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MAN BECOMING: RELEVANCE

AT THE PRICE OF REDUCTION?--

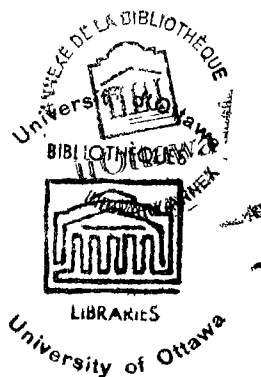
A Study of Gregory Baum

by

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Submitted to The Department of Religious  
Studies in partial fulfilment for the  
M.A. Degree.

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## CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

Peter Praamsma was born August 25, 1939, in Joure, The Netherlands. He received the Bachelor of Arts Degree in Philosophy from Hope College, Holland, Michigan, in 1964. He received the Bachelor of Divinity degree from McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, in 1967. The Title of his thesis was The Natural Theology of A. N. Whitehead--Its Solution to the Faith-Reason Problem and Its Significance for Christian Theology.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of Man Becoming Baum has written many articles on a variety of topics. Some of these articles are quite theological while others deal with contemporary social and political issues. In either case, however, I have not been able to detect a change from the position manifest in Man Becoming. True, sometimes there is an expansion in terminology. For example, in "The Bible as Norm" Baum typifies his hermeneutical position as that of a theology of the inner and outer Word: "The theology of the Inner and Outer Word encourages us to affirm that the ground of truth on which a man stands is his own deep experience of life (in which God's Word addresses him)."<sup>1</sup> But here, as in "An Answer to Father Tavad," Baum underlines his conviction that "It is present Christian experience that serves as the starting point for asking questions and seeking the theological significance for Scripture and creed . . . ."<sup>2</sup> The question as to how ". . . the normative action of the Bible is part of a critical and confirming interaction between the definitive witness of the past and the more tentative experience of the present . . . ."<sup>3</sup> Baum deals with most

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<sup>1</sup>Gregory Baum, "The Bible as Norm," The Ecumenist, IX, No.5 (1971), p. 77.

<sup>2</sup>Gregory Baum, "An Answer to Father Tavad," Journal of Ecumenical Studies, Fall, 1970, p. 788.

<sup>3</sup>Baum, "The Bible as Norm," p. 76.

explicitly in Faith and Doctrine, The Credibility of the Church Today, and, where he deals with most fundamental assumptions, Man Becoming. Hence, references to post Man Becoming writings are virtually non-existent in this study. Also, little use has been made of those who have drawn out the implications of Baum's thought for particular themes. Donald P. Gray, for instance, quite clearly sees the consequences of Baum's thought for christology: "The symbol of Incarnation when applied to Jesus should point to a very special instance of what is generally true about God's presence."<sup>4</sup> But Gray also recognizes that Baum's approach ". . . does not begin to settle many other issues that might be raised about why this human life is as open as it is."<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Gray does not deal with the unsettled issues which, from the point of view of this study, are a critical matter.

Quite definitely, the focus in my study is on Man Becoming. Apart from the introductory chapter, the theological position Baum espoused in Man Becoming is here subjected to questions raised by (a) Baum's soteriological emphasis (Chapter II), (b) Baum's universalism (Chapter III), and (c) Baum's epistemology (Chapter IV). What inspired these questions? Of what sort are they? Questions do not occur in a vacuum. Indeed, they are usually sparked by some particular position, and in my case it would be fair to say

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<sup>4</sup>Donald P. Gray, "The Place of Jesus in Man's Becoming," The Ecumenist, X, No. 3 (1972), p. 42.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

that that position is one influenced by the work of Barth and Bonhoeffer.

Particularly in Chapter IV Bonhoeffer's Act & Being plays an important role in my assessment of Baum. Hence, a brief explanation for my appeal to Bonhoeffer is in order.

In Act & Being Bonhoeffer showed that the theologies of his day were groupable into two major families, which he called theologies of act and theologies of being. Further, Bonhoeffer showed that the two types of theologies can in some way be correlated with a duality in philosophical orientation. However, as Franklin Sherman suggests ". . . the problem which Bonhoeffer isolated is still with us, whether represented by the same or different thinkers."<sup>6</sup>

Says Sherman:

If we consider, for example, recent discussions concerning the nature of God, Bonhoeffer's very act and being recur in the terminology of the two chief positions, at least as articulated on the American scene. For the one, God is the God who acts; for the other, he is the ground of being. On the one hand, we have biblical theology; on the other hand, philosophical theology, . . . . No less a person than Tillich's long-time colleague Reinhold Niebuhr has criticized Tillich's ontological speculation, . . . , as inadequate to convey the biblical conception of life as a divine-human drama . . . .<sup>7</sup>

The question, thus, of how God's revelation is to be interpreted remains with us. But which direction should theology take? Should one theologize exclusively in terms of act, or exclusively in terms of being? According to Bonhoeffer's analysis both of the above

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<sup>6</sup>Franklin Sherman, "Act and Being," The Place of Bonhoeffer, ed. by Martin E. Marty (New York: Association Press, 1962), p. 84.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 84-85.

alternatives lead to abstract thought. For Bonhoeffer theology must begin with the givenness of the Church. Therefore, as Sherman points out:

"Being in Adam" and "being in Christ"--these are the categories with which Bonhoeffer counters the attempted neutralism of Thomistic as well as other types of ontology (Husserl, Scheler, and Heidegger are also discussed). At the same time, these categories serve to counter the occasionalism of pure act-theology.<sup>8</sup>

Bonhoeffer thus overcame the conflict between the subjectivism of act-theology and the false externalization of being-theology by a theosociological category:

The being of revelation, as hovering between the objective and the non-objective, is "person"--the revealed person of God and the personal community of which that person is the foundation.<sup>9</sup>

Generally speaking, therefore, Bonhoeffer also presents a challenging approach to overcome the conflict between what Baum refers to as "immanentism" and "extrinsicism."

Fundamentally, however, the questioning that guided my study is the kind generated by the concern that theology, at least within the Christian community, is easily derailed when its decisive historical witness is jeopardized. As the title of this study indicates, there is always the danger of theological reduction which I would here loosely define as the tailoring of the Gospel to suit philosophical (metaphysical or existential-experiential) or even institutional demands. But how can one decide whether a

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 97-98.

<sup>9</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Act & Being, trans. by Bernard Noble (London: Collins, 1962), p. 133.

particular theology is guilty of reduction? No doubt, the concern which Baum's use of the Blondelian Shift in theological interpretation raises for me will manifest itself most clearly in dealing with the hermeneutical question.<sup>10</sup> And it is for this reason that the final chapter focuses on Baum's approach as a solution to the hermeneutical problem.

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<sup>10</sup>Generally speaking, by the "Blondelian Shift" I mean Blondel's insistence that truth and, thus, also divine truth, must have an intrinsic relationship to life. Hence Blondel's proposal embraces the idea of an "insider-God" whose dynamic presence forbids (1) an apologetics that isolates revelation from the life situation in which it occurs, and (2) an approach to history which fails to recognize the interpretive character of a record of history by identifying the complexity of actual historical reality with such a record.

## CHAPTER I

### SETTING THE STAGE

#### Baum's Theological Pilgrimage

In the preface to Man Becoming Baum briefly sketches his development as a theologian.<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of showing that Baum's present orientation is the result of a considerable number of years of reflection and experience, the story is here retold.

Beginning with his days as a member of the Augustinian Order in the late forties, Baum tells us that initially he had adopted a theology with a strong Barthian flavour. Indeed, Baum now acknowledges that his early attraction to Barthian theology was perhaps a natural choice since, in his view, the Barthian emphasis admirably suited the aspirations and traditions of the religious life.<sup>2</sup> However,

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<sup>1</sup>Gregory Baum, Man Becoming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), pp. vii-xiv.

<sup>2</sup>Barth's emphasis on the centrality of Scripture and faithfulness to the Church's apostolic commission reinforces a style of life where action no less than thought is exhorted to be responsive to the God of life: "If our thinking is not to be pseudo-thinking we must think about life; . . ." (Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, trans. by Edwyn C. Hoskyns [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968], p. 425). For Barth everything in the Church from its polity and structure to its varied organizations must be directed by the one apostolic commission to preach and administer the sacraments (Karl Barth, Credo [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962], pp. 143-44). Further, Barth makes his recommendation out of respect for the Church's apostolic commission and not because ". . . the Church should be content to exist in a 'corner of private piety'" (*ibid.*). Baum has therefore good reason for saying that Barth's emphasis suits the religious life. But possibly, since Baum is now critical of a too rigid distinction between the supernatural and natural life, he also intends the charge that the Barthian emphasis tends

at the end of the fifties, pastoral work and continued studies-- notably on the Church's relationship to anti-semitism--made Baum aware of the dangerous self-delusion which may be perpetuated when the Church makes a rigid distinction between supernatural and natural life. Indeed, though constantly aware of the ambiguity of secular, liberal values, Baum came to see that the contemporary culture as shaped by these values revealed hitherto hidden aspects of the Gospel. Baum's discovery, however, did bring on a personal crisis, even to the point of wondering whether he could remain a Catholic. But Baum's struggle came to an end when Karl Rahner showed him a way out

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to give the Christian community a "ghetto" quality. In a more direct way the same criticism is raised by F. Ferré. In attacking T. F. Torrance, a staunch defender of the Theology of the Word, who made the case that only by God's miraculous action the human word becomes the bearer of God's Word, Ferré states: "Why, if these words of ours are quite meaningless as applied to God, are the meaningless words of Scripture more to be respected than the meaningless words of a racing tabloid?" (Frederick F. Ferré, Language, Logic and God [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961], p. 90). The charge laid is logical docetism--a divorce between the logical character of human theological discourse and the meaning and truth miraculously conferred by God. And, of course, the alleged docetism cannot lead to a genuine theory of incarnation. Yet, even if Baum agrees with Ferré's critique of the "Logic of Obedience," he certainly does not apply it to all of Barth's thought. At least, in Man Becoming Baum's attitude to Barth is quite positive and, no doubt, for a good reason: Barth simply cannot be dismissed as the helpless slave of a defective theological method. Barth himself has pointed out that early pre-occupation with the majesty and otherness of God was a reaction to presentations of God as ". . . confined to the musty shell of the Christian-religious self-consciousness, . . ." (Karl Barth, The Humanity of God [Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1934], p. 40). But accentuation of God's otherness did not remain Barth's only emphasis; as the following revealingly shows: "But did it not appear to escape us by quite a distance that the deity of the living God . . . found its meaning and its power only in the context of His history and of His dialogue with man, and thus in His togetherness with man?" (ibid., p. 45).

