church Councils

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4 Trudinger, Paul (1988:3) _Leaves from the Note Book of an Unashamed Heretic_ Frye & Co.
6 Cf. Acts 15:28 which “emphasizes the unity between God and the Church and the way in which the Holy Spirit works in and through the holy councils,” according to a note in the _Orthodox Study Bible_ Thomas Nelson (2008).
had been called by the Roman Emperors to define the new doctrines of the Church. Rather than define new doctrines, Vatican II was called to bring the church up to date in pastoral matters. This updating or aggiornamento was also encouraged in theology and in philosophy by the Council and many philosophers and theologians in Catholic Universities throughout the world undertook the challenge. Dewart’s academic efforts are within this aggiornamento.

This short work is an exposé of my thoughts on Leslie Dewart’s philosophical insights as they occurred to me while I read and re-read his works. My project is not original. Robert Prentice, 49 years ago, as I write this, attempted something similar. His efforts have been somewhat of an inspiration for me. He, as a professional philosopher, attempted an evaluation of Dewart’s thinking. I merely attempt a re-organization and application of Dewart’s thought hopefully to indicate its value within the development of philosophy and take his thought beyond the context in which he wrote. Prentice sees Dewart’s philosophical thought as possibly being available to re-express the Christian faith in contemporary terms. Contextualizing Dewart’s Foundations of Belief, Prentice writes that experience and meaning in religious belief constitute a highly positive part of The Foundations of Belief, in that he begins to set down certain lines of a system which could eventually be developed for re-expressing the Faith in thoroughly contemporary terms. Actually, his own exposition perhaps lacks a certain systematization here, so that here, as elsewhere we have presumed to organize it in our own way, while staying close to his text. His theories, he says, do not in any way deny but rather they assert even more strongly the transcendence and immanence of God. Immanence, however, as he explains it, casts faith as meaning-seeking, rather than as propositional adherence. For the epistemological concept of faith in an immanent God has shifted from its traditional hellenized basis to an existentialist one, whereby faith is seen as incorporated into human experience as the total human project. This renders faith “natural” since it is detached from the problematic in which the supernaturalness of faith was conceived, but it does not make it a purely human creation, since it still depends basically on the divine, transcendent initiative.
Being “natural,” however, and geared to “meaning-conferring,” the “truth” of the faith is no longer viewed propositionally but ontically in so far as it can authenticate human existence on its highest and most meaningful dimension.\(^7\)

The fundamental issue I address is Dewart’s approach to the notion of philosophical dehellenization, which is not a universal theological issue but a particular one of Western philosophy. His philosophical approach consists of the proverbial “two-edged” sword, that is, a negative aspect and positive aspect and neither may be considered without reference to the other. Prentice’s analysis of Dewart’s position is accurate when he writes that the “conception of truth as an adequation of the mind to reality was ill-adapted to express the Christian faith in a world which was only too conscious of the evolving character of reality and truth … [and] that contemporary phenomenological ideas of truth and reality would serve the Church better in formulating her doctrine to the contemporary world … in presenting the evolving quality of human consciousness and of divine faith.”\(^8\)

The development of Dewart’s notion of dehellenization was cumulative. His ideas, first noted in germ in his earlier works, continued to be developed and disclosed throughout his writing career. I contend that each of his books presents a different slant on his notion of philosophical dehellenization. I begin my consideration of his thinking with his PhD thesis (University of Toronto, 1954) entitled, *The Development of Karl Pearson’s Scientific Philosophy*.

From my undergraduate days, my experience has confirmed much of the accuracy of Dewart’s thinking. To me he had the philosophical vocabulary that captured my experience better than my expression at that time. And I continue to explore the significance of his words to this day.

This monograph is a short personal introduction to Dewart’s thought as reflected in his notion of dehellenization. In composing it I attempt to “transpose to another key,” as it were, his philosophy for the benefit of contemporary philosophers and theologians. I make no claim to present an exhaustive critique or evaluation of his

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\(^8\) Prentice, Robert (1971: 205).
thought. One must read his books and their critique by professional philosophers for that. Nor do I attempt to simplify his work. Rather, I present an attempt at “thinking through faith” and “thinking faith through.” To that end, in 2005 I wrote to Professor Dewart about a project I had in mind.

I am contemplating writing a book based on the philosophical perspectives that appear in your published works. As an undergraduate student at St. Michael’s College (1971–1974) I took philosophy classes from you and remember them as among the most exciting and informative aspects of my education at U. of T. They have had a lasting influence and that accounts for my desire to write a book that incorporates the development of your personal philosophical perspective. To this end, I conceive the book as an “intellectual biography” more than an exposé of your thoughts.

The same letter contained a request for a personal meeting to discuss my proposal further. He replied:

I cannot adequately tell you how much I regret that I am unable to accede to your request. … I am especially sorry because your project, as you describe it, seems to me intended as an original contribution that continues and develops – instead of merely recounting – what you have found useful in my work. For a teacher, to inspire his students and be surpassed by them is much more rewarding than merely to have been admired and understood by them. 9

I make no claim to have surpassed Professor Dewart’s philosophical thinking in my academic career. This book amounts to my own exercise in a creative interpretation of Dewart’s philosophy. Hence, I am solely responsible for its content.

Born in Spain as Gonzalo Gonzales Duarte and raised in Cuba, Leslie Dewart came to Canada at 19 years of age. He served as a pilot flying bomber-reconnaissance missions during World War II. It was after five years of service he became a Canadian citizen and changed his name to Leslie Sutherland Dewart.

His University of Toronto education records an Honours BA in Psychology (1951), an MA in Philosophy (1952) and a PhD in Philosophy (1954). Except for a two-year posting in the Department

9 Personal correspondence in possession of the author.
of Philosophy, University of Detroit (1954-1956) Dewart spent his entire career at the University of Toronto, holding positions in St. Michael’s College, the School of Graduate Studies, the Institute of Christian Thought, and Graduate Centre for Religious Studies. Dewart’s interest in Law culminated with an LLB in 1979 from the Faculty of Law, University of Toronto. He was called to the Ontario Bar in 1980. In addition to teaching he held positions on the Editorial Boards of number of philosophical and theological journals for which he had written articles.  

10. From 1970-1971 he was Chair of the University of Toronto Combined Departments of Religious Studies.

10 See appendix: Dewart’s Publications.
The Development of Karl Pearson’s Scientific Philosophy (1954)

According to Dewart, Pearson (1857-1936) concluded that knowledge is identical to virtue and religion, and science is the only reliable knowledge base for religious and moral thought. This role for science, however, is discounted by a contemporary of Pearson, the evangelical theologian, Auguste Sabatier (1839-1901) who held that emotion is the true life of religion. He wrote, “This error arises from the strange idea still prevailing among us, though it is refuted a hundred times over by a careful psychology, that religion is essentially a metaphysical theory, a branch of erudition. … [Rather,] religion exists as emotion, or sentiment, or vital instinct, before it is transformed into intellectual notions or into rites.” 11 To the contrary, deliverance and salvation for mankind lie in knowledge, Pearson believed. Science must somehow transcend the dichotomy (dualism) of matter and mind, subject and object through the identification of phenomena and reality. To that end, Pearson sought a “creed of life” for his personal guidance and his peace of mind.

In his thesis Dewart followed the development of Pearson’s quest for his creed of life from a philosophical perspective. Dewart employed an investigative method which incorporated his personal experience when interpreting Pearson. Given that the man was not a professional theologian, Dewart expressed the hope that his thesis will help others to understand the man before his name disappeared from philosophical memory.

Pearson lived during the time of great controversy between science and religion, when evolution appeared to conclusively refute traditional religious doctrines. Pearson, not being from an overly-devout background, but from a “stock of Dissenters,” as he described himself, thought that it was impossible to hold simultaneously to the theory of evolution and the traditional Christian faith. Pearson did not share the optimism of Sabatier, it

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seems, concerning the transformation of Christian consciousness in its evolutionary development. Sabatier had written:

The transformation of the Christian consciousness and its liberation from all exterior servitude began on the day when piety and science first met. They will be completed, and the religion of the Spirit will reign, all systems of authority having been done away, on the day when piety and science shall have become so mutually interpenetrated as to be thoroughly united into a single entity; inward piety the conscience of science, and science the legitimate expression of piety. This being the case, nothing appears to be more urgent than the constitution of a truly scientific theology. 12

Given Dewart’s personal philosophical approach to consciousness, I suspect that critical philosophers and theologians will be inclined to conclude that Dewart also comes from “a stock of dissenters” within the Western philosophical tradition given his interpretation of Pearson’s scientific philosophy.

How to harmonize and integrate religion and science is the problem for Pearson. Part of the problem is the incorrect grasp of the meaning of science which must be correctly understood before it can be reconciled with religion. Religion, likewise, has forgotten its true nature, and setting itself against religion has fallen into disrepute. Completing his research Dewart concludes that the matter of humanity’s proper relationship to God will occupy Pearson all during his life.

The construction of formal Christian doctrine, in the minds of some early 20th century philosophers and theologians, had neglected human emotion for the sake of its own intellectually orthodox theology by relying too heavily on the Greek philosophy that it had inherited. To correct this, Pearson maintained, scientists must ultimately enlighten philosophers as they account for the universe without the use of religious concepts.

For Pearson, his philosophy of statistical induction was his answer to what was essentially a religious problem, according to Dewart. The philosophy of statistical induction, with the aid of science, was intended to give humanity a religion worthy of its

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12 Sabatier (1899:318) Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit Hodder & Stoughton.
intellect. As we will see below, Dewart will offer his own answer to what essentially constitutes a religious problem, and his answer will not be scientific in Pearson’s sense. However, there were certain philosophical principles that underlie Pearson’s scientific thinking that Dewart will find useful. The unity of all science is in its method, not its content. The method of science leads to knowledge, not to poetry, not to metaphysics, not to mythology, nor to fantasy.

Mythology has concerned itself with the question of humanity’s origin. Philosophers, ancient and modern, have been critical of mythology from their respective points of view. As well, modern science has sought to answer questions of humanity’s origin. Whether seeking answers to humanity’s origin mythologically or scientifically in the Western tradition, Christian revelation must also be considered. As well, in studying human nature from the Western perspective, the process of intellectual evolution must be taken into account. That is, the evolution of human thinking from mythologies to philosophies, from philosophies that accept revelation to philosophies that reject revelation, from Christian philosophy to secular philosophies characteristic of modern science and mathematics.

Contemporary scientists view the world via three aspects. The first is cosmo-genesis or the birth of the universe; the second is biogenesis, or the birth of life; and the third is anthropogenesis which includes noögenesis, the birth of humanity and of the human mind. The theory of evolution is an intellectual construction attempting to retrace and interpret changes in the physical world as experienced through our senses either unaided or assisted by scientific instruments.

To include humans in the theory of evolution is to make it impossible to hold a strictly objective (physical) view of the phenomenon of evolution. Including humans in the theory of evolution introduces subjective and metaphysical elements into the interpretation of the theory of evolution. The appearance of life brought into being a new status for physical matter. We know that the chemical molecules characterizing living things are far more complex than those that the chemist finds in describing inanimate nature.

With regard to the origins of humanity it is possible to distinguish one doctrine common to all branches of the Indo-
European family of peoples, that is, the belief that the gods were the ancestors of humanity. Yet, Western philosophers need not restrict their search for the origins of humanity to Christian philosophers, who focused on the origins of humanity as given in biblical revelation when philosophy was viewed as the “handmaid of theology.” That relationship no longer exists. Modern science, to a great degree, has replaced philosophy and theology in investigating the origins of humanity. For many thinkers today it is as if Auguste Sabatier’s optimism for theology’s role in human affairs has been eclipsed. Sabatier wrote:

It is not enough that theology shall make clear the senility of the old forms of religion; its task is to create for it new forms, and bring the gospel of Christ into more immediate contact with the consciences of men and of modern society; to make it the better understood, that it may be the more readily accepted. Thus it becomes a beneficent mediator between the life-principle of Christianity and the needs and requirements of the present time. For those elements of traditional belief which have become outworn and unassimilable, it substitutes new intellectual elements, philosophical and scientific notions drawn from culture already acquired. … All is movement in us and around us. … [Theology] must remain progressive, like all other sciences, which day by day do a positive without ever doing a completed work.  

There are two ways of viewing humanity from Pearson’s perspective, Dewart notes. In ancient times thinkers regarded humans as a static and quasi-supernatural object. Alternatively, modern thinkers view humanity in its historical context within the cosmos. And just as philosophy replaced poetry and mythology in explaining the origins of the world and humanity, so science has for the last few centuries taken over the quest from philosophy. Contrary to the assertions of certain philosophers such as Auguste Comte and other Positivists, it is natural that philosophy and science, instead of competing, should cooperate. Science remains incomplete so long as its enquiries are not expanded by philosophy. And

13 Sabatier (1899:358) Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit Hodder & Stoughton.
philosophy cannot advance without relying on the technical and social sciences.

The answers to the question of the origin of humanity, given by myths, given by philosophy and science, given by revelation and theology cannot be treated on the same plane. Traditionally, for the Christian, revelation and theology are sources of information in investigating the question of the origin of humanity. What Christian faith teaches us is that there can be no real opposition between these different planes of knowledge or between the branches of study which each pursues. In accepting the appearance of humanity as a major novelty in the universe, it is a fact that in Western philosophy, theology and science are of a common mind concerning humanity’s unique status. Mythology is the exception since it lacks a sense of humanity’s unique status.

Such a common mind implies a usefulness to science and to theology. Science offers a possible description of the future, not an explanation of what the future will be. Dewart’s examination of Pearson’s thought here provides points of departure for the development of some of Dewart’s later ideas. These ideas appear “in embryo” in his investigation (and critique) of Pearson’s scientific philosophy. In short, to my mind, Dewart’s thesis becomes an early (if unintended) “rehearsal” for his life’s work that will ultimately culminate in his posthumously published work, *Hume’s Challenge and the Renewal of Modern Philosophy*.

Dewart’s contribution to Western philosophy merits further investigation. Anyone, interested in theology, who has grasped Dewart’s perspective on philosophical issues, might be inspired to tackle the problem of the underdevelopment of scientific theology, in light of Dewart’s investigation of the underdevelopment of a philosophy for Christian theism.

I took courses from Leslie Dewart during my undergraduate years at U. of T. and subsequently followed his writing career. He was a profound writer and to appreciate his critical philosophical approach requires discipline and perseverance on the part of the reader. In short, his works are not an easy read, including his thesis. Not to be under-appreciated in his thesis is the religious aspect of Pearson’s thought which Dewart developed with regard to Pearson’s scientific philosophy. Dewart writes: “It is plain to Pearson that the traditional forms of Christianity are not the full answer to man’s
religious needs; at least not when the religious experience which gives the ‘visions of man’s dignity’ has been lived intensely.” This theme is evident throughout Dewart’s investigation. He concluded that the development of Pearson’s scientific philosophy arrived at a point whereby philosophy is in a position to judge science, rather than science judge philosophy.
Dewart began the Prologue of the book with the statement: “This is an essay in political philosophy.” And in the epilogue, he concluded: “Two questions underlie every problem raised in this study: One is philosophical, the other theological. From the point of view of Christian philosophy, the question is that of the nature of human freedom. From the point of view of Christian theology, it is that of the nature of the Church.” Despite his remarks, from a cursory reading of the book, some interpreters believe that the political issue is what predominantly concerns Dewart here. But this is not the case and to understand Dewart’s mind as revealed in all his future writings, this dual perspective of philosophy and theology must be kept in mind. Dewart is predominantly a philosopher, yet he is concerned with theological issues.

The reader familiar with the Cuban crisis from a religious perspective will recognize that there is no mention here of the Pope’s encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*. Even though it addressed similar issues to Dewart’s book. Writing in the pre-desktop publishing era, Dewart’s book was at the publisher when the encyclical was released and emendations would have been extremely difficult to effect.

As an essay on political philosophy, the Cuban revolution reflected a political situation within the universal church characteristic of all Catholic nations at the time. In the 1960’s England and Cuba were worlds apart, yet Charles Davis could write, from his own experience of ecclesiastical oppression that “only a revolution would now bring the Roman Church into the modern age, and there is little sign of more than marginal adjustment.”

From a philosophical perspective, the issue was the interaction of free and responsible individuals which brought about Cuba’s revolution. In Dewart’s opinion free and responsible individual action would also conduct future revolutions within the universal

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church for better or worse. Throughout his later works he addressed this problem through a process of philosophical dehellenization.

There is a similarity between Cuban Christians and Christians of other cultures. Both, he claims in this book, are indifferent to the religious institution mainly because of an alienation between the laity and the clergy. Vatican II attempted to correct this in its decree on the laity, *Apostolicam actuositatem*, Chapter 5, #24 and #25 which declared that bishops, pastors other priests should keep in mind that the right and duty to exercise the lay apostolate is common to all the faithful and that, along with the clergy the laity, have their own roles in building up the Church.

After detailed discussion, Dewart concluded that it was a matter of conscience that began the conflict between the revolutionaries and the Church. The implication he drew is that legitimate attempts at reform led nowhere, and the reforming revolutionaries found no support from an intransigent church that looked only to its traditional past, and geographically to Spain, as a stabilizing approach which perpetuated a classical civilization. This insight, which he considered to be counter-productive, provoked the question: “What we need to ask ourselves is what was the nature of the Cuban Church’s implicit ecclesiology, particularly in what concerns the sanctity of the Church; whether that ecclesiology is the only possible one within orthodoxy; whether it is adequate, and finally, whether we wish to share it or not.”

The Church misunderstands itself (but it could have been otherwise) in the modern age due to its lack of understanding of its own historical development which generated the present condition. Auguste Sabatier had a positive insight when he wrote that modern minds “have acquired the historic sense, and this truly new faculty of understanding and reconstructing the past has given them a new vision.” The weight of the Church’s history works against it in the modern context, since its history is improperly interpreted by successive generations. Most contemporary Christians are unaware of this historical perspective and how it inhibits the Church’s role in the modern world. Dewart continues that the Church’s challenge is:

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15 *Christianity and Revolution* p. 180
16 Sabatier (1899:64) *Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit*
Hodder & Stoughton.
“How shall the Body of Christ as it ages and matures, and as it finally comes to its childhood’s end, adapt to an emerging world-wide civilization, ... adapt to a civilization which liquidates not only the medieval, but also the ‘modern’ post-medieval world along with its own foundations in the cultural forms inherited from the classical Greco-Roman world.” 17 This challenge incorporates a spiritual value that constitutes the divine mission of the Body of Christ. In a world that “liquidates” its cultural forms, “What must be feared is not so much that the gentiles shall reject the Church bodily as that the Church may not spiritually conquer the gentiles.” 18 Thus, his fear is that the church will become irrelevant to the cultures of our time — and not just the Cuban culture.

The crisis of the Church reflected in the Cuban context is that Christian cultures are reaching the end of a spiritual stage. The end of a spiritual stage approached so rapidly that many Christian social institutions had no time to adjust — hence they have become obsolete. This applied particularly to Christian religious institutions and, as a result, required a philosophical explanation. Ultimately, this philosophical explanation is to be found in the consciousness of the people, not in the political institutions themselves. Neither is the explanation to be found in the modern science of sociology.

