A Philosophical Potpourri

14 Essays in the Humanities

Allan M Savage, D.Th, D.Litt.
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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PREFATORY NOTE

These essays have been collected and adapted from my previously published books. They have been slightly revised from the point of view of grammar, but nothing substantial in their content has been changed. The book from which each essay was taken is identified on the title page of the essay. The one exception is my review of Beyond the Sea: Navigating Bioshock (edited by Felan Parker and Jessica Aldred).

Listed chronologically the books are:


2010 Phenomenological Philosophy and Reconstruction in Western Theism.


2012 The “Avant-Garde” Theology of George Tyrrell: Its Philosophical Roots Changed My Theological Thinking.

2018 Faith and Queer Consciousness: Philosophical Thinking in a New Key.


2019 Posthuman Theological Reflections.

2020 Beyond the Breakwater: Venturing into Posthuman Philosophical Waters.
1. POSTHUMAN PHILOSOPHY

MY RATIONALE FOR PHILOSOPHIZING

Why read Philosophers? I suppose the immediate answer to that question that comes to mind for most individuals is that “I want to learn something,” or perhaps to know what other philosophers know. Such were my reasons at one time. However, today (in my retirement years) that is not the case. Rather, I read other philosophers to confirm what I already know, not so much to know what they know, although that does occur also. That means that I discover if I am in accord or in discord with the perspective of the philosopher I am reading. In short, I am already somewhat conscious of an issue before I search out a particular philosopher to read. The “inquiring-minds-want-to-know” phase of my earlier philosophical reading has passed and now it is a matter of confirming the truthfulness or authenticity of that which I am aware, but not with the aid of a classical philosophical education. Rather, I ask myself, am I conscious to the fullest degree humanly possible?

Posthuman consciousness does not replace humanistic consciousness in Western philosophy, but it co-exists as a philosophical attitude along-side humanism and other various philosophical fonds (in the archival sense) in philosophical thinking.
A philosophical attitude is a conscious interpretive stance particular to one’s culture and is successor to mythical interpretation. Thus, elements of humanist philosophy will be evident in a posthuman philosophy. I envision philosophy, humanist as well as posthumanist, not as a formal discipline reserved to universities, but as a natural human intellectual activity characteristic of all critically thinking persons.

In my thinking I have become a “disciple,” as it were, of Leslie Dewart (1922-2009) in order to interpret “the master’s” approach to understanding philosophical consciousness. To my mind, one is a true disciple of another philosopher only to the extent that one understands and is convinced by the master’s arguments. But I am not a disciple in that restrictive sense. Rather than accept Dewart’s insights as an intellectual fait accompli, I attempt a further interpretation of his insights by following through on his reasoning and critically examining his arguments.

The human mind is the active faculty of consciousness and thinking that makes us aware of ourselves and our environment. In my conscious mind notions precede their written expression. Notions are in my mind, before I consign them to paper. History shows that the earliest written expressions of ideas were often altered when understood philosophically by later generations, the “original” idea having been expressed in myth or poetry. Yet, not all mythical ideas have reached written status (of the more ancient philosophical writing only fragments remain) and the number that are not extant is unknown. Formal philosophy was undertaken mentally, or notionally, before it was written down and written texts (often in Greek or Latin) were only in the hands of educated individuals. Often not even an entire corpus was available to them. Nor was the entire corpus of ideas of any particular philosopher accepted without modification by the members of a particular school. Nor even understood by savants outside a particular school of thought. There is no doubt that in the minds of many scholars, philosophy initially meant theology, before its current name and its appearance in the academy.

Presently, I am of the opinion that philosophy will function as “theology without God” in posthuman thinking. Unlike classical Western theology, in post human thinking, no act of religious faith is needed to support the authority of philosophy. A simple appeal to
reason suffices in favour of God or not. In the West, a canon of philosophical writings was established (by the academics) which became normative thus founding the principles of Western philosophical thinking. In the Western context, reason has become its own guarantor. Philosophy, in a posthuman context, will need interpretation as to its exact meaning. Authority, in the posthuman context, resides in the agency of individual philosophers and only by virtue of delegation in the agency of a community. As an autonomous thinker, each philosopher must be on guard against the faulty translation of texts, the obscurity of texts (that may even require explanation through other texts) and, as well, on guard against a personal lack of knowledge concerning the complexity of written languages, or of a failure to distinguish between literal and figurative senses. No community can interpret on behalf of philosophers.

Having come to appreciate the philosophical influence of Leslie Dewart, my intention is to provide the critical philosopher with some insights arising in my undergraduate years that have remained with me to the writing of this book. I place this account in the public forum because there may be other philosophers or theologians interested in knowing of my experience. In doing so I present these insights not as a chronological or historical sequence of events detailing the stages of my philosophical journey. Rather, I invite the reader to revisit and reconsider issues of his or her own thinking. Identifying dates and occasions marking the various philosophical movements of conversion when I stopped believing “this” and began believing “that,” is not my intent here. Instead, I identify those occasions when various conscious realizations converged in my thinking which presented a phenomenological insight that changed what I believed. My personal understanding of philosophy is that philosophy is an intellectual and contemplative activity (not necessarily speculative) by which I make sense of my environment. This intellectual and contemplative activity has provided insights that have brought me to a posthuman understanding of theology. That is to say, philosophy and theology collaborated given that critical philosophy offers a higher intelligibility and understanding for theology than does insight nursed on folklore. In short, philosophy offers a higher hermeneutic.

Like many other students of philosophy throughout history, I
began questioning my beliefs during my undergraduate years while studying philosophy according to the classical syllabus. I did not, however, immediately and totally reject classical philosophy. In practice, I took what “worked” from classical philosophy and rejected what was irrelevant to my experience at the time. Today, unlike in my undergraduate years, any rejection of what is irrelevant to my experience is critically thought out. What is relevant is consciously maintained. Over time, I have come to appreciate Christopher Macann’s perspective on the philosophical concept of being. It is not that phenomena reveal or disclose being or even what it means “to be.” Rather, the opposite is the case. Being, or what it means “to be,” discloses or reveals phenomena. ¹ I no longer consider the legacy of Hellenistic ontology as the necessary philosophical substrate common to all human thinking and experience. I once thought that was the case, however. Now, I recognize that Hellenistic ontology is only one interpretation within the evolutionary process of philosophical perspectives that constitute human thinking.

Like many philosophers in the Catholic tradition I sought knowledge of a metaphysical reality, that is, God through transcendental philosophy. At one time, Neo-Thomism satisfied my quest. In the initial years of my thinking, I accepted uncritically what was real and knowable through formal \textit{a priori} ideological structures. That is, my experience was interpreted through Platonic idealism. I later realized that my experience neither revealed nor confirmed that such structures existed. I had presumed them to be “there.” Eventually, and largely due to Leslie Dewart’s philosophical influence, I accepted that there are no \textit{a priori} structures of reality “out there.” Thus, I abandoned the classical ontological ideology and undertook a critical self-reflection on my experience from a phenomenological perspective.

A philosophy of critical self-reflection from a phenomenological perspective revealed a new consciousness, enabling me to understand and make sense, that is, give meaning to my experience. It was my arrival at this stage of assigning meaning that, according to Kristina Stöckl, marked the moment I consciously entered

modernity. The notion of modernity, as a philosophical concept, refers to one’s critical reflection on experience. Modernity, then, was the context in which I found myself engaged in the task of having to make sense of, or give meaning to, my experience. Once I understood this, I came to question seriously whether or not the scholastic philosophical idealism that I inherited from my Western education actually existed independently of my experience. I concluded that it did not. Rather, it is more accurate to say that I intentionally constructed notions through an awareness of relationships with the world around me. Such deliberate intentional constructions, I soon realized, prepared my way to posthuman philosophical thinking.

In my posthuman philosophical thinking I distinguish between my being (a static concept) and my becoming (a dynamic concept), yet I am not able to separate my being from my becoming. They are one and the same activity. As well, I am conscious that my being and my becoming constitute a unity and I understand them as equiprimordial. In short, my being was always present to my becoming.

One question, upon which I reflected in my posthuman understanding, is whether or not to undertake consciously to construct critically my life-world, or, choose to remain satisfied with pre-critical thinking. Having rejected traditional Hellenistic understanding and having undertaken a posthuman philosophical perspective, I thereby transcended Hellenistic metaphysical theory. That is to say that posthuman metaphysical understanding is not a variant of classical metaphysical ideology. Rather, posthuman metaphysics addresses existential phenomena in the human being’s life-world notionally, not as an ideal of classical speculative metaphysics. Posthuman metaphysics is a contemporary philosophy of mind. Thus, in posthuman philosophy, I encounter a different problem. The problem is not whether the world will change or whether it will remain the same as the classical metaphysical philosophers speculate. The real problem is whether the world will change of its own accord, without my participation, or whether it will be changed deliberately, consciously because of my

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participation.

I change my world through changing my relationships existentially. Changed existential relationships define the conscious limits of my life-world. While there is no possibility of retaining the fixed conceptions of my past, the shaping of my future life-world does require an analysis of the circumstances of the past without reliving them. In analyzing the past, I am conscious of myself, not as a static being, but as an active and free agent in the presence of other active and free agents. The presence of God (not conceived as a free agent, as such), constitutes the boundary of my existence. In designing the future of my life-world, I have chosen neither a traditional, nor an updated philosophical perspective such as Neo-Thomism. It was learning to define myself through a non-hellenized posthuman philosophy that I came to appreciate the rationale of the process I use to construct the future of my life-world. In short, I realized that I was living at a threshold of evolutionary posthuman thinking.

Any philosopher who assumes that every entity is necessarily constructed as a self-contained unit rejects the possibility of evolutionary growth and remains within the static Hellenic mind-set and closed to future development. In organizing my life-world, the opposite is the case. That is, I participate in my evolution by reflecting, engaging and consciously growing while facing an indeterminate and unnecessary future.

The posthuman dehellenization of my belief does not mean the rejection of Hellenistic philosophy and the substitution of another more appropriate philosophy as if the two were not related. The term dehellenization is not a negative term, that is, it does not mean simply un-hellenization. It is a positive term. I undertake the process of dehellenization as the conscious creation of the construction of my future life-world in light of a past hellenization. Reviewing my intellectual history, I have come to the realization that the task which awaits me is not the dismantling of one metaphysical system to reconstruct an alternative metaphysical system in its place. Rather the task is to transcend any metaphysical system that reflects another objective world. Transcending any ideal metaphysical system is done through individuating myself within that which is real. That is, individuating myself within the reality beyond being of which I am conscious, i.e., God.
It is understandable that St Thomas thought that the scholastic way of thinking was the only way of thinking given his context. However, I am conscious of the fact that there is no necessary context or methodology that I must employ in philosophizing about reality beyond being. As well, there is no philosophical methodology that is natural or privileged in interpreting reality beyond being. My life-world is one of increasing personal existential responsibility and, as such, my task is to find an appropriate intellectual and philosophical methodology for the interpretation of my posthuman experience.

As I reflect on my experience, I become conscious that the contingency of my physical being is problematic. I attempt to overcome this problematic through a holistic understanding. My holistic consciousness is rooted in a desire to give meaning to my life-world. Since I live in a community of (religious) faith, a problem for me is whether or not I must assign reasons that demonstrate that such (religious) faith is required of those outside the community. The answer is no. While I am conscious of my particular creative freedom, I need not presume that the same degree of creative freedom is necessary for all. There is a difference of degree in the creative freedom of human beings. Other conscious individuals who have unique experiences will assign different meanings to their experience, secular or otherwise. Through phenomenological philosophy, I realize that the outcome of my freedom is not predetermined, as I once thought. I am not a fatalist. That is why I consciously and freely attempt to create a life-world through the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity.

Because of the dissatisfaction with classical philosophy, I now subscribe to a philosophy that is suitable to my increasingly maturing theological thinking in order to give proper expression to the understanding of God’s presence to me. My theological maturing has to do with the epistemological and metaphysical questions which traditionally grounded Western theology and belief. In short, my theological crisis was and is philosophical. Therefore, my need is for a philosophy of deepening consciousness to clarify what I already know, rather than a need for an increase in the quantity of information. A deepening consciousness brings about a re-conceptualized understanding of relationships within my faith community and my life-world in general. In the process of
deepening my consciousness, or reconceptualizing of my life-world, what I become conscious of is that all phenomena are real, but not all reality is phenomena. There is reality beyond phenomenological being.

I am conscious that in expressing my dehellenized philosophy, I employ language personally, but not privately. When I think, or talk about my life-world, I create a relationship to the physical world that is “there.” In this relationship, I do not merely relate to my life-world and the physical world that is there, but I self-relate to my life-world and the physical world that is there. I become consciously related as a self to the physical world that is there, that is, as a subject who knows of his relationship to his life-world and the physical world. Thus, what I achieve through my language and thought is the creation of my identity through relating my self to both myself and the physical world that is there.

Remembering is that characteristic of consciousness which accounts for the fact that the more I am actually aware, the more I become potentially aware. Thus, when I remember anything, I potentially expand my conscious horizon, or potentially increase my awareness qualitatively, not quantitatively. Consequently, if I were to accept uncritically any pre-given conceptual and cultural form of theological dogma, I would be preventing any conscious expansion of my theological horizon or increased awareness for theologizing. Acceptance of any pre-given form of philosophical dogma, characteristic of Hellenism, would obscure any meaning which it once revealed and my theological crisis would remain unresolved. Therefore, I have attempted a philosophical resolution to my theological crisis with an eye to posthuman future.

THE STAGNATION OF PHILOSOPHY

A presumption I make in these essays is that Western philosophy has stagnated. To date, it has failed to achieve sufficient independence from the scientific attitude to attract the attention of the bright minds that contemplate upon the mysteries of life. I hold this perspective to have been adequately demonstrated, through the work of Leslie Dewart, to justify accepting it as a point of philosophical fact. Summarily he writes:

Soon after philosophy was revived in modern times by René
Descartes and given an empirical orientation by John Locke, anglophone philosophy ceased to make much progress in its understanding of the human mind and its conscious quality. Many philosophers today are likely to agree that, regretfully, although the attempts of modern philosophy to fathom the mind have never come to a standstill, generation after generation the most promising beginnings have in the fullness of time invariably foundered. Quite to the contrary, however, on a very different issue “a Great Divide” bisects today’s philosophical community into irreconcilable factions: is it true, as the advocates of “cognitivism” maintain, that with the advent of this school of thought the stagnation of philosophy and its inability to deal effectively with consciousness have come to an end?

The proponents of philosophical cognitivism judge that modern philosophy, having enlisted in the service of cognitive science, has finally come of age and now faces a bright future. The reason, they say, is that cognitivism has at long last discovered how to study human cognition as what it truly is, namely, as one among many possible “realizations” or “instantiations” of the “mentality” of processes that can be observed not only in human beings and infrahuman animals, but even among non-living entities such as computing machines. This, they say, is necessary, because it is the only way in which philosophy can avoid dualism. The more traditionally-minded amongst us, however, continue to uphold the autonomous, science-independent nature and unique value of philosophical knowledge, as well as the empirically-based conviction that human organisms exhibit mental functions that, on the one hand, are vested in exclusively material organisms, but which nonetheless, on the other, are truly real and conscious as well as distinct from, and irreducible to, the organism’s non-mental functions. Now, if this should turn out to be true — and time will probably tell — philosophical cognitivism, like many other philosophical shooting stars that have arisen and fallen in the last two hundred years, is likely to dry out and ultimately evaporate. But that is yet to come, if ever it will. In the meantime, those of

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us who contest the validity of cognitivism are challenged to account for the causes of what we take to be the stagnation of modern philosophy throughout modern times. How did it come about? Why is there no end of it in sight? What is the remedy, if there is one? And how should philosophy reorient itself once it overthrows the obstacles that bar its way to progress? … As for the suppositions that I propose here concerning cognition, reality, and causality as replacements of the traditional versions of these concepts, I recognize they may amount only to an uncertain and unhelpful step towards the reconstruction of modern philosophy. Nevertheless, if this work arouses the interest of open-minded scholars and stimulates them to investigate in depth the questions I raise here but which I raise here only superficially, and if it moves them to reset the compass of philosophy on a more promising course than I have been able to suggest, my fondest objectives in writing this book will have been attained. 4

I accept that the issues of cognition, reality, and causality will take on new challenges of interpretation in the posthuman context. Philosophers in the posthuman context will carry elements of Dewart’s thought a bit further and apply them to posthumanism and transhumanism which are yet to gain greater philosophical attention. Currently their expression is most evident in the fields of science fiction, futurology, and contemporary art. Cognition, reality and causality are minimally influenced by critical philosophy. I view posthumanism and transhumanism as positive philosophical attitudes, designed to enhance the understanding of the human person, not as philosophical ideologies reflecting a dissatisfaction with humanism. Thus, I employ consciousness in lieu of epistemology in interpreting them philosophically. Any negative aspect of posthumanism, to my mind, reflects a carryover from a negative attitude characteristic of studies in postmodern theology. 5

The traditional conventions that Western philosophers have designed and developed to protect them from anxiety in the human condition are likely to be inadequate and unsuccessful in the posthuman world. New philosophical safeguards against anxiety, characteristic of posthuman phenomenology, not scholasticism, need to be properly formulated. However, their effectiveness may be somewhat limited within contemporary Western philosophical thought. The safeguards of traditional religious ideology, having been uncontested for so many years within conventional Christianity, may be the cause. However, for many philosophers these uncontested safeguards no longer work. These classical forms of expression, conceptions, and customs are rooted in the world of a Greco-Roman-Germanic civilization that has deep roots in ancient Hellenic philosophy. I suggest that posthuman philosophical specialization will bring about great changes in interpreting conventional Christianity. As an example, the shift from an objective to a subjective point of view in interpreting personal experience accounts for the fact that many Christian churches have become humanized (secularized) institutions in which humans, not God, have become the primary focus. The focus on humans will likely increase in the posthuman future.

Posthuman philosophical contemplation seems to lie outside the official Catholic tradition in interpreting the scriptures. Posthuman theological philosophy seems to be regarded by the official Catholic magisterium as incapable of assisting in interpreting the scriptures. However, Pope Benedict XVI’s comment calling for a broadening of the concept of human reason suggests that all philosophical interpretation, including posthuman interpretation, might be integrated into official Catholic teaching.  

It must be remembered that the philosopher’s job is to inquire into the experience of scripture, not to interpret the scriptures. Interpretation of the scriptures is the task of the theologian. The posthuman theological philosopher’s investigations are made within an existential order of human life, and not from inquiring into the depths of scripture to

6 “Faith and Reason and the University - Memories and Reflections” 2006 Lecture before representatives of Science at the University of Regensburg.
disclose the mind of God, as it were. The fact is that humanistic philosophers, nor posthuman philosophers are central to church’s faith-life but the sensus fidelium is. In other words, the Church could get along without a class of philosophers but it could not get along without the sensus fidelium, which, in fact, may be considered as the conscience of the Church. ⁷

Evidence suggesting the sensus fidelium as the “conscience of the Church” is to be found in the so-called Modernist Movement, a term coined by the church authorities, not the theologians of the time. Controversial issues in religion, characterized by the Modernist movement, were introduced by the new scientific knowledge of the late 19th and early 20th centuries into the American Church and were often resisted at the pastoral or practical level. However, the same controversial issues introduced into the Church in Italy, France and England were discussed at the level of philosophical and theoretical argument. ⁸ To complicate matters, the Italian, French and English critical philosophers could not appreciate the non-metaphysical or practical language of the North American philosophers and theologians. Thus, the Europeans tended to look upon American theology as somewhat suspicious. This created a dichotomy between North American and Continental philosophers and theologians. In England and the Continent that liberal Catholics attempted to integrate the new scientific knowledge within the teaching authority of the Church. That is to say, that the so-called Modernists at the time attempted to reconcile the conflict between the Church and new scientific knowledge by up-dating the meaning of doctrine, dogma and Church authority.

Unlike philosophy, theology is a process involving God’s self-revelation. For the Italian and French Modernists, the theological study of divinity was a natural activity that included a life of prayer.

⁸ Maude Petre (1863-1942) notes that democracy, although not a religious concept, was a practical element of the Modernist movement. “The problems with which it dealt were those suggested by the political transformations of the day, regarding such questions as property and its rights; class distinctions and their possible disappearance; the future of socialism; and above all, the respective value of this-world and other-world ideals.” Modernism: Its Failure and Its Fruits T.C. & E C. Jack (1918:69) [Reprint Facsimile Publisher 2020:69].
Many Modernist theologians accepted that a saintly life replaced a scholastic philosophical understanding as the proper interpreter of Revelation. As George Tyrrell (1861-1909) reminds us, “Theology is not the product of the spiritual life of the faithful, but of the intellectual life of the Schools.” In the time of George Tyrrell, among certain academics, there was a trend away from reinforcing the doctrinal and dogmatic teaching of the Church by some theologians. The new trend was to engage science and theology (as well as philosophy) to develop a methodology to serve the existential needs of the faithful in the Church. This trend was minimally successful. To this day, classical philosophical construction in the mind of the magisterium has remained the dominant foundation for theology.

Posthuman theological philosophy, if it is to be a human discipline (particularly within the universities), must take into account all religious phenomena, not just Christianity. Posthuman theological philosophy will be a labour of reason that recognizes Revelation from the Jewish, Christian and Islamic perspectives. Any philosophy is an after-thought of human experience, that is, a reflective exercise of human consciousness. Thus, to my mind, from a posthuman theological philosophical perspective it will matter little that Christianity has developed in Orthodox, Roman, Reformed and Protestant traditions. Within a posthuman theology all Christians are potentially able to share in a philosophical consciousness leading to a new expression and practice of the faith.