with a theological anthropology with which it was possible " . . . , to affirm the uniqueness of the Church and at the same time to hold that the mystery of new life is operative in every single human being."<sup>3</sup> Karl Rahner, then, was a key factor in Baum's re-orientation. But, admits Baum: "The shift of perspective began to influence my theology only slowly."<sup>4</sup> Thus the new perspective which had come to him as a question-mark in the late fifties and then as a new way of seeing did not become a subject for systematic investigation and exploration for Baum until the late sixties. In The Credibility of the Church Today, which is Baum's reply to Charles Davis' A Question of Conscience, he fully appropriates the new perspective and interprets the Church and traditional ecclesiology in the light of its new focus. In another work, Faith and Doctrine, Baum works out the implications of the new approach for apologetics. Finally, in Man Becoming Baum answers objections to the new perspective and applies its principles of reinterpretation to the doctrine of God. Also, Baum does acknowledge that he finds support for his views in the work of theologians such as Paul Tillich, Bishop Robinson, and other exponents of secular theology. However, insists Baum, since he chooses to be radical and orthodox at the same time, he has attempted to develop a method and language which would be in greater continuity with Catholic life and thought than that of the so-called modern, secular theologians. Nevertheless, along with Baum's desire for

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<sup>3</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. x.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. xi.

continuity, according to his own judgment, the distinctive thing about his approach is:

. . . the application of a psychologically-oriented phenomenology to show that ordinary human life is not ordinary at all, but, in fact, highly dramatic, a field of conflict between forces of self-destruction and powers--unexpected powers--of creativity and new life.<sup>5</sup>

#### The Wider Setting

Edward Schillebeeckx observes a difference between Catholic and Reformed theologians which deserves attention. Says Schillebeeckx:

In the theology of the Reformed Churches, our attention is again . . . drawn to a continuing series of peaks of theological authority--Barth, Bultmann, Tillich, Ebeling, and Fuchs, Moltmann, Pannenberg and so on. In Catholic theology, however, these peaks are more relative--theology seems more to be borne along by a wider stream which carries all kinds of vessels along with it, but within which a current that is somewhat faster than the stream itself can from time to time be observed.<sup>6</sup>

But, further, the difference between Catholic and Reformed theology is, according to Schillebeeckx, the result of the distinctively Catholic idea of the Church. Suggests Schillebeeckx:

According to this idea, the radical need for hermeneutic interpretation is recognised as clearly as in Protestant theology, but far greater importance is attached to the fides Ecclesiae, the faith of the whole community of believers, than to the finest synthesis of theologians, even though these have a critical function with regard to the empirical form in which the faith of the community appears.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>6</sup>T. M. Schoof, A Survey of Catholic Theology, 1800-1970, with a Foreword by Edward Schillebeeckx, trans. by N. D. Smith (New York: Paulist Newman Press, 1970), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 1-2.

Hence, if Schillebeeckx is correct, the Catholic theologian may be expected to have a sense of modesty--a consciousness of being " . . . only one small voice within a great movement. . . . "<sup>8</sup> Now, naturally, one realizes that Reformed theologians too may have their reasons for a sense of modesty. Respect for a wide variety of traditions as well as a theologian's understanding of his work in relationship to the Church, may have a profound bearing. Nevertheless, in Protestant circles theology often did and does express itself with an urgency and a prophetic emphasis which would seem to belie the presence of modesty. Yet, quite apart from the question of modesty, it is especially the flexibility which can be a part of viewing theology as "borne along by a wider stream" which deserves attention. A flexibility which implies even the possibility of a Copernican turn-about, I believe, would be difficult for a theologian in the Reformed tradition. Of course, one should immediately qualify the foregoing statement. The really important theologians--whatever their period or Church affiliation--are too complex, versatile, and alive to be rigidly classified! Also, particularly in the absence of well documented studies on the subject, assertions on how Catholic and Protestant theologians differ with respect to the way Church-life influences their theology, can only have the validity of a general impression. Nevertheless, on the whole, it seems to me, Schillebeeckx's judgment is quite warranted. Theological tradition in the Reformed Churches is usually sharply distinguished from the primary, Scriptural witness. Consequently, even if in practice a particular

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

historical confession or doctrinal expression is held to be binding, such a confession or doctrinal expression is commonly regarded as subject to the critique of the "Word." Hence, by implication, what the theologians consider a "right" reading of the "Word" plays a decisive role in Protestant communions. Now, as suggested by what may happen in practice, one could not say that tradition for Protestants never succeeds in becoming something like a "word incarnate." As a participant in the current study of the Plan of Union for the United Church of Canada, the Anglican Church, and the Disciples of Christ, I am often surprised by the weight of authority certain people still invest in a Calvin, Knox, or Wesley. But let me clarify further: by stressing the prophetic role of theology in Protestant circles I by no means wish to imply that Catholic tradition is never subject to a critique in the light of Catholic theology. The bearing of the new perspective on Vatican II serves to illustrate the point--and, one could add, also illustrates how the theological critique in Catholicism is more likely to express itself through a consensus rather than an individual voice. Thus it is here acknowledged that the greater weight imparted to tradition in Catholic thought is apt to provide the Catholic theologian with a sense of relativity and perspective which can give his work a more tentative and less rigid character. The work of Baum is of course a good illustration of Catholic flexibility. Baum's movement from a Barthian emphasis to the near opposite theological anthropology initiated by Rahner tells the story of a theologian who frankly admits that his point of view is subject to revision in the light of critical reflection on his own and the Church's experience. Now, no doubt, self-critical reflection also

occurs among Protestant theologians. Yet possibly, the Protestant impulsion to present here and now the way things ought to be understood--the peaks of theological authority of which Schillebeeckx speaks--is a liability rather than an asset for the creation of a dialogue which may change minds. Indeed, Schillebeeckx is polite when he speaks of peaks of theological authority. One could easily regard twentieth century Protestant theology as a series of wrestling matches where a champion's chief credentials are of course his skill, wit, and prowess to dethrone others. Barth had to demolish Harnack, the secular theologians had to show Barth's irrelevance, Bultmann's disciples had to "correct" Bultmann, and the theologians of hope, no doubt, received a spotlight because they shadow-boxed the despair left by the so-called Christian atheists. The foregoing is of course only a caricature. Yet insofar as the caricature discloses a grain of truth, it is probably true that in contrast with its Protestant counterpart the Catholic community of theologians possesses a greater humility before tradition as a whole. Consequently, one of the traits of the Catholic theologian should be his patience and capacity for sympathetic dialogue--even if this makes his work less flamboyant and for some, therefore, perhaps less exciting.

For the present investigation, however, the question which must be raised is: What is Baum's contribution within the dialogue of the Catholic theological community? Is his work an entirely new contribution? Further, what is the value of Baum's theology, and how does one judge it?

As noted, Baum admits his indebtedness to Karl Rahner. Also, in Man Becoming Baum makes it abundantly clear that his proposals for

reinterpreting Christian doctrine are founded on a modification of Maurice Blondel's method of immanentism. Still, Blondel and Rahner are not the only influence. Baum's participation in Scriptural studies and in the ecumenical dialogue doubtless means his exposure to a great variety of thought and scholarship. Generally speaking, thus, Baum's work illustrates the three themes--an impulse from the authentic Christian past, an impulse from contemporary existential experience, and an impulse from the other Christian Churches--which T. M. Schoof observes as ever discernible in Catholic theology in its process of renewal.<sup>9</sup>

Baum's novelty is thus not a case of isolated, unrelated originality. Rather, Baum adopts and applies the insights of a tradition which he makes his own and which, as such, he makes new by doing his thinking in the midst of a stream of interacting influences emanating both from the past and the present.

However, already at this point something can be said of Baum's style of theologizing. Charles Davis who accuses Baum of ideological thinking<sup>10</sup>--we will not judge here whether Davis' charge has validity--does, at least indirectly, point to a quality in Baum's work. That is, Baum's work rather has the appearance of being dominated by the search for a philosophical justification for the life of the Church. An exaggerated way of underlining Baum's apologetic concern is to describe

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>10</sup>Charles Davis, A Question of Conscience (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967), p. 244.

him as having looked for and found the key by which the door is opened again to meaningful and viable Christian faith. But what's wrong with such a stance? If it is really so that an intelligible faith is the prerequisite for a socially relevant faith, one should not complain! Of course, should the concern with apologetics become too isolated or technical--which emphatically is not the case with Baum--then criticisms such as made by Daniel Callahan are quite understandable. States Callahan:

Most of the great Catholic figures of our day--the Rahners, the Küngs, the Schillebeeckxs, the von Balthasars--are notably scant in references to economics, political science, urban planning, and even to the sociology and psychology of religion.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the following remark is even more telling:

The new realm of Catholic thought--of I-Thou encounters, salvation history, omega points, Lonergan-like insights, sein and dasein, kerygma--is a delightful place for Catholics to live. It's just that we're the only ones who live there along with a few scattered Protestants.<sup>12</sup>

But, of course, Baum's work is not blind to the psychology and sociology of religion. On the contrary, Baum's psychologically-oriented phenomenology produces an interpretation which is of direct relevance to all phases of life. But, further, whether directly or only indirectly relevant, must one not maintain that a form of apologetics remains indispensable? The Church can not have a real sense of direction and thus be of social relevance unless it proceeds on the basis of an

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<sup>11</sup>Daniel Callahan, "The Secular City: Toward a Theology of Secularity," New Theology, No.3, ed. by Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1966), p. 35.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 35-36.

intelligible faith. An apologetic attempt, therefore, which, as Baum does, aims at giving the Gospel a foothold in contemporary thought and experience should have much to commend itself.

Nevertheless, there is, I suggest, a quality in Baum's work which is common to Catholic renewal theology. As Callahan insinuates, there is a tendency to be concerned with religious security, and especially in the sense of a great effort to show that the new is in line with the old. Now, of course, the need to demonstrate the continuity of the new with the old is not quite as urgent as in pre-Vatican II days. As T. M. Schoof indicates in his observations on pre-Vatican II renewal theology,

The factor to which the laborious progress of the theology of renewal can be attributed is not, on closer inspection, the magisterium as a regulating function within the Church. . . . No, the restraining factor is attributable to the fatal alliance between this teaching authority and neo-scholasticism, . . . .<sup>13</sup>

Thus the pre-Vatican II state of affairs meant that theologians who aimed at renewal were under constant pressure to make their efforts acceptable to a teaching authority which " . . . believed firmly that this system of theological concepts that is, of neo-scholasticism was identical with the revelation of Christ, . . . ." <sup>14</sup> Again, in Schoof's words:

. . . , the theologians who were looking for new ways of expressing the central elements of revelation, faith, and tradition recognized the indispensable need to make their inner conviction acceptable to the teaching authority by a more and more subtly shaded presentation

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<sup>13</sup>Schoof, A Survey of Catholic Theology, p. 148.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

of their point of view. When it became apparent that this could not be done successfully from a position outside that of neo-scholasticism--the failure of the modernist movement is an example of this--an attempt was made to do it by going back to the sources of scholasticism itself.<sup>15</sup>

Now, of course, the post-Vatican II situation in which Baum theologizes does not conform to the conditions described by Schoof. But why, then, the need to re-interpret and re-formulate if there is a new found freedom? That question is, of course, partly answered by the distinctively Catholic idea of the Church which, as noted, entails an inescapable encounter with past doctrine and practice. But, further, it is also Baum's expressed desire to be both radical and orthodox at the same time which necessitates his coming to terms with the Church's past witness.