Our minds are “all we have of ourselves to do God’s bidding, and what we need to use, even with grace,” writes Dewart. 19 The Catholic idea of grace is essentially something which humans, whatever their merits or efforts, are incapable of obtaining by themselves. It is something which human nature does not include. Nor does human nature claim that which is not due to it. Thus, the Christian problem is not merely how to correct the past, but how to plan for the future in the grace and presence of God, as Dewart will eventually attempt to explain.

We live in a world which, “we must now commit ourselves for longer, with ever fewer opportunities of later changing our minds. ... We are not simply the actors on a historical stage already set: We are the creators of a whole world to come.” 20 By this notion Dewart connects the Cuban revolution and the Church in a common activity.

17 Ibid., 183.
18 Ibid., 185.
19 Ibid., 193.
20 Ibid., 194.
in the initial stages of reform at least. “The reason is that although the Church is not of the world, the world is of the Church,” according to Dewart, and the two cannot be separated. 21

Furthermore, the world may be distant from the Christian, but it is never an alien place. Christians are always politically and philosophically engaged within the world. Christians are incarnated into this world. That is why, “We do not want the world to embrace the Church; we want the Church to embrace the world.” 22

“The most urgent and immediate task for the Christian is to become aware of the present age of the Church; thus, the immediate task for us is intelligent self-examination and self-criticism” which are the conditions of spiritual and political human growth. 23 Understanding such growth in the Church must take into account the particular culture’s theory of knowledge. Historically, all the events we can know could have been otherwise than they actually were. This gives the Church the reason to believe that, in Cuba’s case, “if communism is wrong, then precisely because it is such, what we should do to it is not destroy it, but do what it cannot do for itself, namely, make it find its proper perfection, and its proper truth.” 24

The contemporary challenge for Cuban Christianity is to extend this particular role to a universal role of a proper and perfected communism. Thus, all Christians are called to a higher task in this world which, ideally is best lived out within the church. However, for those outside the Church, Dewart notes that “to live by ideals is the best that pagans can do: It is not even the least that Christians are required to achieve.” 25 Pagans live through idealism because they are bound by the idea of Fate. Christians are Fate-less, not bound by pre-existing ideals to which they must conform. Christians create their existential reality by not accepting a determining Fate in charge of their existence as Dewart will later insist. I find it significant that Sabatier thinks the same way. Before discussing the religious evolution of Israel, he writes:
  But first let me explain what I understand by this word evolution, and let me eliminate from it the fatalistic sense too often given

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21 Ibid., 195.
22 Ibid., 196.
23 Ibid., 199.
24 Ibid., 217.
25 Ibid., 278.
to it. If by evolution you mean a necessary and unconscious process, a mechanical and continuous movement, which, without either effort or danger, causes light to spring out of darkness, good from evil. And raises a people or a race from a lower to a higher form of life, you incur the reproach of confounding the laws of the moral world with those of the physical order. ²⁶

From a moral perspective, Dewart believes that to do the right thing Christians must enquire into what they have to do to bring into existence what does not yet exist. They must start existentially from their actual condition in life in which they find themselves related and relating to the mystery of God. Theologically, from a Christian perspective, Dewart recognizes two temporal moments of existential awareness. The first moment of existential awareness is objective and is that life is a gift from God as recognized psychologically through the development of consciousness. He will expand on this later. The second moment of existential awareness is subjective recognizing, through faith, the immanent gift of God in humanity. Such divine immanence means that faith is seeking meaning. Faith is not a form of propositional adherence. Faith authenticates the human being at its highest level of existence, raising it above the level of mere animal life.

Humanity lives out its life historically as a free agent in both a fallen and redeemed world. That is why humanity’s moral problems arise out of human consciousness and subjective evaluation. Moral problems arise from the interpretation of humanity’s social context. In short, the problem is not with the world, but humanity itself which is responsible for its choices.

A lesson to be learned from the Cuban situation is that, “justice today cannot obtain among nations unless it takes place within the unity of the human race; the concept of political justice itself must be recast in order to mean not an approximation to an ideal reality, but the concretization of human fraternity.” ²⁷ In other words, a Pax Romana is inadequate for contemporary human needs and will not work for any future political cooperation. Dewart will propose a

²⁶ Sabatier, Auguste (1897:123) Outlines of a Philosophy George H. Doran Co.
²⁷ Ibid., 284.
dehellenized philosophical solution to this cultural (political) problem.

“The time has come, therefore, for Christianity to create its own cultural forms. No doubt, this creation, required by the development of our history, demands by its very nature continuity with tradition: There is no material out of which to create the Christian cultural forms of the future except our past and our history.” 28 The call for a Christian culture is idealistic and there appears to be minimal support for its establishment in the present Western context since Dewart penned his thought on the matter. However, he did maintain that, in fact, the task of establishing a Christian culture will fall to the church. He writes, “It may be that to make peace, to work towards the making of an unprecedented world without war and, thus, to begin and to create a united, catholic world under the sponsorship of the Catholic faith, is the political vocation offered by history to collective ecclesiastical Christianity in our time” [Dewart’s italics]. 29 But, also, he maintains that our fears and our delusions of persecution prevent us from following through even in our own minds.

It is to be remembered that Dewart writes to academics from within the walls of academia. Therefore, the “dry rot” within the university halls is not to be overlooked as contributing to the necessity of dehellenization. Interestingly, Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984) questions Dewart’s work, especially in The Future of Belief, as being not sufficiently academic and a somewhat immature philosophically. The quality of Lonergan’s critique in the Journal Theological Studies, notwithstanding, I highlight some of Dewart’s “immature” thought from an article in that journal written by Lonergan. First, Dewart has inadequately interpreted scholasticism; secondly, he has caricatured popular faith; thirdly, he advocates for a “metaphysics of presence” whereby we could get along without the training and education few can afford; fourthly, he classifies Dewart as merely a revolutionary, not a reformer, and one who could have written a more important book. Lonergan agrees that there are limitations to Hellenism that have yet to be successfully addressed by Catholic theology, but Dewart is not the man to

28 Ibid., 286.
29 Ibid., 287.
address them. Creating a future of belief requires hard work, both by the individual and the community. As Dewart has put it: “It is surely not for nothing that talent has come to mean principally intellectual endowment. Catholic intellectuals who are not ready to make their talent fructify can always chose any equally noble, but less arduous, less responsible, way of Christian life.” Such is the lesson of the Cuban crisis.

Within the first 30 pages of this book my memory took me back to my university days when Leslie Dewart taught me at St Michael’s College, U. of T. I recall Dr. Dewart's first wife, Joanne McWilliam (who was also teaching at U. of T. at the time) warning me that Leslie's works are all difficult and demanding reading. How true. In re-reading Christianity and Revolution, I am reminded that Christianity is an existential life-style or political philosophy, before it is thought of as an issue of belief or unbelief about God’s incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth. A human internal moral force, Christians place themselves in a particular relationship to world politics. Thus, as I was reminded, Christian political philosophy acts a means to religious human ends.

Much of the content of this book focuses on Fidel Castro’s character and personality as Dewart sees it. For his attention on Castro I am grateful since I was young and more interested in ideological issues than personal ones when I was first introduced to this book. The Communist Party of Cuba initially did not consider Castro a Communist, even though he allowed the Party freedom and opportunity to promote its ideology. Eventually, as it turned out, Castro adopted Communism of his own free choice, as Dewart explains, so as to combat the disordered and civic immorality of the Cuban culture. (His character might not have allowed him to do otherwise, Dewart suggests, since Castro’s solution to corruption involved his psychological processes and inner dialogue.)

As I grew up, in an increasingly secular age, it was not fashionable to mix religion and politics. But, in the Cuba of the revolution, religion or better the Church, played a singularly important role in bringing about the revolution — but not for the

31 Ibid., 292.
reasons one may presume given the lack of understanding of Cuban history, culture and the Church, Dewart suggests. After reading the causes he advances I believe that he was correct. (Ultimately, the Catholic Hierarchy and the Catholic Faithful constituted a “house divided” between the traditional conformist attitude and the new non-conformist attitude that was developing within the country.)

Reading deeper into the book and into Dewart’s insightful way of thinking, it becomes clear that Church and State relations in Cuba ultimately deteriorated and the problem, as Dewart saw it, was an ecclesiastical one. I cannot disagree. The notion of “ecclesial,” however, as advanced by Vatican II was not, as yet, in the minds of the magisterium or of the faithful either, for that matter. Politically, Cuba was beginning to emerge from a medieval understanding of life and the Church was in danger of failing the people spiritually given its adherence to a nostalgic past. In the 1960’s the end of a classical spiritual age was approaching in Cuba, and I agree with Dewart that in Cuba’s experience lies a lesson for our time, as our governing ecclesiastical institution appears to be adhering to a nostalgic past.

That there is “more world in the Church, than Church in the world,” as many see it today, is a corruption and betrayal of the Christians’ desire. Christians do not want the world to embrace the Church; Christians want the Church to embrace the world. To my mind, Christian theology (to which Dewart alludes) needs to address anew the nature of the Church in humanity’s fallen state, and responsibly rule itself politically and spirituality. The Church no longer lives its fallen state in the classical world, but in a world beginning to “dehellenize” itself, as the lesson of Cuba demonstrates. How philosophers (and any serious theologian, for that matter) will view God in a dehellenized culture will concern Dewart in future books as an existential reality within a future Western philosophy of belief.

This is Dewart’s first book which is actually an essay in political philosophy addressing the relationship between Church and State. According to Dewart, the lesson to be learned from a theological perspective given the relationship as experienced in pre-revolutionary Cuba is that, over time the Church may not remain spiritually relevant to the faithful as the traditional relationship between Church and State begins to end. Political institutions, civil
and ecclesiastical, make adaptations in light of cultural experiences but at an obsolete rate of development, Dewart maintains. Whatever political order is determined for the future must be grounded in human social and historical freedom. Whether in Church or in State affairs humanity cannot avoid ruling itself except reasonably, humanely, and autonomously. Humanity must not fall into the philosophical trap of trying to seek out a preconceived or predetermined order, such as the ancient Greek philosophers did, whether social, political, economic or personal. In this book Dewart sets out his initial reflections that will eventually form the basis of the phenomenological and existential thinking that characterize all his writings.
This book treats of how the Christian faith evolves when understood as a supernatural gift of belief. Dewart’s understanding is similar to Sabatier’s distinction between faith and belief. At the end of his study of religion Sabatier wrote:

In all that has preceded I have carefully distinguished between faith and belief, reserving the first expression for that act of heart and will — an essentially moral act — whereby man accepts the gift of God and his forgiveness, and consecrates himself to him; and applying the second to that intellectual act by which the mind gives its consent to a historic fact and to a doctrine. 32

In this book Dewart examines Sabatier’s second point within the everyday experience of modern-minded individuals. The problem of the mind giving consent may not be perceived by us if we accept the traditional experience of religion as adequate and neglect the critical historical and evolutionary approach to understanding human experience.

Western experience is at the modern stage of its historical and evolutionary development. It will evolve further. This being the case, we must keep in mind that Christianity has a mission; it is not merely a message. In its cultural development, and within the process of globalization, Western Christianity may need to recognize divergent conceptualizations of God for future belief. Philosophically, these divergent conceptions will most likely arise from non-Hellenist views imported into Western culture by the various Asian cultures that have come into contact with the West.

The Reformation tried to integrate experience and the post-medieval understanding of God – but actually failed. Modern industrial and technological societies often perceive themselves as in conflict with Christianity. But there is some cause to believe that this is slowly changing in contemporary Western culture, as noted

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32 Sabatier (1899:335) Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit Hodder & Stoughton.
by Vatican II. 33 It is through the modern scientific consciousness that Western society creates itself. A scientific, as opposed to a philosophical culture, defines a great portion of contemporary humanity. Psychology is a dominant “soft” science, not a philosophy. Since Kant, (1724-1894) psychology has been able to establish itself as an empirical, natural science without a priori metaphysical or theological commitments. 34

Psychology (with its subjective component) has influenced the Western definition of the human being more than any physical science. As humanity “comes of age” it may realize that it is not naturally alienated from creation or from itself. As humanity rejects its fear of the future it will re-organize its self-understanding and its concept of God. This self-understanding will touch on the theory of dogmatic development which is more properly a theology, than a philosophy. Dewart follows Vergilius Ferm’s understanding that “theology, in the widest sense of the term, is a branch of philosophy.” 35 Unfortunately, to many contemporary thinkers, philosophy often means an obsolete mode of thought. A re-organization of philosophy following the insights obtained through consciousness will require that any scientific interpretation become religiously meaningful in keeping with the nature of the human being.

Philosophy probes into human beings existentially; theology probes into human beings transcendentally. Here, Dewart suggests that the notion of consciousness as understood by the pre-Marxist Sartre, who wrote almost exclusively about an individual’s psychology, imagination and consciousness, will be most helpful. Storm Heter (East Stroudsburg University) confirms Sartre’s change of perspective. “Marx’s influence on Sartre is undeniable. While he identified with the French Left prior to the war,

33 “We cannot but deplore certain attitudes, not unknown among Christians, deriving from a short-sighted view of the rightful autonomy of science; they have occasioned conflict and controversy and have misled many into opposing faith and science.” Gaudium et Spes, para. 36.
35 Runes, Dagobert (1963) s. v. Theology.
experiences during the war politicized him and motivated the turn to Marxism.”

Theistic belief has a future role, albeit a changed role, within the evolution of humanity. One must decide to both believe and disbelieve in God, that is, to believe in a dehellenized God and to disbelieve in the traditional myths about God formed by an acceptance of the myths and poetry of a closed Hellenized world. A Hellenist philosophy also represents a closed world within its perspective.

Christian belief in God (faith) is a moral act of existential self-relation to ultimate reality which is disclosed in lived experience. Hence it is a way of life. Ultimate reality, for Dewart, is a reality beyond the totality of being. To my mind, Dewart has expanded the perspective of Alois Halder who has written: “As a transcendental note of being, reality is therefore prior both to the distinction between potency and act … and the categories of substance and accident, and applies to all these throughout. … It also comprises the distinction between ‘being’ and ‘thought.’”

This transcendental reality beyond being, requires not an act of faith, but a life of faith. This means that the Christian life must be both a life of belief and disbelief. The Christian life, if lived within Dewart’s articulation of the Christian vision, must include the legitimate possibility of asking whether as part of the Christian conceptual system, might become an inadequate concept by which to express Christian truth.

A human is conscious being whose reality extends beyond its existential limitations. That is, a human being is a holistic being whose reality is greater than the sum of its parts. Humans are thus transcendent beings whose experience of religious development follows the same rules as secular human experience. The paragraph below, which appears on page 81 of Dewart’s book, and which I have rendered in the first person singular is effective in grasping Dewart’s thinking about transcendent being.

My transcendence, which is the nature of my consciousness, and my radical distinction from the animal, would be mistakenly expressed in the formula “I not only know, but know that I

36 Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy s. v. Sartre [https://www.iep.utm.edu].
know.” For the point is not that I, who can know beings other than myself, can also be an object of knowledge for myself. It is not that I can “reflect,” that is, make my own (previous) act of knowledge the object of a (new) act of knowledge, and thus know that I am a knower. The point is that in the very act of knowing an object (whether a being other than myself, or the being which is myself) I become present to myself.

In short, knowing the object, God, renders me present to myself. The understanding of divine transcendence is traditionally called the “uncreatedness of God.” This notion, when understood from Dewart’s perspective allows that God, although not experienced directly, is yet definable and accessible. God does not require meaning in itself, but has meaning for us. This is largely a theological problem touching on God’s presence to us. Christian theology, employing Aristotle’s philosophical perspective, had concluded that Nature does not have its own finalities independently of God’s finalities. Today, we need to devise new ways of speaking about God. Experience requires that we disbelieve in a divine being who is different only in degree from the primitive deities, or disbelieve in the God of the philosophers. Paul Trudinger arrived at a similar conclusion through his religious experience. He, in his own way, has come to disbelieve in the traditional God of his youth. He writes:

One of the most scary faith-shifts in my pilgrimage occurred when I decided that I was very unsure about the role of God in the creation of this physical universe. … To find myself growing to believe that God was not involved in the physical universe’s coming into existence meant that I had to face the fact that I was, in this regard, cutting myself off from the great majority of both Christian and Jewish believers in God. 38

In a note on Modernism Dewart writes: “Dogmatic formulae and concepts do not mediate between faith and its object: they express faith in its object, God.” 39 But, how shall this expression appear, Dewart will ask later. His answer will not be in accord with the scientific proposal of Auguste Sabatier. Sabatier presented his

39 Future of Belief, p. 115.
solution this way: “From methods naturally designed to lead men to faith, they have become the first objects of faith. … Thus, were formed and established the fundamental dogmas of the Roman Catholic system and of the old Protestant system. … The critical examination of these two dogmas is laid upon us. What method shall we bring to it? Only one is of value today — that dedicated to the scientific spirit.”

Catholic theology today needs a creative philosophy in which the role of modern science has yet to be adequately determined, I suggest, in light of Dewart’s criticisms. Lacking a modern scientific understanding Catholic theology turned to non-scholastic disciplines to answer its needs, i.e., it turned to the “soft” sciences of psychology and sociology. Faith should not be required to uphold any creative philosophy. This would be more of a hindrance than a help, and any such a stop-gap use of faith should be abandoned.

The problem of God considered traditionally is that it has been considered in abstraction from God’s nature. This traditional approach is not based in experience. Considering God as presence and reality, that is, factually, would constitute a Christian philosophy that is not abstractly understood, but existentially experienced. This is Dewart’s approach. A caution however: philosophically speaking, “presence” is not equal to “identity.” Identity is a product of being, that is, the continuous existence of the personality despite its physiological and psychological changes; whereas presence is a notion that is properly unobjectifiable. To be of benefit to Christian belief in the future critical Christianity needs to acquire a healthy status of personal growth through the self-consciousness of presence, both individually and collectively.

Disbelieving in a mythical divine being, different from the God of the philosophers, presents a practical point concerning worship, Dewart notes. In any new understanding, “worship might be better understood as the rendering of ourselves present to the presence of God, whether in the interior prayer which sends no message to God but which receives his presence, or in public and common ceremonies which visibly, audibly and sensibly unite us through our

collective presence to each other in the presence of the present God.”  

As an undergraduate in 1970 I was warned that this book was a difficult read. It was true then and is true today. Dewart does not engage in any “pop” presentation of ideas but rather leads the reader on an exciting religious examination through an evolution of critical thinking. Dewart intends this book for those interested in “the problem of integrating Christian theistic belief with the everyday experience of contemporary man.” He is concerned mainly with the problem of everyday experience as understood within the Roman Catholic perspective at the time of the Second Vatican Council. The context in which Dewart writes reveals the issues and passions of the day. This is not a limitation. Although, not intended as a book on pastoral theology, I recommend that the last chapter be read as such. The last chapter, “The Development of Christian Theism” has insights on self-conscious development of the Christian understanding of God that should be of interest to any critically thinking pastor of this day and age. The Western conception of God is challenged by secular thought which fails to appreciate the Hellenistic background that continues to support much doctrine and dogma. Dewart has presented, from this reviewer’s perspective, an excellent professional academic understanding of the problem. He is able to help one to think one’s way out of the Hellenistic cultural setting and yet remain faithful to the truth it has expressed. Not to be overlooked are the copious footnotes in the text which indicate the seriousness and depth of Dewart’s thinking. They are of exceptional use in helping the contemporary individual in understanding the evolutionary characteristic of interpretive thought. Further, these notes provide a much-needed corrective to the misunderstood and misrepresented classical ideas of antiquity often encountered in popular religious books. I would not recommend the book for the casual reader, nor for the lazy reader. In fact, this is a painful book, not so much when reading, but when put into practice. It calls the reader to a self-confidence based on the reader’s conscious, self-conscious awareness of who he or she is, and able to become. Understanding Vatican II as a Christian

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41 Ibid., p. 206.
42 Ibid., p. 7.
watershed in theistic belief, Dewart writes: “We now stand on a very uncertain terrain. We are justified in exploring it solely for the attempt’s possible heuristic value.” 43

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43 Ibid., p. 173.
The Foundations of Belief (1969)

This massive work treats of how the faith is understood as philosophically true and how its object is said to be philosophically real. This makes Dewart’s his study specialized, as he admits. The notions he discusses in this book are Christian but may be applied within any religious conviction with appropriate allowances for variations. The human community must include religion in some form as integrated into its experience for its ongoing development. Since Catholicity is a call to contribute to the religious development of the human race, Christianity must make itself worthy of undertaking this role, since no other faith may be in a position to do so. As I interpret Dewart here, dehellenization will open Christianity to the “higher religions” of the East and invite Christian philosophical thought to transcend its inherited metaphysics and ultimately become meta-metaphysical.

