

Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 25:4, Fall 1988, pp. 555-572.

**TRUTH, MYSTERY, AND EXPRESSION:
THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES REVISITED**

Richard J. Beauchesne

PRECIS

The theme of this article focuses on the human compulsion to absolutize the relative — the human mediations of God — and on the divine/human exigencies to relativize the absolute — the ultimate mystery, which is God. Philosophically, the essay approaches truth both as transcendental/absolute and as propositional/relative. It explores further the intentional structure of consciousness, which allows the subject/object dichotomy to be partially over-come. Theologically, God is described as "presence" at the horizon of consciousness — the realm of transcendental/absolute truth — where consciousness is the companion to the Absolute. Here, no one — even in God's name — has the right to enter consciousness, to rename the holy presence, and impudently therein to hang foreign icons, except the possessor of consciousness, the only high priest. As for the human expressions of God, through language — the temple of Mystery — at all time and in all instances, they remain within the realm of propositional/relative truth. In conclusion, where the relative is absolutized, truth is silenced and our humanness violated; where the absolute is relativized, truth is cherished and our humanness respected.

God is infinite and incomprehensible, and all that is comprehensible about him is his infinity and incomprehensibility.

John Damascene (*De fide orthodoxa*)

How is the experience of faith shaped by God's infinite and incomprehensible mystery, and how does it express itself and relate to its expressions? Have expressions of faith — in ideas and speech, sounds and colors, movements and stone — been pre-cast in the concrete of faith-experience itself, or do they reveal a creativity of their own? What truth resides in the depth of faith-experience? In its expressions, what remains of the truth? Are the expressions faithful to the experience of faith? Are they its replica or its symbols? When expressed — reflected upon or put into stories, sung or painted, danced or sculptured — is faith-experience condemned to be expressed only in dogmatic formulae that often silence one's soul, or can it live and grow unviolated, be expressed freely, and resonate within the soul of those with whom it is shared? Like an intertwined yet invigorated vine, these are the questions thriving in the foreground of this article.

Nearly thirty years ago, as a young preacher of the Word, I wrestled with the issues of ministry in the church and of ultimate mystery, which is God. In an article entitled "Preaching, Mystery, and Ministry," published in 1965, I expressed my concern: "Too often, the Word becomes word, and the sermon is but an elaboration of some doctrine. . . . The Word does not become flesh."¹ After eleven years dedicated mainly to the ministry of preaching, I felt impelled to focus on the ecclesiological ramifications of ultimate mystery, the soul of ministry, and took on

¹ Richard Beauchesne, "Preaching, Mystery, and Ministry," *Worship* 39, (August-September, 1965): 412

four years of doctoral studies. At the Boston University School of Theology I specialized in ecclesiology, ministry, and ecumenism. These years were not only rich in ecumenical experiences but also laden with insights into the absolute mystery, which is God, as well as into the historical and relative nature of all human expressions of God, including church and ministry. Whereas my Roman Catholic tradition had led me to revere the human mediations of God—mediations which, in that tradition, are not always differentiated from God—the Protestant tradition affirmed my deep respect for God's mystery, which, for Christians, is mediated only through Christ, within whom Christian ministry in the church is nurtured. Even through Christ, ultimate mystery remains historical and relative when expressed personally, communally, or linguistically.

During the past ten years, I have spent my ministerial life in higher education. Yet, my underlying preoccupation today remains the same as it was thirty years ago: to ground my ministry unconditionally in the absolute mystery, which is God. In this article, my intention is not to discover new paths but, rather, to walk the most traumatic ones all over again. In a state of Ricoeurian *seconde naïveté*, I invite you, the reader, to reconsider with me the issue that has haunted me all along the way: truth as it relates to mystery and to linguistic expression.

One can never wrestle enough with God if one does so out of pure regard for the truth. Christ likes us to prefer truth to him because, before being Christ, he is truth. If one turns aside from him to go toward the truth, one will not go far before falling into his arms.

Simone Weil²

What is truth? Even asked unpretentiously the question puzzles and intimidates the mind, and even proposed judiciously the answers leave the

² Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, tr. Emma Craufurd (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1951), p. 69.

mind unsure and still searching. Several years ago, Edward M. MacKinnon discussed numerous classical theories of truth, from the Aristotelian-Scholastic and Marxist views to those of the empiricists and existentialists, including the meaning of truth in science and religion.³ Having reviewed most of the Western world's diverse understandings of truth, MacKinnon formulated what he perceived truth to be:

'Truth' can be taken as an abstract way of referring to true propositions. But there is also a deeper meaning, as when one speaks of science as the search for truth or of theology as based on revealed truth. 'Truth' in this sense connotes something transcendent . . .⁴

"Something transcendent," of course, may speak of subrational conditions, such as altered states of awareness engendered through drugs, as well as of transempirical ecstasies such as peak experiences allegedly located beyond sense perception.⁵ For his part, MacKinnon related transcendence both to the mystery of the universe, which scientists fathom, and to the mystery of God, upon which theologians reflect. He suggested that both mysteries summon tentative "propositional" expressions of their respective "truth": scientific