Now, of course, insofar as Baum's reinterpretation does introduce a radical element, he may easily become the victim of rash judgments. Especially for the traditionalist, it may be tempting to dismiss Baum's self-proclaimed orthodoxy as a "sugar-coated" attempt to appease conservatives. Again, others might make the disparaging suggestion that Baum's work epitomizes an attitude which allows one to tamper with orthodox foundations without restraint. But, of course, unless the emotion is based on a rationale with which one can enter a constructive dialogue, very little is gained. Certainly, the view that theology too is at last the victim of a "permissive" society is simply too naive in that it belittles the greater personal responsibility with which theologians must function in an open situation. Rather what Baum's work does prove is that in his freedom of expression he is able to

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

produce a theology in which the present plays a vital role. Moreover, Baum presents his theology with such a clarity and pastoral concern that it cannot escape the attention of the Church at large. Indeed, the lucidity with which Baum expresses himself could make him for the Catholic communion much what Bishop Robinson was for Protestants in the early sixties. Of course, the similarity between Baum and Robinson must not be pushed too far. Nor do I wish to imply that both Baum and Robinson are mere popularizers who are void of any originality. The point here is that Baum--as Robinson did with Tillich's and Bultmann's theology--presents a quite readable and, as such, perhaps controversial interpretation of a tradition of renewal whose progress is by now irreversible.

The central problem Baum concerns himself with in Man Becoming is the doctrine of God and how for modern men this doctrine can be turned into either sense or nonsense. Thus, touching the central nerve of what it means to live by faith, Baum inevitably creates some deep questioning and probing. And how could it be different! Modest as Baum's "current that is somewhat faster than the wider theological stream" may be, his consistent application of the Blondelian Shift in the work of interpretation affects the understanding of every single doctrine. Inevitably, therefore, Baum's proposals are bound to stir up questions, and, indeed, if not questions, perhaps suspicions. Consequently, it is not a total surprise that Baum has expounded his views as if in anticipation of various charges.

## CHAPTER II

### TRUTH AS SALVATIONAL

#### The demand for non-objectification

Time and again Baum stresses that the truths of faith are salvational:

The articles of faith recited in the creed do not describe an object called God of which man is an observer: these articles proclaim and mediate God's communication of himself. Since God comes to man in his Word, his truth is always salvational.<sup>1</sup>

Baum is thus in harmony with the tradition that stresses the "affective" aspect of the content of faith. The revelation of God, it is held, is not in a vacuum but is inseparably linked with man's life. But, further, Baum suggests: "Divine revelation is not new knowledge; it does not make men learned or well-informed about the divine, rather it affects man's consciousness."<sup>2</sup>

However, what does it mean to say that God affects man's consciousness? God's immanence and, hence, man's participation in revelation, doubtless means the impossibility of what Baum calls a "spectator knowledge of God." But does God's immanence also mean that the concepts of faith only have an objective reference to God-in-his-effect and not to God-as-he-is-in-himself? Actually Baum tells us that we may not make the above distinction: "The Word of God to man is God himself. The gift of God to

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<sup>1</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

man is God himself. This is the Good News proclaimed by Jesus Christ. For this reason we may not suppose that behind God's presence in history there is a God existing in himself."<sup>3</sup> Salvational truth, Baum thus holds, is also with reference to God-as-he-is-in-himself. Yet far from meaning that God is intelligible mystery in a transcendence which is also distinct from the human reality, Baum asserts a transcendent mystery at the heart of life. Further, as men reflect on the presence of the mystery, it unfolds a meaning that ". . . may be translated into declarations about human life [and thus] indicates that man's knowledge of God is always salvational."<sup>4</sup>

In the interest of avoiding a position which he feels inevitably leads to an objectification of God, Baum holds that there is no point at which man can regard himself apart from God or God apart from man. Hence, without positing a God behind the God-in-his-revelation and without denying God's transcendence, Baum can make his case for a theological anthropology and the relevance of a psychologically-oriented phenomenology.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, surely, Baum's conception of God is not the only basis to avoid non-objectification. The demand for non-objectification is also

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 181-82.    <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>5</sup>Baum, of course, grants the validity of the ". . . more exclusively intellectual theology" (Man Becoming, p. 285). But this means for him that it ". . . should be possible to approach the insider-God with the methods and tools of philosophical reasoning" (ibid.). That is, an intellectual approach may not deviate from the premises that make Baum's theological anthropology possible. Indeed, philosophical reflection may for Baum ". . . be an attempt to discern the message inscribed in man's experience of reality . . ." (ibid., p. 170). The validity of Baum's appeal to Vatican I in this context is of course dependent on his interpretation of the ratio fide illustrata of that council. In the light of Edward Schillebeeckx's comments (Revelation and Theology, trans. by N. D. Smith [2 vols.; London: Sheed and Ward, 1967-68], I, 128) one may have serious reservations with regard to the universalism which Baum attributes to Vatican I.

satisfied by a theism which maintains a conception of God as somehow embracing both entity and non-entity.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the presence of an "entity" aspect would then allow one to speak of an objective reference to God. And, further, even though knowledge of the living God by necessity is salvational, it would nevertheless put the believer in the direction of knowing God until ". . . we shall see him as he is."<sup>7</sup> Consequently, faith would not be a new consciousness in the sense of realizing something about my deepest dimension. Rather, faith would then be the reception of truth which I may trust is a knowledge of God.

Now, of course, Baum may object that the theism I have in mind, even if it avoids a once-for-all conceptual grasping of God, still views the reality of God and man in terms of an "over-againstness." Thus Baum might well protest that my suggestion entails an objectification of God.

Admittedly, the conception of God as embracing both entity and non-entity is rather paradoxical, but it is not for that reason nonsensical. In its non-entity aspect the notion points to the "more than personal" of God's reality. But at the same time the entity aspect

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<sup>6</sup>Of relevance here is Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In a chapter on revelation in terms of being in which he examined revelation understood (1) as doctrine, (2) as psychic experience, and (3) as institution, Bonhoeffer concluded that the latter are inadequate because they ". . . understand the revealed God as entity, whereas entities are transcended by act and being" (Act & Being, p. 111). Nevertheless, suggested Bonhoeffer, ". . . for the pure ontology of revelation it is as wrong to volatilise revelation into non-entity as to treat it wholly as entity. It must rather be thought of as enjoying a mode of being which embraces both entity and non-entity, while at the same time 'suspending' within itself man's intention of it - faith." (ibid., p. 113).

<sup>7</sup>I John 3:2. (R.S.V.)

signifies that the "more than personal" is not "less than personal." Thus the Ultimate is described as an otherness which affirms the Christian conviction of communion with a real Thou. Now, without question, in and by itself the idea of God as embracing both entity and non-entity is an abstraction. However, rather than calling this abstraction a case of objectification is it not, and more justly so, a thesis about the relation of God to man in the light of the witness of faith? Indeed, if it is argued that a thesis concerning God which wishes to do justice to him as personal reality involves objectification, then Baum's own thesis is guilty of the same mistake. Then, in Baum's case, his exclusive stress of God's non-entity aspect is entirely in the interest of safeguarding a purely salvational dimension of our knowledge of God! Baum's theological synthesis thus, no less than any other, quite definitely involves a metaphysical judgment. But, further, what is the case if real objectification is defined as the imposition of a judgment on the data of faith? Could Baum really argue that his synthesis merely operates in the light of these data? One might plausibly argue, it seems to me, that, if anyone, it is Baum who objectifies--turning God solely into non-entity only because he is really conceived as unintelligible entity, save in his dynamic effect.

The word "objectification", it appears then, is easily abused. It provides the theological marksman with ammunition that can hardly miss the target. However, precious little is gained if the target is merely an artificial rendition of what one thinks others are doing.

Theology exclusively in  
a modum affectionis?

A further point raised in connection with Baum's emphatic stress on the salvational character of the truths of faith is the question whether he intends to theologize exclusively in a modum affectionis. Remarks such as ". . . beyond the salvational knowledge of faith there is the more exclusively intellectual knowledge of theology" and, "The more restrictive approach we have adopted . . . has enabled us to speak about God and his revelation in ordinary, largely non-technical terms, to bypass many philosophical issues . . ." <sup>8</sup> almost give the impression that a theology in Aquinas' sense of a reflection in the modum cognitionis can be dispensed with. <sup>9</sup> However, as in the case of Leslie Dewart, an "every-man's theology" or a "market-place theology" is, of course, very much grounded in what an academic theology now ordains. <sup>10</sup> Baum himself admits that he capitalizes on the direction academic theology received in the thinking of Blondel, Maréchal, Rahner, and others. <sup>11</sup> But, as a result, Baum's position is of course more than the mere consequence of a direction which others have justified philosophically. Baum's own

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<sup>8</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 285.

<sup>9</sup>According to Schillebeeckx (Revelation and Theology, I, 282) Aquinas feared that thought exclusively in the modum affectionis would produce vague and emotional results.

<sup>10</sup>In his plea for a metaphysics of presence, Leslie Dewart states: "Christian theology and philosophy would then cease to be academic subjects and theo-logical enquiry would once again take place in the public, everyday, real life of the whole church" (The Future of Belief [New York: Herder and Herder, 1966], p. 145 n.).

<sup>11</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, pp. 26-27.

engagement in the refutation of charges against the Blondelian perspective by necessity entails a critical evaluation of theological issues in a technical sense. Hence, even if one is of the opinion voiced by Richard P. McBrien that here Baum's ". . . lucidity and simplicity become a liability, not an asset,"<sup>12</sup> it is nevertheless critical theology.

The dogmatic aspect of  
Baum's apologetics

Man Becoming, it is at once clear, is more than the mere explication of the truths of faith in today's language: it is at the same time an apologetic for a certain kind of language. The predilection for terms such as "new consciousness," "orientation," and "transcendent dynamism" is not an accident. The concepts which are the result of Baum's appropriation of the Blondelian shift also imply an evaluation of any assumptions that would dispute the legitimacy of these concepts. Thus Baum is critically engaged in the discernment of what is involved in Christian faith. In his critical engagement, however, Baum is from the beginning concerned to show the validity of certain existential-ontological categories. It is not in ontic, existentially contingent event, but in dialogue, communion and the gift dimension as reality dimensions that Baum aims to find the unity of revelation and existence. Hence, Baum's critical discernment is immediately dogmatic in nature.<sup>13</sup> Baum wants to

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<sup>12</sup>Richard P. McBrien, review of Man Becoming, by Gregory Baum, in Commonweal, Nov. 6, 1970, p. 156.