The immediate issue is how Western humanity will “self-direct” the evolution of its religious belief to a meta-metaphysical status. Christian theology is to promote the development of doctrine but not based on natural theology, but on the presence of a revealing agent. Christian theology, in contrast to natural theology, is still mistakenly understood by many as revealed by God, and hence supernatural in origin. Phenomenology has changed some Christian belief but not all belief, according to Dewart. He is concerned with both, what has and has not yet been changed.

“To know” and “to love” determine the existential horizons within which Christian religious consciousness can expand. Since the reshaping of the future is but the analysis of the past, what are the alternative foundations needed for planning the future of belief to avoid past mistakes, Dewart asks. His answer reflects the historical “turn to subjectivity” movement that has been occurring in philosophy since the Middle Ages, that is, from the static thing in space to the person in time. Yet, objectivity itself is not a problem. The dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity is the problem.

Neither the classical, nor the neo-Thomistic understanding of the faith that is modified scholasticism is satisfactory for redeveloping
Christian faith. An incomplete “dehellenization” and the retention of a Hellenistic perspective accounts for the present stagnant situation in philosophy. Western philosophy must abandon classical knowledge as a way to relate itself to reality, and investigate the use of human consciousness to acquire knowledge of its proper relationship to reality.

Hellenization changed the understanding of the truth of Christianity intellectually and culturally. Theologians who have disagreed with Dewart’s accounting of Hellenization have found themselves, however, in agreement with his understanding of truth. The Christian faith is a grace and can be lost, according to Dewart.

To create the future foundations for belief is to transcend the past through dehellenization. The Hellenization of Christian culture has taken place in the absence of the consciousness of Christian belief, which is a philosophical problem left to contemporary philosophers to solve.

The form of philosophical reasoning is influenced by the structure of the language in which the thinking is done. The danger to be avoided when thinking in one’s native language is to become glossocentric, that is, believing that one’s language, culture, and world view constitute the centre of reality.

All thought systems relate humanity to reality. The way we think is often assumed to be the way all humanity thinks. According to Max Black, (1901-1988) an analytic philosopher, the “enquiries into the origin of language (e.g. in Plato’s Kratylos) once a favorite subject for speculation, are now out of fashion, both with philosophers and linguists. Enquiries as to the nature of language (as in Descartes, Leibniz, and many others) are, however, still central to all philosophical interest in language.” [Black’s italics]

Having knowledge of a thing does not mean that our knowledge

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44 Charles Davis (1967:52) has written of Dewart: “Now, while I have my own reservations about [Dewart’s] views on the hellenization of Christian experience – in any case, too large a subject to enter into here – I am completely at one with him in maintaining that all genuine faith demands an ultimate commitment to truth wherever and whatever it might be. Religious dishonesty in the corruption of faith.” A Question of Conscience Hodder and Stoughton.

corresponds to such a reality, no matter how accurately we express knowledge through language.

In classical Christian theology, all creatures depend on God once they have received their being, which is not necessary, that is, God is not required to create anything, which continues to depend on God even after it has received its being. Dewart credits St. Thomas with what amounts to the beginning of the process of dehellenization. When Thomas removed the notion of necessity from the Hellenist view of the world the process began. Dewart further suggests that human reality involves a possible “co-creator” status that through experience we choose to bring about a future as yet to be determined.

When Christian philosophers begin to tell people, as St. Thomas did, that they exist in their own right, and give them the premises from which they will in time deduce that they, too, are creators, and that they have a decisive role to play — for better or for worse — in the shaping of themselves, and that it is better to have creatively attempted something and failed than never to have created anything at all, one has to expect that some people — perhaps even most people for a while — will not know just what to do with their discovery and will not quite manage themselves well. But ars essendi longa, vita hominis brevis. 46 A little atheistic wild oats, a little experimental apostasy, may not be such a bad thing in the end, if only the Christian would learn to profit, even from them. 47

Dewart notes that the mind, or consciousness, is definable in terms of the presence of the self to itself. It is an activity of awareness, conscious or otherwise. Ledger Wood, (1901-1970) who was a member of the Princeton Philosophy Department for 43 years, noted that in addition to denoting a being, an individual self, a mind may be understood as “a metaphysical substance which pervades all individual minds and which is contrasted with matter or material substance.” 48 Were Wood’s “metaphysical substance” to have been rendered “metaphysical reality beyond being” instead, is, in my opinion, close to Dewart’s understanding of “consciousness.”

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46 Translation: art is long, life is short: i.e., learning one’s craft takes so long that a lifetime may not be adequate.
47 The Foundations of Belief, p. 206.
s. v. Mind.
Classical knowledge introduces a dichotomy into what was originally a unity and undifferentiated experience. Modern knowledge is the possibility of subjectivity appearing in the world by the subject’s own self-differentiation within the world of concrete matter from which humanity emerges. According to Robert Prentice, within Dewart’s perspective, “any of the techniques which investigate the manner in which man relates himself to reality, such as those used by the natural sciences, by philosophy, by psychology in its various forms, by sociology, etc., provides man with means of bolstering himself against the human fallibility to which he remains, however, incurably subject.” 49 Here, I would add theology as a technique of knowledge to Prentice’s list. But theology as understood, not in the traditional Roman Catholic sense but in a manner suggested by Sabatier.

Theology is in no sense a speculative science. It is an error to confound it with metaphysics. In the psychological fact of religion it’s basis is in experience; and in dogma or traditional theology it finds its matter formulated by history. … In our opinion it belongs rather to sociology; for religion, the object of its study, is certainly, side by side with language, the most important social fact which sociology can investigate. The sociological character and importance of theology will in the future appear and assert itself with ever greater evidence. 50

To my mind, Dewart’s dehellenization is a partial fulfillment of Sabatier’s prediction.

Humans continue to evolve (emerge) from whom they presently are. The concrete world becomes a self-made value to the conscious individual. Otherwise, it would remain merely a fact. The current evolutionary process is understood differently by scientists and philosophers than originally understood by earlier scientists and philosophers because of two new factors: 1) humanity’s self-understanding has been heightened and expanded, and 2) human evolution has entered a self-directed stage making it personally purposeful, Dewart notes. Humanity’s ability to relate itself to itself

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50 Sabatier (1899:357) Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit Hodder & Stoughton.
is truly distinctive and such a self-relating evolution takes place within the human consciousness.

Phenomenology once presented as a philosophical solution to the problem of Hellenization has not succeeded to any great extent according to Dewart. This is so since phenomenology, as classical metaphysics, continues to identify reality with being. And being is what appears phenomenally as real or as fictional. However, according to Dewart, philosophy is called to transcend all metaphysics through an evolution of creative consciousness. In this sense the evolution of a creative consciousness as a philosophical concept replaces phenomenology. He also concludes that if being and reality are not the same, philosophy need not be ontological in its nature. Its nature can simply be consciousness, a notional concept.

Dewart asks: What is the nature of truth beyond metaphysics? Is it consciousness? Is that why the history of philosophy is the progress of human thought? Among his answers are that truth is that which renders humanity transcendent. It is that quality of knowledge which impels consciousness beyond itself to the ultimate degree.

Among the foundations of our belief are that we are consulted by God, as it were, concerning the gift of “new” life God given us, unlike the “old” life which was just given. The offer of grace, that is, the new life is an offer of reality beyond being, that is why death cannot take it away. Being alive, beings die; reality being life, does not die. “One of the best indications that reality is not convertible with being is man’s spontaneous refusal to believe that the end of his existence, death, is the end of his reality.”

Does the analysis of religious experience reveal a reality which transcends being, Dewart asks? In dehellenization, reality is that which is other than one’s self. In short, Dewart suggests that reality is different than what traditional Western philosophers and common sense say it is. Reality is whatever the self can have relations with. But, contrary to Dewart, Ralph B. Winn has written that “some philosophers doubted or even denied the existence of the self. Thus, Hume pointed out (Treatise of Human Nature, I, pt. 4) that, apart

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51 Ibid., p. 375.
from the bundle of successive perceptions, nothing justifying the concept of self can be discerned by introspection.”  

Death ends human existence in this world, but the real existing human self (the transcendent self) will find its true reality beyond existence in death.  

The transcendent self is a reality whose reality is not given in an act of being. The transcendent self is not non-being; not no-thing, not unbeing. Thus, based on Dewart’s insights, I suggest, that the self is a holistic being.

Christian belief must be belief in the church, not just in its doctrine or dogma. The traditional Catholic concept of faith separates ordinary belief from religious belief, often forgetting that religious belief gives meaning to all belief. Concerning belief in the church’s dogma Sabatier believes that philosophy has a role to play in the formulation of dogma. He writes that, “if we could succeed in presenting dogmas — not as absolute and immutable formulas, but in their power of evolution — as being the result of the sustained and progressive effort of the religious consciousness, we should, perhaps, make them more acceptable to philosophers.”

Ordinary human belief is insufficient for the fulfillment of the transcendental self unless it extends into a new extraordinary dimension. This extraordinary dimension is faith in an unsubstantiated, not existing, reality. This extraordinary dimension need not be cast in Hellenic terms, however. Rather, faith may be understood as participating in reality, and not the reduplicating of reality. Thus, faith relates us to a situation not of our own making or doing, according to Dewart.

Faith, as we live it, illustrates that ultimate reality lies elsewhere than in ourselves. Faith, characteristically and specifically, defines the essence of human existence as religious. Faith is a commitment to conceive oneself in the light of that reality that transcends one’s own transcendence, yet is not understood objectively. From an existential point of view, the freedom given by faith requires that humans follow through upon their experiences of belief or unbelief. Unbelief, according to Karl Rahner (1904-1984) is to be


53 Ibid., p. 400.

distinguished from disbelief. Unbelief is a personal psychological state of those who no longer take religious faith to be a serious question in light of reason and freedom.  

God’s reality is not like the reality that comes to humans from outside themselves. God’s reality vivifies from within. Humans never cease evolving in revealing themselves to themselves and, hence, reveal God’s reality in the process. This process leads Dewart to conclude, “I have in this book suggested some reasons why the confusion of reality with being and, above all, the identification of reality as being, is invalid and particularly inadequate as a possible philosophical foundation for Christian theism today.”

I have begun again the challenge of reading Dewart’s very detailed book on religious foundations — hoping to savour once more, in a new light, details I have long forgotten. Do reality and truth evolve? Will Christianity direct its own evolution into the future, or be directed by another agency? Such specialized questions still capture my interest. What is coming back to me, at this stage of re-reading, is the possibility that dehellenization has opened up Christianity to the notions reality and truth contained in the “higher religions” of the Far East, possibly, in part, as a result of our understanding of ourselves as a “global village.”

I sense, within this re-reading, that western religion has entered a DIY age. The Do-It-Yourself approach arises from humanity’s ability for self-directed evolution. Not only what has changed, but also what has not yet changed, concerns Dewart in this book, that is, what it means for a religion to be “revealed.” Can the traditional understanding of Revelation remain as presented?

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56 Ibid., p. 522.

57 At a certain stage in re-reading Dewart’s book, the Hellenic understanding of knowledge and fate and their influence upon Christian theology, reminded me of a book on my library shelf acquired years back but which I never read. So, I decided to interrupt my reading of Dewart and focus on Dickinson’s, *The Greek View of Life*. My digression into this book was not what I expected. But reading it did help in appreciating the Greek mind expressed by the pre-Socratic philosophers and those Greek philosophers who came after Socrates. Reflecting the academic understanding of his time, the Dickinson cites “harmony” as the over-riding intent of the Hellenic thinkers, even if they reserved this harmony only to the aristocrats of the time. Later on, he maintains, this harmony was undermined by the dichotomous philosophy that
Leslie Dewart (1922-2009) Canada’s Forgotten Theological Philosopher

I am more convinced than ever of Dewart’s suggestion that redeveloping Christian belief cannot rest on inherited philosophical principles without modification. If I have understood him correctly, thus far, the notions of “necessity” and “fate,” as inherited, must be replaced by the notion of “contingency,” as it applies to understanding God and truth in themselves. Christian belief must become conscious of adapting to future and cease to accept uncritically its present status in contemporary Western culture. It is always a challenge to read Dewart and follow the discussion on the points he makes. The philosophical intellect of the Christian does not need enlightening by faith, he maintains, when it comes to recognizing the contingency of beings. (This philosophical position may have earned him a reputation of being an atheist in the minds of some critics.)

To sum up: Will Christianity undertake to direct its own evolution or continue to evolve at an obsolete rate and in a pre-conscious mode? This is the major question Dewart addresses in this work. Within the order of Christian belief, he investigates what has been changed by the phenomenological philosophical approach to belief and what has not yet been changed by it. He argues that the reshaping of the future is but the other side of the past. Hellenization shapes the future, whereas, dehellenization reshapes the future. It is only after we have learned to define ourselves in terms of our consciousness that we can appreciate the logic of the process by which we became conscious of ourselves, he maintains. Defining ourselves in terms of our consciousness is achieved through a process of dehellenization. The dehellenization of Christian belief does not mean the rejection of the Hellenist past. The term is not simply negative; it is not un-hellenization. In short, the task to which philosophy is called today is to set dehellenized foundations that transcend metaphysical philosophy, varieties of which can still be recognized in our contemporary belief systems.

appeared in Greek classical times. It was advantageous for me to be reminded that the “dislocation of the spirit which opposed the body to the soul, heaven to earth, the church to the state, the man of the world to the priest, was alien to the normal consciousness of the Greeks” The implication being that the problems which occupy us today originated with later Greek philosophy, not Greek consciousness. Dickinson, Lowes G. (1932:252) The Greek View of Life. Methuen.
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Religion, Language and Truth
(1970)

There is more to Dewart’s philosophy than is covered in this his 4th book which he wrote after reading a review of *The Foundations of Belief* in the *Times Literary Supplement*. In the Preface of *Religion, Language and Truth*, Dewart wrote that a reviewer suggested, “I should write a short, popular statement of [my] views, so that they may be made available to those [who may not have a professional level of] technical and historical knowledge.” That book is the result.

Evolution has affected our understanding of philosophy and our belief in God. The nature of religion has changed on three counts Dewart maintains: 1) that humanity has become more aware of its own nature and what language is; 2) that philosophy has begun to revise its relationship of language to reality; and 3) also to revise its relationship to the understanding of the nature of truth. Not every philosophical theory is compatible with the truth of Christianity, however. Why? The answer may lie within the Catholic philosophical crisis that began with the arrival of Modernity.

The Catholic philosophical crisis must be understood in the wider context of Christianity as a whole. Furthermore, the Catholic philosophical crisis can be considered to reflect the crisis in religious belief as a whole. That is to say it must be understood in terms of the evolution of human language. Differences of opinion on religious beliefs cause problems within the philosophy that underlies religious belief.

Speech is at the heart of what distinctively characterizes the human being. From an evolutionary perspective, we are only at the beginning of our understanding of ourselves. The linguistic ability of the human being has been developed in the course of the evolution of human nature. Human consciousness arises in the world in which humanity exists. Language is a sign conceived by the mind of that which is experienced. In turn, speech makes signs significant. Language allows the human being to think meaningfully about a reality that does not have any meaning in or of itself. It is clear that Dewart is influenced by Noam Chomsky’s theories of language. It
seems to me that Dewart has developed the ideas first introduced into philosophy by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) who distinguished between *langue* and *parole*. The former being “a complete system of forms and contrasts represented in the brains of the language-users” and the latter “viewed as the act of speaking by an individual at a given time.” 58

To all intents and purposes, Greek philosophy is Greek religion. Dewart is not alone in this belief. To the best of my knowledge, nowhere in *The Greek View of Life* does Lowes Dickinson employ the term ‘philosophy.’ Rather, his view is that in Hellenist religious festivals:

The whole life of man, in its relations both to nature and to society, was conceived as derived from and dependent upon his gods; and this dependence was expressed and brought vividly home to him in a series of religious festivals. Belief in the gods was not to him so much an intellectual conviction, as a spiritual atmosphere in which he moved; and to think it away would be to think away the whole structure of Greek civilization. 59

Thus, in talking about religious reality, we make it meaningful. We are, through experience, related to reality and redefining language means that we redefine the nature of reality itself, if I have understood Dewart correctly.

Truth is not the fact itself as some contemporary scientists might suggest. Rather, it is the quality of consciousness as it abides by the facts. Dewart has no vested interest in the Greek-Christian traditional view of truth and he notes that the facts are the same for all creatures. But truth is understood only by humanity. And before understanding human truth, Dewart suggests, we must understand humanity itself. And to understand humanity, we must look at what humanity creates, etc. The same applies to God. It is worth quoting Dewart fully.

He who would understand man must, as it were, adopt the motto: *si naturam requires, circumspice*. That is, if you wish to understand the nature of man you must look to the world he brings about, you must observe how he transforms whatever lies

within his horizon, you must examine how he extends and projects himself outwardly in time and space and, you must discover how he gives a distinctive shape to the indeterminate future and thus brings off the creation of history through his consciousness of that which he thinks and believes and does today. And the same is true, in every fundamental respect, of every other reality. It is even true of the reality of God.  

Humanity is the historical collectivity of generations succeeding generations in time. An alternative conception of humanity may be obtained through language where humanity situates itself in the world and creates its selfhood out of its relation to reality. The question arises: “What is humanity’s relationship to reality precisely as humans are human?” This is the question not asked by Hellenist philosophers or scholastics. The passive contemplative philosophical approach of Hellenist thinkers, in fact, impedes the active philosophical approach that is needed to answer this question, Dewart says. The answer requires that humanity understand itself as a creative agent. Human knowledge is the separation which differentiates that which is self-contained and self-sufficient out of what is not, i.e., reality, thus generating the human being. Thus, Dewart conceives creation, not classically as *ex nihilo*, but as differentiation and, or, possibly as the re-arrangement of one’s present world.

The church has no message from God, the church is the message from God. The kind of God one believes in is a measure of the depth of one’s self-understanding and moral insight. One’s Christian faith needs to take advantage of the growth of human experience to improve one’s concept of God. Dewart’s motive for desiring philosophical change to religion, language and truth is that he does not intend his words to be a depiction of the world. Rather, he writes, on page 167 of *Religion, Language and Truth*, “I intend them to facilitate my own understanding of the world, and hopefully my readers.”