To this end, I suggest that a phenomenological philosophy, in a posthuman context has the capacity to potentially bring about an end to the theological tension that exists among Eastern Orthodoxy, Rome and the Reformation. I suggest that phenomenological philosophy in a posthuman context will accomplish this by overcoming the dichotomy of objectivism and subjectivism and recognize each perspective as equiprimordial in human consciousness. Thus, in ending this idealistic dichotomy, a new Christian consciousness may be neither Orthodox, nor Roman, nor Reformed. This presents an exciting possibility upon which posthuman religious philosophers may wish to venture.

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I suggest that the survival of orthodox Christianity requires that philosophers and theologians take a posthuman approach to interpretation otherwise their efforts may be of no benefit to the Christian community. This is especially true at the University level where theologians fulfill their task of inquiry into the rationality of the faith. In the contemporary Western context, with its emphasis on personal corporality, there is a danger that a believing community may be understood as less than necessary for one’s spiritual life. This is an erroneous supposition. One must not forget that it is through the believing community that new generations are introduced to a faith-life. It must not be forgotten that the task of the philosopher is the analysis of public life and of private life of the individual. However, it must be remembered that sociological or psychological aspects of the philosopher’s task are secondary, even though they may have a religious focus.

Posthuman philosophy, as an activity of the mind, may be directed to a religious purpose. Tertullian, the Carthaginian theologian, who died circa 230 A. D., spoke of the “natural man,” as being *anima naturaliter Christiana* simple, rude, uncultured, untaught, and not yet ruined by Greek education. Tertullian invited individuals to return to their own religious experience since experience is prior to any theory. In their religious experience they could explore their spiritual life in order to find the Christian route to God. An earlier philosophical thinker, Socrates, in his dialectical approach, desired to help clarify the thinking of poets, politicians and whomever he met in the market place, both young and old. Yet, Socrates did not initiate a system of philosophy. Rather, he undertook a responsible approach to thinking about abstract ideas. While it may be true that for many humanists God has died in the Western culture of the 19th Century, God may yet return in our posthuman culture understood through new images and new symbols. Interpreting these new images and symbols would be the task of the 21st Century posthuman *religious* philosopher from a sociological perspective. It is to be remembered also, that the task of the 21st Century posthuman *theological* philosopher is to interpret from a faith perspective. Posthuman thinkers will come to realize, through their experience, that there is no final philosophy or theology. Thus, the work of the posthuman theologian will be conceived differently than in the days of the development of the
medieval theological systems. The task of the posthuman theological philosopher will be to make known the abiding truths of reasoned belief to a new generation. The principle merit and usefulness of a posthuman theological philosopher will be to satisfy the faith of the believer living in a dehellenized church.

PHILOSOPHICAL DEHELLENIZATION

A dehellenized philosophy is not a fixed philosophical system. It is a continual process of the deliberate re-evaluation of experience. Thus, it is a dynamic process. The dehellenization process helped me to recognize that my Christian and secular experience had been, for a time, the same. There was no need to distinguish between them. It was easy, therefore, for me to think that to be a Christian meant living uncritically in the Western social and cultural order that I inherited. It took some time for me to realize that this social and cultural order was, in fact, the legacy of a Hellenized philosophical tradition.

Reading the works of some contemporary Western philosophers, I realized that this Hellenized philosophical understanding was also of serious concern to them. Given the realization that their Hellenized philosophical understanding was also undergoing critical re-evaluation, they often seemed threatened and wrote rebuttals to dehellenization in favour of the classical approach. Realizing their bias, I ceased to follow their lead and rejected their efforts at rebuttal and sought instead to review my self-understanding and develop an appropriate approach in my existential philosophy.

In light of the Catholic philosophical perspective of Vatican II, I favor ressourcement over aggiornamento. I favour a re-visiting of classical philosophical sources, the result of which is not merely the updating of philosophical language. Returning to these sources I am able to clarify their meaning and contrast their significance in light of contemporary usage. As a philosopher and theologian living in the twilight of the classical philosophical age, I ponder what is to be my philosophical role in any new understanding arising out of my Christian and secular experience. My conclusion is that only a return to, and critique of, the sources of Western philosophical thinking can provide a satisfactory readjustment of my thinking.
The cultural context in which I live is organized on the basis of an interpretation of the collective experiences of the community which, naturally, includes me. Any reorganization of culture and society occurs slowly. I realize that I am among those Christians who call for a collective re-interpretation of personal experience. However, I am often not taken seriously by many of my contemporaries. Their lack of interest, I suspect, is due to their philosophical bias which favours an a priori belief which they have retained from their Hellenized philosophical past.

In the process of philosophical dehellenization, I soon realized that if answers to my questions were provided to me beforehand through well-meaning and authoritative instructors there was no need for me to undertake any personal critical investigation with respect to my experience. I could remain philosophically passive and accept uncritically their ideas. But I soon realized that, rather than simply accept my intellectual inheritance without question, I needed to acknowledge my own intellectual responsibility and become an agent for change with respect to myself and subsequently within my environment. Thus, my problem became not just how to update my understanding, but how to formulate my philosophical convictions free from Hellenized philosophy. Thus, I needed to plan a future that was not a repetition, or variation of my past experience. However, this could only be done through a new methodology, one not dependent on a classical inheritance, but one phenomenologically undertaken. But what was to become of my understanding of science in this dehellenized philosophy?

PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

When, in my early years, I encountered individuals from various cultures who often held beliefs different from mine, as well as different beliefs among themselves, I was frequently frustrated by these contrasting and discordant opinions. However, while in university I delved more deeply into these differing beliefs and it eventually became apparent to me that Western philosophers favoured a particular interpretive perspective rooted in ancient Greek philosophical understanding. In hindsight, I recall that this ancient Greek philosophy often failed to contribute satisfactory answers to my questions.
I am also aware that, in those years, there was an optimistic belief in the progress of the sciences, but that nothing similar had occurred in philosophy. I wondered why science had advanced and philosophy appeared to remain perennially the same. The answer to that question I found in the contrast between the respective methodologies and objectives of philosophy and science. Looking into the historical development of science and philosophy, I discovered that originally there was no adversarial understanding between the two. Initially, philosophers and scientists recognized each other as searching for the same thing, that is, the truth, although each was searching from a different point of view. In time, however, scientists did separate from philosophers and their respective methodologies did take on different founding principles and their terms of reference became less understandable and acceptable to each other. This resulted in Western academics deciding that the discipline of philosophy, unlike science, was not a system of proofs founded on propositions. That is, philosophy was not a science, but an art.

I recall that in my early studies I was disposed to view the relationship between the two, not as antagonistic as some academics did, but as complimentary. I recognized that science and philosophy both provided some answers to the deeper questions I had about life, but from different points of view. In my current perspective, the data presented by a scientist provides the subject matter for a philosopher to contemplate. In other words, the goal of a philosopher is to clarify and specify the meaning of facts provided by the scientist.

Unlike classical philosophers, however, phenomenological philosophers, take a different approach to understanding meaning which cannot be taught as an objective system of knowledge, as is the case in the West’s classical Greek philosophy. Rather, within phenomenology the experience of the philosopher leads to the assignment of meaning, even mysteriously, to the facts. That is, the phenomenological philosopher adopts a subjective interpretive stance towards life, rather than accepting an objective and normative system of ideas. As a phenomenological philosopher I assign meaning and significance to my experience from a subjective point of view, but not, however, in isolation from the community in which I live. The meaning and significance of my experience and that of my community are related through an inter-subjective
I find modern scientific (techno-digital) techniques insufficient in accounting for personal meaning. Techno-digital technologies, of themselves, cannot provide any theory to account for the meaning and significance of human life. Although scientifically-minded sociologists attempted this in the 1960’s. The authors of the Preface in *The Theories of Society* wrote: “The selections we have brought together document what we believe to constitute a major revolution in scholarly and professional thinking about the nature and determinants of human conduct in society. … Like the theory of evolution [this major revolution] was **centered in one scientific discipline**, but its repercussions have begun to ramify through a major part of the whole intellectual world” [my italics]. Since assigning meaning in life is not the purpose of scientific technique, another discipline is needed. This discipline is phenomenological philosophy.

Today, in place of classical philosophy, I undertake a phenomenological approach when assigning meaning to my experience — something infrahumans and robots cannot do. However, there seems to be a conscious resistance in the contemporary Anglo-American philosophical community to phenomenological philosophy. Phenomenological philosophy, also known as Continental Philosophy, is rarely favoured professionally in American universities. Rather, the teaching that appears in many Western universities reflects a retention of the classical perspective, as Shannon Vallor states in her book.

Scientific interpretation requires narrow parameters restricted solely to demonstrable facts, which change in light of new discoveries. I see no such parameters or progress in philosophical interpretation such as I see in scientific interpretation. Rather than philosophical progress, I recognize, in my phenomenological

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11 *This book recommends a classical solution: an energetic (perhaps even desperate) collective effort to reinvest our culture in the habits of moral self-cultivation and education for technomoral wisdom*” (Vallor’s italics).

approach, a deepening appreciation of my conscious life within the evolutionary process. The questions I have asked myself in these pages arise from interpreting my personal, not private, life-world existentially. Am I experiencing a problem with the philosophical foundations of my knowledge? I asked myself. My experience of the world of scientific facts alone no longer satisfies my curiosity about my life-world. Even though there are various systems of the human sciences, i.e., sociological, psychological, etc., (as distinguished from the physical sciences) available to me to explore my intellectual curiosity, none of these systems has been able to adequately express the totality or complexity of the experience of my life-world. 12 However, as I eventually discovered, I was able to account for my experience more adequately through a phenomenological philosophy.

Upon finding the traditional approach to philosophical knowledge wanting, I opted for a phenomenological philosophical approach (employing consciousness, not epistemology) to interpret my experience. Phenomenological philosophy, as a means of conscious interpretation, has no boundaries of its own. It is bounded only by the limits of the human mind. As a phenomenological philosopher, God is not the direct focus of my philosophical inquiry within my religious experience. Rather, I consciously contemplate phenomena, other than God, in order to reach God, without God. According to Stephen Laycock this notion of reaching God without God was introduced by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) the principal founder of phenomenology. 13 Thus, I undertake phenomenological philosophy to interpret my religious experience so that I can consciously assign meaning and significance to my life without requiring the epistemology of the Hellenic philosophers of a bygone age.

I recall that early on in my philosophical contemplation I

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12 I adopt Strasser’s view. “Physical science, in the broadest sense, views man as part of the cosmos, a part that is not essentially different from the rest. Human sciences, on the other hand, are concerned with that which is specifically human.” Strasser, Stephen (1963:5) Phenomenology and the Human Sciences: A Contribution to a New Scientific Ideal Duquesne University Press.

encountered two significant existential phenomena. First, that I had inherited a religious world-view which I did not make or design. Second, that there was no stopping the evolution of this inherited world-view. However, as time went on, I came to understand that I somehow personally directed this evolution to some degree by making appropriate choices. Yet, in my present cultural context my world has remained determined principally by the dominant ideas of ancient Greek philosophy that are so steeped in contemporary Western society that I am not able to bring about any significant philosophical or theological change. However, once I adequately understand the limitations of techno-digital science, and the advantages of phenomenological philosophy I hope to restructure my theological understanding appropriate to my posthuman needs.
2. THE PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF GEORGE TYRRELL’S THEOLOGY

Introduction

My contention for many years has been that theological problems are first, and principally philosophical problems and need to be addressed as such. I began forming this view during my undergraduate years when I studied philosophy and was introduced to the theological perspective of George Tyrrell (1861–1909). Further, the philosophical perspective of one of my professors at St Michael’s College, University of Toronto, Leslie Dewart (1922–2009); contributed significantly to the formation of my convictions. Dewart’s understanding of “dehellenization,” a philosophical concept which is not to be confused with the negative concept of “unhellenization,” provided an intellectual opportunity for fresh reflection on my inherited classical understanding which was presenting problems for me. Through an examination and review of their writings, I connected the thought of George Tyrrell and Leslie Dewart and remarked on the differences. I then contrasted their thoughts with my classical understanding. Today, I continue with these efforts which disclose fresh insights in philosophical and theological thought. I do this to aid the quest of the contemporary seeker of wisdom and I leave it to the reader to decide whether or
not my reflections have clarified the issues or clouded them.

It is unfortunate that, at this time in the development of religious ideas in the Western context, the place of philosophy in relation to theology seems to have been usurped to a great extent by sociology and psychology. And I am sure that contemporary theologians are the poorer for it. That having been said, it is my hope that those readers who may not be philosophically inclined, but favour sociology and psychology, will uncover insights not previously realized, should they persevere with these essays. First, however, I make a brief remark about the “philosophy as an art form” that I endorse here in contrast to the method of science. To my mind, science is not to be confused with technology, nor philosophy. I hold that philosophy as an art form is a reasoned philosophy, but one that need not be rooted in Greek classical thought. As an art form philosophy may be contrasted to the form of scholastic philosophy which I find wanting in its ability to support credibly a contemporary theology.

Many contemporary Western theologians are in the process of rethinking the role of theology in the public sphere and its subsequent influence in secular society. In the public secular society, where religious and spiritual ideas are often perceived as needless, although they may be accepted privately as necessary, contemporary theological thinking is able to serve as a means for the proper integration of religious and spiritual ideas into the public sphere, without offence to its secular status. Admittedly, theological thinking, when aberrant, can serve as cause for division, fragmentation and disintegration within a society, thus giving offence to believer and non-believer alike. Today, in the Western world, a shift is taking place from the old style competitive theological polemics to a new style of cooperative ecumenical theology. This change in thinking is also happening on a global scale and in various non-Western cultures. Such change is reflected in that conventional theology, supported by classical philosophy, is shifting to discursive theology, supported by phenomenological philosophy. Further, many contemporary theologians are seeking to make sense of the personal, but not necessarily private, experience of the believer. Making sense of the believer’s experience is often expressed in narrative terms, that is, through the telling of one’s personal story of belief or faith commitment. And many theologians
have their own story to tell, including the convert George Tyrrell.

In his day, and within his particular intellectual climate, George Tyrrell attempted to understand the human narrative through his own story of the experience and understanding of revelation. Being a theologian his preoccupation with revelation and the religious narrative became a primary focus in his life. His theological legacy has its roots in the Roman Catholic theological views that were in vogue in the early 20th century. Tyrrell’s way of thinking reflects an early ecumenical discursive model of theologizing rather than the conventional polemical model of theologizing current at the time. It is in this discursive model of theologizing, I suggest, that one finds Tyrrell’s creative and insightful contribution to the understanding of his faith. Further, his creative and insight contributions may enlighten the faith of others.

These essays are intended to draw the reader’s attention to the fact that many creative and insightful contributions from theologians are often quoted and discussed by academics and others. These critics truly believe they have understood and correctly expounded the ideas of such insightful and innovative theologians. And in most cases, they probably have done so, but not always. To my mind, George Tyrrell’s story of creative and innovative theologizing is a case in point. The appreciation of his style of creative and innovative thinking is not as well received as it could be among those seeking religious enlightenment. The majority of academics discuss Tyrrell from an historical perspective within the (so-called) Modernist Crisis in the Roman Catholic Church. However, David Schultenover focuses on a different historical understanding than that of the conventional one. Schultenover writes of Tyrrell’s way of thinking that

its genre is intellectual history as distinguished from institutional history...[and] it aims to describe not the “modernist movement” but the intellectual development of a major contributor to the “movement” by focusing on the man as the key to his thought.  

From Schultenover’s point of view, Tyrrell’s intellectual development is expressed in the Prefaces of his books. In the Preface

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of a book an author often says what he said he said in developing the main thrust of the argument. Through a critical reading of the Preface of a book, readers can encounter that personality whose ideas they may come to appreciate and whose influence they respect. A brief synopsis of the particular intellectual climate of Tyrrell’s day will help in appreciating the context which formed his particular meditative character.

**Particular Intellectual Influences in George Tyrrell’s Life**

Tyrrell lived “at a time when religion seemed fated to be submerged and undermined by the vast torrent of secular knowledge that was sweeping over the intellectual world.” ¹⁵ This torrent of secular knowledge threatened to discount the intellectual meditative approach to religious experience. This threat was common to the intellectual worlds of the British Isles and the Continent. Tyrrell displayed in is writings an Irish heart but he had a German mind which characterized him as straddling both worlds. Mary Green suggests that in Tyrrell’s day “Catholic religious thought had not kept pace with English religious thought in general, whether sound or poor, nor with Catholic and general religious thought in most countries on the Continent.” ¹⁶ The German intellectual meditative thinking, which influenced Tyrrell had its roots in the deep religious feelings which attained a unity of thought that could never be the result of knowledge founded on reason alone. An earlier development in intellectual meditative thinking that Gostwick had observed, was that “the ‘rights’ of intuition and immediate feeling – these rights so long suppressed under the tyranny of logic – were now allowed to be as valid as the conclusions of reasoning processes.” ¹⁷ This validation of intuition nourished Tyrrell’s intellectually meditative character. “The Programme of Modernism,” initiated by the encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*

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¹⁵ May, Lewis (1932:9) *Father Tyrrell and the Modernist Movement* Eyre & Spottiswoode.
of Pius X, thus provided a focus for Tyrrell’s provocative thinking. The philosophical system known as Scholasticism is a product of its own age and time. Tyrrell recognized that the synthesis it provided no longer met the needs of the modern and scientific age. He probed into religious experience and, with the aid of scientific thinking desired to express his intellectual meditative understanding in a new frame of reference. In Leslie Lilley’s words Tyrrell could “no longer accept a demonstration of God supported by those ‘idols of the tribe’ – the Aristotelian conceptions of motion, of causality, of contingency, of finality.” Further, Percy Gardner suggests that some knowledge of Hegel’s dialectical philosophy would help in understanding the context of Tyrrell’s thinking. Gardner quotes Tyrrell as saying, “The process through which I have reached my present position will appear as a wavering, rather than a straight line, a result that should facilitate the critic’s task.” As well, Bernard Reardon acknowledges Hegel’s influence on Tyrrell’s thought. A contemporary of Tyrrell, Hakluyt Egerton, (pseudonym for Arthur Boutwood), alludes to the meditative aspect of Tyrrell’s thinking. When Tyrrell speaks of “Divine Immanence,” Egerton does not believe that Tyrrell means Pantheism, the doctrine that God is the substance of all finite particulars. Rather, Egerton writes, “Undoubtedly Father Tyrrell believes that God is in man – although by way of mere indwelling, or as a part of man’s composite nature, is not clear [Egerton’s italics”]. Egerton also notes that when Tyrrell distinguishes an ordinary experience of religion from an experience of revelation he does not refer to the objective source of the experience but refers to the experience itself by a description of its ‘subjective’ character, that is, to its character as a psychological happening. According to Maude Petre, in a lecture entitled, “Revelation and Experience,” Tyrrell wrote a response to Egerton

in which he sets forth this distinction: “Faith and knowledge cannot be confronted, because their realms are not the same.” \(^{22}\)

These, then, are the particular intellectual influences in and through which Tyrrell thought and wrote and which shaped his character. They also gave rise to a distinctive approach to theology which is evident in his thinking.

3. A PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF LESLIE DEWART’S PHILOSOPHY

I recall Dr. Dewart’s first wife, Joanne McWilliam (who was also teaching at U. of T. during my time there) warning me that Leslie’s works are all difficult and demanding reading. How true. In reading his books I am reminded that Christianity is primarily an existential life-style or political philosophy, before it is an issue of belief or unbelief about God’s incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth. As a moral force Christianity is placed in a particular relationship within the politics in the world. In that light, I offer a personal philosophical appreciation of Dewart’s insights 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 political and personal ones when I was 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 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 during 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 a political revolution — but not for the reasons we might presume given our lack of knowledge of Cuban history, of the Cuban culture and of the Cuban Church Dewart suggests. After reading the causes he advances I believe 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 then developing in Cuba.

As I read further into the book and deeper 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, 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 in 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 on the part of the Christian faithful. They do not want the world to embrace the Church; they want the Church to embrace the world. To my mind and, to which Dewart alludes, Christian theology needs to address the nature of the Church in humanity’s fallen state, and rule itself responsibly, both politically and spirituality. This must be done in a fallen world that is no longer a classical world, but one beginning to “dehellenize” itself, as the lesson of Cuba has shown. How we view God in a dehellenized culture concerns Dewart in his next book, (and should concern any serious theologian, for that matter), as an existential fact in the future of belief.

*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 at the time, but knowing it was going to be very influential in my thinking. Its influence was predicted by a reporter in the Toronto Star newspaper who wrote, “Dewart is the author of a philosophical best seller which may become one of the landmark books of our time.”

It has remained very influential in my way of thinking, and I understand its content more clearly with every reading. 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 the church may have is to be replaced by practice, but practice that is appropriate to humanity’s contemporary experience, not one imported from tradition.

By way of example, Dewart assesses Freud’s, The Future of an Illusion that encourages the rejection of the illusion in which primitive humanity trusted to meet its needs. In contrast, humanity “come of age” does not discover the world as hostile, but, rather, as stimulating and challenging and must change its belief in God accordingly. Throughout these essays I frequently referenced Auguste Sabatier’s perspective as similar to that of Dewart’s. However, there is an exception. Sabatier and Dewart interpret “coming of age” differently. According to Sabatier, Friedrich Schleiermacher “erred in insisting only upon resignation” to external forces in his understanding of religion. Thus, he 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. “Submission makes us recognize and accept our dependence, faith transforms that dependence into liberty,” to quote Sabatier, remains a classical expression of religious belief.