³ Edward M. MacKinnon, *Truth & Expression* (New York: Newman Press, 1971).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁵ Regarding the transempirical, see Immanuel Kant, "Transcendental Dialectic," in *Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: Dutton, 1964); Mark Taylor, "Space, Time, and God's Transcendence," in *Riff Review* 31 (Winter, 1974): 25-40; and Alistair Kee, *The Ways of Transcendence* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971). Regarding the subrational, see Herbert Richardson and Robert Cutler, eds., *Transcendence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969). Articles that review several contemporary understandings of transcendence and truth are found in the *Boston University Studies in Philosophy and Religion* (University of Notre Dame Press): vol. 2, Alan M. Olson and Leroy S. Rouner, eds., *Transcendence and the Sacred* (1981); vol. 3, Leroy S. Rouner, ed., *Meaning, Truth, and God* (1982); and vol. 7, Leroy S. Rouner, ed., *Knowing Religiously* (1985).

theories, which represent successive approximations to specialized aspects of the universe, and theological linguistic analogs, which express a human understanding of God.⁶

MacKinnon, it seems to me, proposed two meanings of truth: transcendental and propositional. The latter is an explication and approximation of transcendence; the former, the ultimate ground and goal of the search for truth. He wrote:

... transcendent reality is the ultimate ground and goal of the search for truth. But it is a ground which can only be explicated and a goal which can be only approximated by the slow piecemeal process of presenting propositions which we take to be true and hope to be not too inadequate.⁷

To illustrate the two meanings of truth, transcendental and propositional, consider MacKinnon's last statement. It "proposes" an explication that approximates "transcendent reality," and, as the following explanation spells out, it implies that truth reveals itself both as transcendental and as propositional. As transcendental, truth points to the *existence* rather than *nonexistence* of "the explicated and approximated": in the statement, "transcendent reality." As propositional, truth points to the "true" in "the explication and approximation"—"a slow piecemeal process" MacKinnon called it: in the statement, "the ultimate ground and goal of the search for truth," which "transcendent reality" is "proposed" to be, and "which we take to be true and hope to be not too inadequate."

I suggest, therefore, that truth has both an absolute and a relative meaning. As

⁶ MacKinnon, *Truth & Expression*, p. 182. In the present article, the expression "mystery" is used interchangeably with the expressions "transcendence" and "being." When capitalized, these expressions refer to "ultimate transcendence," or God, whose self-revelation is the all-encompassing horizon of consciousness. See, e.g., Avery Dulles, "Revelation as a New Awareness," in his *Models of Revelation* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 98-114.

⁷ MacKinnon, *Truth & Expression*, p. 182.

transcendental, truth is absolute in the sense that, in a proposition, it *always* conjures some transcendent reality, which *exists* rather than *existing not*. As propositional, however, truth is relative: in a proposition, it directs one to the "true" in the explication, which exists *to the extent* that transcendent reality is approximated. Both truths, transcendental and propositional, reveal themselves in propositions, even in propositions that are factually false. For example: "The holocaust of six-million Jews never took place." In this proposition, the transcendent reality conjured by transcendental truth is the mystery of ignorance, feeble-mindedness, or indoctrination, and the "true" expressed by propositional truth signifies the extent to which the mystery of such evils is approximated. The approximation is hoped to be "not too inadequate."

Obviously, in the example of a false proposition, transcendental truth will not be acknowledged by whoever "proposes" the statement. Nevertheless, a proposition has its own subject. Robert W. Funk explained: "Behind all verbal formulations, even those in which the object . . . is, so to speak, the subject, stands another subject, the real subject, the logical subject of the structure of the assertion. That subject is the posterior 'I.'"⁸ It is this posterior "I" that speaks of transcendental truth, not necessarily the "I" of the subject of a proposition or of its "proposer," whether the proposition is factually true or false.

Nevertheless, transcendental truth, when "propositionalized," can only be approximated, and the reasons are many, which accounts for the inadequacy of propositions. Some are biological and psychological, others physical and technological. For example, astronomers who, on several occasions, observe a

⁸ Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 51.

star know that none of their readings are accurate.⁹ Stigmatism and fatigue, air scintillations and micrometric limitations—all contribute to the inaccuracy of the astronomers' readings and of their expressions in speech or writing.

Culture also accounts for the inadequacy of propositions. Langdon Gilkey described the effect of cultural relativity on religion and theology:

If all is by means of and within its locus in space and time, a product of the forces behind it, relative to what surrounds it, and replaced by what follows, . . . even our thoughts, our philosophic categories and our metaphysical systems are formed . . . by the fundamental social and intellectual forces of our era, and thus they are relative to their time and place. . . . [W]hat is the mind of the Church in this manifold of changing historical minds, each rooted in and so directly relevant only to its own epoch?¹⁰

For example, the fourth century's cultural view of "person" differs from that of the previous century and of today. The Councils of Constantinople I (381 C.E.) and Chalcedon (451 C.E.) spoke of "three persons" in God; the Councils of Nicaea I (325 C.E.) and Sardica (343 C.E.), of "one." Today, when modern Christians speak of "three persons" in God, they may have in mind three gods: "God might be conceived of as Siamese triplets!"¹¹ By "one person" Nicaea and Sardica affirmed the ontological oneness of God, and by "three persons"

⁹ Jacob Bronowski, *A Sense of the Future: Essays in Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977), p. 225.

¹⁰ Langdon Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), pp. 50-51. Bernard Lonergan, in *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), discussed the theorists of history who are struggling with the problem of historical relativism. In order to bring relativity under control, he suggested the techniques of dialectic — his fourth functional specialty — rather than the techniques of critical history exclusively (p. 195). Dialectical techniques are explained in *Method in Theology*, pp. 128-130. Regarding the importance of religious tradition as part of cultural relativity in religion, see Steven T. Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," in Steven T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 22-74.