This book partially fulfills the request made to Dewart to write a more popular version of his views. It has to do with philosophy’s contribution to the “contemporary crisis of man,” as Western thinkers become more aware of the evolution of human nature. Such

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60 *Religion, Language and Truth*, p. 89.
has been my experience, as well. The philosophical crisis of reality and truth is a religious crisis as well. This book provides a very helpful review of Dewart’s perspective of his notion of dehellenization as it is revealed through his examination of the phenomenon of speech. I was reminded that speech is first of all what I say and, secondarily what you hear. In my experience the two are not always well correlated. My experience continues to confirm, as Dewart suggested, that the Church has no message (speech) from God, but the Church is the message (speech) from God. The distinction is crucial to the development of the religious life. The book contains an Appendix in which Dewart states his personal belief. I quote from page 162:

I am disinclined to believe in the hidden power of the immanent divinities which, as Thales thought, all things are full of. Belief in the Christian God implies, so far as I am concerned, a positive disbelief in Fate: necessity be damned, for all I care. I refuse — let me make the religious nature of this act of un-faith clear, I refuse — until, if ever, I should be shown otherwise, to believe the primitive superstitions that there are implicit necessities within being, that being has, as its very reality, an inner warrant to command assent, and that invisible predeterminations constitute it and make it definable as that which has an antecedent call on the intellect.”

This is personal dehellenization at its best as I understand it. He goes on to say that by writing these words he intended to facilitate his own understanding of the world as well as the readers’ understanding of the world. By such a standard he wished the value of his words to be judged.

A grave religious crisis of the Catholic Church today has to do with the epistemological, metaphysical and other philosophical questions which underlie theological and religious disputes. What are merely philosophical views have often been invested with the certitude of faith and the authority of revelation, according to Dewart. Our language, philosophical and otherwise, is creative of our human selfhood rather than illustrative of the world’s objectivity, he maintains. As a result, humanity must participate more consciously and deliberately in its own self-fashioning than has been possible or necessary in the past. Within this process of self-fashioning we may take advantage of the growth of human
experience in order to improve upon our concept of God, and subsequently the understanding of religion, language and truth.
Since humans lack any historical awareness of its development, consciousness is lost in the limitless fields of fantasy, according to Dewart. Hence, he attempts to bring an understanding of our consciousness to light. In this attempt, much of his work is unconventional. This, to my mind, is his most difficult book to read and understand. Its scope is too large to summarize with any clarity so I present a few notions that touch upon the theme of dehellenization.

First, human life is more than the genetically conditioned physiology of the human organism. It is a collection of historical experiences. The early scientists did not always realize the religious origin of some of their terminology. These terms were the conventional wisdom of the day, some of which require dehellenization in our day.

Secondly, phenomenology is a form of empirical philosophy. It includes the presence of the observer among the observed. In fact, phenomenology is a philosophical anthropology not known to the ancient Greek philosophers.

Thirdly, the conscious quality of the human experience characterizes a being as human. Conscious experience is never found in a disembodied state and is not to be confused with the soul or psyche of Hellenist thought.

Fourthly, thematic speech helps us interpret the world for our purposes. In non-thematic speech characteristic of Hellenist thought reality determines what the speaker shall be conscious of and speak about. The differences and significance of these two notions is thoroughly discussed by Dewart with reference to dehellenization.

And fifthly, God’s creatures do not own themselves, their reality belongs to God. Even so, as unique beings humans belong to this world and do not need to be saved from it. This world is humanity’s proper home.

It was during my time in Toronto when I attended the posthumous book launch of Dewart’s, *Hume’s Challenge and the*
Renewal of Modern Philosophy, that I completed my re-reading of his earlier book, Evolution and Consciousness. Although, not explicitly discussed, the notion of dehellenization is evident throughout the book. It is presented from a variety of perspectives too numerous to summarize with any degree of accuracy. So, I quote Dewart directly from his Prefatory Note to this tome to justify my lack of commentary. Dewart writes: “What I have tried to accomplish here … is mainly to arrange a large number of tesserae that, if taken one by one, are very familiar, into a single mosaic of a fairly comprehensive and unconventional philosophical synthesis. I would have liked, therefore, to acknowledge all the sources of stimulation on which I have depended, and to explain how I have turned the contributions of many to my own recusant purposes. To have done so, however, would have raised a cloud of minor distractions ….”

In his insightful review of this book, Gregory Nixon notes that “Evolution and Consciousness was written before the consciousness studies boom of the 90’s (which continues in this decade) but it was a mistake for it to languish so ignored. Much of the confusion of more recent writings on consciousness could have been avoided if the lessons of this book had been given a wider reading.” I agree. However, this book is more than an academic work on the contemporary understanding of consciousness. It probes into philosophical thought as far back as the Hellenists. Further, an appreciation of the profound thought in this book awaits anyone who is familiar with Leslie Dewart's earlier writings. Throughout his earlier philosophical works Dewart had embarked on an intellectual process of dehellenization which I suggest culminates in Evolution and Consciousness. Dehellenization is a positive process. It is not un-hellenization, which is a negative process. For Leslie Dewart dehellenization is an evolutionary process within modern Western philosophy which meets satisfactorily the needs of the contemporary critical thinker. Given a good grasp of Dewart's notion of dehellenization, then, the reader will discover in this book a clear and useful presentation of the fruit of Dewart's philosophical thought for contemporary philosophy. From my perspective, however, learned Western readers will most likely experience a rise in their anxiety level and the non-philosopher might even abandon the book. This is a common experience, as one moves from a
scholastic to phenomenological philosophical perspective. The deconstruction of one’s inherited way of thinking, as Dewart labels his dehellenization, is a threatening activity to some. As an invitation to philosophical growth, Dewart's dehellenization amounts to a conscious creation of the future of belief within an evolutionary context as linguistic skills and notions evolve within the capacity for self-reflection. The book, in short, is an examination of an evolutionary maturity within the contemporary Western philosophical experience.
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Hume’s Challenge and the Renewal of Modern Philosophy
(2017)

This book is, in fact, an “unpolished” recapitulation of Dewart’s other four books. He began it with his long-standing theme of the stagnation of modern philosophy which is rooted in failures of an earlier age. This book is the final edited compilation of Dewart’s notes prepared for posthumous publication by Cajetan J. Menke (done very faithfully so, preserving Dewart’s style of writing unique turn of phrase). Our current attempts at reorganizing philosophy, he says, are not that that successful since Hellenization has crippled modern philosophy. He recalls that our thinking does not bring “knowledge” into our minds. Rather, our thinking sets up a relationship to the world and its objects which we call “knowledge.” There is no fixed timetable for the realization of the progress of philosophical thinking to begin, but once begun usually continues for a lifetime.

The answers to our questions lie within us. We just have to find them. We have not done so due to a failure to understand the human mind sufficiently given our contemporary needs. Current philosophy and science no longer ask the classical question, “from where does pre-existing truth, inherent in objects, come?” The truth is about reality, but it should not be identified with reality. Rather, truth is about our knowledge of reality.

Contemporary philosophy of mind has become allied with science resulting in the discipline of psychology. Before existential philosophers and psychologists developed their perspectives, a human being’s awareness of its own reality was sufficient evidence of the existence of God as the creator of the world. Existential interpretation, or psychological interpretation do not argue against God’s existence, i.e., atheism. Rather, existential interpretation, or psychological interpretation are susceptible to rendering God’s existence irrelevant and thus make possible the secularism of the modern world and engender concepts of anti-theism. I believe Robert Prentice is correct about Dewart’s purpose in detaching Christianity from Hellenism. “By no means does he make thereby any accusations against Christianity, which he obviously loves, nor
does he disregard the achievements of Greek civilization, which he equally obviously admires.”

Biological evolution is not progressive or regressive in relation to a pre-determined end. There is no evidence of such in our experience. Evolution produces differences in species, it does not produce similarities. The history of the evolution of differences helps us see old problems in a new light.

Conscious cognition and speech define the human being, Dewart noted in earlier works. Philosophy, on the other hand, attempts to improve the quality of human pre-philosophical experience, that is, common sense, or the sense that is common. But in doing so philosophy does not develop a different order of knowledge. In doing so, we use our mind to investigate our mind. We need to understand the past correctly to understand the present correctly and correctly plan for the future. History shows that Christian philosophy became problematic when, as a discipline, it re-interpreted what Plato and Aristotle spoke of as theologia (later metaphysics) in accordance with Christian belief.

Even in the presence of evidence to the contrary, people of religious faith affirm the truth of their belief, with assurance and devotion. Objects, including God, are not pre-adapted to be known by us. Belief in God is unwarranted, i.e., there is no evidence that God exists. The supposition consistent with the possibility of God’s existence, is the assumption that the world is not the standard of reality. Rather, it is the standard of being. Therefore, belief in God is optional according to Dewart.

The nature of an object is “what we want to understand” of its being and purpose; not what it does in and of itself as a physis or natura. Existence reflects the relationship between our conscious selves and the world. We do not create the world in the sense of ex nihilo, but, rather as homo faber. If the present world creates its own reality, then reality “from on high,” or of the “next world” presents an interpretive problem. This could mean that God is not required to account for the existence of world events. Even though it may appear that God’s providence and existence are gone from our daily

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experience, what is not gone, however, is God. Or better, we have replaced the traditional God, with contemporary “gods.”

It is true that philosophy has been theologized out of its true role, and it is readily evident that modern philosophy is divorced from theology and religious belief, yet, modern philosophy still retains the religious presumptions of ancient Greek culture.

In classic scholasticism, reality must be known by a human agent in order to be, that is, to have existence. Skeptics claimed that the “unknowable” amounted to nothing, or “no thing.” Ronald Knox, (1888-1957), a convert to Roman Catholicism in 1917, countered this belief with his famous limerick illustrating that God is the knowing agent in the absence of all other knowing agents.

There was a young man who said, “God
Must think it exceedingly odd
If he finds that this tree
Continues to be
When there’s no one about in the Quad.”

Dear Sir:
Your astonishment’s odd:
I am always about in the Quad.
And that’s why the tree
Will continue to be,
Since observed by
Yours faithfully,
GOD.

Philosophical knowledge is existentially constructed, it is not erected on a priori principles. Philosophical knowledge undergoes perpetual critique and development and, in the process, one should not confuse universal development with uniform development.

Evolution is not an external force. It is an internal activity which objects undergo. It does not compel objects to do what they would not naturally do, as it were. Nothing in the world suggests that God directs evolution externally, or that God evolves. The understanding of evolution itself has evolved in a process from a zoological type of activity to a psychozoic type of activity whereby evolution has been interiorized and made purposeful. What we do makes a
difference; it does not make us what we are. (It is consciousness that specifies humanity.) The human mind is the result of earthly causes, making it subject to the evolutionary process. Sabatier held a similar view and wrote:

Formerly people dealt with ideas — metaphysical ideas especially — as fixed and immutable quantities. … To-day, our ideas even the highest, no longer come before us with this absolute character; they are the result of a mental evolution that we can follow up in history. The human mind itself undergoes modification. Our ideas are only phenomena which must be explained by anterior phenomena. In other words, the notion of evolution in matters of philosophy has triumphed by means of the historical method…. 62

To sum up one could say that thought does not evolve, but language does; religion does not evolve, but dogma does; life does not evolve, but the organism does, and within Dewart’s thought, reality does not evolve, but being does.

Consciousness adds a new dimension to human experience. One’s mind is one’s conscious activity, which can be turned on and off and is possible only in living entities. That is to say, only living beings can truly act purposely. Inanimate beings (objects) react contingently.

Conscious knowing takes the mind into the world, not the world into the mind. Reality is not inherently knowable it is only knowable in relation to active knowers. Truth is the value of our knowledge of reality. Reality is not created by the mind, but truth is. The goal of the mind is to perceive and understand reality that is both simultaneously immanent and transcendent and that is found in the world. We cannot use the same techniques to study the mind as we do to study independent extra-mental entities. Philosophy could help to develop a concept of reality based on empirical observation.

Reality does not have to be intelligible in itself for humans to understand it. The mind does not create the existential (concrete) world, but it has the capacity to make the concrete world rationally intelligible to itself and to others. Sabatier, in his investigations had asked himself the question: “That all which is intelligible to us is

real, I grant: but is all that is real intelligible to us?” The world of the mind, to which no other species than the human has access, is said to be the virtual world. In what sense then does God exist in the virtual world? In light of the above no satisfactory answer is possible from within a Hellenist philosophy.

Only humans can value privacy, and individuality, (Dewart does not mean individualism). Previously, religious faith had suggested that humans are destined for a “higher” future than they had in the past. However, humans rewrite their cultural programs in the present and are not determined by them. We obtain new insights when we change the meaning of our experience of reality, thus we change our future. The conscious mind is interpretive. It not only understands reality for itself but translates it through speech into a type of language all can understand. There may be a reality that humans have not yet experienced. However, if there is such a reality it is inherently possible on our part to experience it, Dewart concludes.

Published posthumously and as the title suggests this book has been written for the philosophical community. Its style is more Gordian than prosaic. It reads as any “work in progress” would with no fully developed structure. And by his admission Dewart has left a number of issues without definitive conclusions. As I understand it, Dewart’s motivation for preparing this book was that other philosophers may want to take up the issues which he writes about and possibly arrive at a more satisfactory result. To my mind, Dewart’s overall purpose for writing this book reaches back to the roots of his first book, Christianity and Revolution. Although this is a book on philosophy, astute readers in other disciplines may be able to deepen their understanding of their respective subjects in light of Dewart’s evaluation of the present state of Western philosophy.

Throughout his career, Dewart philosophized with attention to the religious context of his thoughts. (A cursory evaluation of his work might fail to reveal this.) This makes him a religious philosopher, not a theologian. The two are not to be conflated. The theologian probes into the belief required by faith, whereas the philosopher is concerned with the scholarship of religious experience. But, the theologian may “make use” of the philosopher’s scholarship. There are, no doubt, other implications besides theological ones in Dewart’s thought which may be discovered from a secular perspective.
According to Dewart, modern philosophy stagnated because of failures of an earlier philosophical age, which he tried to correct. His attempts at correction concern human sense perception and its truth content as understood within Western philosophy since its origin in ancient Greece. From the point of view of philosophy today, unlike former times, Dewart maintains that nothing in the world can be seen as a demonstration of God’s work, even when understood as a transcendent order of reality. That God is possibly irrelevant to contemporary human experience, is a notion he introduced in *Christianity and Revolution*. Throughout his career, as far as I can make out, Dewart did not advance arguments against the existence of God, but only questioned God’s relevance to the modern secular world.

He viewed the dependence of philosophy on religious concepts as contributing to philosophy’s stagnation. He attempted to free philosophy from a dependence on religious concepts through a study of the history of philosophy in light of its own purposes. He sought to see old problems in a new light. For him, philosophy is useful to clarify common sense and improve the quality of one’s pre-philosophical experience. It is not intended to develop a different order of knowledge. In order to clarify common sense through philosophy, he focused on experience and understanding the consciousness of the human mind which in turn led him to the cultural question of the contribution of Christianity to philosophy. This question ultimately became the foundation of his “dehellenization” of Western thought, which he continued to write about through this book.

In ancient Greek philosophical culture, it was accepted that knowledge was somehow transferred from the object known to the knower, thus somehow nullifying the chasm between the knower and the known. But this dichotomous view no longer serves modern philosophical ends, Dewart believed, and must be abandoned. He suggested that our best option to achieve modern philosophical ends is to understand our existence as a relationship between our conscious self (the knower) and the world of our reality (the known). In this relationship, philosophy does not need to rely on the revealed truths of the Christian religion, nor does philosophy need to discredit the Christian faith, in order to achieve its goals. However, from an historical perspective, he shows that such had been the relationship
between philosophy and faith which over time had the opposite effect. Philosophy was crippled and the faith was weakened and neither properly achieved its goals. As long as this understanding continued, he noted that philosophy was being “theologized” out of existence, and hence was stagnating. As it happened, secularized philosophy came to subscribe to the laws of nature. While, at the same time it failed to understand that “the ‘laws of nature’ perform the same service as a God [to philosophy] whose existence need no longer be affirmed, having been rendered superfluous by recognition of the reality of the world” (p. 203, n. 226).

Thus, in this book Dewart has proffered a challenge for modern philosophy to a further demystification of the laws of nature. Modern philosophy needs to focus consciously on cognition, reality and causality to reconstruct the discipline of philosophy and align it with what human experience reveals, Dewart maintains.

Philosophically he maintains in this book that what is wrong with our human nature is not explained by the classical religious notion of sin, but rather, by one’s diminished ability to empathize with other human beings and with oneself. Dewart called this diminished ability “absent-mindedness.” With the religious notion of sin no longer providing an explanation of reality for philosophy to remedy, the remedy for one’s diminished ability to empathize with other human beings and oneself must be a secular one. Philosophy no longer needs to depend on its religious roots. To my mind, this conclusion is actually an understandable (dare I say predictable) outcome of his earlier investigations, addressed above, in which he sought to dehellenize philosophical understanding. Within my theological point of view, Dewart’s dehellenized philosophy provides useful insights for theologians, who dare to consult it when undertaking the interpretation of Revelation and matters of truth.

This work, to my mind, will be of interest to the seasoned and perhaps disaffected philosopher tired of the variations on a classical theme in Western philosophy. In short, the book is an attempt to be a prelude to a new approach within the Western philosophy of mind. “Representationism,” by which perception transfers the contents of reality into the mind, is rejected as an outdated legacy of ancient Greek philosophy by many contemporary philosophers. This is so, Dewart suggests, since “philosophers invented the institution of
scholarship *ab initio*, by taking advantage of the characteristics of the human mind,” which undergoes an evolutionary change (p. 91). This means using the mind’s capacity for thinking in a disciplined rational, manner to arrive at a better explanation of human experience. To arrive at a better understanding first requires a probe into the failure of modern philosophy to understand the human mind, followed by an attempt to re-conceive, or re-interpret experience without the aid of Greek metaphysics. Like all Dewart’s works, this book is not an easy read. However, perseverance will certainly reveal philosophical insights for the reader’s benefit. As Dewart admits: “Now, if this is true, it follows that, if modern philosophy should manage to re-orient itself, reject representationism, and develop a sound understanding of human nature and its cognitive powers, our culture might conceivably embrace secularity in a consistent and healthy manner and abandon the insanities and idiocies that have been fostered by its confusions about itself and its relationship to the world” (p. 203). This investigation into the stagnation of Western philosophy, though not presented as a completed project by Dewart himself, makes a valuable contribution within the historic development of Western philosophical thought.
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A Recapitulation of Dewart’s Dehellenization

I recall Dr. Dewart’s first wife, Joanne McWilliam (who was also teaching at U. of T. at my time there) warning me that Leslie’s works are all difficult and demanding reading. How true. In re-reading his books I am reminded that Christianity is an existential life-style or political philosophy, before it is an issue of belief or unbelief about God’s incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth. Being a moral force places Christianity in a particular relationship with the politics in the world. In what follows, I offer a personal existential appreciation of Dewart’s books and how they have influenced my theological understanding.

Much of the content of his first book, Revolution and Christianity, The Lesson of Cuba, focused on Fidel Castro’s character and personality as Dewart saw it. For this I am grateful since I was younger and more interested in theological issues than personal and political ones when I was first introduced to this book. The Communist Party of Cuba initially did not consider Castro a Communist, even though he allowed the Party freedom and opportunity to promote its ideology. Eventually, as it turned out, Castro adopted Communism from his own free choice, as Dewart explains, so as to combat the disordered and civic immorality of the Cuban culture at the time. (His character might not have allowed him to do otherwise, Dewart suggests since the issue to “combat disordered and civic immorality” revolved around Castro’s psychological processes and inner dialogue.)