Humanity has yet to come of age from Dewart’s point of view. Seeing the world as stimulating and challenging from Dewart’s perspective requires an abandonment of scholasticism, and the subsequent development of a conscious

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24 Sabatier, Auguste (1920:28ff) Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion: Based on Psychology and History George H. Doran Co.
reconceptualization of experience. This, from my experience, requires constant effort. Dewart identifies this conscious process as “dehellenization,” which is a positive term. It is not “unhellenization.”

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 and not merely God’s message in my life. Recognizing God’s self-communicated presence has 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 using Hellenic metaphysical categories, interpreting my contingency in this world must be conceived differently. Dewart has suggested that our presence to the reality of God, and God’s presence to our reality is a viable conceptual alternative. In this mutual presence, I experience my personal history as truly contingent and unforeseeable. This, to my mind, is a more appropriate view given my situation than scholasticism offers. In short, it is a dehellenized view.

The mutual presence 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 to conceive a co-creator status for myself. This is the dehellenized view of God that I hold to be true, according to my experience. Classical 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 belief come of age. Of all Dewart’s books, this one has had the most influence upon my thinking.

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

When I began the challenge of reading Dewart's very detailed book on religious beliefs, *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 philosophical questions still capture my interest. What came back to me, during a re-reading, is that the possibility of dehellenization has opened Christianity to the notions 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 credible as presented in contemporary thought? 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. Christian belief must become conscious of its own future and cease accepting unconsciously its present state as fixed condition in contemporary culture. However, philosophers must take care not to substitute one “necessity” for another. Sabatier cautions against this possibility by 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

25 A good introduction to Eastern philosophy for the Western reader is Mel Thompson’s *Eastern Philosophy* (2000, Teach Yourself Books) in which he explains eastern terms used in the text.
it, and to make necessity the sovereign ruler of the world? Science in the strict sense of the word, is determinist. 26

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 to the minds of some.)

Elsewhere, I have written of humanity’s status as co-creator of this life. My notion 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 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. 27

The possibility of co-creation is only one topic Dewart discusses in *Foundations of Belief*. Those interested 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 from a *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer. Such simplicity could help with philosophy’s contribution to the “contemporary crisis of man,” as Western thinkers become more aware of the evolution of human nature. Thus, *Religion, Language and Truth* provided a very helpful review of Dewart’s perspective on 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 is the message (speech) from God. The distinction is crucial to the development of one’s religious life, to my mind.

I find it interesting to compare Dewart’s expression of his purpose 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. 28

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4. THE SEPARATION OF PHILOSOPHY AND MODERN SCIENCE

In the present intellectual climate, many of the new age perspectives undertaken in seeking clarification and knowledge of ourselves are likely to be short-lived in terms of the longevity of ideas. In other words, they are “trendy” for a while. A case in point, to my mind, is the current hybrid understanding of our human consciousness, which integrates elements of scientific and philosophical understanding. Such integration of scientific and philosophical thinking may be more of a hindrance than a help since the integration of the art of philosophy and the methodology of science is not a natural fit. Whether every action in which I am engaged at any given moment is susceptible to philosophical interpretation is a debatable question. Whereas, every action I undertake at any given moment is unquestionably susceptible to scientific explanation. However, the moment I begin theorizing consciously about my action it becomes a philosophical question of interpretation, and no longer merely one of scientific explanation. To my mind, the two approaches are distinct as to their purposes and ought not be conflated. Modern science and philosophy must remain distinct modes of knowledge, although related.

Knowing myself better is a primary purpose of my philosophy.
Generally, philosophers seek in the notion of God (or in some sort of absolute principle) the reconciliation of a conflict which is felt within themselves as well as among themselves and within their life-world. In short, they tend to seek a unity or meaning of their experience. This, I suggest, is a misdirection due to a Hellenist understanding of knowledge carried over into modern philosophy. My experience indicates clearly that evolution tends to diversity, not to uniformity; to plurality, not to unity. In short, my experience does not conform to the Hellenist philosophical understanding that humanity is heading towards unity, but away from it.

I am, as a thinking organism, capable of distinguishing between myself as subject and myself as object. This distinction is achieved through a process of differentiation which occurs within my consciousness. However, this process of differentiation does not fracture my integrity as a person. Following Auguste Sabatier’s suggestion, I envision my consciousness similar to an ellipse, as it were, possessing two centres of activity. One centre is receptive of information through sensation and is passive. The other centre is creative of meaning and is active. Sabatier writes: “The line of the ellipse described by the relation and the distance of these two centres is the approximate but never perfect synthesis of the two kinds of data which thus arrive in consciousness” (my italics). 29 Were the two centres ever to overlap or merge perfectly a circle would result, symbolic of perfect unity. But if my personal experience is any guide this can never happen. Hence, I redirect my efforts to understand philosophically that diversity, not unity, is the goal of my experience. On the other hand, my inherited theology (faith seeking understanding) has been directed towards outcomes that are unified with respect to theology’s goal. Currently, I find that Daniel Guerrière’s understanding of theology most satisfactory. “Theology remains the self-knowledge of faith for the sake of faith. It compromises a systematic (or dogmatic) and a practical (or pastoral) endeavor, each with a methodological (or dialectical) moment.” 30

29 Sabatier, Auguste (1897:303) *Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion* George H. Doran
Relationships, not connections

My mind is an activity of my brain. It is an abstracted activity understood as distinct, but related to my body. Thus, my conscious mind, or my conscious mental activity, is literally a metaphysical activity. In an opposing view, reductionists hold that the mind is the brain, or, more accurately that conscious mental activity is identical with physical neural activity. This identification with physical neural activity is a “red herring” which is part of the artificial philosophical problem that is caused by the integration of the methodology of science into the philosophical understanding of the mind. There is no need to merge science into philosophy in order to understand the mind. Historically, however, each has had a role to play and continues to have a role to play independently within human consciousness. Philosophically, I recognize a dualistic approach in this matter (a duality) of mind and brain and accept that conscious mental activity, or mind, is constitutionally different from the physical world. In short, mind and matter are of two distinct orders or modes of knowledge.

It is possible that the metaphysical activity of my mind may coincide with the physical life of my brain as a living organism. However, it is not necessarily so. The two are not connected in any manner of identification, but are only reciprocally related. The conclusion I ultimately draw, then, is that my consciousness (a metaphysical activity of my mind) cannot be identical with anything physical, because there is no causal connection between the mental and the physical. Only a relationship exists between the physical and the mental, which is not a causal connection, although it may be considered so in certain cases. On the macroscopic level my consciousness is a mental movement as an observer which brings

31 A speculative example could be that an organism becomes necessarily constituted or composed as human at a certain point of proximity in the distance (space) given in the relationship between the mental (metaphysical) state of the organism and its physical matter. Should the mental (metaphysical) state and its matter separate and become too far apart in distance (space), the human organism would cease to exist, that is, it would de-compose. This, in fact, is the classical view of body and soul relationship.
about no change in that which I observe. Thus, the current presumption of a connection between science and philosophy is unnecessary chaff and, in fact, a mistaken understanding of their relationship. To my mind, attention would be better focused on the relationship of the two as independent, but related, phenomena.

A suggestion put forth in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* is that some form of materialism is probably much more widely held today than in centuries past. No doubt part of the reason for this has to do with the increase in scientific knowledge concerning the working of the brain and its misunderstood relationship to the metaphysical mind including any relationship between a physically damaged brain and various degrees of unconscious activity.

The *Encyclopedia* also notes that it is difficult to see any real connection between specific conscious states and brain states in a way that explains just how or why conscious states are identical with brain states. That is to say that some philosophers conclude that an explanatory gap exists between the physical and mental (metaphysical) which someday may be overcome. In my view, there is not a true “gap” between the two as if one did not influence the other. But this “gap” is constituted by the misconceived relationship between the mental (metaphysical) and the physical. Again, from my perspective, this gap is artificially produced by well-intentioned, but misguided academics who try to establish the existence of connections in order to close the gap where they should understand relationships established by the gap. When such academics are theologians, I find it disconcerting that their theology seems to be “immature.” Brian Gaybba understands that:

> The degree of academic maturity of any theology can be measured by the extent to which it is conscious of and examines its own presuppositions and methodology. It is therefore a sign of the maturity of monastic theology that several of its practitioners pondered the epistemological presuppositions of a theology that places experiencing the divine at the very heart of its methodology (my italics). 32

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Some of the questions that gave rise to the essays in this book have been discussed in the Internet Encyclopedia of philosophy. As well, some questions in this collection of essays recall Auguste Sabatier’s perspective to these same issues. Could there be two centers (poles) to conscious activity (subjective/objective) in one mind? What makes a person the same person (a continuum) over time? What makes a person, a person (an identity) at any given moment? These questions are closely related to the traditional philosophical questions of personal individuality, which is also linked to self-consciousness, not just consciousness. It is significant that only persons can be self-conscious. Brute life can only be conscious. To my mind, for a satisfactory answer to these questions, a philosophical methodology that remains distinct from, and not merged with a scientific methodology is required. In short, an independent anthropological philosophy of consciousness is needed to keeps philosophy and science distinct.
5. CHRISTIAN CULTURE: ITS PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS AND PRESENT CRISIS

The Aims and the Assumptions of Christian Culture

Culture is an intelligible pattern of life, which influences the aims and habits of individuals and has been created collectively by them. The Western European culture with its set of outlooks, aims and ways of life has been transmitted to other parts of the world resulting in both positive and negative effects. Culture includes, in my understanding, the official societies and associations that address the interests of various populations and are vital to their physical, political and spiritual existence. Those cultural activities that enrich life must also preserve or augment that life. The understanding of culture that I discuss includes all such official societies and associations.

Even serious inquirers often mistakenly think that the culture in which we presently live is of necessity a part of the nature of things. Culture is not natural, but fabricated or fashioned, by humans. Henri Bergson 33 suggests the same for philosophy which must go counter to the bent of the intellect. Culture needs tending like a garden or the soil. Three influences which mould a culture are: a) its dogmas, that

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33 Bergson, Henri (1944) *Creative Evolution* Modern Library.
is, that which a culture takes for granted about itself, b) its rituals, that is, the activities its populace does every day, and c) its structure and organization of social life, that is, interpersonal and corporate relationships. Theologians are beginning to recognize that the traditional culture of European civilization is outdated to the point of uselessness. Thus, other cultures, of an entirely different fabrication and fashion, are beginning to take its place. There are movements within modern European culture that are proving to be preferred to the movements of Europe’s traditional cultural life. Two such movements are, one, the denial of metaphysical being or the denial of an ontology, classically understood, and two, the acceptance of science, technology and reason as possessing ultimate control over things and human beings. However, science, technology and reason, in themselves, do not give control over, nor determine things or human beings. As well, industrialism, not industrialization, has introduced the improper use of the machine, which has led to depersonalization. It was once hoped that industrialization being the more democratic approach would give the mass population what had been the privilege of the upper economic classes.

Since the replacement of true industrialization by industrialism, the less democratic approach, it is becoming clear that any new shape of a believing community ought not to be patterned on any model of industrialism. Within the West, Christian culture was originally conceived not so much as learning a lesson about the faith, but as an initiation into a new life, or as an initiation into the mystery of life. Christian culture is something that cannot be conveyed by words alone, but is conveyed by that which involves a disciplined activity of the whole person. Christian culture requires more than catechesis. It is a process of catharsis and illumination which is centred in the sacred mysteries and, which is subsequently embodied in symbolism and liturgical action. It is through an activity of worship that the Christian culture originates and develops. Insofar as the conception of worship differs there is also a difference in the conception of culture and vice versa. A culture lacking a form of worship cannot transform society.

As a believer, I require a culture, not a theistic theology, to make sense of my life in meaningful terms, which may be myth, folklore, legend, philosophy or science. I require a theistic theology, not
culture, to make sense of my life in spiritual terms. As a Christian my theology arises from within the immediate experience of my life in the spirit. What is the spirit of God revealing to me now, I may ask? This is a theistic theological question, not a cultural one. Culture is not theology. The uncritical acceptance of a religious life in terms of myth and folklore cannot address this question intelligibly, although it may address it socially. Thus, the purpose of theistic theology in the public forum, that is, the community at large, does not serve the same purpose as religion in one’s life. Theistic theology and religion in one’s life each fulfill different roles in a pluralistic society. Theologians need to rethink the place of theology in the public square. Since theological opinions arise in a pluralistic society, I need to ask the question: Do theologians within a single religious context differ from theologians within a pluralistic religious context? The distinction between single and pluralistic religious contexts opens at least three areas of discussion concerning the status of theistic theology. The first area is theistic theology, as a service to a religion based on myth or folklore, seems to be in decline. The second area is theistic theology, being descriptive and normative in contemporary civil society needs to be acknowledged as a discipline and clarified as to intent and, third, theistic theology as a source for integration and of social division needs to be reappraised.

As many Christians realize today, the Church is no longer the moral guardian of community values in contemporary society. There has been a shift in emphasis from the guardianship responsibility of the corporation to the individual responsibility of the member of society for his or her moral life. I consider this shift in responsibility from corporate guardianship, an objective principle, to personal responsibility, an individual subjective experience, not to be an actual decline but merely a highly significant change. Such change simply means a re-alignment of our ways of thinking appropriate to our time and culture. In the West, a move has been to phenomenological philosophy in which a new relationship, between theistic theology and the contemporary world, is reflected. Within this change, theistic theology takes on a new approach in interpreting revelation for contemporary believers. In this new interpretive context theistic theological belief may or may not be affected by secularization. Note that I do not say secularism.
Secularization, not secularism, is characteristic of the new phase of service-orientated and information-based economies that is replacing the industrial-based economies in influencing theological thought. Hence, under the right conditions in this new context of secularization the theologian’s discursive power in the public square may come to exceed traditional corporate or institutional power. In a word, theistic theology, like the economy, is information-based, not industry-based, i.e., corporation-based, and there will be an increase in the tension between an individual theologian’s interpretation, as information-based, and that of the Magisterium, as industry or corporate-based. Thus, there is need for an appropriate philosophy to support contemporary theistic theology in its new social context.

Civil society is a philosophical idea that was conceived in contrast to the ideas of the natural and hierarchical orders of the classical era. In that era, it was accepted that God sanctioned the natural order and the hierarchical order. In such a society the human or acquired virtues were contrasted with the theological or revealed virtues. Upon the theological, or revealed virtues is founded a religious humanitarianism that aspires to a higher human good that constitutes our Christian culture. In contemporary Western culture fundamentalist theology is adverse in a wider social engagement within the public forum. Whereas, evangelical theology engages the entire public forum as the locus of Christ’s redeeming presence. Given the apparent growth in evangelical theology, I make a general observation that Western theology’s influence on culture is moving from the public square, i.e., the state, its traditional locus, to the public square of civil society, its contemporary locus.
6. HELLENIST PHILOSOPHY AND THE CRISIS WITHIN ORTHODOXY

Dehellenization as a pre-requisite to an Orthodox theological Ecology

Dehellenization is a process of discovery of the redirection of human life within Western culture. This philosophical process of discovery is anchored in the foundation of the scientific vision of the Western world. However, scientific understanding has become so complex in serving as a tool to understand the sense of human direction that it often impedes humanitarian advancement. Enabling humanitarian advancement is not a question of rejecting our previous rational thinking but of transforming our classical rational thinking into a scientifically and evolutionary creative rational thinking. In evolutionary and scientifically creative thinking knowledge is hypothetical and temporary and this has important consequences for theological understanding. In such thinking fixed notions of social construction of our environment are abandoned. This is dehellenization. Leslie Dewart has addressed the dehellenization of Western philosophical thought through a process, which he described positively as the “conscious creation of the
future of belief.” 34

The question we ask today is: Is there a problem with the foundations of our knowledge? What alternatives do we have in constructing ways of thinking in light of the future of belief? In contrast to the still-dominant vision of the mechanical world, based on a Newtonian science, we have to create a new scientific understanding of reality within a new cosmology in which we recognize the value of a non-mechanical, that is, the organic model of the cosmos. We have to develop a system of knowledge and understanding of the human being which suits the vision of a universe in which we co-create values and meanings as responsible stewards. The development of such a system of knowledge and understanding requires a conscious effort.

Mechanical science presented a picture of continual change as it promised perfection and liberation from ignorance. This utilitarian doctrine claimed that our ethics must be based on the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number. However, as this doctrine was popularized it acquired another meaning, that is, the greatest material quantity for the greatest number of individuals. Much current Western philosophical and scientific thinking, upon which we have constructed our ethics in a technological and consumer society, is based on an outdated Hellenist philosophy. Our contemporary philosophical understanding has developed beyond that of humans as rational animals which have their intellectual roots in the Hellenistic tradition of philosophical understanding. Many philosophers understand themselves as humans through a process of conscious self-reflective activity from within a phenomenological philosophy.

To re-compose our artificially divided selves it is necessary to revise certain philosophical premises because the philosophical division is fundamentally due to the Hellenistic tradition of interpretation. We have to realize first of all that a correct understanding of the individual self is characterized by a unified, not divided, conscious self. In the immediate past, modern science formed the human self just as much as the human self formed modern science. Today, our selves are not determined by mechanics.

Rather, our selves are influenced by our free human acts which relate us, via our environment, to reality. Such reality is external to our selves and enters our consciousness, not spatially, but notionally. This conscious reality has no particular nature, of itself, and is susceptible to degrees of human understanding. It is worth noting that the Hellenistic manner of relating to reality is uniquely binding on that particular culture and has no necessary claim on other contemporary cultures. Modern science and ecological theology must work together and establish a proper and successful relationship in the world of the future. A new wisdom will follow upon the integration of modern science and eco-theology since they influence all the levels of our existence. To make sense of any such integration we have to change our scientific understanding of the world around us, and of our philosophical understanding of knowledge, which also includes our knowledge of spiritual reality. In short, we must develop a new cosmic philosophy which reflects a new sense of the future of belief vis à vis the world around us.

The philosophical life is a process of perpetual adjustment within our conscious understanding. To rely on the thought of Henryk Skolimowski, which has influenced much of my immediate thinking, to change philosophy is to change the understanding of the gospel, be it a religious or lay gospel. Conversely, when a society or a civilization, changes its fundamental belief systems new thoughts and new points of view arise upon which to base a new philosophy. Thus, a society, or civilization, in which technology is the supreme god, all other gods become technicians.

We live in a world where scientific knowledge has redefined our understanding of nature and ecology such that we deal with contemporary philosophical problems without historical awareness. Attention is focused only on the present. This approach to nature and ecology requires correction. In the Western world we suffer from unprecedented social and individual distress and anxiety. Ironically, our scientific and technological knowledge serves more as an intellectual crutch with the result that we often can no longer

“Dans un ciel où la technique est le dieu suprême, tous les autres dieux sont des techniciens.”
think or act by ourselves. Dehellenization, as a process, takes into account human nature, the environment and its ecology whereas contemporary utilitarian philosophy ignores both. Thus, dehellenization is not limited to the care of natural and material resources but is a philosophical approach that incorporates a humanitarian and spiritual understanding of life. Humanitarian values have become part of the wider aspect of the environment within which humanity participates and which it co-defines. Dehellenization focuses on saving the quality of life. Much Western philosophy seems to have departed from such a purpose to improve the quality of life and to have focused mainly on material progress and development. Thus, Western philosophy establishes a context which not only supports, but encourages an inordinate material growth.

Hellenization has its political and social roots in the philosophy of ancient Greece, in particular, in the thinking of Aristotle. Humans are political and social animals not by virtue of a desire for power, as is often asserted, but because human actions have societal and political consequences. Dehellenization, the alternative to hellenization, is essentially concerned with political and societal well-being and, as such, is proper to human life as a philosophical expression of Western society. Society is a factor in bringing about human perfection and, understood transcendentally, is a factor incorporating human spirituality. Within a societal context dehellenization encourages individual responsibility recognizing that rights and responsibilities are reciprocal within a humanitarian perspective. Dehellenization reveals that transcendental phenomena are characteristic of humanity and act in concert with physical phenomena to promote survival. Such a promotion for survival is evident in the various philosophical and religious systems which express levels of being and reflect the complexity of our relationships in the world. Dehellenization reveals various epistemologies that address physical and material questions at the same time as transcendental questions. Thus, it is imperative that a correct choice of philosophy be made to enable the correct understanding of reality. The correct philosophical choice today is to remove any contemporary utilitarian philosophy that has become a destructive instrument in and to the environment. Dehellenization abolishes the Cartesian dualism that supports a destructive utilitarian
approach and considers the various aspects of being as constituting the same mental and spiritual context.

Mechanical science, as a reaction to religion, is a form of mythology. Mechanical science has its dogmas. The scientific method is a sort of cult in its own right and worships, as it were, the deity known as objectivity. In doing this it deifies certain attitudes, such as, detached research and value-free, or neutral, inquiry. In the mind of Henryk Skolimowski, the mechanical approach to life is identical to the secular approach to life. Contemporary philosophy, in its mechanical scientific form, has undergone a spiritual death because the environment which gave it birth has died. The old universe of inanimate material, physical facts, logical and objective relations, no longer can account for all of human experience. This death, as it were, presents an occasion for dehellenization. In seeking a new life, we are able to influence every element of our social, individual, spiritual, ecological and political life, not only separately, but simultaneously. In short, dehellenization presents a philosophical stage of dialogue within the universe which itself is in perpetual movement. By changing ourselves and changing our relations with the universe we subsequently change the universe itself through participating in its creation.