<sup>13</sup>In a sense, of course, no thesis concerning God's reality escapes the charge of possessing a dogmatic dimension. However, notice that in Baum's case I underlined the word "immediately," meaning that revelation's content is pre-determined from the start. But immediate pre-determination of revelation is not inescapable and here Bonhoeffer's "genuine ontology" may serve as an illustration. A genuine ontology,

show us precepts about the nature of God, man, and man's knowing which will render faith plausible and, thus, save it from becoming fideism without falling into sheer rationalism. Unfortunately, however, Baum's direct application of an apologetic scheme in the interpretation of the historical witness means that either hermeneutics in its effort is rendered useless, or that it has been made synonymous with dogmatics.<sup>14</sup> One detects Baum's own unhappiness in the matter in his comments on the principles which he recognizes in the idea of the Church as hermeneutical principle:

The principles formulated as they are, make us a little uncomfortable because we recall that they have been used to promote obscurantism, to resist the certain results of scientific exegesis, and to suppress Christian scholars dedicated to biblical research.<sup>15</sup>

Still, Baum is not so uncomfortable that he refuses to embrace the very principles which, as he himself acknowledges, might jeopardize scientific exegesis. Thus, one might contend, Baum's thesis supposes that all will

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according to Bonhoeffer, ". . . comes into its own, in as much as it defines the 'being in . . . ' in such a way that cognition, finding itself in the world of entity, suspends itself when confronted with the being of the entity and does not force it under its control" (Act & Being, pp. 115-16).

<sup>14</sup>H. M. Kuitert points out that, as Lothar Steiger has done in Die Hermeneutic als Dogmatisches Problem (Gütersloh, 1961), one can justifiably say that the question of hermeneutics presents a dogmatic problem: "Hermeneutical questions are dogmatic in nature, as, vice versa, dogmatical questions are hermeneutical in nature" (de realiteit van het geloof [Kampen: J. H. Kok, N. V., 1966], p. 9 [translation mine]). But then Kuitert adds: "It is precisely the two-foldness of dogmatics and hermeneutics which guarantees the only possible resistance against the so-called dogmatic exegesis" (ibid., p. 10). Further, by dogmatic exegesis Kuitert means a process which, according to him, is to be found in certain types of existentialist theology: ". . . the identification of hermeneutics and existential interpretation . . . as if no other hermeneutical designs were possible" (ibid., p. 83). Thus, with Bonhoeffer (Widerstand und Ergebung [Munich, 1956], p. 15) Kuitert treats Bultmann as being guilty of a typical "liberales Reduktionsverfahren" which adjusts revelation to existence (ibid., p. 84).

<sup>15</sup>Gregory Baum, Faith and Doctrine (Paramus, N. J.: Newman Press, 1969), pp. 124-25.

be well as long as the Church anchors its principles of interpretation in the proper theological perspective. However, a biblical, patristic or reformation scholar could not really be pleased with Baum's hermeneutical proposals.

Something quite drastic happens when dogmatics usurps the place of hermeneutics--even when it avoids the pitfalls which Baum fears by asserting a perspective wide enough to tolerate historical and textual criticism. When dogmatics overrides hermeneutics, then the disciplines dealing with the historical aspect of tradition are in advance robbed of making any significant contribution--that is, to dogmatics! In Baum's case, in spite of his claims to modesty, the new focus, the very perspective that will deliver us from intolerance, is a kind of ne plus ultra. Baum asserts a perspective which in the end claims a thoroughly explanatory and all-embracing meaning. But even though Baum's focus views life as a process of growth through dialogue and communion, may one not object that this focus prevents Baum from genuine participation in the dialogue? Already before any dialogue materializes, the perspective determines the meaning of what is taking place. And, of course, from the point of view of knowing what one feels others ought to know but perhaps don't, the stress on life's ambiguity can be a face-saving device. The acknowledgment of ambiguity somehow makes one appear less all-knowing; or, it at least gives another the consolation that he may well know what is to be known unconsciously. Hence, little wonder that in the face of disagreement Baum is sometimes tempted to treat such disagreement as an apparent contradiction because of ambiguity or because of a different conceptualization of what is held to be the same

experience. Says Baum:

Without denying the ambiguity of the world religions and hence their need of redemption--this ambiguity exists also of [sic.] the Church--contemporary Christians joyfully acknowledge that men are summoned and graced by what is best in their religious traditions to become trusting, generous, loving, patient, and cheerful people devoted to a meaning of life that transcends them.<sup>16</sup>

The rejection of a correspondence  
theory of truth

Baum's penetrating ability to state what life is about in all regions and quarters is no accident. Baum's far-reaching vision is possible because he employs a concept of the conceptualization by which man understands life which softens all tensions in the search for truth.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, it is no surprise that Baum in his role as editor of The

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<sup>16</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, pp. 82-83.

<sup>17</sup>It is of course true that Baum vigorously argues for a tension between past and present: ". . . everything God has done for the salvation of man . . . in Jesus Christ . . . lies in the past" (The Credibility of The Church Today [New York: Herder and Herder, 1968], p. 141). Further, adds Baum: ". . . we believe that the divine redemption, revealed in Christ, is still going on . . . . Redemption took place once and for all; and yet it is forever contemporary to us (ibid.). More crucially, against homogeneous development and in favour of discontinuous development, the tension, Baum maintains, is preserved insofar as ". . . the several focal points in the books of the New Testament explain why it is impossible to reconcile the various positions into a single consistent system of thought" (ibid., p. 154). However, what must not escape one here is that Baum conceives of the tension in terms of socio-historical conditioning as it comes to bear on faith's interpretation and application. Redemption is forever contemporary to us: that is, it is not the case that there is a period in the tradition which possesses an exclusive more penetrating perception. And all this Baum can maintain without jeopardizing his claim that Christ's revelation is still definitive and that the ultimate guarantee of ". . . God's work in the present is the conformity with the original gift" (ibid., p. 145). Why? The reason is simply that the dogma of the normativeness of Scripture does not for Baum entail an element of "Scripture 'over-against' the Church": "The full meaning of a biblical text may be available only through the experience of the Church and the verdict of the ecclesiastical magisterium" (Faith and Doctrine, p. 124).

Future of Belief Debate aligns himself with those who give a positive evaluation, and, especially, that he should do this in the area of epistemology. In his article "Orthodoxy Recast" he indeed stresses the importance of Dewart's theory of knowledge and reproduces it in a nutshell:

Dewart follows Wittgenstein in affirming that this process is socio-historical. It would be incorrect to say that man's experience has an inner reality for him which he, then, tries to express in concepts and words: what is true, rather, is that man becomes conscious of his experience through the conceptualization to which his society introduces him. Conceptualization of experience is not a perfection added to man's being; it is rather constitutive of man as a self-conscious person.<sup>18</sup>

Now, indeed, it would be foolish to deny the import of socio-historical factors in our conceptualization. But why must one make so much of socio-historical factors that one has to jettison a correspondence theory of truth, as I suspect is the case in Baum? Perhaps one might plausibly argue that it is the status of the new perspective itself which makes it helpful to dispose of a correspondence theory.

The new perspective, Baum holds, is more than a private thesis. The new perspective, suggests Baum, is ". . . the new experience of the

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Hence, in reality, the Spirit-guided experience and judgment of the Church never fails in understanding a past Word, and, hence, the tension is only relative. If, however, one believes that the Spirit not only guides but through the Word witnessed to in concrete, historical event also confronts the faithful, and one thus grants a degree of independence to Scripture and hence establishes the importance of biblical exegesis, and thus also refuses at any point to identify the Word understood with the Word witnessed to, then Baum's past-present tension is not conceived in terms which are radical enough.

<sup>18</sup>Gregory Baum, "Orthodoxy Recast," The Future of Belief Debate, ed. G. Baum (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), p. 105.

Gospel as a new sense of brotherhood and a new openness to truth."<sup>19</sup>

In Baum's opinion, therefore, the acceptance of the new perspective is not, in the first place, the result of a critical judgment, but the consequence of an "eye-opening" experience.<sup>20</sup> And certainly it would not be advantageous for Baum to introduce a distinction in the "eye-opening" experience between experience and consciousness, between reality and the reality intended in consciousness. Inevitably the above distinction makes the new perspective merely one questionable conceptualization among others. Hence the claim that the new perspective is Spirit-created and, thus, really a salvational truth may at least in part motivate one to embrace an epistemology which opposes a correspondence theory of truth. And, of course, it is far from just to imply that

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<sup>19</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 163.

<sup>20</sup>One wonders how much Max Scheler's concept of the "envisioning I" has influenced Baum. According to Bonhoeffer's analysis, Scheler, in the "sense of values," regards the "envisioning I" as ". . . endowed with the capacity to take into itself the whole world, the fulness of life, the good and the very deity . . ." (Act & Being, p. 57). Thus, following Scheler, his epistemology would at least imply an a priori cognitive level where the role of judgment and, hence, a correspondence theory is not applicable, and for the reason that the truth, in the sense of reality, is a datum displayed to consciousness. And, of course, Baum does make an approving reference to Scheler and the manner in which the latter dismissed arguments for the existence of God: ". . . if a man looking at the universe . . . discerns a single world . . . something marvellous has already happened to him. The God whom he wants to prove has already touched him" (Man Becoming, pp. 187-88). Noteworthy concerning the "super-look" are, however, Bernard Lonergan's reservations: "I have no doubt that concepts and judgments . . . are the expression of one's accumulated experience, developed understanding and acquired wisdom, and I quite agree that such expression is an objectification of one's self and one's world, . . . but I would urge that this objectification is intentional. . . . we objectify the self by meaning the self and we objectify the world by meaning the world . . . . Such a meaning of its nature is related to a meant, and what is meant may or may not correspond to what in fact is so" ("The Dehellenization of Dogma," The Future of Belief Debate, p. 73).

Baum's epistemological stand is unreasonable. A divinely created re-focusing, if it is similar to Dewart's re-conceptualization, as Baum claims it is,<sup>21</sup> one could claim, makes it imperative that a subject-object epistemology be dismissed. Afterall, how could a conceptualization of the divine-human reality claim revelational status if it merely came about through the resolve of human judgment? Judgment here would imply a separation from the divine-human reality which Baum's translation of God-talk into anthropology cannot permit. Further, if I am really inseparable from a dynamic divine-human reality, then my concepts are not, as Dewart points out, photo-copies of reality or what he terms "subjective expressions of an objective reality."<sup>22</sup> Rather, on Dewart's assumption, my concepts are " . . . the means by which we objectify the world and the self. . . ." <sup>23</sup> What we have to do with therefore is not objectification in the sense of reality judgment. Rather we are dealing with objectification as a creative process and in the sense of a coming to be through the self's differentiation of itself out of the totality of continuous reality. Hence, truth is not a scientific, descriptive category, but is "something" that is: " . . . the result of the mind's coming-into-being through the self-differentiation of that-which-is into self and world."<sup>24</sup> And, thus, all I can say as one suspended in reality painted in this way, is that there is the mystery that my consciousness, constituted as it is by socio-hist-

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<sup>21</sup>Baum, The Credibility of The Church Today, p. 174.

<sup>22</sup>Dewart, The Future of Belief, p. 116.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 93. <sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

orical conceptualization, experiences my world and myself with this or that structure, order, or meaning. To say anything more, or to ask whether this or that order or meaning is really true, that is, really corresponds to the way things actually are, is forbidden--that would be tantamount to making my conceptual apparatus the judge of being. Hence, out with a view of truth as the adequatio rei et intellectus in favour of a view of truth as active and living--the adequatio mentis et vitae! Yet, ironically, as Bernard F. Lonergan observes in the case of Dewart,<sup>25</sup> Baum too, far from assuming the self-evidence of truth as salvational in his sense, needs a correspondence view of truth to mean what he says.