Growing up in an increasingly secular age I was taught not to mix religion and politics. But, in the Cuba of the revolution, religion, or better the Church, played a singularly important role in bringing about the political revolution — but not for the reasons we may presume given our lack of knowledge of Cuban history, of their culture and their Church, Dewart suggests. After reading the causes he advances I believe he was correct. Ultimately, the Catholic Hierarchy and the Catholic Faithful of Cuba constituted a “house divided” between the traditional conformist attitude in the country and the new non-conformist attitude that was then developing in Cuba.
As I read deeper into the book and into Dewart’s insightful way of thinking, I appreciated that the relationship between church and state in Cuba ultimately deteriorated and the problem, as Dewart saw it, was an ecclesiastical one. The notion “ecclesial,” as advanced by Vatican II, however, was not, as yet, in the minds of the Catholic authorities or the faithful either, for that matter. Politically, Cuba was beginning to emerge from a medieval understanding of life and the Church was in danger of failing the people spiritually given its adherence to a nostalgic past. In the 1960’s the end of a classical spiritual age was approaching in Cuba, and I agree with Dewart that in Cuba’s experience lies a lesson for our time, as our hierarchical ecclesiastical institutions continue becoming politically obsolete.

There is “more world in the Church, than Church in the world,” as many see it today. This is a corruption and betrayal of the desire of the Christian faithful. “We do not want the world to embrace the Church; we want the Church to embrace the world.” To my mind, Christian theology needs to address the nature of the Church in humanity’s fallen state, and rule itself responsibly, both politically and spirituality. However, the Church lives in a fallen world that is no longer a classical world, but one beginning to “dehellenize” itself, as the lesson of Cuba shows. How we view God in a dehellenized culture will concern Dewart in his next book as an existential fact in our future of belief. (This should concern any serious theologian, for that matter).

The Future of Belief: Theism in a World Come of Age, is my favourite of Dewart’s books. It is the first one that I read as an undergraduate student, understanding very little of it, yet knowing it was going to be very influential in my thinking. It has remained very influential in my way of thinking, and I understand its content more clearly upon repeated readings. As a result, today I am concerned with the church’s mission, whereas formerly I was concerned with its message about God. The two are not to be equated, according to Dewart and I agree. This book constantly reminds me that the church’s mission, or experience, is to be integrated into my existence. Any theory or message that the church has ought to be replaced by practice, but practice that is appropriate to humanity’s contemporary experience, not one imported from mere tradition.
By way of example, Dewart assesses Freud’s, *The Future of an Illusion* that encourages the rejection of the illusion that primitive humanity had trusted to meet its needs in a hostile world. In contrast, a humanity “come of age” does not discover the world as hostile, but rather as stimulating and challenging and humanity must change its belief in God accordingly. Throughout this book, I have frequently referenced Auguste Sabatier’s perspective as similar to Dewart’s. However, there is an exception. Sabatier and Dewart interpret “coming of age” differently. Friedrich Schleiermacher, in his understanding of religion according, to Sabatier “erred in insisting only upon resignation” to external forces. Thus, Schleiermacher could grow no further. Whereas for Sabatier, when humanity is delivered from its “state of misery and oppression” by prayerful submission in faith (not resignation) it has religiously come of age. When “submission makes us recognize and accept our dependence, faith transforms that dependence into liberty,” to quote Sabatier, is a classical expression of religious belief. 63 From Dewart’s perspective humanity has yet to come of age. Seeing the world as stimulating and challenging from Dewart’s perspective requires an abandonment of scholasticism, and a subsequent existential interpretation of experience. This requires constant effort from my experience. Dewart identifies this conscious process as “dehellenization,” which is a positive term. It is not “un-hellenization.”

Today, I am, and will be in the future, an atheist with respect to false gods, and a theist with respect to the true God given that my theism has “come of age” and I have come to recognize God’s self-communicated presence to, and not merely God’s message in my life. Recognizing God’s self-communicated presence satisfied my faith. I am now able to pursue a more appropriate philosophy in the interpretation of my experience without the use of Hellenic metaphysical categories.

Without the use of Hellenic metaphysical categories, interpreting the contingency of life in this world must be conceived differently. Dewart has suggested that our presence to the reality of

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God, and God’s presence to our reality is constitutes a viable relationship. In this mutual relationship, I experience my personal history as truly contingent and unforeseeable. This, to my mind, is a more adequate view than scholasticism offers. And, in short, is a dehellenized view.

This mutual relationship of God and me allows me to grow beyond myself, as it were, through a relationship that Dewart calls the politics between humanity and God. The result is that I am no longer a mere creature, upon whom God acts through his will. I am, however, a conscious agent creating my world in God’s presence. Hence, my view of God has changed, allowing me a co-creator status. This is the dehellenized view of God that I hold to be true, according to my experience. Notions of superiority/inferiority with respect to God no longer apply within my experience. Rather, these notions are replaced by God’s graceful presence being willingly shared with me as was originally intended by God’s self-communication. This sharing is truly a “pastoral” work to my way of thinking in a religious consciousness come of age. Of all Dewart's books, this one has had the most profound influence upon my thinking.

These comments have not exhausted the book’s content, of course. There are many salient ideas of Dewart’s that I have not commented upon. Some are: 1) the philosophical exploration of consciousness, 2) the future divergent, but acceptable, conceptions of God, 3) the distinction between a-theism and anti-theism, 4) the implications following upon the realization that Revelation ended with the death of the last apostle and, 5) the difference between thought and language. of Dewart’s

When I began the challenge of reading Dewart's very detailed book on religious belief, The Foundations of Belief, I savoured again details I had long forgotten. Do reality and truth evolve? Will Christianity direct its own evolution into the future, or be directed by another agency? Such specialized questions still capture my interest. What came back to me, during this re-reading, is that the possibility of dehellenization has opened Christianity to the notions of reality and truth as understood in the “higher religions” of the Far East, possibly in part as a result of the understanding of the “global village.”
I sense that western religion has entered a Do-It-Yourself age. The DIY approach arises from humanity’s ability for self-directed evolution. In this context, not only what has changed, but also what has not yet changed, concerns Dewart in this book, such as, what it means for a religion to be “revealed.” Can the traditional understanding of Revelation remain as contemporary theologians and philosophers present it? I wonder.

I am more convinced than ever that Dewart’s suggestion of developing Christian belief cannot rest on the inherited philosophical principles as they presently are interpreted. If I have understood him correctly, thus far, the notions of “necessity” and “fate” as inherited, must be replaced by the notion of “contingency,” as it applies to understanding God and truth itself. The Christian faithful must become conscious of their own future and cease accepting unconsciously their present state being as fixed within contemporary culture. However, interpreters must not substitute one “necessity” for another. Sabatier cautions against this possibility in the misunderstanding and misuse of science.

To make a discovery, to explain a new phenomenon, what is this but to add another link to the causal and necessary network which science weaves and spreads over things? To put sequence, order, and stability into the world, is not this, for science, to put necessity into it, and to make necessity the sovereign ruler of the world? Science in the strict sense of the word, is determinist. 64

It is always a challenge to read Dewart and follow the discussion on the points he makes. The philosophical intellect of the Christian does not need enlightening by faith, he maintains, when it comes to recognizing the contingency of beings. (This understanding may have earned him a reputation of being an atheist in the minds of some of his readers.)

Elsewhere, I have written of humanity’s status as co-creator in this life. My interpretation stems from Dewart’s words: “When Christian philosophers begin to tell people, as St Thomas did, that they exist in their own right, and give then the premises from which they will in time deduce that they, too, are creators, and that they have a decisive role to play — for better or for worse — in the

64 Sabatier, Auguste (1897:19) *Outlines of a Philosophy* George H. Doran Co.
shaping of themselves, and that it is better to have creatively attempted something and failed than never to have created anything at all, one has to expect that some people — perhaps even most people for a while — will not know just what to do with their discovery and will not quite manage themselves well” (Foundations of Belief, p. 206).

The possibility of co-creation is only one topic Dewart discusses in this book. Interested parties can obtain a copy of the book and read for themselves what he has to say about: reality transcending being; God being understood as “subsistent Relativity;” belief in the church and, understanding our experience as a participation in reality and not a reduplication of it — as the Hellenists would have it.

His next book, Religion, Language and Truth, partially fulfills a request made to Dewart to write a more popular version of his views. It has to do with philosophy’s contribution to the “contemporary crisis of man,” as Western thinkers become more aware of the evolution of human nature. This has been my experience. The philosophical crisis of reality and truth is a religious crisis as well. This book provided a very helpful review of Dewart’s perspective as I examined his notion of dehellenization as revealed through his examination of the phenomenon of speech. I was reminded that speech is first of all what I say and secondarily what you hear. In my experience the two are not always well correlated. My experience continues to confirm, as Dewart suggested, that the Church has no message (speech) from God, but is the message (speech) from God. The distinction is crucial to the spiritual development of the Christian faithful.

I find it interesting to compare Dewart’s self-understanding of his purpose in philosophizing with that of Sabatier, after both men had arrived at a certain stage in their life’s work. Although separated by the cultural upheavals of two world wars, both men had come to similar conclusions about their philosophic efforts. Sabatier wrote:

In this book I have hardly noted any but facts that have been verified in myself and by myself. It is true that I suppose that every reflective reader is capable of finding them and tracing them out of his own personal experience. Those who are able and wishful to re-read my book themselves, and thus verify my analyses, may perhaps draw some profit from it. Those who read
me otherwise will not only lose their time and pains — they will misunderstand at every step the meaning of my phrases and the direction of my ideas. Beneath my reasoning or my images they will put other ideas and other intentions than mine, and they may afterwards, with an apparent good conscience, deduce from them the most terrible consequences. Philosophical language lends itself to all and permits all; and the mischief of it is that it would be useless to desire to prevent these quarrels.  

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65 Sabatier, Auguste (1897:348) Outlines of a Philosophy George H. Doran Co.
SECTION TWO

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A Fictitious Interview with Leslie Dewart

Prefatory note

In 1966 Dewart published a book entitled, *The Future of Belief, Theism in a World Come of Age* containing philosophical ideas sufficiently revolutionary as to attract the attention of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. That book has had a great influence on my thinking. Therefore, with the intent of following-up on an idea arising from our 2005 correspondence (reproduce in the appendix) I have crafted in this section of my book an imaginary interview with Leslie Dewart. My questions have been crafted to reflect his “answers” as they appeared in *The Future of Belief*. Naturally there is more to Dewart’s philosophy than has been addressed by me here. For a full appreciation of Dewart’s philosophy and development of ideas the reader will need to refer to the range of Dewart’s works. For my purposes in the interview below and in conformity with the literary convention of his day, I have left his vocabulary as it appears in the book. That is, I have not changed “man” to “humanity,” or made any similar alterations to meet contemporary literary conventions.

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66 This section is content edited from *The Future of Belief*.
67 As noted in *Contemporary Authors*, no condemnation was issued, but the Congregation asked Dewart not to authorize further editions of the book. He declined stating that “to have struck any such defensive posture would have implicitly granted the legitimacy of the Congregation as a tribunal at whose bar transgressions of the bounds of legitimate speculation may be tried.”
Christian Theism and Contemporary Experience

Savage: The title of our first session, which sets the theme for all subsequent interviews is: “Christian Theism and Contemporary Experience,” following your own mind. I have some questions that I hope will disclose your thoughts and perspectives on theistic belief. Of course, we will limit our conversation to the contemporary understanding of the experience of those of us living in a Western Christian culture. What is the main problem, as you see it?

Dewart: We perceive that there is a certain incongruity between Christianity and the contemporary world, but we frequently misconceptualize the precise nature of this lack of rapport.

Given your notion of this “misconception,” my first question is: since Christians preach the Word of God as revealed in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and there are many hard sayings in his message which seem to discourage acceptance of it, does this account for that lack of rapport from your perspective?

It is hardly an essentially proselytic or pastoral matter, least of all a problem in public relations. In its ultimate import the problem does involve the self-communicating nature, eschatological aspirations and the missionary objectives of a faith which not unfittingly calls itself Universalism. But to suppose that the question of integrating Christian theism with contemporary experience is one of message-communication, how to convey the meaning of Christianity to a world whose ordinary human life renders it refractory to conversion, this would not only miss the real difficulty but would also include several assumptions contrary to fact.

Can you give me an example of an assumption contrary to fact?

It is not certain, for instance, that the mission of the Church can be properly described in terms of conveying an idea to those outside it. Christianity has a mission, not a message. The Gospel is not the textbook of the Christian faith. As news it is the report of an event that happens. But what it communicates is its reality and existence, not an idea.
When I hear you say “reality and existence” I think of the contributions of science to contemporary culture. Yet religion and science seem to be in conflict. Could science ultimately be mistaken?

It is not readily apparent that science, however proud and rebellious, is a radically mistaken mode of perception of the reality of man and world. Contemporary experience should not be identified with the non-Christian, non-believing experience of those who are outside the Church, implying the assumption that the disintegration of contemporary experience and Christian faith is, up to a point, the normal and natural state of affairs. What we really mean if we thus construe the project of integrating Christian belief and the everyday world, is that we hope that non-believing modern man will eventually cease experiencing himself and reality as he does, and that he will replace his contemporary experience with Christian belief.

As I understand G. Lowes Dickinson, the separation of belief and the experiences of the everyday world actually began in ancient Greece. The pagan philosophers Anaxagoras and Socrates were indicted as atheists in their day. Concerning the non-believing modern man, you say, “cease experiencing himself and reality as he does.” What is the alternative you have in mind to man’s present non-believing mode of experiencing himself?

Contemporary experience should rather be understood as the mode of consciousness which mankind, has reached as a result of its historical and evolutionary development. To suppose that mankind could voluntarily renounce its history, its normal development and its growth in self- and world-understanding would show an unrealistic and misguided lack of appreciation of the nature of man, if not also of that of the Christian faith.

I am sure we will probe into the understanding of the nature of humanity and the nature of the faith as we plod through with our interviews. From my research, experience is a key concept in your

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understanding. Are you thinking only of the Catholic tradition in the integration of the faith and experience?

The project of integrating faith and experience is at least as relevant to the contemporary experience of Christians as to the experience of non-believers. In fact, if the solution to the problem should turn out to be useful towards the fulfillment of the missionary eschatological goals of the Catholic faith, the contemporary experience of Christian man automatically would integrate Christianity, at least in principle, with the experience of any contemporary man. Proselytic endeavors must be subordinated to the wider, theoretical question of the integration of Christian belief with the contemporary state of human development.

But Catholics have the truth, do they not? Yet, the present state of human development seems to be leading away from this Christian understanding, no?

Regardless of what we may feel, we all observe that the fairly total and serene self-assurance which had long characterized the consciousness of the Catholic believer, has been shaken in recent years. We note that there is unrest, unease and a frequently undefinable dissatisfaction, among the faithful and the clergy. And though bishops do not often disclose to the Church as a whole what their everyday consciousness reveals, there are indirect signs that they too, though perhaps in a different way and for different reasons, experience uncertainties, limitations and inadequacies to a degree which they are not by tradition accustomed to suffer.

Are you saying that the clergy experience the Church in one way and the laity experience it in another? If so, is there no unity of mind among clergy and people regarding development of the faith?

Catholic opinion is polarized into those who are exhilarated by the prospect of change and those who are fearful of it. That is, into those for whom it is a primary concern that the faith of the people should not be “disturbed” and those who argue that the welfare of the Church, if not the conversion of the world, requires radical innovations and possibly dramatic readjustments. To be sure, no
given position on any given subject marks anyone with one type of mentality or with another. It does not necessarily reveal one sort of attitude or the other but that if one faces each issue with an independent enquiring mind, with intellectual autonomy and honesty, and on the matter’s own merits, a proper and legitimate random divergence of conclusions is likely to emerge. Whatever the reason, it is possible to estimate, not only that beyond liberal and conservative positions there are liberal and conservative attitudes, but also that these alternative modes of thinking correlate highly with a Catholic’s degree of acquaintance with, participation in, and acceptance of, the contemporary modality of human experience. For these two ways of thinking manifest fundamental differences in one’s most basic orientation towards the problem of the relation of the Catholic faith to the contemporary and, indeed, to any given stage of human development.

So, you are suggesting that an independent enquiring mind leads to a plurality of ideas as one stage in evolutionary development. This plurality of ideas is expressed as liberal or conservative, and is embedded in Catholic teaching, yet transcends it. That being the case, how do these contrasting attitudes affect our understanding of God?

We have to do here with divergent orientations towards the meaning of the Christian faith, towards the meaning of religion itself, and therefore towards the Catholic’s very understanding of his self-disposition towards God. Ultimately, we may have to do with divergent conceptualizations of the God of Christian belief. They would be mistaken who thought that the post-Vatican II critical period of the Catholic Church, hardly more than the first episode of which, probably, is behind us and can be accounted for in terms of what Pope John and the Council wrought, or loosed upon the Church, depending on one’s viewpoint. 69 What we are witnessing today might be more accurately envisaged as a resolution of the very

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69 Robert Adolfs wrote: “Essentially, the Council was little more than a professional discussion between administrators of the Church, but popular imagination turned it into a spiritual rebirth of the Church. History, however, has shown that spiritual rebirths simply do not take place at Councils.” The Grave of God (1966:9) Harper & Row.
problem of which the Reformation was an unfortunately abortive issue, namely, the integration of Christian belief with the post-medieval stage of human development.

*We live in a scientific age which is characteristic of the post-medieval stage of human development. Do you see any particular difficulties between science and religion traceable to the apparent tension between the two?*

The contemporary experience includes respect for science, largely because of science’s diffidence and its readiness to change its mind, whereas contemporary man’s enthusiasm for self-assurance of much Catholic philosophical thinking is under much stricter control. But if the problem is not, on the one hand, the incorporation into belief of the trappings of modern civilization, neither is it, on the other, the integration of Christian belief with that specialized function of modern life which we call science. It would make no sense to condition Christian belief upon the findings of science. It is not science, an extra- or super-human reality, that creates modern man. On the contrary, it is modern man that creates science. To be precise, modern man creates himself by means of science, that is, by means of his scientific mode of consciousness, that it is scientific culture that defines contemporary man. What counts is the human reality, the human experience and self-understanding, which produce the scientific method and scientific world-views, an experience and self-understanding which are then reciprocally molded by man’s own scientific and other cultural creations, even if only a fraction of the population has more than an elementary acquaintance with science. It is not on science as such, but on the contemporary cultural stage of human self-consciousness, typically manifested in and conditioned by science and technology, that the traditional Christian faith grates.

*So, the problem is not between the methods of science and the interpretative philosophy of religion as being in conflict. It is more proper to locate the conflict in the human person at a particular stage of conscious experience. However, is not secularism the true “locus” of the problem?*
We might mistake it for the problem of the Church and the modern world, meaning the problem of reconciling the holy and the secular enterprises of man. That is, God’s religion and man’s political organization, man’s social life, man’s economic existence, man’s technological world. The objection to this is not only that the opposition between theistic faith and everyday experience is not an opposition between the human and the divine, but also that the outward novelties and the secular changes that make up the contemporary world are but manifestations of a profound change in the mode and nature of human experience.