Constantinople I and Chalcedon affirmed the oneness of God through substantial and eternal relationships, whereas today's Christians, influenced by the modern psychological understanding of "person," may be affirming in God three autonomous centers of consciousness.

Avery Dulles emphasized the cultural conditioning of dogmatic propositions:

It would be a gross oversimplification . . . to imagine that the reformulation of dogma consists simply in changing words. Revelation always comes to men within some definite sociocultural situation, and this necessarily affects the manner in which they articulate the revelation conceptually.... The ... history of doctrine in the Christian Church has been deeply affected by the societal forms, the customary attitudes, and the philosophical heritage of the Greek, Roman, feudal and baroque worlds.¹²

Finally, and most importantly, transcendence itself accounts for the inadequacy of propositions. Although necessarily expressed in language, transcendence carries a surplus of meaning that no proposition can fully encompass, penetrate, or signify. Paradoxically, however, within one's consciousness, transcendence reveals its own inexpressibility in an experiential residue that lies beyond language. Henri Duméry appealed to a theological example and defined transcendence as God's inexpressible mystery, and its demand for linguistic expression, as a human imperative:

Religious experience is the experience of the inexpressible; *that is why* it is expressed in words . . . the only way to enshrine and transmit that which surpasses all language. This process is unavoidable because man is incapable of experiencing anything without putting it into words. Each one of his experiences, including that of the sacred,

¹¹ Avery Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), p. 159.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 160.

must be passed over into expression.¹³

Duméry further explained why transcendental expression remains inadequate. Again, the example is theological:

[O]ur idea of God is necessarily below God. It has a functional role; for taken as a determination, it is only the conceptual expression of the intention toward God. Thus it remains human, limited, ambiguous, indefinitely purifiable, even when the movement of the soul it takes account of is supported by an Absolute of exigency. This absolute impels man to place himself totally ... in question in order to transcend himself in all that he has and is.¹⁴

The issue — that of our human capacity to transcend — is crucial. H. Richard Niebuhr, for example, described as infinite the abyss between the object (the reality "out-there," or external history), and the subject (the reality "within," or internal history). He distinguished between the knowledge of the Jesus of history (objective knowledge through observation) and that of the Christ of faith (subjective knowledge through participation), writing: "There is no continuous movement from an objective inquiry into the life of Jesus to a knowledge of him as the Christ who is our Lord. Only a decision of the self, a leap of faith, *a metanoia* or revolution of the mind can lead from observation to participation and from observed to lived history."¹⁵ This decision of the

¹³ Henri Duméry, *Phenomenology and Religion*, Hermeneutics 5 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 12. Regarding how divine "inexpressibility" can be known, see Nelson Pike, "On Mystic Visions as Source of Knowledge," in Katz, *Mysticism*, pp. 214-234; Renford Bambrough, "Intuition and the Inexpressible," in Katz, *Mysticism*, pp. 200-213; and George Mavrodes, "Real v. Deceptive Mystical Experiences," in Katz, *Mysticism*, pp. 235-258.

¹⁴ Henri Duméry, *The Problem of God in Philosophy of Religion: A Critical Examination of the Category of the Absolute and the Scheme of Transcendence*, tr. Charles Courtney (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 68, n. 33.

¹⁵ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p. 83.

self, the leap of faith, the *metanoia* or revolution of the mind — all these Niebuhrian expressions evoke the transcendental exigency of consciousness that meets the divine Thou, not by seeking, but by being met by Him/Her through grace. Thus, consciousness itself chooses God in the process of being chosen by God.¹⁶ Consciousness tends God as it is being tended by God, and the process through which consciousness "leaps" into God's mystery is one of internal history — personal and engaging — rather than one of external history — impersonal and distant.

It remains that what propositions reveal of transcendental truth is conditioned by the nontransferability of the uniqueness of the self's internal history, molded by the specificity of biological, psychological, physical, technological, and cultural forces, and, most importantly, by the inexpressible nature of transcendence. All these forces contribute to the shaping of conscious subjects into unique selves, which must express themselves linguistically, yet inadequately, and, as Duméry expressed it, humans must ever "place [themselves] totally . . . in question in order to transcend [themselves] in all that [they have] and [are] ." ¹⁷

II

Nevertheless, does the distinction between propositional and transcendental truth, which I have proposed above, reintroduce into philosophical thinking the irreconcilable dichotomy between subject and object? Are transcendental reality "out there" existing transempirically and the human subject "out here" existing empirically, each one isolated by the

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁷ Duméry, *Problem of God*, p. 68, n. 33.

boundaries of its own world, gazed at from the outside with epistemological telescopic lenses and confined to its own brand of knowledge and truth? For both Niebuhr and Duméry the answer is no.