When one asks concerning the new perspective, "Is it really so?", then the justification of it as Spirit-created, if this is more than an emotive statement, implies a mind outside of the process so perceiving it and making a case for it--as indeed Baum does! Now, no doubt, a redeeming feature is that the new perspective is not simply a one-man's philosophy. Moreover, though from my point of view the dogma of the normativeness of Scripture is weakened with an interpretation rooted in the notion of truth as the fidelity of consciousness to being, I have no doubt that in practice here and there Scripture is not merely subordinated to the dictates of present schemes of conceptualization. For example, when Baum describes Christ's resurrection as a salvational marvel which asserts a continuity between the earthly and risen Christ in personal self-identity, he also says: ". . . the question as to whether the

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>25</sup>"The Dehellenization of Dogma," p. 73.

great marvel of the resurrection is also a miracle remains open."<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, even if the new perspective is only a sort of ne plus ultra in a relative sense and only through acquiring authority by a process of testing and final validation by the Church's magisterium, it presupposes a rather idealistic form of ecclesio-centrism.<sup>27</sup>

Baum's functional view of  
theological language

Doubtless, Baum's unreserved commitment to treat the truth of revelation as constitutive of human life and, hence, his stress on an empirically oriented concept of truth, has the effect of making the Gospel a penetrating commentary on life. And, conversely, Baum's approach also invests life itself with apologetic power. However, as observed from hermeneutical and epistemological considerations, Baum's apologetic emphasis is not without a price. The exclusion of intelligible objective reference to God's aseity means that ontologically the mystery of God's being is stripped of objective intelligibility. Therefore, as an apologetic for Christianity as a particular and unique truth-claim, Baum's proposals may be regarded as far from satisfactory.

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<sup>26</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 278.

<sup>27</sup>In his review of Baum's Faith and Doctrine Jack Eichhorst maintains that Baum's idea of the Church as hermeneutical principle is not rendered void by post Vatican II developments such as Humanae Vitae. According to Eichhorst, all Baum needs to admit is that the collegial character is not yet adequately realized in the present ecclesiastical manifestation. However, Eichhorst's comment does point out the idealism in Baum's conception of the Church. Baum, as Eichhorst suggests, does not entertain the Protestant notion that the Church could be in radical opposition to the Gospel. Nevertheless, in principle, Eichhorst concedes that a Church meeting Baum's requirements might well end up preaching and teaching contra Evangelium (Journal of Ecumenical Studies, Winter, 1970, p. 133).

On the one hand, Baum's tendency is to subordinate particularity to universal relevance; on the other hand, he desists from investing the witness of Scripture with ontological significance. Anything that suggests that God is a supreme being is, for example, simply to be understood " . . . in a non-metaphysical, religious sense as affirming his power and grace. . . . "28 That is, the Scriptural witness is so interpreted as to conform to Baum's existential-ontological world. Thus, Baum's interpretation makes the particular Scriptural account little more than a window on what he regards as a universal truth. But what Baum then gains in the way of universal experiential relevance at the same time makes it difficult to establish the uniqueness of the concepts employed in any historical witness to revelation. The difficulty of doing justice to particular concepts in the historical witness is especially evident in Baum's use of theological language. One can hardly escape the suspicion that any objective reason for any one concept for Baum has well nigh evaporated.

For Baum a concept such as "Father" in its application to God comes to mean "that man is a being with a destiny," "that he is grounded in a principle that is personal, that is love," "to be able to say 'we' in regard to all men," or "the ultimate ground of reality is love."<sup>29</sup> And, of course, all of Baum's meanings may be legitimate and necessary consequences of believing God to be "Father." However, what is striking is not that the concept of God as "Father" is held to have certain con-

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<sup>28</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 177.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 193-95.

sequences which, no doubt, it has for the manner in which the Christian may and even must regard his world. Rather, what is decisive in Baum is that the concept "God is Father" is held to be the equivalent of certain anthropological consequences--and all this notwithstanding Baum's warning that at times the need does arise to mention God's name lest ". . . we forget that the mystery at work in . . . history radically transcends it."<sup>30</sup> Thus certain concepts for Baum remain indispensable in order to indicate the transcendence of the mystery. Yet, since Baum, unlike de Petter, does not posit an ". . . objective dynamic element in the contents themselves of our knowledge . . . ,"<sup>31</sup> any distinctive meaning in our concepts is threatened. Baum writes as though the witness to revelation is translatable into flexible, functional declarations about human life.

No doubt, then, Baum retains objective reference to God's transcendence. But in the face of God's transcendence Baum limits our concepts to reflect nothing more than the transcendent mystery-in-its-effect. Ultimately, thus, it appears that theological reflection for Baum rests on a non-conceptual element. Baum invites us to focus on the dynamism of the human spirit in which we may believe God is creatively and redemptively involved. Hence, since Baum puts a rather exclusive stress on the salvational aspect of man's knowledge of God, it appears that he denies that man is also objectively directed to the mystery of God's

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 284.

<sup>31</sup>Schillebeeckx, Revelation and Theology, II, 19.

intimate life.<sup>32</sup> Rather for Baum the man of faith is continually directed to greater salvation which he is able to interpret as "greater humanization."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Insofar as Baum follows the Blondel, Maréchal, Rahner solution to the problem of the relationship between experience and concept, the criticism made above finds some support in Schillebeeckx's assessment of this school:

"What is unsatisfactory about Marechal's solution is that it does not explain the distinctive meaning of every conceptual content; that the reality and validity of knowledge is based on an extra-intellectual element; and finally, that while it does establish that human knowledge cannot remain stationary at anything finite, but must always be continuing to search and explore other territories, it does not establish that man, in his knowledge, really attains a positive and infinitive end, God himself" (Revelation and Theology, II, 18).

<sup>33</sup>In fact Baum makes "greater humanization" the content of eschatology (Man Becoming, pp. 94-126).

## CHAPTER III

### BAUM'S UNIVERSALISM

The first principle of interpretation, Baum asserts, is that God is never simply man's "over-against."<sup>1</sup> Thus divine redemptive involvement inescapably means that the truth of revelation is salvational. However, does a salvational stress by necessity entail theology's translation into anthropology? Disagreement with Baum here would not be inconsequential. Hence, the question emerges: "How does Baum justify his anthropological translation?" That is, what is questioned here is the validity of Baum's second principle of reinterpretation, namely, ". . . that every sentence about God can be translated into a declaration about human life."<sup>2</sup>

Of course, insofar as the first principle of reinterpretation is descriptive of what directly or indirectly is asserted by the normative witness, that is, Scripture, it is purely formal. Thus the main thrust of the first principle is to underline that revelation is (a) always by God's initiative, (b) an existential, historical happening and, hence, salvational, and (c) is not merely a human discovery, but the result of God's "working within." Therefore, fittingly so, Baum concludes discussion of his first principle by considering the import of the doctrine of the Trinity for the possibility of God talk. "The Christian Church must speak of the one God who is alive in history and

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<sup>1</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 170. <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

transcends it, in trinitarian terms."<sup>3</sup> That is, man is able to speak of God only because the transcendent God (the Father) is also the Word become flesh (the Son) and the immanent God (the Spirit), and this triune God in his immanence continues to lead man into salvational truth.<sup>4</sup> But, granted one's agreement with this "formal" principle, does it now follow that one must also agree that all statements about God can be translated into declarations about human life and destiny? The second principle, I believe, involves a questionable universalism which may be conveniently discussed under the topics of revelation, the concept "in Christ," and faith.

#### Revelation

If the first principle may be regarded as formal in the sense of making explicit the "how" of revelation as implied by Scripture, the second principle is concerned with substance and, hence, is an interpretation of revelation's content. Baum interprets God's gift of himself, that is, revelation as it is ultimately understood in the Christian tradition, to mean that "God has entered the definition of man."<sup>5</sup> Says Baum, and rightly so: ". . . there is no God-in-himself hidden behind the God-for-us. To suppose this would be to deny the divinity of Christ and the divinity of the bond that unites us with him."<sup>6</sup> Baum thus affirms with the Church the identity for faith of God-in-himself and God-for-us or God-in-his-revelation. Were this not so, then, of course one would end up with tri-theism or a form of

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 179.    <sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 178-80.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 184.    <sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

Arianism where Christ emerges as the highest intermediary being. Hence, as Baum indicates, the identity of God-in-himself and God-for-us must be asserted if it is to be believed that in Jesus God has revealed himself totally: "He has uttered his Word in an unconditional and definitive manner."<sup>7</sup> However, does it now really follow from this that what can be said about God-in-himself, because of his self-revelation in Christ, is equivalent to a declaration about human life? A number of things, it seems to me, need to be said.

First, with Baum I think it is absolutely necessary to recognize God's self-identity in his revelation. Says Baum:

What is revealed to us in Jesus Christ is, . . . , that the God-for-us is in fact the God-in-himself. In Jesus God has revealed himself totally. He has uttered his Word in an unconditional and definitive manner. Nothing remains to be said.<sup>8</sup>

Now with the last sentence "Nothing remains to be said," Baum, no doubt, does not mean to say that Christian theology is no longer necessary but that it cannot add anything to God's revelation. Yet granted that the revelation in Jesus is God's total self-revelation, does this mean that from man's side all that can be said about God is convertible into talk about man? Baum reasons as follows: ". . . since God is present in human life not simply through some created effect but through his self-communication, it should be possible to translate every sentence about this God into a declaration about human life."<sup>9</sup> And, no doubt, Baum's reasoning is correct if God is a dimension of human life as indeed Baum sometimes gives the impression:

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.   <sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 182-83.   <sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

"That God is person means that man's relationship to the deepest dimension of his life is personal. . . . The deepest dimension of human life is not a blind life force or a necessary, ever expanding dynamism. . . ." <sup>10</sup> Of course, Baum here gives the word "dimension" a special meaning. Yet, insofar as "dimension" still carries overtones of a somehow inescapable aspect of life, may one not legitimately object that the use of this word obscures the Christian experience that the Revealer is greater than that in which he reveals himself?

Secondly, as saving event, God's gift of himself in Christ undoubtedly involves a declaration about human life, but, then, human life as Baum intends it is far from ordinary. He speaks of human life as really rooted in God. Thus, from the beginning, "declaration about life" really means by definition a statement about life in which the reality of God is inescapably present. This being so, Baum's second principle is not nearly as radical or startling as it may sound. However, it does raise the question whether perhaps the new perspective is in danger of becoming angelology--that is, it does not seriously take into stock the present human situation. If we are speaking of an unconditional revelation in Jesus, it is inevitably true that we are also speaking of a unique humanity and destiny. Further, through the Spirit, Christ undoubtedly is in the process of transforming our humanity and life in the likeness of his image. Hence, a statement about God-in-himself is certainly a declaration about the eternal imperishable humanity of Christ. However, may we so identify ourselves

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 191-92.

with Christ--even if from his side his identification is complete-- that whatever is true about him is also true of us? Insofar as Christ is also our goal, and not yet our complete state, I would suggest that the Gospel is rather more a declaration both for and about life than simply about life.