Dehellenization is not simply a new label applied to old concepts. Rather, it implies a fundamental reorientation within our perception of the environment and of our place in it. Where the damaging effects which result from the misuse of mechanical science are evident, the dehellenization of mechanical science encourages a return to a unitary vision in which philosophy and humanity act as a reflection of each other and are part of our expanded vision of the evolving universe. The age in which we live is an age of management of our intentions and purposes. Thus, we work within an evolutionary process to transform our environment and our humanity via the creative forces of evolution. For believers their actions are influenced by God’s life within them which characterizes their spiritual human nature. Evolution is a spiritual process as well as a biological one. It is a process that generates, yet

is itself, not generated. We cannot know what came before evolution, if anything, but we know that evolution is essentially both the process and the product. It is the philosophical point of departure and the philosophical point of arrival. Thus, “to be, in the evolutionary sense, is to continually transcend” and, as Henryk Skolimowski notes, in this sense humans have no sense of creating themselves but are simply conscious of continuing creation. 37

There are many systems of knowledge, or epistemologies, to assist us in managing our intentions and purposes, but none can contain the totality, or complexity, of the universe. The process of dehellenization reveals that we are not insignificant matter residing in some dark and hidden recess of the universe. Rather, we are one of the causes within a remarkable process which cooperates with, and to some degree, coordinates all the forces of the universe. We are neither lost in, nor alienated from, the universe since we are created as part of the universe. In short, the Copernican revolution need not result in the alienation of humanity within the universe.

In dehellenized philosophy, human values govern inter-human relations, as well as those other values between humanity and other life forms. In dehellenized philosophy humanity appears as a part of and, as a product of, the evolutionary process. This involvement in evolution allows humans to transcend nihilism and moral relativism which have no place in a humanitarian context. It also allows the recognition of the sacredness of humanity. Sacredness is specifically a humanitarian characteristic and is inherent in humanity. Sacredness emerges, or manifests itself, in the following ways: through the recognition of transcendence; through the celebration of an evolutionary life; and through protecting and valuing the environment around us. This manifestation of evolutionary sacredness frees humanity from the prison of a mechanically scientific, technological and secular fate. Secular fate is one that is emptied of transcendence and results when technology is extended to the point that machines dictate modes of human behaviour.

The evolutionary process, as it pertains to sacredness, leads to transcendence and to perfection through our perpetual growth which is not merely physical. To the degree that humans sacrifice

themselves, consciously or unconsciously, they are transformed into instruments that bring about other purposes in life. These may be either constructive or destructive in nature. Either purpose can be part of our human nature. Thus, societies refusing to incorporate positive constructions as factors of social behavior court social conflict in terms of societal values. Our age is a primary example. In our society humans can be at the same time both an end, or a means. From a moral perspective it is inadmissible to reduce human beings to a simple means whether for positive or negative purposes. Human life can be developed only within a spiritual environment which is both its end and its means understood positively. When humans consider theology as a means of human perfection it performs a positive role. However, seduced by material progress theologians often forget the wholesome aspects of theology. Life and evolution, as ends and means, constitute theology and when humanity accepts itself as God’s partner it participates in the conscious creation of the future of belief. This is what I mean when I suggest that dehellenization is a pre-requisite to ecological theology.

It is Edmund Husserl’s, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy* that has influenced this inquiry to a great extent. ³⁸ Western and Eastern theologians live in a European world still largely dominated by the mechanically (techno-digital) scientific approach to understanding. Rather than understand this approach to be opposed to theological understanding or belief, I suggest that it becomes, when properly understood, a point of departure for a new theological understanding and belief. In our age I maintain that a properly understood science is one that is seen from Edmund Husserl’s perspective and not from the perspective of the mechanically-minded and techno-digital scientific philosophers. The mechanical and technological sciences utilize the insights derived from physical experiments and these results are often perceived to be of universal significance. In contrast, the humanitarian sciences following Edmund Husserl’s approach are less utilitarian and address the activity of persons as they live in their

environment. The communities we form through our relationships act as horizons of interpretation of our activity, collectively and individually. These communities constitute three aspects of our environmental life; the present moment, the memory of a life lived, and the anticipation of a life yet to be lived.

There is an on-going precision in the development of the mechanical, technological and exact sciences in the Western world. However, this has not been the case for the humanitarian sciences. The mechanical, technological and exact sciences, however, do not consider consciousness as part of the living organism that discloses the activity of persons in their world. These sciences remain focused on the finite interpretive horizon of the person. This situation has developed out of the original philosophical approach on the part of the ancient Greeks which, in turn, has undergone a development and change such that our philosophical understanding, claiming Hellenic heritage, is far removed from Hellenic principles. James Payton notes that the Hellenic culture was transformed into the Hellenistic culture as it incorporated ideas from outside the Greek world. 39 The ancient Greek philosophers, not the ancient Greek poets, founded the principles out of which the Western philosophical state of affairs has developed and continues to develop. Their ancient cultural world, like our present cultural world, was expressed not as a presentation of what truly is, but as a re-presentation of what truly is. Such representation followed a pattern based on Plato’s understanding of the ideal as being represented in a particular entity. Our representation of what truly is results, on the contrary, from the philosophical meditative process as characterized by Neo-Platonic thinking. Our representations of what truly is are subjective appreciations of themes that arise from human philosophical (spiritual) activity. These philosophical or spiritual themes are susceptible of observation in the concrete and existential lives of persons. In fact, much of our modern philosophical thought has its roots in Neo-Platonism. According to Simon Frank the Neo-Platonists were “right in modifying his doctrine and proclaiming Ideas to be contents of the universal reason, as it were eternal

thoughts or designs of God.”  

From a theological perspective Frank’s observation draws attention to a change in the understanding of the philosophical support structures of the Orthodox theologian. The “spiritual image,” characteristic of Orthodoxy, is influenced by the philosophy that undergirds Orthodox theology. Should that philosophy present a new, evolving understanding of humanity, distinguishable from the previous one accepted by philosophers, there will be a corresponding change in the understanding of the Orthodox theologian. While individual Orthodox religious traditions may differ, and perhaps clash, there is an inner affinity of spirit that transcends their differences and unites them. This innate affinity of spirit, I suggest, is more clearly revealed through a new philosophical understanding à la Edmund Husserl, which has the potential to express the unity of Orthodoxy. Such an expression of unity would cause a fresh consciousness in human understanding that was not possible in pre-Socratic philosophy. The philosophical insights from this fresh consciousness, unlike the technological achievements of the exact sciences, do not wear out since they are not consumable material products. Repeated philosophical insight does not produce a similar product or improved product. Rather, the repeated insight remains identical, in sense and value, no matter how many times, or how many persons, are involved in the repetition (re-creation) of it. Further, consciousness is a universal capacity of humanity and it is an essential constituent of humanity. One cannot be human and not be capable of consciousness. It can happen that the conscious state may be impeded, impaired or otherwise limited, but the person remains human, consciously or unconsciously. Conscious humans recognize their life-world, both collectively and individually. Husserl speaks of this life-world in his later writings as the Umwelt, a world that “is subjectively ‘constituted,’ [but] it is still not a private world, since its constitution is ultimately ‘intersubjective.’”

It is the philosopher, contemplating in wonder, who cultivates

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41 Husserl, Edmund (1965:151, n. 2) *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy* Harper Torchbooks
an enduring interest in the conscious horizon constituted by the *Umwelt*. The philosopher’s interest is occasioned by particular events. There is an intentional relationship created by the philosopher to relate these particular events within the life-world. This intentional relationship becomes a defining characteristic of the person, or group of persons, seeking a goal of unity within particular diverse experiences. Such a connection is established on the transcendental level as well as the practical level. When it is established on the level of religious myth, as in primitive or sophisticated cultures, ultimately such establishment develops an attitude of *theoria*. This is clearly visible in philosophical cultures. *Theoria*, as a universal philosophical attitude, is a non-mechanical and non-technological science capable of transforming humanity into a new creation based on absolute theoretical insights. Our human transformation evolves as we satisfy the practical needs of day to day living and thus have time to contemplate the philosophical insights that transcend all practical issues. We, in effect, create a new humanity that, in turn, creates a new form of culture and new form of community, unknown to pre-scientific humanity, or the Hellenic poets and which is distinct from that created by a mechanical science. Thus, according to Edmund Husserl, “there grows up a special type of man and a special vocation in life correlative to the attainment of a new culture.”  

This new humanity, culture, and community are philosophically significant for Orthodox theology. Philosophical wonder is not restricted to national traditions or interests. The insights expressed within the community constituted by Orthodox philosophers and theologians are not only intended for selected inhabitants of the world but these insights are intended as the common property of all members of all the communities of the world. Thus, a new philosophical insight, such as, that God is reality and value may be apprehended by the believer as binding on the interior life. Theologically, such binding constitutes its own evidence.

By “God as reality and value” I do not intend that as a factual statement of God’s existence. Rather, I mean that God is present to, or characterizes that insightful world of intentionality that evolves

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from within consciousness. To understand God as reality and value we must take into consideration our own presence when actively contemplating God’s presence to us. To be conscious of God, in other words, means to be conscious of ourselves. Further, to be present to God means to be present to ourselves. In fact, we cannot be conscious of God without being conscious of ourselves and other selves any more than we can be present to God without being present to ourselves and other selves. Such understanding means that there is no ideal God existing independently of our consciousness such that a dichotomy between us and God is created in the *Umwelt*. In this understanding the *Umwelt* consists of a unified consciousness and there exists no such thing as a dis-embodied consciousness. One Western theologian, Gabriel Moran, replaces the theoretical abstract subject/object dichotomy with an existential conscious/unconscious awareness when explaining the relational character of the experience that Edmund Husserl has identified as the *Umwelt*. 44

Conceiving God as reality and value introduces the concept of interpersonal relationships which replaces the classical idea of individuals existing independently, or in an isolated fashion, within their life-world. If the reader has endured to this point in reading it should be becoming apparent that this process of dehellenization, which constitutes a new philosophical approach, suggested by Edmund Husserl’s insights, is appropriate to an Orthodox interpretation of the *Umwelt*.

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7. THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RELIGION

The Process of the Social Construction of Religion

In this essay I discuss the process of the social construction of religion and, in particular, the Christian religion. By the social construction of the Christian religion, I mean that discourse with the given world that takes place through a dialectic with the world that we subsequently make for ourselves. Our human world is not constituted solely by given natural events, but is one of social construction. Thus, the social construction of our religion is not a pre-determined phenomenon rather it is a product of the ethical and moral choices we make existentially. Contemporary social construction of the Christian religion is to be contrasted with the traditional Western philosophical understanding that has been inordinately influenced by Hellenistic, or Ancient Greek philosophical thought. Leslie Dewart's efforts at dehellenization are an attempt to formulate a new social construction with a new theological understanding. I concentrate in this essay on the way my belief has been re-shaped through a dehellenized philosophical understanding. In this investigation, religious roles, as opposed to religious goals, take prominence. As well, I conduct my discussion in terms of existential relationships that have come into being since the dominance of contemporary Western or Hellenistic society. That
is to say, I characterize Western society as being dependent on the linguistic and philosophical invention of the copula verb “to be.” The contemporary social construction of the Christian religion exposes those societal practices that have wrongly become regarded as inevitable. Contemporary social construction of the Christian religion corrects this view of societal practices wrongly seen as inevitable. This correction takes place through phenomenological activity, not through classical philosophical speculation. I am indebted to Leslie Dewart's initial philosophical ground work in *Religion, Language and Truth*, wherein he has written:

I have suggested in this book how it may be possible to understand the nature of language in a way other than Aristotle’s, not as the expression of thought, but as its creative form, its womb or matrix, as it were, so that language, instead of corresponding to that which is spoken about (as meaning corresponds to the meant) is rather the means whereby consciousness can think meaningfully about a reality that does not have any meaning in or within itself. 45

The social construction of the Christian religion is a difficult task and requires conscious and concerted effort on our part because “the intuitive view is that there is a way things are that is independent of human opinion, and that we are capable of arriving at belief about how things are that is objectively reasonable, binding on anyone capable of appreciating the relevant evidence regardless of their ideological perspective.” 46 Since an ideological perspective is innate to the social construction of religion, I often employ the full term the social construction of the Christian religion to prevent a possible lapse on the reader’s part into thinking that I mean the social construction of reality, which excludes religion.

The social construction of the Christian religion arises from the believer’s experience. Such experience may be negative or positive which in turn effects any social construction of religion. Reflecting upon experience negatively, one may conclude that the western expression of religion is dying and view the future in fear. Things are not the way they once were, one may conclude. Religious life is

decadent. The Christian moral values that were once acknowledged publicly seem to be challenged in contemporary society. This challenge often results in conflicting opinions. Media headlines, even those which incorporate a religious point of view, often suggest that total destruction may be near given the perpetual state of war and conflict in which the world is engaged. The moral and ethical principles that formerly held religious life together seem to be disintegrating as the traditional supports of western belief are being undermined.

The positive side of one’s experience is that the world goes on because the ordinary person is cheerful and optimistic. The ordinary person believes that life is good and feels a part of a larger rhythm of creation despite its apparent corruption. Mary Jo Leddy, founding editor of the now defunct Catholic New Times, in theological discussions with Bishop Remi De Roo and Douglas Roche, shares the following personal comments. Her insights are in the book, *In the Eye of the Catholic Storm: The Church since Vatican II*.

Let me begin by talking about the television remote control I’m holding in my hand. This is a symbol of our culture for me, a symbol of the modern world. ... I come now to my own feelings. In this world I feel marvelously alive. I feel I am sharing in God’s process of continued development of the planet. I offer that not as a grandiose claim, believe me. But I do feel blessed — I have to put that right on the table. I feel blessed by health. I have sufficient funds to keep myself alive. I have the blessings of a strong family. I have faith — which gives me a base on which I can stand as I get up in the morning. And I realize that I have an obligation to those around me. ... I don't mean to suggest that my life is without pain. There are strains in my family, there is suffering in the world. I have had my share of frustrations in politics and diplomacy, in dealing with bureaucracies. I too am a mix of the ups and downs of this world. In the final analysis, it is my faith that motivates me, that secures me and enables me to reach out. That’s why I am so grateful to the Second Vatican Council — because of what it did to reinforce that faith. So, I do not feel myself overwhelmed by the down-side of culture. I come back now to this remote-control device which lets me control the television. Notice the way I put that: I control the television. I don’t feel enslaved by it. I don’t
feel that being a channel flipper is necessarily a bad thing. This device enables me to sustain and affirm my liberation in a culture that is surrounded by all kinds of values I don’t share. I can select from thirty of forty channels and I have access to the world. And believe me, that will get even better when we have instant translation of the news from places like Beijing every night. So, I have answered the question about how I relate to the culture around me. I can celebrate its achievements and struggle against its destructiveness.  

Often this optimistic attitude to culture finds an expression in a religious life or even in a secular, but respectful, attitude toward creation. Religious people, like those mentioned above, experience their religion as part of the various historical movements that have characterized human development throughout the ages. Thus, the approach I take to the social construction of the Christian religion is rooted in a positive experience of life.

Once humans give meaning to their experience they have entered into the realm of philosophical discussion, an advanced activity reserved to humans. Prior to that, meaning was assigned externally in simpler stages of existential life that is, tilling, fabricating tools and shelters, and the rearing of the young, which eventually became established as habitual cultural activities. These cultural activities, in time, gave rise to new experiences that required further adjustment of the social order or to the institutions within that social order. When these experiences generated new theological insights the social construction of religion became more complicated in its constitution. The scholarship and theological reflections, which arise in this complicated context are only contingent points of view and do not produce permanent philosophical systems.

In this process of the social construction of the Christian religion I am not examining metaphysical ideals, that is, super-sensory ideas as the basis for social construction. Rather, I examine existential or phenomenological relationships. Chronologically, the inquiry into the nature of the human being occurs prior to the inquiry into the nature of God. Ordinary people must inquire into themselves before

Leddy, Mary Jo; De Roo, Remi; Roche, Douglas (1992:164ff) In the Eye of the Catholic Storm: The Church since Vatican II Harper Perennial.
they inquire into God because their conscious experience of
themselves comes before their conscious experience of God. Thus,
as we realize the need to possess our own being, we seek God in
which to understand ourselves. In short, we follow St Augustine’s
experience (Confessions Book 1, Chapter 1) “our hearts are restless
until they rest in Thee,” often without knowing of it.

Our present-day problems are simply the logical outcome of the
so-called Modernist crisis of an earlier era. Our consideration of our
problems as merely psychological, not theological, impedes the
opportunity to solve them. However, religious psychology may
facilitate a solution through the social construction of religion.
Contemporary religious psychology describes the changes that take
place in the community and in the individual under the form of
psycho-social laws or demonstrable patterns of behaviour. These
patterns of behaviour may be phenomenologically interpreted. The
social construction of Western religion establishes its own similar
demonstrable patterns through theological reflection upon
Revelation within an ecclesial context. This ecclesial context is
constituted by a community being “called out” of the general social
context in response to a divine summons. A community that is called
out gives the social construction of the Christian religion its unique
character and capacity to express the truths of Revelation. In all
cultures social institutions are the means whereby individuals relate
to each other. Family, government, church, agriculture, trade, etc.
are examples of such institutions. The decay or the growth of anyone
of them will have negative or positive effects on the people living
in that the society. The same is true for the religious institutions of
a society.

Authentic social construction of religion cannot take place in a
defensive and self-isolating context. For the social construction of
religion to play a humanizing role it needs a publicly supportive
environment. Similarly, the faith of individuals needs the instruction
and the encouragement of other believing individuals.

Contemporary social construction of religion is based on one’s
sitz-im-leben, or existential situation in life, not upon the
natural/supernatural schema of traditional western theological
understanding. The social construction of religion can only occur in
a specifically religious context. The social construction of religion
is a human characteristic of all self-discovery that distinguishes a
conscious human being from a non-conscious human being. The social construction of the Christian religion possesses its own special insight into Revelation with respect to knowledge and action that enables the individual to become fully human. The social construction of religion engages emotion, feeling and intuition, and also enables the faithful to engage the transcendent since one’s consciousness extends beyond sensible experience. This essay suggests a direction towards achieving a correct conception of the social construction of the Christian religion to avoid the uncritical conclusions of fantasy, folklore and new age thought.

The faithful must exercise critical discretion in forming judgments about their experience upon which they construct their religion. The social construction of religion is purposeful in intent. By that I mean that its purpose is related to an actual experience; as well, its purpose is discovered within lived, not theoretical, social relationships. Further, its purpose is to serve a future practical function of providing an expression for the individual’s belief. The social construction of religion has its own distinctive character which reflects the special features of a community of unique self-discovery that presumes that a relationship between God and humanity has actually occurred.

The substance of this unique self-discovery is not to be restricted to any part of human experience. The social construction of the Christian religion, arising from self-discovery, starts with the conscious relationship between the risen Christ and the faithful that exists in this world. Thus, in this world each faithful individual must undertake a journey of theological interpretation and may do so without error only insofar as he or she has learned to enter the social reality of the community. The contemporary process of the social construction of the Christian religion needs to be set against its proper Western historical background. Before discussing the special characteristics of this contemporary process of the Christian social construction of religion I shall present the theology that has influenced my understanding.
An Understanding of Theology within the Social Construction of Religion

As a professional activity, contemporary theology began with the formation of the universities. Initially theology was undertaken informally within an ecclesiastical context, a vocational guild, as it were, and its purpose was to serve the Church in clarifying and formalizing doctrine and dogma. In this essay, I view theology as foundational to the social construction of religion, as well as, clarifying doctrine and dogma. My purpose is to think theologically within a phenomenological interpretation of faith, but outside the guild of an ecclesiastical theology. Further, I undertake an ecclesial theology that refers to a communal relationship of the Christian life, distinguished from the ecclesiastical life that refers to the historical governing structure of the Christian community. The doctrinal and dogmatic formulations extant in most ecclesiastical institutions presume a classical theological construction based on the historical experience of the church as a believing community. As a consequence, over the centuries various rhetorical accretions have clouded such theology, leading to a social construction of religion that no longer authentically relates to contemporary experience. In contrast, theological phenomenological reflection that takes place in an ecclesial context does relate to immediate experience.

The way in which we conduct theological reflection outside of the traditional theological guild is through critical reflection. Critical theological reflection is a unique human activity as an innate capacity of the human mind. This innate, critical capacity reaches to the depths of the mind and to its consciousness as it reflects upon its object. Critical theological reflection discloses the best collective efforts of believers in co-creating an authentic Christian anthropology, or put another way, the understanding of human life that enables the human species to evolve in its social construction of religion. An active critical reflection in theology has at least three characteristics. First, critical reflection must relate to actual experience. Second, it is to disclose truth within a social relationship. And third, it is to serve in some capacity within an ecclesial community.

With that in mind, I reflect upon a collective experience and incorporate what I find into my theological thinking outside the
traditional mould of an ecclesiastical guild. Thus, I reject the form of expression of an earlier Medieval Christian theology, influenced as it is by outdated Aristotelian categories. These outdated categories lack resonance with contemporary cosmology as noted by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Additionally, by reflecting outside the guild, I avoid the baggage of disputed ecclesiastical political and power-related issues that emerged in the Reformation/Counter-Reformation period, but which are no longer relevant. The way is thus opened for new investigations for theological reflection in a new social construction of religion in our contemporary context. However, despite my reluctance to embrace the past in investigating religious experience, as a theologian I must take seriously the notion that the Enlightenment period which began in Europe has introduced by virtue of its epistemological, historical, and evolutionary development, a variety of legitimate expressions of religious experience.