René Firmin de Brabander wrote to explain Duméry's understanding of human consciousness and of its relationship to transcendence. The relationship is one of intentionality rather than one of subject/object:

Once we accept that the known object is not a thing in consciousness, but consciousness of something, and that consciousness, therefore, has to be conceived as constituting the object as signification, then consciousness becomes an "efficacious look" ("une visée efficace"), without any substantial content. There is no independent world of objects, nor an independent consciousness confronting this world of objects. There are only intentioned objects because there is no consciousness but objectifying consciousness.¹⁸

Contextually, "intending consciousness" rather than "objectifying consciousness" would express more accurately Duméry's view, since Duméry himself, as already mentioned, referred to consciousness as "an efficacious look," *une visée efficace*. In French *visée*, like *visage* (the human face), "intends" in the Latin sense of the verbs *intendere*, to aim, and *attendere*,¹⁹ to pay attention, to care for, and to listen (to direct one's ear attentively and caringly). "*Visée*" is best translated "an aim and a listening that is attentive and caring."

¹⁸ René Firmin de Brabander, *Religion and Human Autonomy: Henry Duméry's Philosophy of Christianity* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), p. 86. De Brabander critiqued Duméry's dependence on Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. For a brief exposition of phenomenology in Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, see Pierre Thévenaz, *What Is Phenomenology?* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1962). For an exposé of transcendental theology, see Helmut Peukert, "Transcendental-Theological Hermeneutics," in his *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology: Toward a Theology of Communicative Action*, tr. James Bohman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), pp. 269-275.

¹⁹ In *The New Collegiate Latin and English Dictionary* (New York: Bantam Books, 1966), see entries for *tendo*, *intendo*, *intentus*, and *attendo*.

Martin Heidegger described the intentional-caring structure (*Sorgestruktur*) as including the phenomenon of selfhood — the projecting dimension of *Dasein* (being), which leads "being" to authentic existence. He wrote: "This phenomenon [Selfhood] is clarified by interpreting the meaning of care [*Sorge*]; and it is as care that *Dasein*'s totality of Being has been *defined*."²⁰ Further, "Dasein's totality of Being as care means: ahead-of-itself-already-being-in (a world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world)."²¹ Thus, care allows *Dasein* "to be with" transcendence (*mit Sein*) as a presence tended rather than as an object "set over against" the subject, which absorbs it — for Heidegger, authentic and inauthentic existence, respectively. Without unjustly equating *Dasein* with ultimate transcendence or God, I believe one can say that, for Heidegger, care as "presence" facilitated the intending process toward transcendence and, consequently, toward authentic existence.

Conversely, Gabriel Marcel referred to mystery itself as "presence" and explained that, as such, mystery can only be welcomed (*accueilli*) or rejected.²² Rollo May affirmed that to reject the mystery is tantamount to "not caring": "When we do not care, we lose our being; and care is the way back to being."²³ According to Heidegger's thought, care is the way back to "Being-at-home" [*das zuhause-sein*/"Being-alongside"/"Being-with," that is, authentic existence] rather than "not-being-at-home" [*das Nicht-zuhause-sein* /"being-in"/"being absorbed,"

²⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 370. For an excellent investigation of existential theology, see Helmut Peukert, "Theology as Existential Interpretation: Rudolph Bultmann," in his *Science, Action*, pp. 249-268.

²¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 375.

²² Gabriel Marcel, "Presence as Mystery," in his *The Mystery of Being: I. Reflection and Mystery*, tr. G. S. Fraser (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1960), pp. 242-270, esp. pp. 255-256.

that is, inauthentic existence].²⁴ As we shall discuss below, Heidegger referred to language itself as the house of Being.

As explained above, consciousness "intending," that is, consciousness "aiming attentively and caringly," is also consciousness "listening to attentively and caringly" as it is "being addressed" by transcendence. In the words of the later Heidegger, "[B]efore he speaks, man must let himself be addressed by Being."²⁵ John Macquarrie has explained that for Heidegger the German verb *ansprechen* means both "to address" and "to claim." Being as addressing or claiming "refers to a reality with which human beings have some affinity and with which there is the possibility of some intercourse, a reality that can address us and even claim us. . . ."²⁶

Consciousness, "the efficacious look" (*visée efficace*), as Duméry termed it, is thus essentially an "intention," and it comes "to be" only when it "intends," that is, when it attentively and caringly aims at and listens to "something," and "that something" comes "to be" "for" and "with" consciousness only when it is "aimed at and listened to attentively and caringly" by consciousness. In that sense, "the look of consciousness" is efficacious: it causes "that something" to be "for" and "with" consciousness.

Where "that something" is transcendence itself, "consciousness that aims at and listens to attentively and caringly" makes transcendence "be" *for-and-with consciousness*, and it is then only that consciousness comes "to be." Therefore, there is no independent and objective world of transcendence, of which

²³ See Rollo May, *Love and Will* (New York: Norton, 1969), p. 290.

²⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time* pp. 233-244.

²⁵ Heidegger, *Ober den Humanismus* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1947), p. 99, quoted in John Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity: A Theological and Philosophical Approach* (New York: Crossroad, 1983, ©1982), p. 100.

²⁶ Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity*, p. 100.

consciousness knows, nor is there an independent and subjective world of consciousness, before which a transcendental world exists. There is only consciousness "aiming at and listening to" attentively and caringly, and transcendence "aimed at and listened to" attentively and caringly, and in the process both consciousness and transcendence "come to be" *for-and-with* each other.