Thirdly, as implicit in the preceding remarks, a "declaration about human life" which is held to be equivalent to a statement about God-in-himself, must by necessity, if one is serious about the word "equivalent," come to insist that the word "God" means no more than man is capable of experiencing. Hence, the action of God in Christ is restricted to a revelation of what is already potential in man. Consequently, Baum's doctrine of incarnation blurs the distinction between God and man in such a way as to raise the question whether he believes God to have any existence apart from the existence of man.

Finally, the only condition, it seems to me, which would satisfy Baum's proposals involves a form of idealism. The demand that a word about a God "who is more than human at the heart of his immanence" be equivalent to a word about human destiny is only met when transcendence, that is, "the more than human," comes to mean not "wholly other" but by definition immanent, inexhaustible power to create and actualize human potentiality. But does not transcendence in Christian tradition mean more than the fact that "man is alive by a principle which transcends him?"<sup>11</sup> The accent which the meaning

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

of transcendence receives in Baum, it appears to me, comes dangerously close to implying a system which, as Paul Tillich recognized in naturalism

. . . denies the infinite distance between the whole of finite things and their infinite ground, with the consequence that the term "God" becomes interchangeable with the term "universe" in Baum, human life and destiny? and therefore is semantically superfluous. This semantic situation reveals the failure . . . to understand a decisive element in the experience of the holy, namely, the distance between finite man, on the one hand, and the holy in its numerous manifestations, on the other.<sup>12</sup>

In conclusion, then, the tenet that revelation has empirically oriented meanings is of central significance for Baum. But it should be at once clear that the empirical orientation does not mean that faith now becomes a verifiable matter. Actually, now and then Baum puts the word "declaration" in italics to signify his intent that a word about God constitutes a proclamation about life which defies "hard" empirical verification.<sup>13</sup> Thus, no doubt, the Gospel's translation into declarations about life remains an option of faith. Still, of great interest here is Baum's claim that he avoids pantheism. How does Baum bypass a pantheism and what conception of God does he thereby imply?

On the basis of a static understanding of the nature of man and his world, Baum speculates, his denial of God as "over-against" would carry pantheistic overtones.<sup>14</sup> Hence, in effect it is for Baum the dynamic constitution of reality--its being "summoned" by a dimension

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<sup>12</sup>Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology. (3 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63), II, 7.

<sup>13</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 185. <sup>14</sup>Ibid., p.184.

which is always more than what is actualized--which saves theology from pantheism and at the same time from non-relevance. But Baum's sort of immanentism does have implications for faith. Faith can now no longer primarily be regarded as personal disposition to and relationship with God himself. Rather, faith now means a state of consciousness, that is, an openness to the divine self-giving which enables us to "become." Thus Baum views Christian faith as "new consciousness."<sup>15</sup> Now consciousness is of course awareness of "something." But the awareness of the reality of God means for Baum that God is for us neither personal in the sense of a personal "over-against," nor merely some thing. Rather, we have to do with an awareness for which God is the presence of mystery which manifests itself through its effects on life. Thus, as we saw, the God who is present to life as transcendent mystery is ever engaged in a salvational revelation: he discloses himself as "summons" and "gift" to greater humanization. Therefore, whatever is said about God is also a statement about the human life in which he is present and known through the "difference" he makes. For example, the statement that God is personal no longer is in any way a statement about God as if distinct from the human reality, but is also inextricably bound up with the latter and, thus, comes to mean that ". . . man's relationship to the transcendent mystery can never be reified."<sup>16</sup>

However, what does it mean to say that one's relationship to the divine is non-reifiable? In Baum's context the intent is obviously not to deny that God is more than personal. Rather, he means to deny

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 27. <sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

the conception that God in his being toward us is encountered as Personal Reality: there is no room in Baum's thought for the conception that somehow God embraces both entity and non-entity. To call God "Thou," as one finds that in Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel, comes, for Baum, dangerously close to objectification.<sup>17</sup> And, of course, Baum is absolutely right if it is really true that the concept "person" by definition entails a reification of reality--something indeed questionable. First, to say that one's relationship to some reality is not reifiable, if one means "relationship" and not "identity with a deeper dimension," already involves the acknowledgment of two distinct realities--even if then in the case of God one asserts that his reality in some sense is both "in" and "beyond" any finite reality. Secondly, the application of the concept "person" to "certain" realities in our experience would indeed be reification if it means an acceptance of those realities as "dead," manipulatory objects. But, certainly, "person" implies the opposite meaning. To relate to another, designated as a person, means to suspend judgment on his material, outer aspect: it means to allow that other's material aspect to be the means of communication for a non-objectifiable, transcendent self. This Baum clearly recognizes when he says, "People are never simply objects; they are primarily subjects."<sup>18</sup> But why, then, if communication is recognized as the clue to personhood, should the concept "person" only have a metaphorical value for theology and not an ontological one--granted,

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 196-97. <sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

of course, that in the light of revelation such a concept cannot be applied univocally? After all, is it not strange that the transcendent mystery which, Baum holds, can only be spoken of personally,<sup>19</sup> should "summon us" and "enter dialogue with us" and do all this without in some sense being reality which really is personal?

Baum, of course, opposes the application of the concept "person" to God--even if its meaning is qualified by the doctrine of the trinity--in that it still treats God as distinct from the human reality. On Baum's reading, the concept "person," if applied to God, would violate his idea of immanence as God's universal redemptive involvement. For Baum, man's personally being related to the transcendent mystery is not personal relationship in the sense of including the meaning "inter-personal." Rather, "personally related to the divine" comes to mean precisely what was already assumed from the beginning, namely, that life is not ordinary, that is, has a transcendent "depth dimension." Now, of course, it is entirely Baum's privilege to persuade us that the Gospel is a statement about life's "depth-dimension." But it is quite clear that Baum's argument is only convincing if one agrees to his universalism: namely, that by definition God is everywhere redemptively involved and indeed in such a way that any element of personal "over-against" only remains metaphorically and not in "truth." Moreover, if Baum is right here, then the Gospel certainly is a great declaration about life. Nevertheless, one may wonder, is not the result rather too good to be true? May one not

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 192.

justly suspect that the universalism of Baum's perspective comes too much like a trump card in a "hand" he too readily judged as hopeless? Furthermore, might one not hold that Baum's version of the new perspective with its explicit and conscientious drive for relevance comes dangerously close to a "sell out" to western, secular pragmatism? Such a view of Baum's perspective, it would seem to me, is not entirely unjustified, and especially in view of his doctrine of God. Certainly, Baum's proposals visualize God as ever involved in making us more human. However, the manner in which Baum envisions our humanization at the same time weakens a sense of personal identity. By jeopardizing the aspect of inter-personal communion in the divine-human fellowship, Baum minimizes the element of what we already are, in spite of ourselves, in the sight of God.

#### The Concept "In Christ"

Another way to consider the import of Baum's universalism for basically orthodox tenets is to focus on the meaning of the concept "in Christ." Whereas the Church certainly held and holds a doctrine of apotheosis for the world "in Christ," in Baum's theology it is precisely the content of the concept "in Christ" which may raise a few eyebrows.

Baum has no hesitation to interpret such passages as John 1:1-9, I Col. 1:15-20, and Heb. 1:3 as declarations of universal salvation in the sense of being complementary to the more particularist New Testament claims.<sup>20</sup> That is, Baum does not view the great

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

christological assertions as the heightening of the urgency and importance of the concrete and historical Jesus.<sup>21</sup> In Baum these assertions primarily receive the accent that they are evidence of God's ceaseless saving activity which, as it were, is a message written in our experience. Now, of course, Baum does say that the Gospel became explicit and definitive in Jesus. Hence, it's not the case that Baum minimizes the work and person of Jesus. Jesus, it is held, is ". . . a turning point in man's universal history of grace, the beginning of a new human consciousness and a new orientation toward greater humanization."<sup>22</sup> Still, notwithstanding the definitive role of the historical Jesus in revelation, it is clear that Baum rejects any exclusivist conception of the term "definitive." "Jesus Christ was not God's entry into human life."<sup>23</sup> Also, before and apart from any knowledge of the historical Jesus, Baum maintains, God was and is also redemptively involved. And, of course, no one can debate Baum's conclusion here, especially the Christian who reads the Old Testament as the record of God's redemptive involvement. However, what is debatable is the manner in which Baum relates the particular to the universal. Are the themes of God's universal saving activity and the concrete saving event in Christ best reconciled by making the concrete the definitive instance of what in principle is held to be universally discernible? The place of Jesus Christ in

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<sup>21</sup>Of particular relevance here is John 1:17, ". . . as the Torah was historically given through Moses so grace and truth came by Jesus." Thus, according to C. K. Barrett: "The Logos exists, but is unknown and incomprehensible apart from the figure of the historical Jesus" (The Gospel according to St. John [London: S.P.C.K., 1965], p. 129).

<sup>22</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 90. <sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

Christian tradition, one may object, has been too compelling and significant to regard him only as the perfect embodiment of what we are all summoned to be, consciously or unconsciously, in the so-called "general revelation." Surely, one may plausibly argue that the answer to Christ's uniqueness is his unconditional acceptance of God's summons and self-giving and thus stress what one could call an adoptionist theory. However, in an adoptionist position Jesus' unconditional acceptance itself points to a question which, in turn, for its answer requires the doctrine of incarnation. And here Paul Tillich's analysis is particularly helpful:

Adoptionism, the idea that God through his Spirit adopted the man Jesus as his Messiah, leads to the question: Why just him? And this question leads back to the polarity of freedom and destiny which created the uninterrupted unity between him and God . . . the symbol of his pre-existence gives the eternal dimension and the doctrine of the Logos, which became historical reality (flesh), points to what has been called "Incarnation." The incarnational Christology was needed to explain the adoptionist Christology.<sup>24</sup>

An adoptionist stress continues to need the explanation inherent in an incarnational christology. But it is difficult to see how such an explanation can take place in Baum. Since Baum speaks of Incarnation as the principle for the way of God's universal presence,<sup>25</sup> the question why in Jesus there is an unconditional acceptance of God's presence as summons and self-giving remains unanswered. Thus it

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<sup>24</sup>Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 149.

<sup>25</sup>Submits Baum: "In Christ is revealed that the way of God's presence is incarnation" (Man Becoming, p. 90)--that is, no doubt in degree, incarnation in Christ is unique, but on the whole it comes to mean that ". . . human life is the locus of the divine" (ibid., p. 90).

appears that Baum blurs the distinction between adoption and incarnation. Now undoubtedly, in spite of his equivocation, Baum intends to assert Christ's uniqueness. Nevertheless, Baum then posits a uniqueness of Christ which comes to stand on a shaky foundation.