Unless I am mistaken, Dickinson, in his perspective of ancient Greek life also saw a change in the nature and mode of human experience. I quote. “The quarrel of the philosopher with the myths is not that they are not true, but that they are not edifying. Clearly, concludes the philosopher, our current legends need revision; in the interest of religion itself we must destroy the myths of the popular creed.” Are the changes in the manner and experience of these “outward novelties,” as you call them, not sufficient for the individual believer to continue to believe in God? Must the creed be destroyed in favour of an edifying scientific attitude?

The deeper question concerns an issue at once more fundamental and more comprehensive, namely, the meaningfulness of Christian belief for the experience and self-understanding of man in a modern, industrial, technological society. For the experience and the self-concept of modern man do not merely fail to accord with institutional Christianity, they appear to conflict with Christianity’s most basic doctrines and, in the first place, with belief in God.

Is to live in accord with institutional Christianity and to believe in God, not a moral requirement for Catholics? In other words, “extra ecclesiam, nulla salus,” that is, no salvation outside the church.

The far greater majority of men in the West have opted for the rejection (also, to be sure, in varying degrees) of the realism, if not

also the moral validity, of institutional religion. Retaining an integrally contemporary experience, they have fashioned for themselves (if they have not drifted into religious indifference or discovered the religions of atheism) a vague religious sentiment more or less distantly affiliated to the traditional Christian belief to which, from the point of view of the history of culture, they continue to belong.

*Does this “vague religious sentiment” you identify replace the traditional notion of theism as the new belief in God?*

The trouble with religious theism is that, having once had an important, in fact, necessary role in human development, and having once usefully served man as a means of coping with utterly real perplexities, it has perpetuated itself beyond his needs. With increased self-consciousness and increased mastery of the world, religious theism, to be sure, is highly imperfect. Man can devise more adequate means than religion to grapple with the same problems. Science is, of course, the principal, though by no means the only, such means.

*So, what is believed in by contemporary humanity may differ from traditional belief in God by the Church proper. Yet, humanity’s beliefs have been the necessary products of human development. This leads me to shift the focus of religious belief to that of religious illusion. Since Freud’s “Future of an Illusion,” which appeared in 1927, do you see a bright future for religious belief in God? And, if so, do you see Freud’s contribution to philosophy in this area as truly significant?*

In common with every other scientific humanist, Freud hoped that mankind might one day rise above this view of life. He looked forward to the future when mature man should find it possible to do without the consolation of the religious illusion in order to endure the troubles of life, the cruelty of reality. For, in his argument Freud retained certain questionable presuppositions which do not invalidate his argument altogether, but which once exorcised require one to transpose his conclusions into a key that does not readily harmonize with scientific humanism. To believe, for example, that
the scientific *Weltanschauung* \(^{71}\) required the confession that man is no longer the centre of creation, was to assume a relatively primitive and gross, indeed an inadequate and quasi-geometrical, criterion of the centrality of man’s position in the universe. With the greater self-confidence provided by his superior cultural equipment, Freud went beyond primitive man in proposing that fear should be overcome. But he did not appear to doubt that reality is truly frightening. He shared the primitive view that the apprehension of reality should normally elicit concern for one’s safety. Like primitive man, according to Freud, contemporary man is bound by the nature of reality to experience helplessness when faced with the cruelty of the world. He proposed that modern man should react differently to what he assumed to be the same situation in which both primitive and contemporary man find themselves by nature. And yet, it may be that the possibilities open to man are much wider than Freud suspected. It may be that man’s reaction should be different, but only because his situation is not the same. For it may be that to a mankind come of age the world should no longer appear hostile, but simply stimulating and challenging. The insecurity which Freud took to be natural to man may well be proper to only a passing stage of human evolution. Man may not be naturally alienated.

*I find it interesting that in the opening chapter of his book Dickinson remarks from a philosophical, not psychological point of view: “Man, in short, by his religion has been made at home in the world and that is the first point to seize upon.”* \(^{72}\) Thus, the cosmos is something familiar to man. But remaining within a psychological perspective, my past, present and future, as I understand them, form a continuum that, so far, confirms Freud’s view of alienation. I look to correct in the present moment my mistakes of the past in order to be happy in the future. Theologically, in other words, I seek to have my sins forgiven.

There is indeed much evidence for the view that when Freud wrote that the intention that man should be happy is not included in

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\(^{71}\) A particular philosophy or view of life; the world view of an individual or group.

\(^{72}\) Dickinson, Lowes G (1932:4) *The Greek View of Life* Methuen.
the scheme of Creation, he did not merely mean that man is not assured of self-fulfillment and perfection by nature but must instead creatively fulfill himself. He seems, rather, to have been harking back to a dominant theme of Greek philosophy, to which he owed so much in so many other respects, that man, against whom, as Hippocrates said, “all things conspire,” is destined by fatal cosmic forces to suffer tragic distress.

From a philosophical point of view, I tend to agree with Hippocrates. My experience is that the world is often against me and that life is a burden. I hope for a better life in heaven. Do you not find this to be a legitimate aspiration?

It is not out of the question to doubt that the large legacy of pessimism we have inherited from Greece must be an essential part of human nature. If reality is experienced as reality, if the world is envisaged as man’s home, and if the purposiveness of conscious existence is conceived as being and not as being happy, the future forecast by Freud for the religious illusion might well come true, but in the form of a further development of Christian theism, not in that of its disappearance. Freud’s thesis cannot be invoked in order to do away with the legitimacy of religious preoccupation. In the end it is the pastor who has to dissolve the inconsistencies and liquidate the mystifications of theologians and philosophers. The Catholic clergy have generally attempted but to convey to the faithful, as best they could, the mind of the Church.

It seems to me that your comment about a change of form for Christian theism as an outcome of Freud’s contribution, which has been prefigured by Dickinson, is similar to the pastor’s work in relation to the scientific attitude. Let me quote a short paragraph from Dickinson. “The beauty, singleness, and the freedom which attracts us in the consciousness of the Greek was the poetical view of the world, which did but anticipate in imagination an ideal that was not realized in fact or in thought. It depended on the assumption of anthropomorphic gods, an assumption which could not stand before the criticism of reason, and either broke down into skepticism, or was developed into the conception of a single
supreme and spiritual power.” In light of Dickinson’s remark, do you think that the faithful need pastor-philosophers to interpret “the mind of the Church” for them, lest they fall into Freud’s view?

The difficulty is that ever since Christian morality began to be conceptualized, to use St. Thomas’s own language, in terms of the performance of certain acts which constituted the means whereby happiness is to be gained, in other words, ever since it began to be cast in the hellenic concepts of means to the attainment of a final end, it has been difficult to preach Christianity without fostering the illusion described by Freud.

Again, if I may reference Dickinson, the ancient Greek “lived and acted undisturbed by scrupulous introspection; and the function of his religion was rather to quiet the conscience by ritual than to excite it by admonition and reproof.” But in our psychologically dominated age how do we overcome Freud’s illusion, and the need for “admonition and reproof?” Is anyone to blame for it?

Not even Freud sought to blame anyone for the religious illusion. But we might go beyond Freud and insist that it was not only healthy, but also proper and good, under concrete historical and cultural conditions for Christian theism to have taken the illusory forms it has. No one need, or indeed should, regret having lived a younger life, no one need be ashamed if when he was a child he spoke as a child. But, if not with Freud, then with another Jew whom Freud admired [Ernest Jones] we might agree that once we admit to ourselves that we are no longer children, the time has come to put away the things of a child.

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74 The Greek View of Life (1932:66) Methuen.
Moving beyond Freud, do you have any thoughts about contemporary theology, one that is freed from the limitations and isolation of the seminary curriculum and the concept of God?  

The direct treatment of the problem of everyday experience and Christian belief in God has been relatively neglected, even if it is amply recognized that we unquestionably do need a re-statement of what God is all about. The time has come for Christian thought to apply itself, within its more general plan to integrate experience and faith, to the problem of the concept of God. The problem of integrating theism and modern life requires, therefore, a theoretical justification, in the light of a commitment to the truth of Christianity, of the attempt to integrate it with contemporary experience, in other words, a theory of dogmatic development.

The suggestion of a theory of dogmatic development seems to me to advocate exploring new ground in light of the traditional teaching on the concept of dogma. Yet, the dogmas of the church concerning God’s transcendent reality as revealed truth do not change, as I understand it.

However ultimate and transcendent God’s reality, if he is a reality, must be conceived as being. And insofar as God’s principal and original relation to man is that of creator to creature, God must be conceived as the being who is the cause of being. The idea is that reality as such is properly, necessarily and exclusively conceivable as being, or otherwise not at all. The suggestion that the integration of Christian belief and contemporary experience, especially in what concerns the concept of God, could not be successfully attempted by a Christian theology, should be put positively. The integration of faith and experience might be successfully undertaken, particularly with regard to the central dogmatic theism of the Catholic faith, in the light of philosophical principles which in their totality.

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75 Robert Adolfs wrote: “One very important task of the clergy in the future will therefore be to make the laity conscious of its call to service as the People of God within the structures of secular society. … We shall indeed see a completely different form of theology arise when the teaching of theology is freed from the limitations and the isolation of the environment of the seminary.” The Grave of God (1966:138) Harper & Row.
corresponded to the contemporary level of human self-consciousness. It must radically depart from the philosophic world-viewing which has given the traditional Christian faith in God a cultural form which no longer serves well that Christian faith. My suggestion is that it is precisely at this level that a Christian philosophy could usefully intervene in Christian theological speculation.

Regarding contemporary scientific speculation, the work of Teilhard de Chardin comes to mind, especially his “Divine Milieu” and “Phenomenon of Man.” Both books attempt to integrate evolutionary, or scientific thought with theology. Any comments on Teilhard’s approach?

Teilhard’s thought was not an apologetic endeavor to harmonize science and the traditional conceptualizations of the Christian faith. It was a creative attempt to follow through to its ultimate consequences a scientific and fully contemporary experience in the light of a Christian faith which, on the one hand, functioned to make that scientific experience religiously meaningful, but which, on the other, required re-interpretation and reconceptualization in the categories of contemporary experience for the very sake of illuminating that everyday scientific experience.

As I understand Teilhard, evolution has an end point, a final goal. Do you agree?

There are several passages in Teilhard that only with great difficulty, if at all, could escape the objection that in his doctrine the evolutionary processes lead necessarily and inevitably to a final, that is, Omega point of history. For Teilhard occasionally equated intelligibility and necessity, and a Christian can do so only as long as he does not believe in evolution. Teilhard was needlessly betrayed by an uncharacteristic reversion to a hellenic idea that development must be reducible to becoming, therefore, in things which develop the actual is intelligible only in relation to the possible. If so, there is at bottom nihil novum sub sole. 76 That which

76 Translation: nothing new under the sun.
results from evolution must be found in potency in that from which it evolves. More precisely, in this philosophical tradition potency is essentially relative to act and is for the sake of act, *potentia dicitur ad actum*. Potency is, therefore, intelligible in relation to act. Though this aspect of Teilhard’s thought is probably not central or decisive or definitive part of the spirit of his doctrine, there can be little doubt that Teilhardism is philosophically weak. But this does not mean it should be rejected. It means that the present moment of the history of the Church offers to the Catholic intellect the task of providing a rigorous philosophical foundation for such Christian visions as that which was inspired in Teilhard de Chardin by scientific experience.

*Teilhardism is philosophically weak you say. Is such a philosophical weakness evident throughout contemporary Catholic theology?*

Perhaps the same point should be made rather more generally, in terms of certain significant differences, surely not surprising, between the typical difficulties with Catholic and Protestant attempts, respectively, to integrate theology and exegesis with contemporary experience. The differences are, as it so happens, related to their typically divergent traditional attitudes towards philosophy. Speaking very generally, it can be said that Protestant thought is not well disposed towards philosophy. The traditional Protestant tendency to rely on Scripture alone predisposes it towards this attitude, which is confirmed by its original aversion to Scholastic rationalism. Catholic thought, on the other hand, has always recognized amply the indispensable role of philosophy in theological speculation. But in this context philosophy has to date continued to mean predominantly an obsolete mode of thought. Radical Protestant theology has been characterized by a variation of the same idea of dogmatic theology. It has tended to become the understanding of Scripture in the light of contemporary knowledge, and in particular science, history or modern philosophy.

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77 The full philosophical axiom is: *Potentia dicitur ad actum et specificatur ab objecto.* Translation: There is no third way, there can be no middle between being and non-being.
Understanding the New Testament as a document which under rigorous scientific examination can reveal its original cultural and historical meaning, has led us to a deeper appreciation of the total humanity of Jesus and to an eye-opening assessment of the cultural and historical origins of the Christian faith.

This is true in the West, I believe, but, something similar has occurred in the East regarding Orthodox theology. It has traditionally developed without a classical philosophical support structure. But, further discussion on this would take us away from our present concern. So, to stay on topic the question is: given the “deeper appreciation of the total humanity of Jesus” arising from Protestant scientific examination, in light of Catholic philosophical interpretation where do you see the weakness?

The contemporary philosophical understanding of human nature could in turn help much, but if, at the same time, in the absence of ready-made concepts of God which can be plundered from the classical sources of phenomenology and existentialism, God remains understood in the traditional way “of all centuries,” say, as the Supreme Being, the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation is apt to become, if not totally impossible, so obscure as to be next to meaningless. In this approach, the integration of experience and faith has sometimes meant only the rhetorical and figurative re-interpretation of the traditional doctrine.

It seems to me that a rhetorical and figurative re-interpretation might return us to Freud’s perspective. To advance beyond his perspective, is not more required of the Christian philosophical understanding of God?

More concretely, I suggest that the integration of theism with today’s everyday experience requires not merely the demythologization of Scripture but the more comprehensive dehellenization of dogma, and specifically that of the Christian doctrine of God. Of course, this task is of such magnitude that I wish to reiterate what I mentioned earlier I am merely sketching the proposal in broad outline in order to try it on the touch-stone of public examination. Dehellenization is the negative way of
expressing this idea. It is the logical term to use for it if, astride the present, before we proceed forward, we take stock of where we have come from and where we have been. But we look to our hellenic past in order to transcend the ambivalent present. This transcending of the present is dehellenization insofar as the present is out-of-the-past. For this reason, it is more difficult to find the logical name for that which dehellenization positively seeks to bring about.

*From a philosophical perspective it appears the you are attempting to turn a negative term into a positive one to describe the future understanding of dehellenized Christian belief.*

It is difficult to know what the future might look like as a result of the transcendence of the present, and as long as dehellenization is a project of the present, the future has not yet come about. On the day when we can call dehellenization by its correct present designation, as having transcended the past, the problem will be how to transcend it, whatever it might be called. Nonetheless, on the basis, not of what it might positively look like in the future, but of what its positive function at present already suggests, dehellenization may well be described, without a negative reference to the past, as the conscious historical self-fashioning of the cultural form which Christianity requires now for the sake of its future. In other words, dehellenization means, in positive terms, the conscious creation of the future of belief.

*So, do we create a new image of God, then? A new theism, as it were?*

Theism in a world come of age must itself be a theism come of age. There is, of course, nothing unusual, mistaken or shameful in the implication that theistic belief should have once been infantile. There might well be, however, something unreasoning, to say the least, in a theistic belief that willfully and consciously chose to remain forever out of phase with the maturity of human experience at any given stage.
In our present Western Christian culture, many people do not believe in God. For those who do, what do you think is the greatest paradox concerning their belief in God?

Does not the very existence of atheism in the midst of a culture which is historically theistic, a culture which, despite its apostasy remains culturally and anthropologically describable in no other terms than Western Christendom, tell us something about the nature of Christian theism? Had modern atheism been imported from abroad the case might be different. But it happens to be a historical fact that our atheism is indigenous. We devised it ourselves, strictly out of our own cultural resources. Evidently, modern atheism is the atheism of the Christian world.

Are you able to account for this “atheism in the Christian world”? If so, where do you begin?

We should begin with a commonly accepted distinction, first made by Henri de Lubac and subsequently widely reproduced, between atheism, in the strict sense of the word, and antitheism, or, more precisely, antichristianism. The denial of the existence of God as an actuality requires the admission of the existence of God as at least a logical possibility, not necessarily, of course, as a real one. For the anti-theist God is, if nothing else, thinkable. For the a-theist he is not. It is a negative existential judgment concerning an object of thought, God, who is, therefore, at least by implication, allowed the status of a logically possible, conceivable reality. This is important, because from its negative character it follows that atheism as such is not actually the absolutely first metaphysical principle. As a negation of a certain existence it rests upon a prior affirmation of another existence. This other existence is not far to seek. It is the existence of man. The denial of God is the logical consequence of the affirmation of man. The existence of man is held to be scientifically, psychologically, logically, physically, metaphysically and, above all, morally undeniable.

If I follow through on your thought and affirm my humanity then, does that mean I eventually will come not to believe in God? That I will no longer need religion?
In finding either the absence or the presence of God we have to do with a fundamental mode of self- and world-consciousness which is concretized in a radical resolve, that is, in a commitment of oneself, to a certain projected existence. One has to decide both whether to believe and whether to dis-believe. By religion I mean here a mere phenomenological and cultural fact, namely, some sort of fundamental attitude towards totality and resolve towards existence, regardless of the specific content of that attitude. For, as Michael Novak notes, the decision to believe, made with authenticity, appears to have roots other than emotional weakness or monistic prepossessions. The decision to believe springs from a decision about what in human experience is to be taken as the criterion of the real. As each man is, so will he decide what is most real in human experience. According to that decision, he will shape his own identity. But, of course, the same is true of the decision to dis-believe, because, again from Novak’s perspective, the serious nonbeliever and the serious believer share a hidden unity of spirit.

So, both the believer and non-believer are religious, each in his or her own way.

When both do all they can to be faithful to their understanding and to love, and to the immediate task of diminishing the amount of suffering in the world, the intention of their lives is similar, even though their conceptions of what they are doing are different. Christian belief in God is nevertheless an act of existential self-relation to ultimate reality. We have to do with the order of ultimate self-commitment, ultimate self-disposition towards reality. In either case we have to do with faith. For although the inexistence, just like the existence, of God may well be reasonable, the inexistence, just like the existence, of God is inevident. From this antithesis we may draw, not the skeptical conclusion that no one can decide whether to believe, or dis-believe, that God exists, but we may observe the verifiable fact that no one, unless he deceives himself, can find “reasonable proofs” remotely sufficient to necessitate a personal commitment to existence.

Are you saying that although reason cannot prove God’s existence, I must have faith that God exists?
I interpret the teaching of Vatican I concerning the demonstrability of God’s existence as relative to its preoccupation with fideism. Even among Thomists very few have drawn the idea that in point of fact any demonstration can actually replace the Christian’s act of faith in God, though some have actually drawn it. Faith is a commitment of one’s existential self in the light of a certain apprehension of reality as disclosed in lived experience. For faith is always coming-into-being, it is never quite fully faithful, it is always on the way, hence never perfect and achieved. And if faith is a mode of existence then Christian theism is a way of life.

How do you understand faith?

Faith is the existential response of the self to the openness of the transcendence disclosed by conscious experience. It is our decision to respect, to let be, the contingency of our being, and, therefore, to admit into our calculations a reality beyond the totality of being. For the reality of Christian belief is distorted if we understand the “act” of faith as a discrete operation. It is no less a coming-into-being than the act of existence which is, likewise, a perpetual achieving of the unachieved. In real life we find not the act, but the life of faith. We cannot believe in God once-for-all any more than we can exist once-for-all. To the degree that we cease believing and presume to rest on our belief we are likely to become unfaithful to our faith. We are apt to arrest the development of our religious life.