Consciousness and transcendence, therefore, are constitutively relational, and I suggest that truth is the name for consciousness-on-its-way-to-transcendence in the pursuit of fidelity. Truth is consciousness resolutely faithful to what it "sees" as it "looks, aims at, and listens to" transcendence attentively and caringly. As transcendental, truth is consciousness directing itself toward transcendence faithfully and situating itself within the embrace of transcendence irrevocably; as propositional, truth is consciousness expressing itself faithfully and putting into thought and language the inexpressibility of transcendence tentatively. As transcendental, truth is fidelity of consciousness to transcendence itself; as propositional, truth is fidelity of consciousness to itself. This may be why Leslie Dewart defined truth as "fidelity of consciousness to being,"²⁷ (that is, to transcendence, to mystery).

If so, transcendental and absolute truth would then be consciousness faithfully "intentionalizing" the mystery, directing itself faithfully toward it, while propositional and relative truth would be fidelity to one's own self in the process of becoming empowered by being, of reflecting upon one's self-becoming, and of expressing the latter in thought and language. Dewart described the reflective and expressive processes of consciousness as "the self . . . objectified, . . . systematized,

²⁷ Leslie Dewart, *The Future of Belief: Theism in a World Come of Age* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 92.

organized, *lived with* and *made meaningful* for our consciousness.²⁸

Undoubtedly, Thomistic philosophy equally defines truth as relational: the *adequatio rei et mentis* (the conformity of the thing and the mind).²⁹ Conformity is a relation, but not of intentionality and fidelity. Consequently, the dichotomy between subject and object remains fully established, for within the Thomistic perspective, as subject, consciousness is "impressed" (*species impressa*) by the object (reality "in itself"). Consciousness then "expresses" the object conceptually (*species expressa*), and to remain "in truth" consciousness' expression must be conformed to consciousness' impression of reality and to reality "in itself."³⁰

Both conformity and fidelity are relational but in ways that are significantly different. Conformity speaks of a subject/object dichotomy; fidelity, of the intentional nature of consciousness. Dewart contrasted the relation of conformity with that of fidelity: "*Conformity is a relation towards another which is owing to another by reason of the other's nature. Fidelity is a relation towards another which one owes to oneself by reason of one's own nature. Conformity obligates from the outside. Fidelity, like nobility, obligates from within.*"³¹ Thus, fidelity is the soul of intentionality, and intentionality is "the structure of meaning which makes it possible for us, subjects that we are, to see and understand the outside world,

²⁸ Ibid., p. 93.

²⁹ MacKinnon, *Truth & Expression*, pp. 30, 57-63; and Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*.

³⁰ MacKinnon, *Truth & Expression*, p. 62. Transcendental truth could be expressed as fidelity of consciousness to being *in actu exercitu* — to use Thomistic-Aristotelian terminology — and propositional truth as fidelity of consciousness to being *in actu signato*: the latter, within the field of reflective consciousness; the former, within the field of pre-reflective consciousness. Regarding pre-reflective consciousness, see Karl Rahner: *Vorgriff* (pre-apprehension or pre-reflective consciousness). For an explanation, see Anne E. Carr, "Starting with the Human," in Leo J. O'Donovan, ed., *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner's Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), pp. 20-22. See also Karl Rahner, "Theology and Anthropology," in his *Theological Investigations*, vol. 9, tr. Graham Harrison (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), pp. 28-45.

objective as it is. In intentionality, the dichotomy between subject and object is partially overcome."³²

Because of its intentional structure, consciousness relates to transcendence not as to a rock "out there" lying in a field but as to a friend present "right here" knocking at the door. Transcendental presence lies at the frontiers of consciousness, and like a horizon it calls forth consciousness. "A horizon," explained Hans-Georg Gadamer, "is not a rigid frontier, but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further."³³ As the horizon of consciousness, transcendence brings into being the intentional structure of consciousness, moves with it, and, as presence, ultimately invites it to advance further to be embraced by its infinite gracious and liberating power. The summons of transcendence and the intentionality of consciousness have been celebrated in the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke:

Catch only what you've thrown yourself, all is mere skill
and little gain;
but when you're suddenly the catcher of a ball
thrown by an eternal partner
with accurate and measured swing
towards you, to your centre, in an arch
from the great bridgebuilding of God:
why catching then becomes a power—
not yours, a world's.³⁴

When, compellingly, it is summoned by mystery and when, faithfully, it affirms mystery through participatory and "propositionalizing" responses — experiential, reflective, and linguistic — then consciousness remains unviolated. Linked to mystery as in Rilke's words, "in an arch from the great bridgebuilding of God," the

³¹ Dewart, *Future of Belief*, p. 96.

³² Rollo May, *Love and Will*, p. 225.

³³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), p. 217.

"eternal partner," consciousness remains in truth, and "catching then" from your own center "becomes a power — not yours, a world's."

III

The experience of transcendence, as discussed above, calls for linguistic expression. A question remains, however. Even when linguistically expressed, does consciousness' participation in transcendence³⁵ remain solipsistic and unsharable? For the intentional theologian, the answer is no, because, within consciousness, language itself allows transcendence to emerge, and, within the world, it allows consciousness to connect with the transcendental reality of its own

³⁴ Ibid., p. ii.

³⁵ During the past thirty years, the relationship between religious truth and its linguistic expression has been discussed extensively. Some of the works I have found insightful are: Ian Ramsey, *Religious Language* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), and *Words about God* (New York: Macmillan, 1971); William A. Christian, *Meaning and Truth in Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964); Gerhard Ebeling, *Introduction to Theological Theory of Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973); Paul van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 63-109; Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics," in *Studies in Religion*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1975/76), pp. 15 ff.; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, and "L'Herméneutique philosophique," *Studies in Religion*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1975/76), pp. 3-13; Antony Flew, "Theology and Falsification," in Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, eds., *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), pp. 96-130; Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic*; Dallas M. High, comp., *New Essays on Religious Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); Dallas M. High, *Language, Persons, and Belief: Studies in Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations and Religious Uses of Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); Terrence W. Tilley, *Talking of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis of Religious Language* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978); Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); and Peukert, *Science, Action*.

self, of the world, and of God.