Of course, Baum, now and then, does make an appeal to Scripture for his position and of relevance in this respect is his comment on John 4:21, 23-24. Says Baum, "Before Christ's coming men may have sought the invisible God in temples and shrines; after his coming, they seek him in human life."<sup>26</sup> And indeed, the interpretation Baum here gives immediately brings out the difference between Karl Barth and himself. But, the difference is not quite what Baum delineates it to be when he suggests that his view merely differs from Barth in the understanding of how God is "total subjectivity." Says Baum, "Where we differ from Karl Barth is in the answer to the question as to how God is coming. For Barth this only happens in Jesus Christ."<sup>27</sup> However, is it not important, then, to ask what for Barth the reality "Jesus Christ" signifies? Barth's comment on the same Johannine passage which Baum interprets is:

. . . the opposite of Rome, Wittenberg, Geneva and Canterbury-- is not the universe at large, which is the superficial interpretation of Liberalism, but Jesus.<sup>28</sup>

But this Jesus is for Barth far from confined to the "dust bins" of past history! Note how Barth conceives the Spirit as ". . . no other than the presence and action of Jesus Christ Himself: His stretched

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid. <sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>28</sup>Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, trans. by G. T. Thompson (4 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-69), II, 1, § 31, 1, p. 481.

out arm; He himself in the power of His resurrection. . . ."29 That is, there is a pneumatological dimension to Barth's Christology which retains a concrete-universal polarity and which, hence, can do justice to the hidden, incognito Christ (Matthew 21:21-46) without dulling the urgency of positive proclamation.

Of course, one would have to grant that Baum's stress of Jesus as the definitive explicitation of universal revelation might prove to be congenial to the dialogue with other faiths. But for the reasons thus far indicated one may wonder whether the de-emphasis of Christ as really personal reality in favour of universally accessible mystery "scribbled in the heart of life" is permissible in the light of the New Testament testimony. In the interest of greater justice to the Scriptural claims, it seems to me, it would be better to drop the distinction between universalist and particularist themes in favour of a universalist movement of concentration and expansion as, for example, suggested by Théó Preiss. Writing about Christ, the centre of history, he says:

Jesus is radically theocentric. While maintaining the vigorous dualism of the apocalypses, he surpassed it, for he develops the line of Old Testament thought into this fundamental certainty: God reigns and he will reign . . . . But this concentration goes much further: The Kingdom of God is not at work in general but at a precise point, in a person, in Jesus, in his words and sovereign deeds . . . . As divine Man and true Adam he is engaged in reversing the whole course of the history of Adam . . . . When he says, "But I say unto You . . . ." he places himself above Moses as the Lord of the Torah who is both fulfilling and transcending all that the ancient covenant promised. A greater than Solomon is here; the wisdom of God embodied in a person; more

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., IV, 2, § 64, 4, pp. 322-23.

than Johah: here is the true prophet who has been speaking in all previous prophets.<sup>30</sup>

The above view of Christ's work in terms of a universal movement of concentration and expansion implies, of course, a divine freedom which resists a reduction to the status of "transcendent principle." Indeed, Preiss' view only makes sense if with New Testament Christology and later formulas, Christ--wholly distinct from finite creation--is viewed as the eternal expression of God's wisdom who in Jesus ". . . became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth; . . ." (John 1:14). The view would not make sense if the mystery and paradox of the Incarnation is diluted to a mere but somehow perfect appropriation of universally available power for self-transcendence: that would be quasi-adoptionist, and only quasi-adoptionist since a truly adoptionist view, no less than an incarnational one, requires that God in relation to man takes the initiative and thus encounters him as divine "Person." Of course, in connection with this thought one can hardly avoid Baum's objection that God can in no way be regarded as a Person since part of the meaning of person today is that ". . . one comes to be through . . . responses to reality."<sup>31</sup> And in a sense, of course, Baum's objection here is to the point. A literal application, quite apart from philosophical reasons, would run counter to the witness to revelation. As a symbol, however, rooted in the experience of revelation, "Person"--far from being poetic license--presents a truth claim which

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<sup>30</sup>Theo Preiss, Life in Christ, Studies in Biblical Theology, No. 13 (Napierville, Ill.: R. Allenson Inc., 1957), pp. 67-68.

<sup>31</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 191.

some would contend is most decisive for Christian faith. That is, one can find theologians not a bit afraid to assert that the symbol "Person" points to a reality of becoming in God, while, of course, at the same time stressing God's radical transcendence of any such becoming. Thus, for example, Paul Tillich in discussing in what sense God can be called an individual, says:

Is it meaningful to call him the "absolute individual?" The answer must be that it is meaningful only in the sense that he can be called the "absolute participant." The one term cannot be applied without the other. This can only mean that both individualization and participation are rooted in the ground of the divine life and that God is equally 'near' to each of them while transcending them both.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, it is not difficult to find statements which appear even more daring in stressing the relevance of "becoming" in God for faith. Wrote G. A. F. Knight: "God has gained something throughout the centuries as a result of what has happened in the sequence of time; God himself has grown in experience as a result of his gracious love for men."<sup>33</sup> A little later, true, Knight tones down his statement, "God grows and yet does not grow."<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, one senses here the soteriological concern as rather clearly defined by H. Berkhof:

. . . we must ask: Can we prevent ourselves from believing that God himself will be enriched when in the consummation, as a result of his double movement of condescendence and elevation, his prodigal son will be brought home to participate in his glory?<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 244-45.

<sup>33</sup>G. A. F. Knight, A Biblical Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity, Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers, No. 1 (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1953), p. 61.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>35</sup>H. Berkhof, The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit (Richmond, Va: John Knox Press, 1964), p. 118.

And, of course, the position of process theology is that God in his temporal pole does grow--so, for example, John B. Cobb, Jr.: "He [God] vividly and consciously remembers in every new occasion all the occasions of the past. His experience grows by addition to the past, but loses nothing."<sup>36</sup> Hence, Baum's contention "that God comes to be . . . goes counter to the entire biblical witness"<sup>37</sup> is challenged from a number of viewpoints, even if it is true, if God is not to be reduced to finite being, that "growth" and "becoming" may not be applied univocally.

Another aspect of the view of God's redemptive involvement as a universalist movement of concentration and expansion is an understanding of continuity in the tradition which at the same time recognizes a discontinuity. Since this view does not dissolve the historical character of the witness to God's revelation into some "eternal" constant, it must present that witness as a claim which is always in need of interpretation. And, thus, fellowship with the self-same God across the ages does not mean the denial of the historical uniqueness of this God's initiative in history's varied and different situations. Now, of course, for Baum, too, continuity does not mean the absence of real discontinuity. In a way Baum's whole endeavour to demonstrate the cogence of the new perspective is an assertion for the validity of real discontinuity within continuity. Thus Baum is concerned to show that already in the New Testament itself the Church in various cultural

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<sup>36</sup>John B. Cobb, Jr., A Christian Natural Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965), p. 191.

<sup>37</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 191.

climates and conditions and, thus, with differences in expression, witnessed to the self-same Christ.<sup>38</sup> Suggests Baum: "in a new cultural situation the Church testified to the ever-self-identical Word in doctrinal formulas that correspond to the language and consciousness of the believing community."<sup>39</sup> However, what one might object to in Baum's statement is the passivity of the self-same Word which his language implies: it seems to be there almost as a something which the Germans would call vorhanden--merely awaiting expression in whatever socio-historical modes of conception are available. Of course, without a doubt the language of Christian faith is historically conditioned. Still, at the same time one can plausibly maintain that encounter with the self-same Christ as a living voice rather transformed whatever historical thought-forms and ideas were available!<sup>40</sup>

On the basis, therefore, of a dynamic Christ "reversing the

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 34. <sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>40</sup>Bernard Lonergan supports the view above when he refutes the charges that Christian concepts in the Hellenic period were merely translated into Hellenic concepts. Thus, in the case of homo-ousios, he notes: "It happened, however, that while the metaphor had a meaning, still the meaning was not determined by some Hellenic concept but by a Hellenic technique" ("The Dehellenization of Dogma," p. 82). And very importantly: a characteristic of this technique is that ". . . it offers an open structure: it does not determine what attributes are to be assigned to the Father and so must be assigned to the Son as well; it leaves the believer free to conceive the Father in scriptural, patristic, medieval or modern terms" (ibid., p. 82). And this characteristic also applies to ontology: ". . . specifically Christian thought on being came into prominent existence in Athanasius' struggle against Arius . . . ." "No doubt such an explanation presupposes a Hellenic background for its possibility. But the problem and content are specifically Christian" (ibid., pp. 82-83). Thus, at least from Lonergan's viewpoint, true as it is that Christian faith borrowed from the culture in which it found itself, the normative witness in the tradition nevertheless had a transforming influence.

entire course of man's history" in which at all points his universality manifests itself in concreteness, the distinction between universalist and particularist themes is not very helpful and elucidating. Moreover, for a view which regards redemption as the movement of God's universal concentration and expansion, it would also follow that Baum's observation that the universalist trend never entered into the centre of theological reflection is the result of misguiding concepts. Surely, it's one thing to recognize that one is in good company when stressing universalism,<sup>41</sup> but it's quite another thing to confuse the Church's concern for and focus on the concrete with irrelevant provincialism. No doubt, there was and always is the danger of a narrow, self-justifying institutional parochialism in the Church's witness. Yet, insofar as the Church again and again seeks to realize what it means to confess Christ as Lord, there will be an awareness--the weighty "extra-ecclesiam-non-salus-est" games notwithstanding--that a servant is not greater than his master.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, far from meaning a self-appointed righteousness, the emphasis in tradition on concrete saving events may embody a rather unique understanding of God's universal sovereignty and will to save. It asserts that the Kingdom of God, though at once universal and complete in Christ and thus an "Already," is at the same time, historically speaking, a "Not Yet" requiring for its fulfilment man's positive

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<sup>41</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 25.

<sup>42</sup>Hans Kung makes this point emphatically: "What Christ offers is his reality, his self. But for this very reason his gift is not a controllable 'something,' a magic object, or an autonomous gift quite independent of the giver" (The Church [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967], p. 220).

response--faith. Unlike Pelagianism, therefore, we do not merely appropriate life and then shape it according to some "Christian" vision but in the communion with Christ we enter a process of renewal and sanctification.

Now it is not the case, of course, that Baum lacks a doctrine of sanctification. What is rather the case--and precisely for this reason objections have been made--is that Baum's whole theology becomes a doctrine of sanctification. Man Becoming wants to be nothing less than a modern soteriological statement. But what kind of statement? The truth that God is never simply man's "over-against" comes to mean that in no real consequential sense God is ever "over-against." Consequently, what is most real to many, namely, the communal, personal response to Christ and, thus, the rationale for the Church's coming together in prayer, proclamation, and sacrament, if Baum is right, will for many have lost its urgency and power.