In North America, given our historical patrimony, we continue to be plagued in our theological thinking by problems traceable to the philosophical and theological context prevalent in pre-Victorian England. During this time and, well into the reign of Queen Victoria, 1837 - 1901, England remained virtually isolated from Continental philosophical thought. However, critical examination of English philosophical and theological texts does reveal some influence of German thought. At the beginning of the 19th century Rationalism was in vogue in England and on the Continent. Elliot-Binns distinguishes two strains of rational thought that were hostile to religious and, in particular, Christian experience. One train of thought was the open and complete rejection of the whole Christian system, that was typical of France; the other train of thought, which was typified in Germany, tolerated Christianity, but gradually reduced it to a mere caricature of its former self. The existential and less rationalistic Germanic thought that later evolved into phenomenological philosophy under the influence of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) resonated with the English theologian George Tyrrell (1861-1909). Although he died before any formal development of the

phenomenological school of thought in England, his thinking was definitely heading in that direction.

In his phenomenological way of thinking, W. K. C. Guthrie reminds us that philosophers do not think in a void. In fact, our thoughts are products of three interrelated factors: our temperaments, our experiences and, our reading of previous philosophers, all of which make up our life-world. 50 One of the pioneers of the phenomenological method of philosophical thinking was Edmund Husserl. For him individuals can reflect on all experience as it presents itself to consciousness according to a clear, existential, and methodological framework. Thus, all phenomenological knowledge appears within a complex series of cultural presentments. Phenomenology, as an interpretive philosophy, considers that the world of conscious “lived” experience takes precedence over the abstracted and theoretical world of the sciences. Langdon Gilkey notes that from a personal perspective, the public task of the theologian is primarily the analysis of life with regard to religious issues and is secondarily an analysis of life with regard to its economic, sociological or psychological dimensions. 51 Though each of these has a religious ground, he maintains. Thus, to his way of thinking, an existential reflection on the social construction of religion, although undertaken individually, is not a private enterprise.

The theological approach in this essay falls within Jeff Astley’s understanding of doing “ordinary theology,” which attends to personal insights arising out of experience and theological thinking that takes place outside the traditional guild. Yet, according to Astley, such original theology is rarely done. He maintains that theological thought today is often undertaken as the study of other people’s ideas and is rarely a self-critical reflection on one’s own religious experience and ideas. 52 Although modern theology may

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have begun in the academy, it cannot remain merely a theoretical academic subject, as John Apczynski has shown. 53 Theology, given its contemporary purpose, must address the questions and problems that arise from within all aspects of human society. The thought of any theologian and, in the final analysis this means anyone trying to understand his or her own experience of ultimate meaning emerges from the \textit{lebenswelt} (life-world) of the theologian. The theologian's \textit{lebenswelt} is thus formed by the existential milieu, in Teilhard de Chardin’s sense, of the cultural, social, and religious contexts of life.

Theologians are continually searching for new and meaningful ways to reflect upon religious experience outside the traditional theological guild. One cannot accept the legacy of the past as hardened and dead with respect to the present any more than one can ignore the lives of those critical thinkers who have shaped the past. Although, they may be physically dead from the perspective of social construction of religion the legacy of these individuals continues to shape the present. Their legacy exists, not by virtue of its own historical right, but by virtue of its significance and importance to the present moment. The social construction of religion, from an ecclesial point of view, is greater than the insights of any theological guild. The social construction of religion must be in dialogue with artists, musicians, novelists, poets, psychologists and, of necessity, with the Scriptures. I tap into Marshall McLuhan's insight:

One thing which characterized the finer arts — poetry, painting, music — areas with which we're all familiar — for more than a century, but certainly for the past century, has been a continued insistence on their relevance to daily living. There has been quite an impressive chorus of urgent requests in all fields that we take seriously the arts as basic social factors of enlightenment and guidance and training. 54

Thus, contemporary North American social construction of religion arising within the faith life of believers incorporates aspects of the human temperament, experience and understanding of both

former believers and current thinkers.

Eventually, through time, the initial, diverse conceptualizations of church, or ecclesia, developed into various uniform theological understandings that reflected the norms for the religious life of the Catholic communities. For example, two diverging and distinct schools of theology, known as the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools respectively, developed addressing various Christological questions, based on their respective geographical and intellectual differences. However, these schools were not homogenous groups of thinkers. Homogenous schools never existed in the concrete sense. These schools encompassed convergent themes and approaches, but never became a uniform system. The existence of these schools indicated that diversity was an integral aspect of the social construction of religion for some time after the death of the apostles. As the social construction of the Christian religion evolved, the community began to interpret its experience and socially construct itself in a different fashion. Between the Judaic and Hellenistic world-views, a rapprochement prepared the way for a new articulation of the social construction of the Christian religion. No longer was the imminent return of Jesus the driving force for reflecting upon the social construction of the Christian religion. An interpretation of the social construction of religion which drew heavily on Hellenistic philosophical ideas began to develop, particularly in the Christian East and, it cast the social construction of religion in a new light.

This development continued for centuries. As Brian Gaybba has pointed out, various schools of reflection influenced the religious construction of the ecclesia based on the Christian religious life and were developing long before the Reformation in Christendom occurred. These schools had developed intentionally to advance the priorities and perspectives of particular religious orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans. In the Middle Ages, a change in the structure of theological understanding affecting the social construction of religion occurred with the controversial introduction of Aristotle’s philosophy. The subsequent scholastic method of interpretation that developed, influenced by Aristotelian and

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Platonic thought patterns, was the best tool for intellectual argument in that age. This is evidenced by Thomas Aquinas’s theologically constructed synthesis of Aristotle’s cosmology and the Christian message. One of the consequences, often misunderstood, of this particular social construction was that Thomas relegated spiritual, or mystical theology to a subdivision of moral theology. Eventually his inspired version of the social construction of religion became dominant in the Roman Catholic Church. It is significant that through the acceptance of Aristotle’s cosmology, Christian theology allowed for a very “act-centred” message that was never fully realised, nor socially constructed, by the faithful. Consequently, reflection on the social construction of religion fell under various static legalisms. Schneiders points out that a socially constructed medieval synthesis held together until the middle of the 20th century, when the culture-shattering events of the two world wars, a technological revolution, liberation movements of all kinds, an explosion of knowledge and, rapid developments in philosophy, the humanities, psychology, as well as, other social sciences all brought the comprehensive hold of the medieval synthesis on the Christian mind and imagination to an end.  

Out of this new milieu, diverse theological ways of thinking have been socially constructed and now re-shape the hermeneutic of reflecting on the religious experience. The critical reflection on religious experience often leads one to ask: Is church membership a prerequisite for doing theology? Can one do theology outside of the revelation in Christ? Concerning the religious social construction of the ecclesia it has been noted that some Christians saw and, continue to see, the Invisible Church within the Visible Church and somehow connected to it. Yet, the Invisible Church certainly is not identical, or co-extensive with the Visible Church. That “there are many souls within the Visible Church that do not belong to the Invisible Church; and there are many souls not within the Visible Church that belong to the Invisible Church is still a thoroughly orthodox and common saying,” so notes Baron von Hügel. Nevertheless, in

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understanding ordinary theology through a critical reflection on the Christian religious experience both theologians and religious philosophers need to somehow “enchurch” their thinking. That is, to socially construct the historically called community.

Within a proper social construction of religion, love for God provides motivation for studying theology. Coming to understand the things of God out of love is the beginning and root of all theology. In short, theology is not a programme of studies with roots in the medieval universities. Brian Gaybba reminds us that the phenomenon of Liberation Theology is rooted in Love. Truth is the result of God’s love for us and of our practical learning through a proper social construction of religion. It is possible that one may experience God’s love outside of one’s inherited social construction of religion. We are more likely to feel our relationship with God than to understand it. The Spirit of Christ helps Christians feel this truth and then formulate it through social construction of religion. Once formulated, the Spirit of Christ helps Christians feel their way deeper into this truth.

It is worth noting that non-rational life feels, but does not formulate, nor socially construct its feelings. I suggest that the social construction of religion has two dimensions. One dimension consists of agreement and attraction, and the other dimension consists of dislike and revolt. Agreement and attraction, as well as dislike and revolt, are dimensions of all communities. By way of example, the Lex Orandi, the rule of prayer, is a product of the community, not the individual. The Lex Orandi is the social construction of the community’s religion, not of the individual’s isolated experience. The social construction of religion acting as a public authority may set the criteria for religious truth, but it does not set the criteria for private judgment. However, for an individual’s life to be healthy and bear spiritual fruit it must unfold within a community and be connected to the social construction of religion that constitutes the community’s life. In each member of the community the work of the spirit of holiness is manifested in the

58 “With the sure instinct given by Love, liberation theology has, whether it realizes it or not, retrieved the classic Augustinian tradition that only love gives full understanding of the things of God.” The Spirit of Love 1987:266 Geoffrey Chapman.
social construction of its religion. With this background in place I now turn to the special characteristics of the social construction of religion.

Special Characteristics of the Social Construction of Religion

What is the Social Construction of Religion?

Here I develop the ideas put forward by the English Jesuit theologian, George Tyrrell. His ideas were not systematically presented but rather they were introduced as needed within the social construction of religion in his day. It is to be remembered that authentic social construction of the Christian religion is not occasioned simply by social problems, but rather is motivated by theological problems. Although Revelation is offered to everyone, according to the Christian tradition, it is understood unequally and subsequently elicits an unequal response. The social construction of religion is never constituted solely for the masses of humanity but is constituted for and by like-minded inquirers who have been called into a community by Christ. This is a special characteristic of the social construction of religion. In other words, the social construction of the Christian religion has a particular, not universal intent. Thus, the universal social construction may be a handicap and liability for inquirers who want more than what attracts the interests of the masses of an undiscerning population.

The contemporary social construction of the Christian religion seeks dialogue with the world outside the visible structures of the Constantinian church. George Tyrrell noted that natural seed carried over the garden wall may sometimes bear fruit more abundantly beyond the walls than within the walls surrounding the garden, and in due time may come to re-fertilize the now drier soil of its origin. Thus, in the contemporary social construction of religion the Church will eventually be leavened by the experience of faith that has been developed in those civilizations that the church has nurtured with the Gospel. To my mind, the social construction of religion is based on a way of being rather than on a way of merely doing. Such social construction does not arise from intellectual reasoning but from a sympathetic intuition of a spirit of holiness within our experience. The theological intent of the social construction of religion is
intended to counter false understanding. There is no political intent to protect the faithful from the hostile world. What is commonly understood by many today as a conflict between science and faith is really a conflict between theology as knowledge (understood as revelation) and reason as knowledge (understood as philosophy). Thus, the social construction of religion reflects a conflict between one type of learning and another type of learning, that is, between the learning of the modern day and the learning of the classical past. Within the social construction of religion, one must distinguish between the learning due to philosophy and the learning due to theology. The social construction of the Christian religion reflects the corporate Church, not as an end in itself, but as a means to an end and, not as constituting a world of spiritual reality, but as constituting an entrance into that world. The social construction of the Church is primarily a spiritual endeavor. Further, within this social construction "spiritual growth," means change in subjective awareness, not a change in the objective reality of what is, or was, experienced.

The social construction of religion is not insensitive to the particular challenge of science, but its concern is for a different kind of apologetic. It is aimed at unbelief and the intellectual difficulties of the believer, that is, it is aimed at the educated and serious Catholic inquirer. I hold to the principle that theology grows and revelation unfolds. Revelation and theology co-operate in the naming of God. The social construction of religion draws an inquiring humanity back to its original source. Within contemporary social construction of religion common sense experience ultimately leads to the conclusion that the truth lies somewhere between two the erroneous extremes. One extreme is Revelation without theology and, the other extreme is theology without revelation. A contemporary social construction of the Christian religion is a way of living, feeling and acting with reference to the transcendent world. However, the transcendent world is not an external disembodied world. There is no supernatural advantage to intellectual enlightenment disembodied from experience. In such uncritical experience, which is the most common, the natural order is trusted before the theological/philosophical order. Yet, both orders belong to this world. The social construction of religion is older than Christianity. In fact, it is as old as humanity itself. Social
construction of the Christian religion is mainly a continuing corrective of the errors of the past. It is medicine and not food as it were. The danger for the contemporary social construction of religion is that our age is more psychological than philosophical. The danger is that secular psychology will replace religious philosophy.

How Does the Social Construction of Religion Occur?

The contemporary social construction of the Christian religion cannot be fabricated on a theoretical formula. Much contemporary social construction of the Christian religion arises from the dialectical insight of Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). The contemporary social construction of the Christian religion is conditioned by the zealous spirit of faith combined with a sincere search for truth in the form of a dialectic. But this process is often not systematic. The process which believers undertake in the social construction of religion appears to many individuals as a wavering journey rather than as a straight course. Thus, the Hegelian notion of dialectic aids in the contemporary social construction of religion. In this approach, we come to know the spirit, not through metaphysical insight but only through the experiential affects of thoughts, feelings and various revelations. Critical reflection and experience must alternate for the believer to come to know God. This is so because we feel truth before we can formulate it. It is after our feelings are formulated, that is, constructed socially, that this dialectic helps us to feel our way further into the truth. Life, not intellectual propositions, are what lead the believer into truth. The social construction of religion evokes, it does not communicate anything from outside the believer. The unattainable object of the social construction of religion is inferred by conscious thought. It is not a given in experience, but rather through consciousness. In the social construction of religion, one must distinguish a revelatory inference from an ordinary psychic experience. This is done, not by a reference to an objective source, nor by pointing to evidence of a divine agency, but by a description of revelation’s subjective character, that is, of its character as a conscious psychological happening.

Throughout our life we are much occupied with analysis and
synthesis. We cannot help it. It is our nature. A reflection upon our childhood often reveals such as we grew into adulthood. In reflecting upon our childhood, often when having been given a new toy, we took it apart to learn of its composition, to criticize its structure, and in some manner to try to improve upon it. This habit has not deserted most of us as we grew to adulthood. Instead of toys, however, it was systems, ideas, creeds, philosophies, received beliefs, religions, to which we applied to our speculative intellect. The social construction of religion undertakes much the same approach as it examines the language and concepts that have, but may no longer, proved fruitful for the Church for nearly 2000 years.

Those who stand outside the institutional Church may appropriate to themselves, in some manner, the results of her activity, yet they do not directly share in this activity. The *vox populi* does not equate with the voice of the people, that is, public opinion. Rather, the *vox populi* is the best presentation of the efforts of the collective human mind. Chronologically, the best presentations of the past are dead in themselves. However, they have been absorbed into the present social construction of religion. Yet, they do not co-exist unchanged alongside a new presentation of ideas. To my mind, this insight raises the question: does thought grow architecturally or organically? I opt for organic growth. The social construction of religion has documented the development of belief. Further, the history of the social construction of the Christian religion is a history of identity, but of identity within difference. Identity is not to be confused with a union of opposites. The social construction of the Christian religion has occurred in the succession of Jewish, Greek, and medieval cultures in which no union of opposites was forged. Theologically, there is no conceivable change greater than that which transformed the Messianic movement of Jesus into the community of the apostolic age and of the Church of the post-apostolic age. Modernism is, to my mind, among the most important theological social constructions in the West that has appeared in the Church since the Reformation. Modernism, as a social construction of religion, developed out of the Reformation and must be assessed in relation to it. Modernism may be described as the activity that the social construction of Western religion undertook given in the experience of modern humanity, as distinct from medieval humanity.
What is the Meaning of the Social Construction of the Christian Religion?

As conscious beings, it often matters little to us how we are perceived by others. However, how we perceive ourselves and what we believe ourselves to be and how we act is everything. Through the same activity by which we create a world of our choice and give it reality we also create ourselves and become what we choose to make of ourselves regardless of what others may recognize. Of course, our success in this endeavor depends on a host of personal abilities and talents.

As Christians we are Catholic because we know that the locus in which the spirit of truth and righteousness gradually reveals itself and, in which it increases, is not the individual, but the community. Thus, one comes to know the spirit through the social construction of religion. But one need not continue to believe in one’s inherited social expression of religion. That same spirit may lead one out of that context. It is to be noted that that which is transcendent and infinite is not equal to the supernatural but reveals an “over-world,” to use a phrase coined by George Tyrrell. This over-world is known through mysteries, natural or revealed. That which is transcendent is on the same level of the natural life. That which is transcendent is undetermined, that is, not confined to anything in particular. The determination of the transcendent is to be brought about by us through an appropriate social construction of religion. That is, social construction of religion provides the context for revelation to unfold in this world. The rule of prayer and the rule of belief applies primarily to the life of the community, and only secondarily to the life of the individual. For a healthy individuality, not individualism, one must appropriate and master what is common to all, and not live in isolation. This leads to the recognition, on a deeper level, of spirituality revealing the necessity of God’s assistance for our salvation. However, we need the assistance of the Church only relatively.

In order to understand Christ’s spirit, it must be reproduced within ourselves. The social construction of religion is to be distinguished from ethics and other forms of rational life, such as, philosophy. Further, the social construction of religion is the
recognition of our moral and practical relation to superior beings of the invisible order whether they are, one or many, good or evil. And social construction of religion is a manifestation of the response that varies to the degree of enlightenment of the individual within the community. The modern mind is much more concerned about the correctness and inferences of reason than about the truth of the principles from which reason draws, or of the conclusions to which it leads. That is, we are often concerned more with the wineskin than the wine.

Theologically, holistic understanding means that all life is under the influence of morality and not in need of wellness which is the product of ethics, but in need of redemption, the goal of reconciliation. However, through science and scientific abstraction human experience can be interpreted which otherwise would remain confused and un-interpreted. In the modern context the scientific mode of knowledge and the transcendent mode of knowledge support each other in interpreting human experience. Neither the transcendent nor the scientific in isolation is adequate. However, understood dialectically and taken together they correct each other’s faults. But taken individually and separately they may incorrectly conclude that the transcendent is the less unreal of the two. However, since our theological meanings are not tied up exclusively with the philosophical categories through which they are expressed, nor with the scientific systems from which they are taken, the social construction of religion can provide a new context for their meaning.

The Social Construction of the Christian Religion is a Constant Calling, Arriving and Moving On.

The first effect produced upon the believing mind in leaving the childlike experience of religious truth given in Revelation is undoubtedly disconcerting and uncomfortable. But, like every other process of transition from one resting-place to another, there are those who have not sufficient strength to carry the process through. They are often injured spiritually by their inability either to go back to the older forms, or to go forward to find something satisfying. But there is the question as to the manner in which the Church may surmount this crisis, that is, the unresolved spiritual crises of Modernism. In the attempt to surmount these unresolved crises
certain varieties of opinion may capture popular understanding, while the actual issues of belief will be proved to be different from all that has been guessed at or predicted.

In point of fact every person who is occupied with something beyond the mere common-place day-to-day existence is necessarily and perpetually making a fresh synthesis. He or she is endeavoring to bring his or her ideas into harmony with the results of a growing knowledge and maturing interpreting of experience. No matter in what sphere of intellectual or spiritual life — literature, art, science, politics, religion — this process of constant revision and readjustment is unavoidably imposed upon the believer. What the Roman Catholic Church, or better, the Magisterium, appears not to see is that it cannot kill Modernism without committing a sort of spiritual suicide. The paradox is that Modernism inflicts upon Medieval Catholicism a mortal wound, yet, it is in virtue of Modernism that Catholicity lives in the contemporary era.

If Catholicism can lead to an arrest of life, it must contain in itself a contradiction. In a world like ours the process of life has no fixed points. The stream of life bears all things within its flow. This is what I mean by the Catholicity of life. Catholicity is a mark, or characteristic, of the Church. Catholicity is of dynamic intent, of direction, and of movement, unlike Catholicism which is static. As we mature in life, within Catholicity, God strips us of our childish and temporary ways in the faith. When we think that all is lost, we suddenly find, in fact, that all has been gained. For all of us at the outset of life and for a vast proportion of our whole lives, the ideals of the past furnish a high standard to be attained. But for leading and progressive individuals in the contemporary community these past ideals can be a hindrance more than a help. Such progressive individuals who transcend and go beyond the ordinary social construction of religion, further the development of Catholicity which frees the believer from the deadening influence of an outdated past. Once we are fully conscious of the limitations of the visible social construct of religion, we can recognize the mystical Christ present in a series of social transformations and societal revolutions. That is, we recognize the mystical Christ via thesis, antithesis and synthesis, thus creating a new social construction of religion. This new social construction of religion, like every other element of human life, physical, intellectual, moral and political, etc. will gain
immeasurably through the co-operation with the mystical Christ whereby the experience of millions can be taken together and unified for the benefit of each.