Language discloses transcendence; in the words of the later Heidegger, it is "the house of being."³⁶ "Being emerges from language, when language directs us into the dimension of our existence determinative for our life."³⁷ Affirming Heidegger's position,³⁸ Ernst Fuchs, along with Gerhard Ebeling, defined reality as constituted linguistically. The world, physical and spiritual, is given to us in language, and no reality exists outside of language. "An eternal silence," wrote Fuchs, "would be the dissolution of reality."³⁹ Language, however, is not verbal only. Fuchs explained: "Language is rather primarily *a showing* or *letting* be seen, an indication in the active sense: I intimate to you or instruct you what you yourself 'perceive' (take notice of or watch out for). . . . That can take place through a simple movement, even by turning away from another."⁴⁰ Funk commented: "That is to say, language in the wider sense, which includes primordial discourse, is what gives being [transcendence] a presence, what brings it to stand. Man does not live in relation to being as it is present to him, and that means in language."⁴¹

³⁶ Heidegger, *Über den Humanismus*, p. 5; quoted in Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic*, p.40.

³⁷ Ernst Fuchs, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, vol. 1: *Zum hermeneutischen Problem in der Theologie: Die existentielle Interpretation* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1959), p. 115; quoted in Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic*, p. 47 (tr. J. M. Robinson).

³⁸ In the early Heidegger, *Dasein* (being) ultimately found its own "grounding" in itself — in its own facticity. The later Heidegger "grounded" *Dasein* in *das Sein* (Being), which linguistically reveals itself to *Dasein*, and *Dasein* is thus enabled to express *das Sein*. See James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr., *New Frontiers in Theology*, vol. 1: *The Later Heidegger and Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 3-30.

³⁹ Ernst Fuchs, *Hermeneutik* (Bad Cannstatt: R. Müllerschön Verlag, 1954), p. 131; quoted in Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic*, p. 51.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic*, p. 51. In the wider sense, language includes the

Language expresses consciousness' participation in transcendence and connects consciousness with its own self, the world, and God. William M. Shea referred to the mediatory function of religious symbols, which are an embodiment of consciousness' participation in transcendence:

The religious symbol mediates to focal consciousness, to attention and understanding and valuing, what cannot be an object *within* the field of consciousness since it is the horizon or boundary within all objects are. The symbol stands in the place of something else, but in this one case it stands in for what cannot stand for itself, what cannot appear [that is, transcendent reality].⁴²

During the 1920's Ernst Cassirer had already described a twofold function of language: as revealer of consciousness to itself and as connector of consciousness with the transcendental "other":

Indeed, it is the Word, it is language, that really reveals to man that world which is closer to him than any world of natural objects and touches his weal and woe more directly than physical nature. For it is language that makes his existence in *a community* possible; and only in society, in relation to a "Thee," can his subjectivity assert itself as a "Me."⁴³

Theologically speaking, when the "Thee" is reinterpreted to mean God's self-revelation addressing human consciousness, then the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, the community of Christians, and the community of all faith-people, as language, become the mediations of God's revelation. Fuchs has related the mediation of Scriptures, as "language event," to theology and its hermeneutical function.⁴⁴ For both Fuchs and Ebeling, Being is revealed through "language as

examples of faith-expressions referred to in the introduction above, such as stories, songs, paintings, dances, and sculptures.

⁴² William M. Shea, "Feeling, Symbol, and Action," in Robert Masson, ed., *Essays on Symbol and the Religious Imagination* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), p. 83.

⁴³ Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, tr. Suzanne K. Langer (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946), p. 61.

⁴⁴ Fuchs, *Zum hermeneutischen Problem*, p. 115; quoted in Funk, *Language*,

salvation-event" (*Sprachereignis als Heilsereignis*) rather than through "salvation-history" (*Heilsgeschichte*), as it is for Rudolf Bultmann.⁴⁵

Human consciousness, however, is limited by linguistic pre-understandings, for example, by the pre-understandings inscribed in the mediation of Scriptures as well as in the mediation of faith-communities, the language-events. New situations mediate a new understanding of the self and create a new language in which the self expresses itself anew. Funk explained Fuchs' position as follows:

It cannot be contested that the pre-understanding transmitted in language is constantly thrown into question by fresh experiences, new observations and the like. Such "crises" may be minor, involving only the readjustment of certain aspects of the way in which man regards the world without a corresponding shift in self-understanding. That is to say, the whole continues to hang together in the traditional way. However, there are major crises, i.e., which involve a re-adjustment of the whole of reality ... Major crises indicate a break with the common understanding.⁴⁶

New situations and experiences lead to a new self-understanding that remains unexpressed in the current language laden with pre-understanding. Even then, one is dependent upon language. The new self-understanding "cannot be communicated directly, but can be 'understood' only belatedly, in the language produced *anew* in a contested or *newly occurring* common

Hermeneutic, p.47.