Does such arrested development of the religious life imply idolatry?

The Christian faith must be, under pain of idolatry, painstakingly self-critical. The Christian tradition, which God we believe in is of the utmost importance and the Christian faith requires us, under pain of infidelity, to profess atheism in relation to every false God. This means that the Christian faith is both belief and dis-belief. It requires conscious separation of that in which we must, from that in which we must not, believe.
In light of the foregoing it appears that I cannot rely on a scholastic understanding of the faith to help me decide what not to believe.

The Scholastic distinction between supernatural and natural faith is not highly relevant to contemporary life. But despite its faulty conceptualization, which weds it to an antiquated philosophy of man, it corresponds to a vital reality of Christian life, namely, that the Christian belief in God is quite unlike faith in anything or anyone else. This is manifested in the fact that belief in God does not settle anything about human life. In fact, to the degree that it rules one’s life faith is, if anything, unsettling.

I can appreciate that belief in God is unsettling. But, is it not the case that an unsettling life may prompt me to avoid or even deny God’s reality?

Christianity enjoys the doubtful distinction of being the only higher religion to have become preoccupied with the existence of God to the extent of having neglected his reality. That it so neglected it is the true meaning of the defection of the working class, the secularization of the culture and the apostasy of science, and it is evident from the history of the Church’s attitude to social, political and scientific questions. Christianity indeed is the only religion to have generated religious atheism within itself. A genuine and lived concern with truth means a hypothetical willingness to disbelieve should the truth require one to do so. And yet, the Christian, evidently, must not so dishonestly or pragmatically believe that he would stand ready to continue believing even if he should no longer experience his belief as true.

When you describe the situation this way I am reminded of the phrase, “my country; right or wrong — and don’t try to change my mind.”

Could the believer wish that if his belief were false he should never find out? This would be believing for the sake of believing or for the sake of whatever consequences, other than truth-belief may bring. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, on the contrary, the steady
purification of the concept of God has increasingly facilitated the emergence of that peculiar disbelief which, being born of the same religious experience as belief, can fairly be called, in contradistinction to the atheism born of inconsiderateness, unreflectiveness, inexperience, or sheer obstinacy in refusing to admit the possibility of God, religious atheism. From the relative nature of Christian theism follows its aptitude for development, readjustment and cultural polymorphism. It is not given once for all. It is, therefore, dynamic, evolving and self-transforming. But how could Christian theism be all these things and nevertheless true? That is, how could it be these things and yet remain, both originally and ever, a true doctrine of the Christian faith? The answer depends on whether a theory of the development of Christian doctrine could reconcile these apparently contradictory, mutually exclusive qualities of Christian belief.

We will pursue your thoughts of the development of Christian doctrine in our next segment.
§

The Development of Christian Theism

I would like us now to turn our attention, in this segment, to the development of Christian dogma that you introduced in the previous discussion. Is there a documented history to the development of dogma in the Church?

It is interesting to note that Catholic theology has only gradually become aware of the fact that dogma develops. St. Thomas was aware that the articles of faith have increased in the course of time. But this hardly constituted a true development of what is believed. The sense is, however, that the dogma itself does not in any real sense change, although its articulation becomes more complex. When Bossuet 78 in the seventeenth century contrasted the immutability of Catholic doctrine with Protestant variability, he may have been emphasizing an aspect of the Thomistic doctrine in which St. Thomas took little interest, but he was hardly departing from the common position of mediaeval theology.

Medieval theology notwithstanding, what is the situation today?

The gradual conviction has arisen that Christian dogma must be said in some real sense to develop and, indeed, to have been developing since earliest time. I underscore this: the fact of which we have recently become aware is not that Christian doctrine has begun to develop in recent times, but that it has always existed in a process of development. It is only the awareness of this fact that is new.

Is Christianity the only religion to experience this “Johnny come lately” awareness of its historical development?

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78 Court preacher to Louis XIV of France, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704) was a strong advocate of political absolutism and the divine right of kings. He argued that government was divine and that kings received their power from God.
The post-facto awareness of one’s development is not peculiar to Christianity. It is a property of human nature. It can be no coincidence that Christianity reached this awareness concerning itself at the same time that mankind reached the same awareness of its own historicity and its evolutionary nature in every other respect. As man has become historically minded, man has found the understanding of his past history indispensable for the understanding of his present reality and for the adequacy of his self-projection into the future. Religious experience follows the same rules as all human experience. Christianity’s awareness of the fact that it develops historically must in some sense find its explanation in the nature of human consciousness.

To me consciousness is a psychological term. But you seem to be using it philosophically.

Indeed, consciousness is understood as the typical and proper form of human psychism, of human existence and life. But in the understanding of recent philosophical thought, man’s psychic life, however, exhibits a peculiar character which animals do not appear even in part to share. For man is the being who is present to himself. This presence of his being present to himself is called consciousness. Both man and animal know. The difference transcends the order of mere knowledge altogether.

When Socrates said, “know thyself,” could he have meant to be conscious of yourself? In other words, can consciousness be equated with knowledge, or are they different?

The typical form of human development can only be an increase in consciousness. Its distinctiveness over learning properly so called is that it cannot take the form of a quantitative increase. Man can develop in this way, that is, he can learn, since he can know, in the sense that consciousness virtually contains knowledge. But this is not what defines his human development. The heightening of consciousness presupposes a genuine but more primitive consciousness. Present consciousness can only grow out of it, and it is meaningful only in relation to it. The understanding of man’s psychic life in terms of consciousness, rather than knowledge,
creates the possibility of understanding the truth of the Christian faith in such a way as would not only permit true development to occur, but indeed as requiring it by its very nature as truth. Insofar as it pertains to mutable things, truth requires constancy of proportion rather than strict immutability.

“Constancy of proportion” to use your words, applied to truth suggests to me that the truth is relative and changes according to circumstances. In short, what may be true for me may not be true for you. I was taught, in the scholastic tradition, that truth being eternal does not change.

The scholastic tradition may well be one source of the fairly common assumption that the notion of Christian truth as eternal and immutable is an integral part of the Christian faith. But this scarcely compels one to conclude that to diverge from the Scholastic conception of truth is to diverge from the truth of faith. Since there is, so far as I understand the matter, no revealed Christian theory of truth, any theory of truth used or assumed by Christian teaching or speculation must run the same risks and be subject to the same development as, say, a cosmological or anthropological theory used or assumed by them.

Are you suggesting the possibility of new truths arising in the faith from philosophical development?

In the absence of new revelation after the close of the New Testament era, the faith of Christianity cannot teach any new truths. In the past, of course, as God’s revelation took place over a long period of time, new truths, the Trinity, the Incarnation, were revealed and taught, pre-eminently by Christianity in relation to Judaism. In this connection it may be pertinent to recall that the Reformation’s anti-Roman character was rendered possible by the Reformers’ assumption of basically the same idea concerning the fixity of Christian doctrine. But assuming also the premise that the contemporary Church, under the Roman pontificate, had substantially changed the original sense, the Reformers had to conclude that Christianity had been corrupted, and that the Christian faith must regain its original primitive sense. It would be unfortunate
if, as more and more Catholics find it impossible to reconcile the historicity of human nature with Proposition 62 of *Lamentabili*, they should draw a conclusion paradoxically similar to that of the Reformers, and look backwards to the original purity of traditional Christianity instead of forward to the demands of the future.

_A moment ago, you spoke of the absence of new revelation after the close of the New Testament era. Can you elaborate a bit on this?_

I mean that revelation has not ended and indeed never shall as long as God continues to deal personally with man and be present to human history. For we should not suppose that the fullness of God’s self-revelation in Jesus means that God’s self-revelation ceased at a certain point in time, after which we no longer enjoy the revealing presence of God, but only the record of the revelation completed in the past. To think in new concepts is to develop one’s original experience. On this basis it may be possible to suggest the outline of a theory of the mechanism of dogmatic development in which the very preservation of the original truth of Christianity would not merely permit, but actually require, the ceaseless re-conceptualization of Christian belief.

_How might a theory of “the mechanism of dogmatic development” be different from traditional concepts?_

Such a theory would rest on the distinction between the experience and the conceptualization of faith. The conceptualization of faith is a process by which we render ourselves present to that-in-which-we-believe. This does not mean that concepts perform the function of mediating the mind’s assimilation of reality. The concepts which articulate and express the Christian faith do not render us present to that-in-which-we-believe by virtue of their alleged representational value. They are not similitudes of their

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79 Proposition 62 condemned the belief that “the chief articles of the Apostles’ Creed did not have the same sense for the Christians of the first ages as they have for the Christians of our time.” The syllabus (1907) does not use the term _modernist_, but it was regarded as part of the campaign of Pope Pius X against Modernism in general, and philosophical evolution in particular.
object. Like all other concepts, the concepts of Christian belief are not true because of their effectiveness in representing objects. They are true because of their effectiveness in relating, by relation of truth, man’s reality to the reality of that-in-which-he-believes. It would be better to say that the concept is true to the degree that by its elevation of experience to consciousness. It permits the truth of human experience to come into being.

*If I have understood you correctly, up to this point, concepts which have been re-interpreted in light of contemporary experience, developed a new purpose within and for consciousness; concepts are not simply a re-working of previous ideas.*

[The re-interpretation of ideas] can be properly called an evolution of concepts because the emergent form cannot be reduced to the act of the potentiality of the original form of the concept. And since the conceptual form of the experience of faith does not determine what is revealed, it also follows that the cultural transformation of the Christian faith and the development of its truth do not imply either the discovery of a new, different truth which it did not previously possess, or the betrayal of the truth that it previously possessed. What it does imply, however, is that truth is no longer the *adaequatio rei et intellectas.* But truth remains, and this truth that remains is living and active. It is the *adaequatio mentis et vitae.* The theory of development I sketch here attempts to account not only for the possible future development of dogma, although its most immediate practical usefulness, if valid, would be to render possible a consciously undertaken programme of doctrinal development.

*Are you thinking in the direction of the so-called theological modernists, Alfred Loisy and George Tyrrell?*

The theory of doctrinal development I sketch here bears some real, but many superficial resemblances to the so-called Modernist theory. Therefore, I should point out certain essential differences

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80 Translation: correspondence of the thing and the intellect.
81 Translation: correspondence of the mind and life.
between the two. The Modernist theory of development, at least as defined and condemned by *Pascendi*, \(^8^2\) which is the only one that matters for present purposes, is in summary as follows. Since God does not reveal propositions or formulae about himself, he does not truly reveal himself except insofar as he implants in man an immanent religious sense or consciousness, and an impulse towards the divine. Christianity is a revealed religion only insofar as it is the evolutionary development of man’s religious experience or consciousness, for the Modernists did not distinguish between the two. That is, Christianity is the development of the original principles immanent in human nature. Therefore, the Judaeo-Christian revelation is not essentially different from any other; it is much like that of any natural religion, except in that, having followed its own evolutionary line, it differs in specific content, in a great many dogmas, from other religions. Thus, the conceptualization of religious consciousness, religious sentiment, or religious experience has no other purpose than to furnish the believer with a means of giving to himself an account of his faith. Dogmas, therefore, are symbols which stand between the believer and his faith. They must evolve because they are in essence, and precisely as dogmatic symbols, inadequate. They were originally inadequate and shall always remain so. All this assumes, of course, that revelation was in no sense completed with the close of the apostolic age. Revelation is rather a perpetual unfolding of the religious sense immanent in man’s nature.

*Given that dogmatic symbols are inadequate as you suggest, how then does what you understand differ from the Modernist position?*

The theory of development in accordance with the views I express here would contest each and every one of *Pascendi’s* propositions. It would instead propose that although God does not reveal propositions or formulae or concepts about himself, he truly reveals himself. He does this not through a principle immanent in

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\(^8^2\) *Pascendi dominici gregis* (1907) issued by Pope Pius X condemned a range of principles which were meant to allow for change in Roman Catholic dogma.
human nature. He does it personally, by his own agency, through his personal presence to human history, in which he freely chooses to appear and take part. Although we cannot deny to God the possibility of acting in all human history and to reveal himself in other ways, his revelation to man in the Judaico-Christian tradition is unique and extraordinary. The Christian religion and the Catholic Church are, in this extraordinary and unique sense, the true religion and the true Church to which all men are called. The conceptualization of religious experience of faith does not come between man and the object of faith. On the contrary, it enables the experience of faith to exist. Dogmatic formulae and concepts, therefore, do not mediate between faith and its object. They express faith in its object, God. Therefore, they evolve not because they are always and from the beginning necessarily inadequate, but because as man develops, they become inadequate if they fail to evolve. They must, therefore, in a sense necessarily develop, since man himself must develop in order to exist.

In light of man’s development, then, is it then possible to think of revelation as closed as you noted earlier?

Revelation was completed with the close of the apostolic age at least in the sense that, the Redemption having been accomplished as a concrete and discrete historical event, mankind ceased to exist in the preparatory period of Heilsgeschichte and henceforth would exist in the final historical age of man in his relations with God, that is, in the new and eternal testament. But this does not mean that within the age of the Incarnation there can be no further development of mankind’s faith-response to God’s continuous self-revelation nor, therefore, in the dogmas that conceptualize and formulate that belief. Nor, incidentally, does it mean that there could not be a further stage of divine-human relations beyond the new and eternal testament of man’s last historical age if, at the end of the world man should evolve altogether beyond humanity. On the

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83 Heilsgeschichte: an interpretation of history emphasizing God’s saving acts and viewing Jesus Christ as central in redemption. Cf. Lauer, 1958:172, n.20 where he distinguishes “Geschichte from Historie. The first is a traceable progressive development, whereas the second is but the record of this development.”
contrary, as man, by his natural powers, develops and becomes more perfectly aware of himself and the world, it is necessary that the conceptualization of his religious faith develop correspondingly in order to preserve if not also perfect his original faith in the self-same self-revealing God.

*Your explanation notwithstanding, I’ll need some time to digest your overall distinctions between the Modernist perspective and your understanding of the development of dogma. However, can you cite a specific point distinguishing between the two?*

The fundamental mistake of the Modernists consisted in attempting to reinterpret the traditional doctrines of the development of dogma and of the nature of revelation in line with the contemporary awareness of human evolution and historicity, but on the continued assumption of the traditional theory of knowledge, in which a subject enters into union with an object to overcome an original isolation between the two. If so, the only alternative to the traditional idea that God’s revelation was essentially and uniquely cast in the original concepts employed by Scripture, is the idea that it was cast in an immanent religious sentiment and inclination as part of the original constitution of human nature. In the theory I suggest here human knowledge is not the bridging of an original isolation but, on the contrary, the self-differentiation of consciousness in and through its objectification of the world and of itself and conceptualization is the socio-historical mechanism through which the self-differentiation of consciousness can take place. Concepts are not the subjective expression of an objective reality nor, therefore, a means whereby we become reflectively conscious of a self which already existed prior to reflection. Concepts are the self-expression of consciousness and, therefore, the means by which we objectify the world and the self, and the means whereby we self-communicate with another self, including God. In short, the means by which we objectify ourselves for another self is the means by which we objectify ourselves for ourselves.

*I am intrigued by your last sentence. Can you express it in a philosophical nutshell, as it were?*
Man’s psychic life is not the mind’s, unilateral and intentional, union with a reality from which it was originally separated by its substantive self-containment. On the contrary, it is the mind’s self-differentiation of its-self out of a reality with which it was originally continuous and united in un-differentiation. But since consciousness differentiates the self out of the totality of undifferentiated reality, the faithful, steadfast and continued development of the self can actually occur only to the degree that the world is objectified, that is, conceptualized, systematized, organized, lived with and made meaningful for our consciousness. The most basic doubt that cannot possibly be entertained, not merely in good logic, as with Descartes’ impossibility of doubting that I think, but even in lived experience, is the doubt that I might be an-other. The fundamental empirical, and not merely logical, fact of philosophy is not cogito, but sum.  

To hear you say that reminds me of Ludwig Feuerbach’s Proposition 55 which I understand to be a broader notion than Descartes’ “cogito.” I quote Feuerbach from 1843:

Art, religion, philosophy, and science are only manifestations or revelations of the true human essence. Man, the complete and true man, is only he who possesses a sense that is esthetic or artistic, religious, or moral, philosophic or scientific; in general, only he who excludes from himself nothing, essentially human is man. “Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto” — this sentence, taken in its most universal and highest meaning, is the motto of the new philosophy.

And on that note, I must end this segment but I look forward in our next session and to your views on the relationship between philosophy and faith.

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84 cogito: I think.
85 sum: I am.
86 Translation: ‘I am a man, nothing that is human I consider foreign to me.’
§

The Underdevelopment of Christian Theism

Now for this segment let us focus on the underdevelopment of Christian theism. When all is said and done how do you see philosophy’s role as supporting the faith?

The transcendence of God makes it necessary both to deny and to affirm. God is beyond existing and non-existing. I do not say that we have always found it possible to abide by this paradox, or to conceive superlative affirmations that were irreducible to simple theses. The point is that we cannot adequately believe in God unless these qualifications and this relative disbelief become integrating parts of our lived faith. Creative Catholic theology has therefore increasingly turned to non-Scholastic which means almost exclusively non-Catholic, indeed, non-Christian, philosophical thought. And a philosophy that had become so impotent that it needed upholding by faith should perhaps have been considered more of a hindrance than a help.

But philosophy was seen in medieval times as a servant to theology, was it not?

My remark applies not to mediaeval Scholasticism as such, but to its retention as the immutable form of Christian philosophy long after its time had passed. All I have taught about the positive benefits of Christianity’s hellenization I believe to be applicable, with added emphasis, to its principal philosophical component, namely, medieval Scholasticism. But by the same token, the obsolescence of Scholasticism goes together with that of Christianity’s hellenic cultural form. As human consciousness continued to develop beyond the middle ages, thanks indeed to its development during the Middle Ages, the usefulness of Scholasticism waned at the same time that its employment gradually became its adoption in the sixteenth century, then its establishment early in the nineteenth, its beatification in 1879, and finally its canonization in 1917.
In your understanding, scholastic philosophy is waning. If that is indeed the case can philosophy be of use for any future belief in God?

Perhaps the most significant defining point of an adequate contemporary Christian philosophy, in general, but with special reference to its study of God, would be that it should begin with a consideration of the needs of the Christian faith, not those of Greek metaphysics. The problem of God would then not have to be posed in terms of demonstrating the existence of God in abstraction from his nature. For the creed does not affirm, “I believe that God that is, a being whose concept is hereby presupposed, actually exists.” Nor, “I believe that God, that is, a being whose existence is hereby presupposed, is truthfully to be attributed such-and-such notes, to the exclusion of others.” The creed’s affirmation, “I believe in God,” bears upon a simple reality, the reality of God, which cannot be analyzed into distinct aspects, however much the real unity of these aspects be thereafter asserted, without distorting the meaning of the belief. From this it follows that the Christian’s act of faith must bear directly on the reality of God, not upon words or upon concepts; this is the corollary to the idea that God reveals himself, not words about or concepts of himself.

Your comments remind me of the “As If” philosophy of Hans Vaihinger that requires that we act as if God really exists, whether he does or does not.