With the growth of human knowledge, our self-knowledge deepens and reveals to us more and more of the hidden source on which our self-understanding rests. From this source come many revelations about our psychology and philosophy. The old beliefs given to us from prehistoric times are not elastic enough to hold the new wine of spiritual advancement. New knowledge leads to a new social construction of religion.
8. A POINT OF DEPARTURE FOR POSTHUMAN PHILOSOPHY

Can phenomenology present a reliable point of departure for posthuman philosophy, I asked myself? I had been taught, throughout my academic philosophical formation, that classical metaphysics is a necessary constituent of Western philosophy. (However, since the modern era science has been accepted as the better approach according to some thinkers, which caused me to wonder if science was but a different type of philosophy and not the physical discipline many understood it to be. I concluded that science was not a philosophy.) Science notwithstanding, it appears to me that classical metaphysical attempts seeking to preserve a “human” philosophy are futile in the contemporary world which is in the process of leaving its Hellenistic epistemological foundations for technological and digital foundations of knowledge. In short, philosophical knowledge is entering a “posthuman” stage of evolutionary development departing from its Hellenistic roots. These attempts within metaphysical Western philosophy at preserving inadequate knowledge, although rooted in experience rely on an outdated philosophy of Platinic idealism, that tell us nothing of what our future world will be like. The task of phenomenological philosophers is to return to the interpretation of experience itself and seek to recast meaning not in terms of theoretical idealism, but in terms of existential experience.
Posthuman philosophy is “post” human in the sense that it transcends renaissance humanism or modern secular humanism. Instead of accepting an inherited epistemology from classical Western philosophy, which defined human understanding, phenomenological philosophers assign meaning to an existential situation in which the human being finds itself. The existential situation, not its meaning, is what is inherited in human life. Posthuman philosophy must deal with the existential anxiety and tension inherited in human evolution. But these tensions and anxieties may be interpreted phenomenologically indicating possibilities for a changed future. From my perspective, these phenomenological indications signal the beginning of a process of dehellenization of classical philosophy thus enabling a conscious posthuman philosophy to be constructed. Posthuman interpretation has no particular philosophy of its own, but must rely on a philosophy which arises out of the present experience of the members of the human community. Posthuman philosophy does not rely on an ideology that exists independently of one’s experience. Rather, posthuman philosophy, as a phenomenological interpretation, has the potential to bring about an end to the antithesis between classical humanism and the “post” humanism that is developing in the contemporary technological and digital Western culture. Thus, any new human outcome may be neither classical nor “virtual” but, rather, reflect a philosophical human self-consciousness.

Self-conscious phenomenological theology

Our times require a posthuman theology to render our Christian experience meaningful. In a posthuman theology I recognize myself-as-subject existing in God’s image and likeness. In traditional Western epistemology, which is not an epistemology of self-consciousness, this is not possible. In that philosophy I am a creature who acts within my own human sphere. Western epistemology is a philosophy of objectivism in which to know a thing more thoroughly often means to know more about the same thing, i.e., quantitatively. In a philosophy of self-consciousness which supports a posthuman theology, I deepen, heighten or expand my self-understanding qualitatively. In deepening, heightening or expanding my self-
understanding, an earlier underdeveloped consciousness is surmounted. There are profound theological implications here to do with truth as traditionally understood.

Within my self-understanding, which means to be conscious, I distinguish between conformity and fidelity. Conformity establishes my relationship to another person, a relationship which I owe to the other person by reason of the nature of the other person. That is, I undertake the will of the other person. Fidelity also establishes my relationship to the other person, a relationship which I owe to myself by reason of my nature. That is, I undertake my will for the sake of the other person. From my experience conformity compels externally, whereas fidelity impels internally.

A philosophy of conscious self-understanding is the means by which I conceptualize my experience. Significantly, human culture is often understood to be at an ex-animal stage of evolutionary development, as it were. Thus, as a human being and ex-animal able to conceptualize God, such conceptualization of God is a religious formulation based on the norms of present human culture. That is to say, in my experience God is revealed to me not in norms of universal conformity, but in norms of particular fidelity.

In a philosophy of self-understanding (phenomenology) I experience God as that present other (a “not-me”) presence which when it makes itself felt I become more than I would be, were I not exposed to its influence. To express religiously this, “becoming more than I would be were I not exposed to its influence,” experience through self-understanding reflects a posthuman theology. Were this experience not expressed religiously, it might be expressed as a posthuman psychology. What needs to be proven to me via argument is not that God exists. Rather, what is needed is the phenomenal appearance of what is not immediately obvious, i.e., God’s presence to me. As a philosopher and theologian, I must first determine philosophically, and then express theologically, in what sense God is present to me.

Without question, my personality reflects my subjective self at any stage in my evolution. As an adult person, I desire to evolve, that is, direct my evolution beyond my present less-than-perfect self. When I interpret my religious experience through my inherited traditions, I find I am looking to the past and not towards the future and beyond myself. In looking to the past, I recognize God’s power
over me. Focused on the past, then, I remain a creature with no opportunity to evolve to a future (posthuman) co-creator status given the history of my religious inheritance. In a posthuman conscious self-understanding, the God beyond me does not have absolute power over me in the conventional sense. Rather, God’s power is shared with me as a co-creator. That is to say that I may or may not choose to create my own life independently of God’s purposes. I have the freedom to choose either path. I can rearrange the physical world (my environment) in ways by which I can serve God so as to realize the autonomy of my own being. (I am homo faber, not homo creator.) Thus, the fundamental relation between God and me consists, not in a hierarchical power relationship of creator-creature, but in a unity of God and me wherein I am a co-creator sharing the divine power. With this realization then, my faith becomes recast and the meaning of religion is expressed in terms that do not imply God’s absolute power over me, nor my inordinate submission to God’s presence. This means that as a posthuman philosopher and theologian, I do not re-evaluate my ideological origins in order to refresh traditional perspectives. Rather, I re-visit my specific cultural and demographic traditions to establish a conscious self-understanding, that is, a meaningful posthuman understanding. Through the perspective of a heightened consciousness, a new understanding comes to light generated from within my ideological origins.

Re-visiting my ideological origins can be a negative or a positive experience which affects my theological understanding. Reflecting upon my experience negatively, I may conclude that civilization is dying. Things are not the way they once were. Life is decadent. The Christian moral values that I once acknowledged publicly are challenged within society and often appear as but conflicting opinions. Media headlines suggest to me that world destruction is near given the perpetual state of war and conflict in which the world seems to be engaged. The moral principles that formerly held life together seem to be disintegrating as the traditional supports of my social life are undermined.

A positive reflection, however, shows that the world continues despite my negative experiences. I, like many ordinary persons, am cheerful and optimistic. Ordinary persons believe that life is good and they feel a part of a larger rhythm of creation despite its apparent
chaos. Ordinary people often experience an abundance of the life in which to participate. Often this optimistic attitude is expressed through a spiritual or a religious life, that is, a vowed life, or perhaps through a respectful secular attitude toward life and creation. Devout people often experience organized religion as one social reality among others. Philosophical, political and economic social realities have, throughout the ages, characterized human experience. Scholarship and the process of conscious theological interpretation are not philosophical ends in themselves but they are means of individual and collective intellectual activity. Neither individual nor collective intellectual activity produces any universal philosophical system of interpretation. Neither is permanent but only establishes temporary points of view that are contingent upon the cultural context of the thinker.

Social institutions provide a cultural locus for the thinker and are the means whereby individuals are able to relate to each other. Family, government, church, agriculture, trade, etc. are examples. The decay or the growth of any one of them will have a corresponding negative or positive affect on the individuals making up that institution. That is to say that theological interpretation based on a conscious self-understanding cannot take place in a self-limiting and self-isolating context characteristic of decay. Rather, it requires a constructive and supportive context which characterizes human evolution.

To this end a posthuman theology possesses its own special self-conscious evolution with respect to knowledge and human activity. Supported by this conscious self-understanding, posthuman theological interpretation engages emotion, feelings and intuition enabling a transcendent encounter since human consciousness extends beyond sensible experience. A purpose of these essays is to formulate an appropriate process for contemporary Christian theological interpretation thus avoiding the distortions of philosophical ideology, the distortions of fantasy and the distortions of any uncritical “new age” thought. Posthuman theological interpretation presumes that a relationship between God and humanity has taken on the special features of unique personal self-understanding with distinctive philosophical (phenomenological) insights.

Classical Hellenist philosophies were formulated in response to
different problems and within a different cultural world. Thus, they reflect the historical experience of the human condition of their time. A posthuman philosophy, to which I subscribe, supports the co-creative evolution of human becoming. Within co-creative evolution each new point of view, or new level of consciousness, humanity thereby transcends any previous philosophical self-awareness. Thus, as co-creator of the universe, humanity is able to structure the order and harmony of the universe with the aid of a phenomenological philosophy, in lieu of an epistemological philosophy.
9. A CONSCIOUS ATTEMPT AT CONSTRUCTING QUEER THEOLOGY

This essay consists of a composition, the core of which I solicited from a gay individual and subsequently edited. We share a very similar understanding of philosophy and theology. The chapter is written in the first person singular as if I were its sole author.

In this essay, I present the process that led me to undertake a personal, but not private, attempt at constructing a queer theology. It is a Christian theology articulated from a subjective point of view. More importantly, however, it is a theological understanding by a gay person undertaken from within a community of faith. From a moral point of view straight theology, rather, the interpretation of straight theology, confronts me in my moral life and is of questionable value to me. I need a queer theology that says something to me about God and our relationship. There is a vast difference in interpretation of some issues between the world of interpretation that produces straight theology and the world of interpretation in which I live as a queer person and a believer in God. The process I envision in order to construct a queer theology is that I must first enter the world of straight theology, determine through an historical and evolutionary perspective what it signifies and, only
then can I say what it means for me in my experience.

In undertaking a theological construction, which is an on-going process, I engage both the world I inherited and the world I subsequently constituted for myself. By constituting my world, I mean organizing that collection of experiences of which I am conscious and giving them meaning. This organized understanding constitutes my “home-world.” Many things exist concretely outside my home-world that have no meaning for me at all. Although they are there and have been given meaning by others. It is phenomenological philosophy that underpins the interpretation of my experiences and my theological understanding.

As a gay person, I find it significant that traditional Christian theology has been constructed upon the presumption that straight people are its exclusive originators and custodians. They have incorporated their particular values and biases into the teaching of the church. This straight theology has been universalized by the church, primarily through its missionary efforts and orthodox teaching which is often hostile to LGBTQ issues of sexuality, as many ecclesiastical publications attest. And not to be ignored are the particular passages hostile to homosexuality in the scriptures sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims.

In this essay I contrast my queer theological understanding to traditional straight theological understanding, which I have come to realize has been influenced by an ancient Greek philosophy that is no longer viable for me. Whether or not my contrasting views will have effects on public attitudes and bring about a change in them is yet to be seen.

My early experiences as a gay adolescent and young adult, which I kept secret until my mid-fifties, were more positive than negative. This was partly due to the fact that I am naturally a cheerful and optimistic person who believes that life is basically good. Among the earliest memories I can recall are memories of pleasant sexual feelings, both heterosexual and homosexual. In hindsight, however, the same-sex feelings were the more intense. From early childhood I had a sense that I was part of a larger scheme of life than my immediate family. I sensed, without understanding it, that there was something greater, yet somewhat unknown to me, in whose presence I was living.

In the process of contemplating a queer theology, I have
abandoned the use of classical metaphysical approach to interpret theology. Not the metaphysical idealism of classical philosophy, but a personal and reasoned consciousness constitutes my theological understanding today. My philosophical understanding originates in the mystery of my sexuality, which includes physically my body and metaphysically my mind. By being a conscious _and_ a reasonable person I have dehellenized my thinking that was previously expressed via a classical perspective.

Within an _ecclesial_ community I have come to accept God’s revelation in a queer-friendly way. The ecclesial community, and I do not mean an _ecclesiastical_ community, is a “called” community responding to a divine summons addressed to both gay and straight individuals. Being gay affords me an experience, unique in character, as I live _in_ faith and _by_ grace. In this context I construct an appropriate queer-friendly theology to interpret my religious experience. I cannot undertake the construction of my theology in a negative self-critical or self-isolating manner. Philosophers and theologians who have no sense of the presence of God, or of a transcendent reality in their lives may find themselves in opposition internally with themselves and externally with their community. Such a context of negativity is not suitable to develop any theology. Any philosophy I construct must be supported by the positive characteristics of self-discovery and the positive worth as to who I am in the presence of God. Thus, my theology is based upon the experience of a positive relationship between God and me that has actually been established. This is a relationship of love. A love that meets my needs and furthers my spiritual growth. It is more than mere romantic love.

As a gay person and a theologian, I am always looking for new and meaningful ways to interpret my religious experience within my queer life-style. This often leads me to look outside the traditional norms of the church. I do have a developing sense that traditional doctrine and dogma are but “fossils of a passing God,” as it were, and no longer adequate. Although, I do not consider the philosophical legacy of the past as hardened and dead and of no use within my present situation. As I see it, my theology must incorporate my gay temperament and world-view in a new way with the re-evaluated understanding of the mind of philosophers and theologians of the past. I undertake all this within a dehellenized
In my dehellenized theology I distinguish between my Christian experience and my secular experience which for a long time I had taken to be synonymous. In my youth, Western culture was generally religious and, as yet, secularism had not assumed a dominant position in society. Secularism notwithstanding, however, I believe that queer theology is an alternative way of religious thinking that transcends the conventional norm of Western culture. In fact, I dare to suggest that queer theology might even present a new hermeneutic for a variety of Christian experiences of sexuality.

Individuals who seek God’s love, be they straight or gay, are more likely first to feel their relationship with God, then understand it consciously and reasonably. At least, that has been my experience. First, I felt God’s love (as a palpable presence, not merely a physical affection) then formulated my experience of it. Once formulated, my experience of God’s love led me deeper into the truth. I make no claim that my understanding of queer theology sets the criterion for anyone else’s judgment, but only that it expresses God’s love for me and may be useful for others. Thus, my queer theology is more than a “pastoral” re-assessment and re-formulation of straight theological perspectives. It is an altered presentation seen through a queer consciousness that may be able to reflect both gay and straight perspectives. “Queer” may be more insightful than “straight,” in understanding human sexuality than vice versa.

I prefer philosophy in formulating my queer theology rather than other disciplines such as sociology or psychology. Philosophy addresses more suitably the deeper questions arising in my mind. Furthermore, philosophical insights give rise to a queer theology that may be applicable, with appropriate adaptations, to Jewish and Islamic theology since “queerness” transcends cultural and religious traditions. I believe that Marc Oraison was heading in the right direction when he concluded:

We have seen that the condition of a person with homosexual tendencies is rooted in the strange incompleteness of all human sexuality. Homosexual life is not something apart. It is one version, among others, of the fundamental human tragedy. This

59 Cf. my Dehellenization and Dr. Dewart Revisited: A First Person Philosophical Reflection.
tragedy is a question beyond any science or rational explanation, yet through faith it acquires meaning. Through Christ triumphant in death, all suffering is revelation, birth, a personal Way of the Cross. So it is that a homosexual can say with all of us: ‘In my own body I make up what is lacking from the sufferings of Christ’ (my italics).  

Taking my thinking one step further, my approach to queer theology is not to be confused with religious studies about queerness which seems to be trending these days. It is too personal for that. Religious Studies is an academic discipline that attaches to the social order of any given culture. Whereas, theology is a religious philosophy for life and attaches to the person in any given culture. It is a “creed of life” for the person.

My attempt at constructing a queer theology is nothing less than the understanding of a personal, religious (loving) relationship with God. Western culture, at the present time, lacks a satisfactory queer theological language about meaning, value and experience that would allow a successful dialogue to take place within the public forum, or even among the Christian faithful. As a Christian philosopher, I have an obligation to somehow integrate my gay experience into the tradition of the faith.

For many LGBTQ individuals, our experience is that we are estranged from the religion in which we were born. This estrangement is due in part, I believe, to the literal inability of conventional Christianity (and by extension Judaism and Islam) to support a positive queer perspective in its theology. In addition, the “death” of God in Western secular culture, or at least the death of the traditional idea of God in our day to day experience, contributes to this estrangement.

In formulating an approach to queer theology, I try to impart the abiding truths of Christianity to this generation and in particular for future generations. I believe that the principle merit and usefulness of queer theology is its potential to satisfy the expectations for

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61 Significantly, Leslie Dewart in his PhD thesis, (University of Toronto, 1954), “Development of Karl Pearson’s Scientific Philosophy” quotes Pearson as seeking a “creed of life” through a philosophical outlook since the creeds of traditional religion had not been able to satisfy him.
change in the doctrine of the church concerning its understanding of human sexuality. In the meantime, a dehellenized philosophy, which is a prerequisite for my queer theology, may offer the faithful some consolation. My intent does not differ too greatly from that of Boethius (c. 480-524) who wrote a book entitled, On the Consolation of Philosophy. Boethius sought to answer religious questions without reference to Christianity, relying solely on natural philosophy and the Classical Greek tradition. (Where Boethius thought within the Greek philosophical tradition in seeking the harmony of faith and reason, I probe into the contemporary understanding of human consciousness.) The truths found in Christianity would be no different from the truths found in philosophy, he believed. I believe that the truth recognized through consciousness is the truth of Christianity.

No two theologians, gay or straight, construct their world views identically. Theological world views are always nuanced. Each individual person constructs a unique personal centre of meaning out of the experience of this world. According to John de Satgé theologians of the late 20th century have welcomed the humanitarian elements that have arisen within our secular world. John de Satgé notes thirteen themes arising within modernity that constitute an examination, in good conscience as it were, for interpretation concerning understanding for theologians. They are:

- Modern thought is superior to all past forms of understanding reality, and is therefore normative for Christian faith and life.
- Religious statements are totally independent of reasonable discourse.
- Religious language refers to human experience and nothing else, God being humanity’s noblest creation.
- Jesus can only be understood in terms of contemporary models of humanity.
- All religions are equally valid; the choice among them is not a matter of conviction about truth but only of personal preference or lifestyle.
- To realize one’s potential and to be true to oneself is the whole meaning of salvation.
• Since what is human is good, evil can be understood as failure to realize human potential.
• The sole purpose of worship is to promote individual self-realization and human community.
• Institutions and historical traditions are oppressive and inimical to our being truly human; liberation from them is required for authentic existence and authentic religion.
• The world must set the agenda for the Church. Social, political, and economic programs to improve the quality of life are ultimately normative for the Church’s mission in the world.
• An emphasis on God’s transcendence is at least a hindrance to, and perhaps incompatible with, Christian social concern and action.
• The struggle for a better humanity will bring about the Kingdom of God.
• The question of hope beyond death is irrelevant or at best marginal to the Christian understanding of human fulfillment.  

I encourage the reader to re-read these statements, if necessary, until the subtle point of re-examination is recognized.

To my mind, no absolute agreement or interpretive harmony should be presumed among theologians, queer or straight, concerning the interpretation of their experience. Interpretive harmony does not concern the uniformity or similarity of interpretation. The problem of interpretive harmony is the inability of contemporary experience, individual and collective, to be resolved by classical philosophy. This lack of resolution suggests that an alternative philosophy is needed. Historically, it is clear that to a great degree the failure of classical philosophy gave rise to the contemporary problem of interpretation. My resolution to this problem, with regard to human sexuality, is in accord with Ronald Long who wrote:

Barring the not very helpful approach of Plato…and whatever might be gleaned from the use of religious imagery in the tradition of romance, the resources of the Western tradition

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proffer precious little for those who would understand the spiritual dimensions of sex, for sustained phenomenological attention to sex remains one of the glaring lacunae in our inherited analysis. 63

Since queer theology is constructed within the sensus fidelium of the church, this presents a critical opportunity in which the community of faith, as well as myself, may grow in God’s grace. In constructing my theology, I realized that I needed to become an agent for change both within myself and in my environment. I cannot remain passive and accept uncritically the ideas and beliefs inherited from my past. The question has become how to construct a queer theology through satisfactory and contemporary concepts while being faithful to Christian (not current Magisterial) understanding.

In this regard the community of faith, on its part, can exercise a pastoral role regarding queerness, if it so chooses. How can queer theology be pastoral, one might ask? It is pastoral when:

1. In the way that it addresses the problems of a believer who is queer, offers moral advice and new solutions for self-acceptance in and by society.
2. In the way that it calls upon the foundational traditions about Jesus of Nazareth and how these ideas structure and enrich the variety of ways we in which live.
3. In the way that it makes a demand on the church to become further practically acculturated in postmodern society to queer issues while remaining faithful to the gospel.

10. NOW, IS THERE SIN IN QUEER CONSCIOUSNESS?

As a phenomenologist, I hold that philosophy can only analyze values that are present to consciousness. In presenting this essay I discuss values of which I have become conscious at some point in my life. I am aware that others, with similar experiences, may realize different values than I do even though our experiences may be very similar. My choice of values is eclectic in that I select examples from within the experience of my intellectual, social, historical and religious life.

To be humanly conscious of something is to have made a deliberate decision of some sort about it. Even if the decision is to ignore that decision. Recognizing that “conscience” and “consciousness” are related terms, I deliberately focus on values which supply the content for my conscience.\(^\text{64}\) “Conscience is not correctly explained by the assumption of innate moral ideas,” as Rudolf Hofmann has noted. But “its aim is the fullest possible exercise of conscientious decision, and therefore the opportunity of

adopting a personal point of view must not be taken away.” The philosophical significance of the moral value of one’s own decision is crucial to appreciating the arguments I set forth in this essay. In applying my understanding to a queer context, I draw heavily on Leslie Dewart’s philosophical investigations into consciousness and conscience. Dewart held that one’s understanding of morality arises from within a conscious experience of values and is not imposed externally by any agency or authority.

The moral value of one’s decision must alter one’s evaluation of sin, which I suggest is necessary if the conclusion to Alfonso Gómes-Rossi’s research is to be realized. In undertaking Queer Studies Gómes-Rossi concluded that “the best way to get the Church to accept gays and lesbians is using the argument that in essence gays and lesbians are born with those preferences.” And, being born with such preferences those “gays and lesbians that want to be accepted by the Catholic Church have attempted to find the answers that justify their homosexuality, with the hope of undermining the premise that they are acting sinfully” [my italics].