⁴⁵ Rudolf Bultmann's view on salvation-history is explained in *Kerygma and Myth I* (London: S.P.C.K., 1953), and in *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), as well as in other of his works. Fuchs spoke of *Sprachereignis*; Ebeling, of *Wortgeschehen*. Both expressions are translated by "language event" rather than by "speech event," which Fuchs repudiated in "Was ist ein Sprachereignis?" in *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, vol. 2: *Zur Frage nach dem historischen Jesus* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1960), pp. 424-430; quoted in Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic*, pp. 20 and 47.

⁴⁶ Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic*, p. 52.

understanding.⁴⁷ For example, Edward Schillebeeckx has explained his "new" christological language, which is contested by the Roman Curia and other traditionalists in the Roman Catholic Church. Schillebeeckx's contention is that the "now" meaning of the gospel can only be discovered in relation to our present experience and expressed anew linguistically.⁴⁸ "This new language will have to distinguish itself from the old, and at the same time still make clear the call involved in understanding, in which we are to respond `with ourselves.'" ⁴⁹The response "with ourselves" refers back to truth as "fidelity of consciousness to being."

For example, it is the new language about "person"—as the psychological center of consciousness—that leads recent theologians to speak of a human person in Christ, whereas traditional Catholic Church dogma has affirmed in Christ the existence of one "person" — the divine ontological principle of individuation, the *hypostasis*,⁵⁰ which assumes Jesus' two natures, the human and the divine. Several years ago, Piet Schoonenberg suggested that, if one denies a human personhood in Christ, then "Jesus Christ is . . . not a man, for what is a man who is not a person, does not have control as person of his own attitude, his own fate, his own being, by his decisions? . . . `what is not assumed is not healed, not redeemed' . . . [and] is not healing, is not

⁴⁷ Fuchs, *Hermeneutik*, p. 137; quoted in Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic*, p. 53.

⁴⁸ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

⁴⁹ Fuchs, *Hermeneutik*, p. 137; quoted in Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic*, p. 53.

⁵⁰ See *Hypostasis* in F. L. Cross and E. L. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 685; Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975); and Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971).

redeeming.⁵¹ More recently, Schillebeeckx wrote: "*A priori* and in the first instance I do indeed start from the notion that the man Jesus, who appeared within our history, is a human person—what else should he be?"⁵² Schillebeeckx argued that it is precisely Jesus' person-hood that should correct our *a priori* concept of "human person" and become normative of "human personhood." Thus, the process of new understanding involves a twofold fidelity: "attentiveness to the history of language and openness towards the reality that confronts us."⁵³

Here, again, on the one hand, the distinction between transcendental and propositional truth, as explained above, is crucial to the *understanding* of faith-experience: the human response to God's mystery as *the* Transcendent Reality. On the other hand, the distinction is also crucial to the understanding of the *expressions* of faith-experience: the myths of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, theological reflection, and dogmatic statements.⁵⁴

It is my firm belief that, for the sake of each person's integrity, the relative nature of propositional truth as well as the absolute nature of transcendental truth must be held to at all cost. For me, it is an undeniable fact that I can express transcendental reality only and inasmuch as I see it, learn to live with the frustration of being misunderstood, and become tolerant that neither I nor

⁵¹ Piet Schoonenberg, *The Christ: A Study of the God-Man Relationship in the Whole of Creation and in Jesus Christ* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), p. 73.

⁵² Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus* (New York: Seabury Press/Crossroad, 1979), p. 601.

⁵³ Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, tr. James M. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), p. 248; quoted in Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic*, p. 53.

⁵⁴ In *Catholicism* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1980), pp. 23-78, Richard McBrien distinguished among "faith," the knowledge of God; "theology," the systematic reflection upon and expression of faith; and "belief," the

those with whom my participation in transcendence is shared are going to "get it quite right."⁵⁵ Sound theology, like sound physics, is grounded in the principle of uncertainty or, as Jacob Bronowski has called it, the principle of tolerance. Bronowski wrote:

In science or outside it, we are not uncertain; our knowledge is merely confined within a certain tolerance. . . . [A]ll information between human beings can only be exchanged within a play of tolerance. And that is true whether the exchange is in science, or in literature, or in religion, or in politics, or even in any form of thought that aspires to dogma.⁵⁶

He explained the new characterization that Heisenberg has given to the electron, which in terms of space and time yields but limited information. The information is confined by the uncertainty of (or as Bronowski described it, the tolerance called forth by) the quantum.⁵⁷

In his singular way, Douglas R. Hofstadter explained Heisenberg's uncertainty principle:

[T]o know the position of a particle [electron] perfectly is to give up any hope of knowing its momentum, and to know the momentum is to give up any hope of knowing its position. And knowing either one *imprecisely* still imposes bounds on the precision with which you could know the other. . . . If you are trying to determine the location of the particle, there will be an uncertainty There will also be an uncertainty

crystallization in doctrines and dogmas of the conclusions of theology.

⁵⁵ See, e.g., Mavrodes, "Real v. Deceptive Mystical Experiences." On p. 256, referring to Teresa of Avila who could only recount her mystical experiences — with no mention of properties that might indicate that her experience was divine — and quoting her, Mavrodes wrote: "The truth was 'engraven upon the understanding' [Teresa's], and doubt was banished. And it is this sort of experience, I think, and not the use of criteria, which is basic in Teresa's mystical knowledge."