I stress that faith must bear directly on the reality of God, in order to distinguish this from the doctrine of St. Thomas, according to which faith terminates at God himself through the mediation of the propositions of the creed. In brief, St. Thomas’s doctrine is that belief in the propositions of the creed amounts to belief in God himself, because the propositions of the creed are true.

Having studied within the scholastic tradition, I wonder if it is possible to transcend the conceptual dichotomy of God’s essence and existence. Are we not bound by both the nature of our minds and the nature of reality to distinguish between the existence and the essence of God’s nature?
I believe that it is possible to transcend this dichotomy, that we are not by nature bound to it, any more than we are bound to affirm the real distinction of essence and existence in creatures in order to conceptualize their contingency. If we depart from Greek metaphysics at their Parmenidean root, knowledge is no longer an immaterial “intussusception” of reality, and the investigation of being is no longer guided by the equivalence of intelligibility and being.  

Hence the contingency of creatures would not be conceived as a real distinction between essence and existence, but as that peculiar quality of their factuality which consists in their appearing, their coming-in-to-being, their sudden emergence, as it were, onto the cosmic stage without having been previously listed in the program. In other words, man’s contingency is the fact that in order to be he must create himself. A metaphysics of presence such as Gabriel Marcel’s, or an eschatological metaphysics such as Berdiaev’s, do not conceive any reality as polarized by existence and essence. They are concerned with being in its empirical immediacy. They try to avoid every a priori construction such as that required to distinguish between essence and existence as constituents of reality as such. For such a philosophy would be concerned with showing how God himself in his reality is present to human experience. Its concern would be the presence and reality of God. Such a God, however, would not be even partially that of Greek metaphysics. For this would be an integrally Christian philosophy. Its God would be wholly and exclusively the Christian God.

Given your reference to Parmenides, I have the sense that Hans Vaihinger was of the opinion, although about fifty years earlier, about the Parmenidean root. Permit me to read a passage from his book.

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87 The “Parmenidean root” as Dewart calls it, translates as: “That which can be thought is identical with that which can be.” The Greek philosopher, Parmenides of Elea, lived in the early part of the 5th Century BCE. A posthuman version might be stated: That which can be virtually imagined is identical with that which is.”
Parmenides, as is well known, held that multiplicity and change were meaningless illusions; there was no beginning; all change and all separation were not true Being but Not-Being, something unreal and unthinkable. Only Being eternally at rest, unchanging, and unmoved, only what persisted in eternal, divine Sameness, was real. Existence is an indivisible whole, a uniform continuum, limitless and absolute. The world of sensory appearance, on the hand, is mere illusion, and unreal. Becoming and passing away are but a delusion of the senses. 88

With that having been said I would like to turn to your thoughts on the development of Christian theism. Earlier you spoke of a God who is not of Greek metaphysics. Do you care to speculate about how the notion of a God, not of Greek metaphysics, might develop presuming such a need is recognized, as you suggest?

Once Christianity becomes fully conscious of the need for further developing its theism it is likely to reconceptualize consciously its belief in God. All history, but very specially perhaps Christian history, is freely and spontaneously made by the creative forces generated by man’s interrelations with the ultimate reality, God. For this reason, history is radically unforeseeable. Nevertheless, what is radically unforeseeable may well be empirically predictable, though we may not say what final goal we are bound to arrive at, we can determine in which direction we are already going. We can forecast what points we are likely to traverse, on the basis of the decisions we have already taken and on the assumption that we will follow them through.

What major point do you forecast in this regard?

The truth that Christianity needs for its health, protection and development is the reality of man’s individual and cultural growth in self-consciousness. We now stand on a very uncertain terrain.

Given this uncertain terrain of self-consciousness, can we ever be sure about the being and existence of God?

What the religious experience of God discloses is a reality beyond being. I do not suggest that if God is beyond being he is empirically unknowable, or that he is, unless we use the term hyperbolically, ineffable. Nor does saying that God is a reality beyond being mean that he can be experienced only mystically or through affective knowledge or connaturality. For unless we retain the Greek metaphysical outlook, the ordinary facts of Christian experience are sufficient to establish that we do experience God, but that we do not experience him as being. We should determine what consequences for our understanding of God follow from this observation, rather than the consequences for our understanding of faith, within the general presuppositions of the Greek theories of knowledge, that follow from the presupposition that the God in whom we believe is the Supreme Being.

If God is not to be experienced as being, how is God to be experienced?

What we must do is to open ourselves to that which transcendence reveals. God’s real presence to us and, therefore, his reality in himself, does not depend upon his being a being or an object. In fact, our belief in the Christian God is post-primitive to the degree that we apprehend that although there is no super-being behind beings, no supreme being who stands at the summit of the hierarchy of being, nevertheless a reality beyond the totality of being reveals itself by its presence.

How do we know something is “there,” beyond being?

The reality of human transcendence discloses the presence of a reality beyond all actual and possible empirical intuition. In the presence of myself to myself I find that over and above my own agency, and indeed as the ultimate condition of the possibility of that agency, there is a presence which reveals me to myself in a supererogatory and gratuitous way, that is, by making me more fully myself than I should be if I were not exposed to its impact.
If God is waiting to make me conscious of myself, he must be “there” in some form, no?

The presence of God does not exhibit him as a prior, anterior, supra-temporal or eternal reality. It manifests him as a present one. The point can hardly be missed once we rid ourselves of any hellenic compulsion to think of God as the First, or the Last, Cause, or as the arche 89 and aitia 90 of existence, or as the Supreme Being. We can philosophically account for man’s experience of God in terms which are not intrinsically inadequate, if we first account for human experience in more adequate terms than Scholasticism does.

Scholasticism accounts for knowledge “of” God for our benefit in terms which you consider inadequate. What about in terms of personal meaning “for” God in himself?

God does not have meaning in-and-for-himself, though he can have, of course, meaning for us. The problem for Christian philosophy is to explore that reality and, in the first place, to try to understand the meaning of God’s simultaneous presence and absence. But this does not mean that we must determine whether an actually existing thing-in-itself corresponds to the object of thought, God. What needs to be proven is not that a God-being objectively exists. What requires a demonstration, for it is not immediately obvious, is God’s presence. Whether it be in what sense, in what way, and with what consequences, God is present. Present, in the first place to himself, though this is largely a theological problem.

As a theological problem, where do you see God as present?

Present, in any event, to being, present to world, present to man, present to man’s faith, present to the Church, present to history, and present to the future that we create. In the future we may well learn to conceive God in a nobler way. The question would always remain

89 arche: (Greek) reflecting the sense of “beginning,” “origin” or “source of action,” and in later philosophy the first principle or element.  
90 aitia: (Greek) cause or reason.
open whether our self-creation will or will not proceed so as to make God to-exist-for-us.

All that being said, I would like to ask a particular question or two concerning a meaningful concept of God. I suspect that your answers will not simply recast classical knowledge in contemporary terms. First, what have you to say about the personality of God?

Christian theism might in the future not conceive God as a person, or indeed as a Trinity of persons. The concept of person remains, of course, metaphorically adequate for theism. Personality has been accorded to God as long as the concept has taken its place in a philosophy for which it was what is most perfect in all nature. In our contemporary understanding of personality, however, this is no longer true. We no longer find it fitting or truly fair to the nature of God to preoccupy ourselves with granting to God the infinite degree of the creaturely perfections. Moreover, personality is no longer apt to signify any perfection transcending man, because we no longer understand personality in relation to Nature, since we do not understand being as a hierarchy of perfection and reality. I assume here, of course, that man has evolved from the animal, but that being, though created, has not evolved from God. Behind this is the fact that the very approach of the contemporary mind to an understanding of every reality, including personality, is at variance with the hellenic approach. The ultimate reason why God was fittingly conceived as a supra-rational person is the same as the reason why he was fittingly conceived as the super-being, that is, for the hellenic mind to understand any given kind of being was to find its proper place in a hierarchical scheme of being which ran from the highest to the lowest.

Then what today replaces the hellenic hierarchical approach of the past?

Today we do not understand man as a rational animal because we do not understand him as an animal to begin with. Now, the contemporary mind does not conceive man as a body, organized and potentially having life, to which consciousness is somehow united.
Now we are back to your uncertain terrain of an independent consciousness.

Consciousness is the constituent of man. It is equivalent to life and existence. Personal conscious existence is all that we have of ourselves in order to create ourselves in time. This means that personality is the summit of man’s actuality, but hardly the summit he hopes to achieve. Man is the being who is sufficiently perfect to tend to transcend personality.

So, it would seem to me that I can engage in holistic thinking for a clue to myself, my existence. That is, “I am greater than the sum of my individuated parts.”

A person is a being who knows enough to want to go beyond himself. But the idea is scarcely new. In the most ancient Christian tradition, too, man’s ultimate achievement is not found in the circumscription of his personality. It is found on the contrary in its communication and expansion beyond itself into another self, indeed, into a community of selves. The ultimate hope of the Christian faith is not that man should achieve within himself the act of beholding God, a vision close enough to constitute an intimate union with God. It is to achieve an intimate union with every person through a union with God in God himself, to achieve a going-out-of-one-self-into-God, an out-going that is real enough to constitute a self-transformation.

In light of this transcendental out-going in life, what do you make of the disaffiliated religious thinker, a Lone Ranger, as it were?

The typical experience of the disaffiliated religious person today is that God could not possibly be a person. He must be some kind of cosmic force. This is surely a naive view to the degree that it implies that God is less than man. But this is not all that this common expression connotes. It also means that God is, rather than a centre of being to which we are drawn, an expansive force which impels persons to go out from and beyond themselves. This expression represents an effort, born of understandable impatience, to transcend
the primitive God-being, God-object and God-person of absolute theism. The truth that that crude expression so mistakenly conceives may yet be redeemed in the future by Christian theism.

*I am led to ask: what about the omnipotence of God?*

If we immediately proceed to conceive God as having, or, for that matter, as being, omnipotence, eternity, immateriality, infinity, immutability, omniscience, etc., in the last analysis what matters is the attributes themselves. The question is rather, what can, and what, if anything, cannot happen, once God and man enter into personal relations. The problem is not how to explain a metaphysical property of God which would have implications for us, but how to understand the reciprocal relations between man and God and, in particular, how mutual power enters into the relationship.

*Does mutual power have to do with co-creatorship? If so, and if I am in a relationship with God, am I not God, or at least part of God, in some sense?*

The problem has to do, as it were, with the politics of man and God. If God is a true reality truly present to being, there are true relations between God and creatures. The politics of this relation should be understood accordingly, that is, in terms of reciprocal being-with, rather than in those of acting and being acted upon. If a Christian looks at the world and understands nature through hellenic eyes, he will find it necessary to assert the omnipotence of God over and against nature. For in this view of nature, either God is necessitated by it, or it is subject to God.

*What are we most likely to see in our contemporary experience without “hellenic eyes,” as you describe it?*

In the contemporary experience nature is no longer understood as the principle which necessitates from within the operations of beings, and therefore makes them resist violence from without. We do not see nature as the source of independence and self-sufficiency which it was for Aristotle. Let us rather say that nature does not have its own natural finalities independently of God’s. The case is not that
God can do the impossible, that is, that God has power to do that which nature cannot do, but that for God all things are possible and that, therefore, with God all things are possible to man. In God nature can do anything. The moral implication of this is that once it no longer has God’s omnipotence to fall back on, our Christian conscience may be awakened to feel its adult responsibilities for taking the full initiative in restoring all things in Christ and for exercising its creative ingenuity in order to determine how this should be done.

If we are truly responsible for our future, must I believe that God is not all-powerful, but rather limited in some fashion by my presence?

The trouble is that it is becoming increasingly difficult for many Christians, and their numbers proliferate daily, to believe in the authoritarian God as traditionally understood. Indeed, some find themselves compelled by their Christian faith, and constrained by their loyalty to Christ, to his Church, and to the living History in which they live and breathe, positively and actively to dis-believe in a divine being who is only in degree and in detail different from primitive deities or from philosophical gods. They find themselves compelled by their Christian faith to dis-believe in a Supreme Being, in a God behind whose kindness and generosity to man stands a supreme, omnipotent and eternal will.

Again, does this not reduce God’s exalted status?

We may yet judge that we have not sufficiently well appreciated in the past that to place God at the summit of creation is to place him in an insufficiently noble station in the world. To say that God is the highest and the first being, and that he has to the infinite degree all the creaturely perfections, may not be nearly enough to begin to approximate the transcendent reality of God. To multiply infinities is not the way to transcend them. He seems rather to rule himself by the principle of noblesse oblige, so that being the noblest he is also the humblest reality, not having hesitated to give man the freedom that renders him capable of true personal friendship and partnership in the creation of history and world. It may be significant that
religion is the last area within the Christian world where the institution of homage is consciously and unashamedly retained.

*Following this logic, then, I need not continue to worship the child born at Christmas time.*

Worship might be better understood as the rendering of ourselves present to the presence of God, whether in the interior prayer which sends no message to God but which receives his presence, or in the public and common ceremonies which visibly, audibly and sensibly unite us through our collective presence to each other in the presence of the present God.

*With these profound thoughts, we conclude this final segment. My penultimate question is: In all the issues addressed by philosophy and theology, are we not becoming less spiritual?*

In recent times, as philosophy has diverged more and more from its Greek presuppositions, and as nature and essence have ceased to be understood as intelligible necessities, the concept of the supernatural has lost its usefulness for Christian theism. This is one concrete reason why, as I have already suggested, since the mainstream of Catholic philosophy has remained Scholastic and hence unsympathetic to the contemporary understanding of nature, Catholic theology, especially in those circles that have consciously abandoned Scholasticism for example, the Teilhardians, or in those specialties that were never dominated by it, for example, in scriptural studies, has increasingly turned to non-Christian secular thought for philosophical help. Although one might wish to avoid the terms naturalism and secularism on account of their historical association with philosophies that are not easily reconcilable with the Christian faith, the fact is that Catholic thought and experience tends with increasing rapidity to interpret Christian belief in the terms of the temporal history of natural entities.

*Finally, are we thus opening the door to secularism by casting belief in terms of the temporal history of natural entities?*
It is most important to note that in this formula the term natural is the equivalent of historically factual. I should incidentally remark that this has profound implications for an understanding of the relation of faith and scientific enquiry, and in particular for the problems of the nature and methods of Christian philosophy and theology. I suggest that in the future we may not feel the need to conceive God as a super-natural being. If we discard the hellenic view of nature, the Christian God no longer must, in order to remain free, gracious and freely self-giving, perform super-natural feats, undertake super-natural functions and roles, or enjoy super-natural status. The traditional Christian faith could then be reasserted under new forms which might make more meaningful and vivid the concepts of grace and charity than the theory of the super-natural has done in the past.
§

Posthuman Belief

Now to draw a conclusion from the above presentation is not an easy task. Each reader will most likely draw a conclusion that is significant for him or her depending on the depth of interest the reader shows in the work. My conclusion is first of all inspired by Maude D. Petre, a close friend of George Tyrrell. Secondly, it is “future-inspired” in the sense that I cast an eye to the current interest in philosophical posthumanity with particular attention to the “unresolved issues” of theological Modernism. I maintain that Dewart has addressed some of these “unresolved issues” in his works, even if somewhat unintentionally.

Writing in 1918, Maude Petre has, to my mind, foreseen the future, as it were, when she wrote about the Catholic Modernist thinker of her day.

Religion is, for him, the supreme interest of life; but it cannot be lived alone, and he needs a Church. This Church can be no academy of ideas, intellectual or social; it must be practically, as well as theoretically, adapted to the needs of all, great and small, rich and poor, learned and ignorant. Neither Church nor State can exist without some principle of unity; hence he believes in authority, and accepts the existing ecclesiastical hierarchy, not as its only possible, but as its actually present instrument in the concrete order. 91

In this passage, I believe, she has characterized thresholds of the posthuman condition even though unwittingly so. To my way of interpreting the data, it was but for Dewart to articulate his understanding of dehellenization which then opened a “philosophical window” for the astute critical thinker to relate the two in light of a posthuman context.

By way of a speculative conclusion, I suggest the Creed below as a possible summation of a Christian posthuman attitude.

A Posthuman Creed

I believe that Christianity is the highest form of religion and that in the historic Christ divinity was manifested.

I believe that God is manifested to humanity in diverse manners. I believe in the sacramental system, in prayer, in sacrifice, and obedience to rightful authority.

I believe in the church as a means, not an end, of eternal life. I believe in ecclesial authority as service imparted by the Spirit for and to the whole church.

I believe that doctrine has not been exhaustively comprehended and I believe the individual and the whole church takes part in an unending process of spiritual development.

I believe that I live in the church and the church lives in me and in no fixed form nor quantity, but as an outpouring of infinity.
EXAMINERS’ REPORT
Date: 1 July 2010
Reference: ASOI/07/2010
Student: Allan Maurice Savage
Degree: Doctor of Letters

The candidate presented a portfolio of publications for assessment accompanied by a critical commentary in line for the regulations for the degree entitled “Interdisciplinary Insights Applied within a Theological Context”. The portfolio was extremely wide-ranging and included work principally in the area of theology and secondarily in the areas of philosophy and psychology.

[The list of previously granted credentials at the degree level has been omitted.]

In addition to previous degree awards and ministerial appointments, the portfolio contained two testimonials from the Bishop of Algoma attesting to his appreciation and high regard for the candidate’s work in ministry.

[The list of publications books, booklets and articles for evaluation has been omitted.]

The evidence of achievement in line with the Regulations for the granting of the degree of Doctor of Letters by published work was amply displayed. The high level and scope of the work undertaken was clearly evidenced and offered a contribution to scholarship that was both original and unusually broadly-based. It was clear that the candidate had thoroughly absorbed the corpus of existing thought in his chosen areas, and had shown himself to be both a cogent expositor of the scholarship of others and an original thinker in his own right.

The candidate supplied a detailed exegesis in his critical commentary that considered each submitted work in turn. The examiners greatly appreciated the role of this approach in clarifying the intentions, methodology and context of the works concerned. The candidate also included a list of the libraries which have acquired at least one of his books.
He concludes that “their acceptance tells me they determined that my books ‘have something to say’ of academic value to the university community and perhaps to the civic community at large.” The examiners endorse this conclusion and commend the work involved accordingly.

It is invidious and necessarily subjective to single out examples of particular work in a submission that was uniformly impressive, but the three books “A Phenomenological Understanding of Certain Liturgical Texts: The Anglican Collects for Advent and the Roman Catholic Collects for Lent”, “Faith, Hope and Charity as Character Traits in Adler’s Individual Psychology with Related Essays in Spirituality and Phenomenology” and “The Ecology: A ‘New to You’ View (An Orthodox Theological Ecology)” were held by the examiners to be of particular merit.

The examiners felt in summary that the submission was of an exemplary quality and reflected exceptional achievement over a sustained period of time. The award of a higher doctorate does not permit the conferral of marks of distinction, but in this case it was felt that the submission was such as to have merited this accolade were it to have been available.

Andrew Linley, D.D. (Convenor)
Vice-President and Director of Administrative Affairs
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John Kersey, Hon.LL.D., Hon.D.Mus., D.D., Ed.D., Ph.D.
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DEWART’S PUBLICATIONS

Books


Contributions to books


**Articles**


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92 Associate editor 1964-1970.


93 Associate editor 1967-1974.
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Leslie Dewart (1922-2009) Canada’s Forgotten Theological Philosopher


—— (1920) *Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion: Based on Psychology and History* George H. Doran Co.