At present, my perspective is that in order to maintain the hope of “undermining the premise that they are acting sinfully” queer individuals will need to embrace a phenomenological philosophy in place of classical scholasticism. In so doing they may realize ultimately their particular goal of revising present theological thinking concerning the justification of their homosexual activity, i.e., that it is not sinful. Humans cause things to happen consciously or unconsciously. Humans act consciously with a goal in mind when they deliberately set in advance what they intend to attain as a practical or moral advantage. Infra-humans, that is, non-human animals also act but their goal is set for them by external

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circumstances which they cannot practically or morally alter. (Robins do not build eagles’ nests. The Inuit can, however, construct igloos or tents.) This is another way of saying that animals are exempt morally from deliberation and accountability, but humans are held to be deliberately accountable.

Western philosophy generally accepts that the traditional purpose of sexual activity is to produce new life in the form of future generations. According to traditional theologians and religious philosophers, sexual activity without this goal is a “death threat,” as it were, frustrating God’s purpose, and hence is sinful. Homosexual sexual activity cannot, of its nature, produce new life. As I see it, sexual sins (or frustrating God’s purpose) are the same for the homosexual and heterosexual. By way of example, anal sex (heterosexual or homosexual) like contraception, does not lead to new life. Yet, many liberated heterosexuals absolve themselves of guilt in this respect when considering the act consensual between partners and thus morally acceptable. To the contrary, from those same heterosexuals, I have heard the argument that homosexual anal sex is inherently unnatural and without any justifiable qualification. Clearly there is confusion in current moral thinking, or at least a double standard, among sexual partners concerning non-lifegiving sexual activity.

A sense of sin as “missing the mark” is revealed within the biblical perspective of sexual morality. Phenomenologically, moral knowledge as virtue, that is, “non-sin” is the adjusting from within the world of mere experience to a world of personal value. This adjustment is not imposed from outside the world of experience by any agency. Rather, it is necessitated internally within the agent him or herself. Often in adjusting to the world as it actually is, we humans “miss the mark” in making a moral decision. As humans we must adjust ourselves as agents within the world of which we are consciously aware and are a part. Morality, or moral knowledge, consists in assigning a human value to our actions. Scientists or technicians do not assign or determine human values, rather, philosophers determine and assign human values. In this sense, everyone is a philosopher. And therefore, there is a need for a new philosophy underpinning science and technology, plus all the social sciences which influence the course of events in our world.

Just as science and technology promote goals for physical
health; consciousness promotes values for moral (mental) health by distinguishing between what is sinful and what is not. We deem ourselves worthy or unworthy, in our own eyes, as we form our conscience. To act morally is a human skill exhibited to varying degrees by individuals, queer or straight. Hence, morality is not a static standard of the quality of human life determined by commandment or law. Rather, morality is a movement to what is “good” in human life (although not necessarily in the classical philosophical sense). Human consciousness discloses that there is an existential call (by way of evolution) to move from a morality of obedience (duty) to a morality of responsibility (initiative). In a morality of responsibility according to Dewart, “transcendence” understood as characterizing an agent, i.e., God, is optional. He writes:

But the fact that human life and behaviour do not have a transcendent value or fulfil a transcendent purpose hardly means that human beings can achieve nothing, or that our efforts cannot be evaluated as progressive or regressive in relation to the possibilities that are open to us as a result of our having evolved into experiencers who are conscious [Dewart’s italics].

If I have understood Dewart correctly, queer or straight, a morality of responsibility attaches to human consciousness.

From a moral perspective in the context of a queer consciousness there is need for a new philosophy of interpretation in the manner of, but not identical with, straight philosophy. The subsequent task for a queer theology then is to point to the malaise in the spiritual life that the queer individual suffers arising from some principles of straight theology. To the question: What is the task of the Catholic intellectual? Robert Barron replies, “It is to evangelize the mind, to speak of God’s noncompetitive transcendence, of the nonviolence of creation, of the God-given intelligibility of the real, of sin, death and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It is, in a word, to declare the truth in love.”  

For the believer, queer theology must

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offer words of hope showing that the malaise arising from a straight theology is an evil, and that freedom from this evil is attainable. Such theology would then overcome the limited understanding of straight theology which lacks queer acceptance. Or, expressed in another way, in light of this essay’s title, straight theology lacks acceptance of the queer sinner on a par with the straight sinner. To accept traditional theology as a fixed charter of doctrinal conservatism fearful of any change, would be a misreading of the nature of philosophy and theology, thus rendering a deficient understanding of sin.

however, I suggest that in his book Barron has failed to demonstrate this goal as applied to queer theology and it remains as a text of straight theology.
11. PHENOMENOLOGICAL THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY

Phenomenological theological inquiry concerns itself with physical existence and the theological metaphysics that has traditionally been described as the “Queen of the Sciences.” The question is no longer of theology being the queen of the other sciences, but whether the other sciences will accept her as their sister. The phenomenological theologian makes inquiries into the pre-reflective human understanding of the “natural man” who is similar to that noted by Tertullian (born 155/160 and died after 220) as untutored in Greek philosophy. It is to be remembered that all poets and artists inquire into the same phenomena of pre-reflective understanding. Theistic theology is arrived at by the phenomenological method of interpretation of the natural man which arises from an existential, not idealistic, attitude towards life. Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) was among the first to initiate existential inquiry into life, which other philosophers and theologians have followed.

Modernist theological thought developed within the theological hermeneutic in Europe and England about 1900 that viewed tradition and dogma as symbolic expressions of religious experience. Modernists insisted upon the importance of religious
phenomena as the starting point of a description of an occurrence in one’s experience. George Tyrrell (1861–1909) and Alfred Loisy (1857–1940) were significant representatives of Modernist thinking and their theological criticism consisted of evaluating the inherited symbolic expressions of religious interpretation of their time. Confronted with a modern world, which had evolved outside of Christianity, the official Catholic hierarchy eventually ceased to excommunicate those who held alternative views and began trying to understand them. Modernist theologians, in contrast to classical theologians, wanted to follow the thinking of the creative Western philosophers who sought a ressourcement, a return to the sources of revelation and tradition. Such was George Tyrrell’s and Alfred Loisy’s intent and experience. As a practical return to the sources of revelation and tradition, the interpretation of ressourcement reflects their era and the thrust of their thinking. However, in Tyrrell’s thinking there was one important note of difference. Rather than expect the Church to embrace science, history and change accordingly, Tyrrell expected science and history to embrace Revelation through the Church and develop accordingly in the light of Christ. Tyrrell and Loisy lived in a new age of Catholic theological thinking inaugurated by Leo XIII. According to Philip Hughes, Leo XIII was a pope, supremely gifted in political understanding and in the diplomatic approach. Further, he was a traditionalist and a conservative who thought in modern terms and spoke in the modern idiom. His reign was the beginning of a new age of Catholic history, the one in which we live, and is only beginning to be apparent to us.  

Today, to my mind, many Catholic Christians remain at the beginning stage of Tyrrell’s spiritual liberation, that is, at the initial stages of theological liberation introduced by the modern world. These initial stages signal the beginning of a significant shift that needs to be popularized and rendered serviceable to believing individuals in contemporary society. For this shift to be serviceable to believing individuals it must confirm the faith and, to be serviceable to theologians it must satisfactorily interpret the faith.

Within the Anglican tradition Modernist theologians are known

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as “modern churchmen” and the most influential among them were H. D. A. Major (1871–1961) and W. R. Inge (1860–1954). Large numbers of these churchmen regarded the claims of Christianity as inconsistent with modern ways of thought. Phrases like the “Fatherhood of God,” “salvation through Christ” and “life after death” seemed like meaningless platitudes to them. In short, new theological understandings were required which were intended to prepare the way for the future of belief. Thus, within the Anglican communion, theological thinking took on a new philosophical form of existential phenomenology.

To this effect a Roman Catholic lay theologian, Leslie Dewart (1922–2009) inquired into the dehellenization of doctrine and dogma through a critical philosophical approach to theological reconstruction. Dehellenization, as an effort at theological reconstruction, is a philosophical phenomenological interpretive activity, which replaces the classical philosophical method of interpretation. Dehellenization is a new threshold of conscious activity that has arisen within phenomenological theology. However, some contemporary Western philosophical thinkers discount dehellenization. And as a result, many believers miss the opportunity to engage the new threshold of theological inquiry that the Modernist movement has initiated.

Due to classical philosophy, theoretical theological questions and answers have come to be determined within a fixed idea of nature and of being. The notion of a contingent relationship, as anything but accidental, is impossible to conceive in classical philosophy. Moreover, the classical understanding of truth expressed in theoretical terms has become so fixed in a particular form of philosophical expression that, in the popular mind, that particular form is perceived to be as valid as the truth. Philosophers and theologians not aware of this aberration, in which the means have become equivalent to the ends, as it were, make interpretive mistakes. Such fixity of expression is not a problem within a phenomenological understanding. In phenomenological understanding concepts have no independent existence apart from the consciousness of the individual and thus there is no opportunity for them to become fixed. The fixed expression of truth does, however, remain a problem for scholastic philosophers and theologians. This problem is not reserved to the discipline of
philosophy. This same problem of fixed expression has developed in the modern scientific disciplines and is readily evident in psychology. The new threshold of understanding presented within phenomenological theology describes a relational and dynamic conception of truth that has replaced the fixed idea of truth.

A critical interpretation of history shows that philosophical schools of thought are related and do not come into being independently of each other. Phenomenologists in giving a description of a dynamic and relational conception of truth, in contrast to the scholastic static conception of truth, understand existence as a becoming and understand unity as relational. These dynamic notions of becoming and unity, theologically understood, are rooted in the philosophy of the Modernist era. But, as well, these notions of becoming and unity are recognized in poetry. Thus, within a phenomenological perspective, they may be philosophically or poetically understood. Each is a legitimate mode, though different, of the interpretation of human experience.
12. A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

A phenomenological philosophical perspective discloses the presence of God in my life through practical and ethical behaviour. Such a perspective discloses not only how correctly I understand my thoughts but also how authentically I implement them in practice. I realize that not all scholars accept the phenomenological approach to experience as one that clarifies. To some scholars the phenomenological method obscures more than clarifies. In my philosophical contemplation, I have come to realize that there is a unity constituted as me, the contemplating subject, and “the other,” as either an object (concrete or notional) or as another contemplating subject. Even given this realization of unity my contemplation is still often plagued by the scholasticism which has introduced a formal dichotomy into the structure of my philosophical understanding. That is to say that within the scholastic perspective I had been thinking about God, while outside God, rather than thinking about God while being within God. God and I are not separate entities any more than life and I are separate entities. Thus, in phenomenological understanding I interpret my experience as occurring in a non-dichotomous life-world and within the presence of God, that is to say, as distinguished from, but not separate from, God.

In my phenomenological understanding something other than
mere *intellectual* change occurs in my thinking. A change in my *consciousness* takes place. Within my phenomenological understanding there is a re-structuring in the relationship between me and the other, the “not-me.” I am now conscious of the other from a different perspective. That is, I understand the other, the object of my consciousness, not via a Platonic ideal, but as a product of intentionality. That is, through intentionality I assign meaning to others and myself within a subjective interpretation of my life-world. This subjective assignment does not, of necessity, conform to the static norms I formerly used to interpret my experience in a classical manner. Rather, this subjective assignment is expressed through an active process of conscious differentiation that defines what it means for me “to be.”

From a religious perspective I have often noticed that when old gods die people do not generally turn to atheism. They invent new gods, even secular ones. However, their inventions do not always prove satisfactory. What may prove satisfactory, however, in place of the invention of new gods, is a phenomenological religious understanding that re-interprets the old gods, as it were. In short, the old gods require a re-interpretation, not as they exist in themselves, but as an interpretation of the relationships between them and believers that lead to new consciously creative insights. That is to say, new posthuman patterns of thought must be created by those faced with new experiences of themselves to meet the challenge of the present-day. John Kersey makes this same point within the context of non-traditional online education.

Teaching online means that, in an economic, time-efficient and resource-efficient manner, the benefits of the tutorial system can be realized. The skills needed of faculty are now more than merely operating software and marketing work; there is need to comprehend the needs of the environment of distance learning and to respond to it with understanding. It is here that the experience of faculty who have themselves studied via distance learning and who are aware of its challenges is valuable.  

During the time of the theologian George Tyrrell (1861-1909) a

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trend away from professional theologians only serving the doctrinal and dogmatic needs of the Church began. This new trend was a turn towards a modern scientific religious philosophy as a methodology for addressing the existential needs of the individual believer. As the believer’s scientific needs were being addressed, August Sabatier could write from the Protestant perspective: “The present condition for theology is whether it may achieve a place in the consecrated choir of modern sciences, or whether it will be shut out for want of any common interest with them.” 71 This trend proved to be only minimally successful due to a lack of interest from the mainstream established churches. Its limited success, to my mind, was due to the failure of the churches to renew philosophy as a discipline within the Western context. In the Roman tradition, the Magisterium continued to adhere to the classical perspective. In 1968, Roderick Mackenzie in an address to a Theological Congress in honour of Canada’s centenary wrote:

At times, biologists, paleontologists, sociologists, psychologists, may have contributions to make of very great importance to the magisterium: if not directly, as expounding truths of faith, still indirectly, as warning of the existence of new problems, which may oblige to a re-examination of traditional teachings, or of traditional ways of expressing them” [my italics]. 72 Mackenzie’s observation was not given credence by the Magisterium. Could this be because from the Magisterium’s perspective at the time no renewal was needed?

Some academics might counter my point by citing the renewal of philosophical thought taking place within certain Western universities at the beginning of the 21st Century. However, from an ecclesial perspective it appears to me that no significant advancement towards posthuman thinking has been achieved as yet. The perspective reflected in the Decree on the Training of Priests, that identified the place of classical philosophy in the Church’s

71 Sabatier, Auguste (1897:345) Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion: Based on Psychology and Religion George H. Doran.
Magisterial tradition, remains the preferred interpretive approach. “Philosophical subjects should be taught in such a way that students are first of all gradually led to a solid and coherent knowledge of human nature, the world and God, guided by the philosophical tradition of lasting value” [my italics]. 73 “The philosophical tradition of lasting value” is classical philosophy which is rooted in scholasticism and remains to a great extent the formal presentation by the Church’s Magisterium, but not necessarily the expression of the community of believers, the sensus fidelium. Today, there is need to establish a philosophy that will be suitable for addressing the expression of the meaning of life arising from humanity-as-a-subject within creation, and not humanity-as-an-object of creation. That is to say, humanity is not merely a part of creation but humanity, as an agent, co-creates itself within the cosmos. In the contemporary religious climate, I detect a renewed interest in the human individual as a person, in philosophy, theology and psychology. And, as such, the person may be appropriately understood from a posthuman perspective, which views these three disciplines not so much as merely academic disciplines, but as legitimate human activities seeking after wisdom and not bound by any particular intellectual heritage.

History shows that much expanding of human understanding or philosophical advancement in theistic philosophy has been the work, not of ecclesiastical theologians, but of faithful individuals whose role was sometimes in opposition to the ecclesiastical Magisterium. These individuals often intended to correct or modify the formal teaching of the Church. The very foundation of humanism, based on a pre-modern classical anthropology, has been questioned from within posthuman philosophical thinking. What the most appropriate response should be to this questioning presents itself as a significant philosophical question for our time. If speaking of God really means that I am at the same time saying something meaningful about myself, then thinking about God in the philosophical categories that belong to an earlier stage of human experience are simply not satisfactory. The secular character of posthuman thinking notwithstanding, I continue to identify the

Church as an advantageous *locus* for my contemplation of God. I say this in deference to the claim of the divine guarantee of God’s incarnation given within Christian revelation, but phenomenologically understood. As a matter of philosophical conviction, I do accept that there are epistemological limits to Catholicism as a classical ideology, but not to Catholicity as a phenomenological notion. In my estimation, Catholicism is limited by Hellenic idealistic philosophy, whereas Catholicity is free from such constraints. 74

Humanity searches for a better world but often does so without seeking a better philosophical explanation of its experience of that which is divine in the world than the explanation it has inherited. In my experience, I have recognized that an evolutionary concept of nature is in the process of replacing a static concept of nature. This presents new problems for my philosophy, theology and psychology and calls for a new analysis and interpretation. 75 That being the case, to my mind, the solutions arrived at through classical philosophy must be replaced by new solutions interpreted phenomenologically. Historical study is most profitable in helping me account for how I arrived at my present philosophical understanding. Recognizing that my thinking has evolved was a significant discovery in my philosophical career. Within this evolution, I have replaced the concept of *being* with the notion of *coming-into-being*, understood “as the emergence of something which is not ultimately reducible to its antecedents.” 76 (Henri Bergson’s (1859-1941) insights in *Creative Evolution* come to mind

74 Had Charles Davis (1923-1999) understood this distinction, he may have concluded his reflections differently than he did in his *A Question of Conscience* Hodder & Stoughton 1967.


Further, my mind as it emerges from the complexity of experience, continually modifies and develops itself. Correspondingly, then, I modify and develop my philosophical, theological and psychological points of view which interpenetrate each other.

Within our Western culture there is a sense that human beings are destined for a higher life. To be sure, the destiny of a higher life, or higher purpose in life, originates in this world, not outside of this world. Even so, as a philosophical concern this higher purpose has a theological dimension in my life-world. And as a theologian I can never complete my interpretive task. I need to perpetually embrace a philosophy that will suitably support the expression of my theological understanding of God’s presence within the ecclesia and within my life-world. Obtaining knowledge philosophically, through the activity of phenomenological human thinking, is a natural activity not to be confused with the act of faith. They are not identical, but related phenomena. No particular philosophy is required to qualify or express my faith. Although, with the papal encyclical Humani Generis of Pope Pius XII (1950), such a requirement was the case. Today, more than a few philosophers and theologians see the comment of Pope John Paul II in Vetitatis Splendor as an advancement in Magisterial thinking: “Certainly the Church’s Magisterium does not intend to impose upon the faithful any particular theological system, still less a philosophical one.”

All philosophy is certainly culturally contextualized, yet phenomenological philosophy does not conform to a given logistics of knowledge or fixed methodology. Phenomenology is a non-scholastic philosophical interpretation of experience. Shadows in the Cave: A Phenomenological Approach to Literary Criticism Based on Hispanic Texts, by Mario Valdés is an example of the flexibility of the phenomenological attitude.

Reflecting on the existential situation in which I find myself, I

77 An insight he had was that in emergent evolution the human mind arises within physical matter that has attained a certain complexity of organization. This is not to say, however, that the complexity of physical matter causes the mind. Complexity enables the mind to appear.

78 Vetitatis Splendor (1993, para. 29).

79 1982 University of Toronto Press.
readily recognize, as a critical thinker, that Christianity has no cosmology of its own. But, pagan religious traditions, unlike the Christian traditions, do have their sacred cosmological mythologies and legends which account for a particular understanding of their religious experience. Paganism has no fixed creed of belief. Nor does paganism have heroes, and public figures similar to Christian martyrs who give up their lives for a moral commandment. A revealed sense of the holy or sacred as a prior condition for faith to be theologically interpreted is required, however, as given in the three monotheistic traditions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This revealed sense is not found in pagan religious traditions.

The experience of an increasing number of Western theologians is that Christian theology suffers from a reliance on an outdated theoretical epistemology in interpreting the faith. They believe theology ought to undertake a contemporary philosophical approach and subscribe to a philosophy of “being-becoming” as opposed to a philosophy of only “being.” Phenomenology is a “being-becoming” philosophy.

Phenomenological philosophy does not re-present things but is capable of disclosing a dynamic “present presence” that realizes that which is divine in one’s experience. In my phenomenological disclosure (or realization) of this presence, by which I mean God, I recognize the other as “not-me” and as an encounter with that which limits me. This new methodological attitude in my thinking requires deliberate cultivation. In thinking phenomenologically, I assign meaning to the concrete connections between myself and others. But these are not connections of a classical sort, but are relations of a posthuman sort that have religious significance for me. My connections have, in fact, become relationships.

I accept that a sufficient degree of organic complexity, through evolution (and without ascertaining the cause of this evolutionary complexity), has allowed my mind to appear which, in turn, allows me to demonstrate that I think consciously and purposefully. Thinking consciously and purposefully has led me to the awareness that God alone is not responsible for everything any more. I have a particular role in the philosophical interpretation of my experience. This particular role allows me to conceive myself as a co-responsible participant and co-creator agent in my culture and society. Given this status I am able to effectively work towards...
building the kingdom of God on earth which more faithfully discloses the presence of God. I ask, as a believer, philosopher and theologian, in what sense and with what consequences is God present to me? I must determine an answer philosophically and subsequently express it theologically. In the development of my Christian posthuman theism, God’s presence to me is a matter of experiential fact, not one of metaphysical necessity. In short, God’s presence to me is revealed, not out of necessity, but out of an unnecessary love for me, originating a parte Dei.

My human way of being, my identity, is constituted through my consciousness which signifies me uniquely to myself and to others. Thus, for me to be a subject, that is, an identifiable person, is also to be a particular object for others as well as myself. I do not understand my objectivity to others as fixed in relation to an external other, a “not-me.” My objectivity to others is a manifestation of my fluid personality at any given stage of development in my evolution. As a person facing the future I consciously strive to evolve beyond my present personal identity. As a Christian, if I look at the world and interpret my experience through Hellenic eyes, I am obliged to look to the past and am confined to a re-presentation of my past in my present experience. In looking to the past as a Hellenist, I am required to accept the power of God over me. Thus, being focused on the past, I remain a creature with no opportunity to evolve to a co-creator status. However, phenomenologically understood through a dehellenized understanding, the God beyond me in whose presence I am does not have absolute power over me in any classical sense. Rather, God’s power is shared with me as co-creator — me having been made in God’s image and likeness. 80 The fundamental relation between God and me consists, not in a hierarchical relationship of power, but in the mutual presence of God and me in a conscious unity within creation wherein I participate in divine creativity. As I dehellenize my Christian theism my faith is reformulated and the meaning of religion is re-expressed in terms that do not imply God’s absolute power over me, nor is any inordinate submission to God implied.