⁵⁶ Jacob Bronowski, *The Ascent of Man* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown & Co., 1973), p. 365.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 353-374.

in the value of the momentum . . . ⁵⁸

Hofstadter explained, however, that Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty applies only to microscopic measurements and that the uncertainty is caused by the nature of the electron itself, not by the observer's interference with phenomena under observation. Consequently, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle applies to theology but with reservations, for transcendent reality clearly is not a microscopic particle upon which we set our gaze, and the root of the uncertainty of transcendental expression is not to be found in the limitations of the observer. Where transcendence is concerned, there are no observers, only participants.

Nevertheless, as in science, the very nature of the theological reality in question, God, the Ultimate Transcendental Reality — its infinity, its incomprehensibility, and its ineffability — "causes" the "uncertainty" in the Heisenbergian sense and advocates tolerance according to the Bronowskian interpretation of the Heisenberg uncertainty principle. Consequently, statements about God, the Ultimate Transcendental Reality, remain inadequate but not uncertain as long as they remain within the play of tolerance. Knowledge, whether in science or in religion, is always possible as long as one holds on to the distinction between certainty and knowledge.⁵⁹

It remains, however, that the principles of righteous intolerance and of monstrous certainty — which led to the rise of Nazism and to the creation of gas

⁵⁸ Douglas R. Hofstadter, "Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle," in *Metamagical Themas: Questing for the Essence of Mind and Pattern* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), p. 463.

⁵⁹ Regarding the relationships between theology and science, see A. R. Peacocke, ed., *The Sciences and Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), especially Richard Schlegel, "The Return of Man in Quantum Physics," pp. 141-160; Nicholas Lash, "Theory, Theology, and Ideology," pp. 209-228; and Mary Hesse, "Retrospect," pp. 281-296.

chambers at concentration camps such as Auschwitz, Dachau, and Belsen — also exist. Bronowski has unmasked the demons at work in the heart of usurpers of truth and concocters of holocausts. What was done at Auschwitz, Dachau, and Belsen "was not done by gas," he wrote. "It was done by arrogance. It was done by dogma. It was done by ignorance."⁶⁰

IV

Mystery — the infinite, the incomprehensible, and the ineffable — is revealed as both absolute and relative. As aimed at, listened to, and participated in attentively and caringly by consciousness, mystery reveals the absolute. It dwells "with" consciousness as in a sanctuary, and consciousness participates in the life of the absolute itself. As reflected upon and expressed, however, mystery is relative. It is approximated by consciousness as a sacrament, and consciousness lives in the hope that the enfleshment be not too inadequate. As absolute, mystery reveals itself in transcendental truth: that is, in the fidelity of consciousness' "intending" and participating in transcendence. As relative, mystery expresses itself in propositional truth: that is, in the fidelity of consciousness to itself as it experiences transcendence, reflects upon it and, in thoughts and language, approximates it not too inadequately.

Language is the temple of mystery in which transcendental truth summons consciousness to fidelity and in which propositional truth reveals mystery to the self and proclaims it to others. Through its intentional structure, consciousness participates in mystery as companion to the absolute,⁶¹ and it

⁶⁰ Bronowski, *Ascent of Man*, p. 374.

⁶¹ The expression "companion to the absolute" alludes to the Latin root of "companion," *cum pane* (with bread); it means "at the same table with the absolute" or "breaking bread with the absolute."

must remain unviolated. No one — even in God's name — has the right to penetrate the precinct of the absolute — consciousness, yours and mine — to rename the holy presence of Being, and, impudently thereon, to hang foreign icons, except the possessor of consciousness, the only high priest. As it "intentionalizes" the mystery, consciousness, through its pursuit of fidelity, is the ground in which transcendental truth is rooted, sprouts, and is tended, and, through language, it is the sanctuary in which Being itself resides and is revered and heralded.

The distinction between transcendental and propositional truth allows transcendence to be venerated for what it is, absolute, and its expressions to be appraised for what they are, relative. Failing to distinguish between the two meanings of truth leads at first to the absolutization of the relative and ultimately to the destruction of our humanness. "The abiding temptation here," wrote MacKinnon, "is to absolutize the relative, to accept particular propositions as adequate expressions of ultimate truth. This is a temptation especially experienced by those with a passion for the ultimate."⁶² Having experienced the cancer of dehumanization that feeds itself within the bowels of the passion for the ultimate — the Nazis' absolute claim to the supremacy of the Aryan race and its commitment to the annihilation of all other races — Bronowski has warned all pretenders to heavenly thrones, whether they

⁶² MacKinnon, *Expression & Truth*, pp. 182-183. See also William F. Lynch, "The Absolutizing Instinct," in his *Images of Hope: Imagination as Healer of the Hopeless* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1965), pp. 105-125. On p. 112, Lynch wrote: "If I were to add a study of natural theology (which I will not!), I would talk of a God who does not make things impotent, or annihilate their resources and their identity, by entering so deeply into them. The final test of his powers, as of all healthy human relations, is that he communicates autonomy: He does not destroy but creates by entering in. If, therefore, we really wish to imitate God, let us make men free."

pontificate in laboratories or in sacristies: "There is no absolute knowledge. And those who claim it, whether they are scientists or dogmatists, open the door to tragedy."⁶³ Where the relative is absolutized, truth is silenced and our humanness violated; where the absolute is relativized, truth is cherished and our humanness respected.

By Richard J. Beauchesne

⁶³ Bronowski, *Ascent of Man*, p. 353.