In late Modernity rapid technological advances have limited the

80 I mean “co-creator” in the sense of homo faber (man who makes from preexisting matter); not homo creator (man who makes from no-thing).
opportunities for ecclesiastical influence in the lives of the faithful who live in a secular and Westernized culture. This limited opportunity on behalf of the ecclesiastical authorities requires a corresponding change in philosophical language. The Internet is a case in point. With the advent of the Internet a new ideology (virtual reality), not merely a new technology, is in the process of being developed through the advance of techno-digital knowledge. At this point in its history the notion of the virtual community may seem to suggest a negative ideology that is potentially a threat to the person. The Internet appears to be a de-personalizing forum in the sense that it has no need for physical, that is, embodied contact among those who use it. In the Internet virtual community there is no possibility of an incarnation such as constitutes physical human relationships in the temporal world of experience. The virtual community is a simulated computerized version of existence, that presents many philosophical and theological challenges to understanding ourselves as incarnated individuals bound within time. To my mind, a non-incarnated, digital relationship, misconceived as authentic existence, cannot reflect any true human community or society since the simulation engineered by virtual decision-makers is not that of actual beings, but “avatars.” The inordinate and uncritical use of Internet technology may engender, as it were, incompetent, non-humanized, un-incarnated entities known as avatars which represent the “absence” of the concrete human being. In short, secularization has imposed a new ideology upon us.

I wondered if posthuman techno-digital philosophy might provide a reliable methodology for the understanding of the future of theistic belief. I had been taught throughout my academic formation that a Christian humanism provided a reliable philosophical approach for past generations, however, it no longer does so. Science had been suggested to me as the better approach to

81 Adolfs (1966:85) notes this negative aspect occurring through secularization (not secularism). Secularization “is an ideology which leads us towards a ‘better future’ but which does not care to know whether man really has a destiny or not. ... The ideology of secular society therefore aims to deaden our deepest restlessness.” For a developed distinction between secularization and secularism the reader might consult the works of Gregory Baum (1923-2017).
answer my questions — science being but a different type of philosophy. Somewhat of late, however, I have re-focused my attention and abandoned pursuing modern scientific questions concerning theistic belief. To my mind, attempts at seeking to prove, through modern scientific efforts, that God exists are futile. In my experience, these attempts by modern science via physical evidence told me nothing of God. As I see it today, the task of the existential theologian is not to look for an opportunity to prove a doctrinal point or reconcile the tension between religion and modern science. Rather, the existential theologian’s task is to express and clarify, within a posthuman philosophical understanding, the experience of faith in light of scripture and tradition, the two modes of revelation.

Initially, when undertaking philosophical contemplation, I found myself in an existential situation that I did not make or design but had inherited. I also knew that I could not stop the continual evolution of my philosophical contemplation. I am personally involved in its transformation, and the question has become to what degree will I influence that evolution. As a Western Christian, I live within that anxiety and tension which accompany the end of conventional humanism as I understand it. But within this tension, signaling the end of conventional humanism for me, I see indications of a new beginning leading to a new future. These indications are marked by the beginning of a philosophical dehellenization in my thinking. Such posthuman philosophical dehellenized thinking enables me to consciously create the future of my theistic belief. As a thinker, I have no unique philosophical system of my own, but rely on the perspectives of an identifiable community of thinkers. Thus, my philosophical contemplation arises within that community of thinkers, yet is subjectively my own.

Looking optimistically to the future, a phenomenological

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82 William James observes the same phenomenon from his philosophical perspective. “Originality cannot be expected in a field like this, where all the attitudes and tempers that are possible have been exhibited in literature long ago, and where any new writer can immediately be classed under a familiar head.” James classified himself as a supernaturalist of the ‘crasser type.’ *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* Modern Library Paperbacks (2002:565).
theology (a posthuman dehellenized philosophy of God) presents a perspective that may bring about an end to the antithesis between Rome and the Reformation. Thus, a new posthuman Christian outcome may be neither Roman nor Reformed. I find this an exciting philosophical and theological possibility. Contemporary theological thought (heralding posthuman thought?) has the capacity to become an autonomous philosophy, free from ecclesiastical regulation, as a foundation for theology within a Catholic context. 83

13. VIDEO GAMING NEEDS A HUMANIZING PHILOSOPHY

This essay does not look at gaming from the perspective of the players (consumers), nor the (product) manufacturers, nor the social scientist (observers/assessors of the phenomenon). Rather it assesses the phenomenon of video gaming from a critical philosophical perspective. This is an academic study intended to throw a critical light on an activity that has become a trendy pastime for certain individuals regardless of their cultural context, Western or Eastern. Admittedly, this is a subjective study, not an analytical one. Although written from within the Western philosophical tradition, it is phenomenological philosophy, not classical philosophy that frames the issue.

Video games are diverse. They have evolved as a human leisure activity with the input of the humans who have invented them. In this sense, from a philosophical perspective, they may be considered to be a posthuman phenomenon. In this essay I comment on the evolution of gaming as a physical product (a concrete phenomenon) and the games’ invisible product (a metaphysical phenomenon) recognized within the human mind. I undertake this assessment in
light of a critical consciousness as suggested by Leslie Dewart. 84 Like one’s belief in God, contemporary video games have “come of age,” as it were, as the generations which played them in their youth have “come of age.” Brendan Keogh notes: “Video games have learned what it means to actually engage with political and societal themes on a deep level not through the technological marvels of the commercial industry but the small, personal titles developed at the industry’s margins…” [Keogh’s italics]. 85 He writes metaphorically, or more like a sociologist than a philosopher. Humans, not games, actually learn to engage life politically and socially.

A limitation in understanding video gaming from a philosophical point of view is that some critics limit their assessment to consumer logic. They do not consider larger philosophical or sociological context. Confining assessment to consumer logic limits any evolution to alternative options in understanding gaming. It also limits the understanding of any humanizing or dehumanizing effects the activity has upon the person. As a nebulous academic field at present, video gaming needs a philosophical interpretation to characterize its presence as something more than merely trendy and, to prevent a less than adequate journalistic style of assessment that is characteristic of much contemporary academia. Further an interdisciplinary study of gaming is not tantamount to a philosophical perspective in which the disparate perspective to interdisciplinary study may complement each discipline leading to new insights. As a philosopher I prefer a disciplined (logical and reasoned) philosophical approach leading to an in depth understanding of the entire phenomenon. In other words, a phenomenological philosophical approach to gaming does not result in an increase in understanding by adding more of the same knowledge of varying perspectives on a theme. Rather, phenomenological philosophers (posthuman) seek a deeper consciousness of a single theme whose content adds substance and value to human life. In short, a quality vs quantity interpretation.

Unfortunately, gaming’s roots are in science fiction and this

85 Beyond the Sea p. xi
seems to have escaped many authors who write about gaming as if it were a physical fact reflecting reality. Science fiction is not a physical reality, but a meta-physical notion, i.e., a product of the mind. This supposed reality of the games lies in the player’s consciousness, not in the player’s sensible experience. One might view notional activity as taking place in the “theatre of the mind” and, as such, not a true experience. The ancient Hellenic philosophers were correct in making a distinction between the physical and meta-physical, I believe. Although, many contemporary Western philosophers in their thinking fail to correctly appreciate the historical traces of this philosophical distinction by the Greeks. Such lack of historical appreciation may lead some academics to emphasize the production of games as an art form and, subsequently forget they are the product of the techno-digital world of their human manufacturers.

Another reason for suggesting that video gaming needs philosophy is that quantity, not quality, has influence the development of the games. This has not necessarily helpful in determining correct set of human values which is a long-held purpose of philosophy. Philosophy can provide a gentle re-focusing away from the (commercial) motives assigned by Felan Parker and Jessica Aldred which I think are not-so-important reasons when it comes to determining human values. Concerning Bioshock they write: “This is not just a game with something to say, but a game worth saying something about — a game that justifies the whole enterprise of game criticism and scholarship. … [And] because of its status as a consumer entertainment object produced and promoted in a hypercapitalist industry and played by millions … it has invited such sustained discussion.” 86 To my mind, being played by millions should invite discussion on human values appropriate to a posthuman context in preference to mere gaming entertainment. I do admit that as a philosopher who has never played video games, my perspective on the phenomenon lacks a direct experience of gaming. What I offer is some insight into the Western philosophical wisdom of those who have contemplated what it means to be human or non-human since the days that philosophy evolved from its folklore status. To the scrutinizing of video gaming through the

86 Beyond the Sea p. 12
lenses of gender, sexuality, race, class, power and identity, I would add the practice of a unifying (humanizing) philosophy.

The content of video games is often subversive in light of traditional human values. The individual is often pitted against the collective and, often uses his or her personal experience drawn from the experiential world for use it in the “virtual” world. The transfer makes for a poor fit. Video games do not set the “first person shooter” as a real living person, but set the player as a sophisticatedly computerized robot encoded with the manufacturer’s values. This raises the issue of a human (i.e., living) “player choice” on the part of the shooter within the contrived and limitedly programmed (i.e., non-living) context of the game. Some critics argue that new techno-digital inventions extend the human experience. This is correct, but there is still the need for an interpretation of the human experience on the part of the human being which differs from the scoring on the part of the game designers. The need for philosophical interpretation gives rise to the question of eisegesis vs exegesis. From what I read in current studies about gaming, most authors practice a form of eisegesis, that is, they read (individual) meaning into game studies, rather than perform a critical philosophical exegesis of the (collective) significance of game studies to understand the underlying assumptions and ideologies of the game.

From a philosophical perspective, video gaming themes often reflect the process where a utopian context becomes a dystopian context where individuals strive for personal gain to the exclusion of altruistic fulfillment. This is not new. It is the story of humanity from the earliest recorded history. Which means that the authors of the games manufacture the pattern of the game to fit the demographic they themselves fit into. In short, like all fiction, game themes are contextualized which may account for their popularity with journalists (as opposed to artists) in contemporary Western culture. But journalists are not philosophers. They are reporters and any attempt by journalists to act as analysts of games to reveal a cultural problematic of human values across media will, at best, achieve a superficial, and trendy outcome.

Some authors draw upon the insight that players beginning a new video game begin a “new life,” as it were, which is similar to humans who are physically born into this life. Both start on
unknown territory and there are “life” lessons to be learned. The difference with gaming, when compared to reading a piece of literature, is that there are two agents involved in gaming. One the (active-agent) player and the other the (mechanized-agent) game, acts as a pseudo “other” in the drama of life. One is alive and one is not. In reading a piece of literature there is only one active agent in the process with a consciousness that is appropriately deepened or expanded in the art of reading. The literature plays no active role. The whole drama and any “lesson in life” learned is played out in the reader’s consciousness. This is the more appropriate humanizing approach to learning about human values in life which need further philosophical contemplation. Thus, the conclusion that “Game players, over time, build trust with the game and its designer because they receive the necessary information, feedback, and nudges to succeed,” has possible satisfactory application within a virtual world but limited application to human life in the existential world. An increase in the sophistication of the game or the player does not move the experience from a quantitative to a qualitative one.

The tension within the gaming experience may be identified as the manufacture’s desire to constrain and protect the game experience for the player and, at the same time, allow the player to participate within the game as co-creator. The manufacturer wants the player to return to the game. Ultimately, the player may become a hero in the virtual world, but not necessarily so in the real world. The theatre of experience has become, once again, the ancient Hellenic one of the physical and the meta-physical.

Philosophically, gaming has not so much to do with its content as with its phenomenological presence in the existential life of the player. The content of the manufactured games most often includes variations on the existential real-life themes of war, politics, parenting, family bonds, sexuality, slavery, technologization, social engineering, etc. — all issues arising in this world and not in any external other world. In other words, through a fiction, (a meta-physical notion) the games purport to critique social conventions but only through their imagined structures offering a “two-agent” experience. (Literature offers a “one-agent” experience.) Is gaming a posthuman meta-physical phenomenon which contrasts itself to

87 Beyond the Sea p. 83
the traditional Hellenic meta-physical ideology of the West? The acceptance of the computer as another agent in one’s life might suggest so. Further, the notion of the computer as agent suggests a different kind of self-awareness (self-consciousness) on the part of the human player which accounts for the perpetual re-definition of the human subject (player). But whatever the definition of the human being, who reacts to the computer programme behind the game, the game-world exists only as the user activates its computerized programme and thus engages and participates in its computations. In this type of participation players do as they are told they do not do as they please. One great lesson to be learned is that players must come to recognize that their role in the game in fact defines them in both real-time reality and virtual reality. This becomes a new problem for the player in real-time reality when a human subject replaces the computer.

The whole experience of gaming is a meta-physical enterprise undertaken as a contemporary needs-fulfillment of the person who no longer wants to live in a classical age and escapes into the imagination.
14. THE POINT OF DEPARTURE FOR A FUTURE OF BELIEF

The title, “The Point of Departure for a Future of Belief,” identifies George Tyrrell’s contribution to my theological and spiritual development. Can metaphysics present a reliable point of departure for a future of belief, I had asked myself? I had been taught, throughout my academic formation, that it can. Is science a better approach? I wondered. Could science be but a different type of philosophy rather than the non-philosophical discipline many understand it to be? Many contemporary thinkers accept that science has dethroned religion. And thus, in the realm of knowledge, religion for them, enjoys little more than a folklore status, as an uncritical mythology. Leslie Dewart’s D.Th. thesis entitled “Development of Karl Pearson’s Scientific Philosophy,” which he defended in 1954 at the University of Toronto, I found the beginning of an answer to my questions. Dewart wrote:

The question is…that science has done away with the worn-out, outmoded forms of religion, and yet has done nothing to fill the vacuum it has created. For man, by his very nature, needs a religion yet, after the advent of science, nothing has come along to fill this need. The dilemma of science and religion is not then
to be solved by a choice between the two, but by the harmony and integration of both.

I suggest that the harmony of religion and science may be achieved in answering the question, “what is man, or, what is humanity?” To this question I answer that humanity, or the human being, is a creature that can approach God. Is the better approach to God through religion or through science, I wondered, each of which describes the human condition? Or, is the better approach to God through a unity of both understood as to reveal the participation of God in the human context? This, to my mind, is the central problem of contemporary Western philosophy as a foundation for theology. The tension between religion and science began shortly after the fall of Constantinople when Greek literature introduced into the Latin world a new critical way of thinking that was not disposed to the acceptance of uncontested philosophical opinion. This new way of thinking ultimately led to modern science. Modern science is concerned with the accuracy of the application of its finding to the practical life. Within the Catholic philosophical tradition, ethics is associated with human practical life, that is, with what humans are or are not to do. Thus, scientific investigation has an ethical aspect.

However, science cannot answer the “why” question in interpreting the experience of deliberate movement in organic growth, i.e., the person. Science merely puts human experience in order, or which is the same, explains the “how” of movement. Thus, science is one method of approaching human experience. Other methods of approach exist, as well, i.e., the philosophical, the metaphysical, the poetic and the mythical, but only science gives knowledge through the classification of human experience. There can be no true knowledge, in this view, only data collection. Knowledge is a product of the human mind, not merely observation. In short, unless there is a “knower” there is no “known.” It is theoretically possible for there to be an “unknown reality” however, incapable of being known by a human being. That being the case one must remain agnostic concerning knowledge of this reality.

Science, when it looks to the past is a description, when it looks to the future it is a belief. It is never an explanation that answers the “why” question. In the Western context, until the Age of the Enlightenment, knowledge was ultimately directed towards religious ends, that is, philosophy was to serve theology. Today,
however, for modern science to fulfill its proper role it must be free of religious or theological methodologies that are not true to the norms of the scientific methodology.

Reconstruction of Western theism is a theological process that characterizes the modern era and beyond. Many of the issues raised in this process remain unresolved, or even misunderstood, which accounts for much indifference in Western theology. My point of departure for a future of belief, has its roots in the *Nouvelle Théologie* which came to prominence in the mid-20th Century in France. Taking my queue from this *Nouvelle Théologie*, I abandoned the scholastic approach and embraced a phenomenological approach in which I explored the reconstruction of Western theism in light of George Tyrrell’s theological insights. To aid the reader in understanding my perspective I cite the historical understanding outlined by Alexander Dru in his *The Contribution of German Catholicism*. His historical understanding of the theological developments as they unfolded in Germany and France provide, in my opinion, a basis for a future of Western theistic belief. He writes:

The last act of the reign of Pius IX began with a double event: the declaration of infallibility, and the loss of the Papal States; on the one hand the affirmation of the spiritual power, on the other the collapse of the temporal power. In terms of foreign policy this meant a state of open conflict between Church and State, more violent in France but better known under the name it received in Germany, the *Kulturkampf*. The limits had been reached: the policy of relying on the “thesis” [that Christendom still existed] could not have been carried further, and Leo XIII turned to the “hypothesis” [the self-criticism of religious motives]. This does not mean that the acts of his pontificate were inconsistent with those of Pius IX. Leo’s aim was that of his predecessor: to maintain the claims of the papacy, and if possible, to extend its power. The thesis was not for one instant lost to sight, and until the year of his death Leo XIII thought in terms of pope and emperor, of Christendom. But by temperament, training and experience he was a diplomat, and in the place of open conflict he desired not merely co-existence but collaboration as implied by the Concordats. … For in the situation as it now existed, it was becoming increasingly clear
that the choice was no longer between conservative and liberal Catholicism, but between accepting the situation and rejecting it – between opposing it (on the grounds of the thesis, or hypothesis) or accepting it: between political Catholicism and religious Catholicism.

For the first time the seriousness of the position in which the Church found itself was being taken seriously. In the place of the customary lamentations about “the evils of the age,” which placed the whole responsibility for the decline of religion and the dechristianization of France on the Revolution and its consequences, on the Freemasons and the Republic, the grave weaknesses within the Church were taken into account and the salutary principle of self-criticism was applied by a few. Moreover, this was done, not from a political point of view, and in pursuance of immediate political results, but from religious motives. What followed was not a change of policy, but a revolution, which has little to do with the ‘liberal Catholicism’ of Lamennais, Lacordaire and Montalembert. Furthermore, it was not conducted by politicians, or by men interested in the main in social and political questions, but by philosophers and poets, by historians and men of letters. … This was the real, cultural background to the failures of the nineteenth century, which self-criticism revealed. Since the seventeenth century the Church in France had relied on political power and influence, wherever possible silencing opposition, and finally isolating itself from the nation. Since the end of the seventeenth century Catholicism had abandoned the cultural sphere for the political in which it was possible for a time to maintain the ‘thesis’ that Christendom still existed, and consequently it had ceased to be a missionary Church inside Europe, hoping to preserve a static position, its ‘power,’ by making Concordats the basis of its policy. … This attitude cut the Church off and isolated it, and its authoritarianism became a sort of caricature of spiritual authority.

The ‘crisis’ of which Blondel wrote was caused by the unavoidable reversal of the Roman policy, necessitated by the situation which could now no longer be denied. This reversal was finally and officially proclaimed by the Lateran Treaty, and by the condemnation of political Catholicism under the name of
the *Action française* in 1926. The aims set before the present Council [Vatican II] by John XXIII are those which emerge naturally in the new situation: both *ecumenism* and *aggiornamento* imply the abandonment of power in favour of a purely religious policy. It is often implied or asserted that the ‘crises’ which began in 1890 and exploded during the pontificate of Pius X centred on the Modernist controversy. That was no doubt the impression given at the time, and moreover it suited the *Action française* and its supporters in France and in Rome (of whom Cardinal Merry del Val was the most important) to make the problems raised by the Modernists the central questions. This distracted attention from the political issues, and moreover it made it possible to stamp any form of opposition to political Catholicism as ‘Modernism.’ But in retrospect (and without for a moment minimizing the importance of Modernism) Claudel’s diagnosis points to the central issue: the crisis was the ‘tragedy of a starved imagination’ – or, in Blondel’s terms, the tragedy of the ‘whole man’ *le tout de l’homme*, cut off from the cultural sphere. It is of course possible to write the history of the period in negative terms, to group events and interpret them as a series of heretical movements – in the social sphere the *Sillon* condemned in 1909; in the theological sphere Modernism, condemned in 1907; in the philosophical Laberthonièrère’s condemnation in 1913. And this has been so effectively that the real leaders of the Catholic Renaissance, the creative writers and thinkers and historians have been ignored or treated in isolation. But if instead of rehearsing the mistakes or possible mistakes which were made, the positive achievement of the period is taken as the criterion, the work of Blondel, Péguy, Bremond, Claudel and others stands out in its real proportions. It then becomes possible to see that Claudel was right in saying that the ‘crisis’ had culminated in the nineteenth century, and that the ‘crisis’ which occurred during the reign of Pius X was in fact the first stage of its *dénouement*. 88

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
Percy Dearmer Professor of Liturgical Studies

John Kersey, Hon.LL.D., Hon.D.Mus., D.D., Ed.D., Ph.D.
President and Director of Academic Affairs
David Hume Interdisciplinary Professor

Kathleen Lucia, Hon.D.Litt.
Vice- President and Director of External Relations

Information: European-American University, 8 Copthall, Roseau Valley, 00152 Commonwealth of Dominica