Of course, Baum does not deny God's reality. Commenting on Feuerbach, Baum states: ". . . according to these philosophers religion is not the living contact with a reality transcending man: there is no reality transcending man. This obviously is not our position."<sup>43</sup> Curiously, though, in a sense Baum accepts Feuerbach's critique of theology as nothing but a form of anthropology by indeed insisting that in essence theology is wholly translatable into anthropology. Now, it is no doubt true that Baum's resultant anthropology is unique and a far cry from naturalism. Still, one may well wonder whether Baum's anti-

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<sup>43</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 181.

metaphysical tendency--except of course on the point that there is "transcendent mystery"--is a little too accommodating to be convincing. As noted before, Baum's claim to have by-passed any form of objectification may be seriously challenged. Baum's "transcendent mystery" is not only evident for faith in experience but also conforms to a hypothesis which makes revelation a definitive word about human becoming. Thus, in Baum, God is exclusively judged to be--one could say "objectified" as--non-objectifiable reality. Consequently, Baum surely understates his case when he says that language about God may be translated into talk about human life. The real force of Baum's assumptions is that God-talk could never have been anything else but a peculiar sort of anthropology!

Now Baum is conscious that at least one of the initiators of the new perspective, Karl Rahner, regards the doctrine of "God's self-communication as constitutive of human life" as peripheral. Indeed, Rahner regards the attempts of such men as K. Bultmann and Bishop Robinson to translate God-talk into talk about man as theological reductions.<sup>44</sup> Consequently, in Baum's view Rahner is guilty of inconsistency. Yet whatever Rahner's reasons, should at this point Baum not have questioned his own position?

Especially in view of the quite "orthodox" roles of the transcendent mystery such as its summoning and self-giving, one could maintain, Baum should have qualified his charge against Rahner. After all, if the roles of the mystery are not mere arbitrary designations, is not then the conclusion inescapable that these roles also reflect the

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 182-83 n.

essential character of the transcendent mystery? What is suggested here is that the historical witness to revelation includes a knowledge of God which goes beyond a knowledge of God-in-his-effect. Now, as I suspect in Baum's case, one might attempt to avoid the above claim by insisting that the sentence that "the God-for-us is the God-in-himself" really means that God is purely act. And, indeed, in that case the knowledge of God-in-his-effect is at the same time knowledge of God-in-himself. Further, insofar as this God is then a universal dimension of life, statements about him would be translatable into declarations about human life. Nevertheless, faced with the question "How does Baum know that God is purely act?" it is obvious that Baum's position involves a reality judgment which speculates about God in a manner which exceeds mere reflection on God-in-his-effect in the life of faith.

From my point of view, then, it is not consistent to hold that a transcendent reality makes itself known through its effect without at the same time holding that in its effect it also reveals "something" of itself quite distinct from that in which it is present as effect. Now, granted, the "something distinct" of God's reality is beyond our objective grasp--indeed, only an absolute idealism which asserts the identity of opposites, it seems to me, could deny such a position. But from the viewpoint taken here, if Baum is really serious that God is more than human life, he should have questioned his translation of the language of faith into a doctrine of becoming. Indeed, it is urged here that Baum should have been open to the question whether in any sense the language of faith does not disclose a conceptualization to which the reality of God in our experience, and yet distinct from it, truly

corresponds. Hence, the important question is: Does God's reality correspond to the conceptions handed down by tradition and the accents and nuances they have received in the history of interpretation?

Gordon Kaufman put it this way: ". . . the problem is whether there is any significant reality at all 'above' or 'beyond' or 'below' the world which we know in our experience, or whether life is simply to be understood in this worldly, that is, secular, terms."<sup>45</sup> And the answer? Claiming to advance an analogical rather than a mythological conception of transcendence, Kaufman says, "Talk about God appears when the ultimate Limit is understood in analogy with the experience of personal limiting as known in the intercourse, and interaction of personal wills."<sup>46</sup> Further, in the context of establishing the validity of a personalistic conception of an ultimate Limiter, Kaufman comments:

. . . inasmuch as it is necessary to grasp the ultimate Limit in terms of some model if it is to be adequately conceived at all, the attempt to grasp it personalistically should not be rejected as mythological (in the dubious sense of claiming unwarranted knowledge of that beyond the Limit) in any way not also applicable to every other attempt to apprehend and understand our finitude.<sup>47</sup>

However, what strikes me as particularly perceptive in Kaufman's analysis and what, as such, has direct bearing on the status and import of personalistic conceptions in the Christian tradition, is his perspective on the role of the via negativa;

If we have correctly identified the experiential elements underlying the term 'God', the doctrine of God must always deal in some fashion

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<sup>45</sup>Gordon Kaufman, "On the Meaning of God: Transcendence without Mythology," New Theology, No. 4, ed. by Martin E. Marty and Dean Peerman (New York: MacMillan Co., 1967), p. 72.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 88. <sup>47</sup>Kaufman, op. cit., pp. 90-91.

with the notion of transcendent reality (even if only to refer it to some 'depth' in everything that is) and with the way in which this transcendence is known to us (i.e. with 'revelation'). However, such highly problematic negative notions as 'infinite' and 'unconditional'--probably rooted ultimately in 'mystical' experience of the 'supernatural'--would perhaps not need to be given the constitutive role in a doctrine of God which they have so often played in the past (though they might well have a certain secondary and interpretative role to play) . . . .<sup>48</sup>

Surely, in view of a position as outlined by Kaufman one might plausibly maintain that Baum views the historical witness in the light of his interpretation of a "highly problematic negative" notion, namely, "transcendent mystery." The result of Baum's approach is, then, that the witness of Christian tradition is not merely qualified but affected in its very content. Where one once read "God" one is now justified to read "man becoming." It is, however, especially the Dutch theologian H. M. Kuitert who is critical of the via negativa as a starting point for theological synthesis:

Ludwig Feuerbach concluded thus that God is the product of man--that we create God in our own image and not vice versa. In response, many theologians have thought that the only manner to combat this drastic logic is to steep oneself even deeper in the theologia negativa. In doing so, however, they only show their acceptance of Feuerbach's conclusion that not a single conception of God possesses theological validity. But this is totally unwarranted! Of course not every conception of God is adequate . . . . There really is such a thing as a legitimate iconoclasm. But over against Feuerbach, Christian theology would be wise not only to accept the application of concepts to God that are rooted in human experience, but also to point out its legitimate role in the birth of our knowledge of God . . . . The critique of the Second Commandment is not aimed at the use of images in general but at that image--and for that reason, among other things, the cultic, graven image--in which Israel's God no longer is honoured as the One Who He is and will be: The Covenant God, the One who in

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 96 n.

addressing us intends to be a Thou.<sup>49</sup> (Translation mine.)

Hence, if with Kaufman and Kuitert--and one can find many others--one grants the validity of a personalistic conception of transcendence, it inevitably follows that one will regard the attempt to translate God-talk into talk about man as a theological reduction. A personalistic conception of transcendence forbids an approach to the divine in the exclusive sense of a dimension of "mystery" which I can't help encountering. Nevertheless, there is, of course, a strong element of truth in Baum's position. Even if in the light of the present analysis Baum does not present an adequate conception of transcendence, his immanentism at least has the merit of accentuating an important claim of Christian tradition. In the reality "in Christ" God's claim cannot be separated from the claims of the "neighbour" and this is a note which, perhaps now more than ever, needs to be heard in our ever shrinking Global Village!

#### Faith

Baum redefines faith as "new consciousness," that is, of the presence and meaning of "transcendent mystery." Hence, the primary accent in Baum's definition of the Church is not on the Church as an historical, ongoing community in fellowship with God. Rather, Baum uses terms which stress a cognitive difference between the Church and the world. Says Baum: "The Church alone is conscious of the redemptive mystery that goes on everywhere."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Kuitert, de realiteit van het geloof, pp. 172-73.

<sup>50</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 64.

Clearly the intention behind Baum's definition of faith is to reconcile the uniqueness of the Church with the existence of universal grace: only the Church is fully conscious of the "Mystery" but she cannot for that reason claim to be an exclusive realization of salvation. Indeed, in a lesser conscious way people outside of the Church may surpass those in the Church in responding to the "summons" in which God is present to life. But what, then, is the advantage of "being conscious"? Baum's answer is that a new consciousness does make a distinct difference in that it means a new orientation.<sup>51</sup>

To dissolve faith into a state of consciousness has, however, far-reaching consequences. For one thing, it means that "sin" is indeed underlined as conscious rebellion in its presence in the Church and that in its presence in the "world" it is a less conscious, perhaps more excusable rebellion. Now, of course, Baum's view here would certainly make the Church as consciously responsible sinner also the locus of real justification and the beginning of renewal if God is really present as Redeeming Word and Sanctifying Spirit. Nevertheless, may one not object that Baum undermines our responsibility and justification. His translation of faith into "new consciousness" tends to blur the distinction between knowing and responding? If "new consciousness" by itself already means a new orientation, then, by necessity one assumes a cause and effect relationship between knowing and doing which makes it inevitable that "sin" is not really rebellion but sheer ignorance. But the identification of doing with knowing as will be shown below, is not consistent

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

with Baum's own analysis of the power of "new consciousness." Nor is the above identification consistent with Baum's clear recognition of the element of will when he says that a man ". . . may enclose himself in the finite order and thus violate the thrust of his own action."<sup>52</sup> Thus, faith translated as "new consciousness" is definitely an over-simplification. Moreover, this over-simplification, it may be shown, is the result of a universalism which fails to do justice to the distinction between the "Already" and the "Not Yet," between the universality of God's will to save and its fulfilment in history.

As noted, it is not the case, of course, that the distinction between the "Already" and "Not Yet" fails to come to the surface in Baum: he recognizes it when acknowledging the reality of sin. However, as Baum's treatment of the doctrine of creation shows, the distinction between the "Already" and "Not Yet" is not grasped as having radical import for the meaning of theological concepts. Viewing creation as ongoing, Baum draws the conclusion that creation and redemption are one and the same and thus that the distinction between them is only possible and necessary ". . . ex parte hominis, from the effects in human life."<sup>53</sup> In this context, however, it is especially the claim that this was Karl Barth's view which is suspect, even if it is true that Barth asserted a very positive relationship between creation and redemption. Baum singles out Barth as the theologian who above all overcame ". . . the unhappy tradition of distinguishing between creation and redemption as between two distinct modes or steps

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 17. <sup>53</sup>Ibid., pp. 214-15.

of divine activity."<sup>54</sup> On the doctrine of creation Barth asserted:  
 " . . . the wonderful thing about the biblical creation narratives is that they stand in strict connexion with the history of Israel and so with the story of God's action in the covenant with man."<sup>55</sup> But Barth's "strict connexion" did not mean for him that the distinction between creation and redemption is wholly " . . . based on a difference in human life and not on a difference in God's self-communication."<sup>56</sup> In the tradition of Reformed theology, Barth retained the view that God is " . . . in Himself, by nature and in eternity, and for us in time, the One in three ways of being."<sup>57</sup> Thus, in Barth's case, God's self-identity in the work of creation and redemption does not mean that the distinction between the two is merely occasioned by a difference in human life. For Barth the distinction between the work of creation and redemption is based on the mystery of God's self-identity in a real plurality of modes of being:

. . . He is . . . in His divine Majesty in the highest, One, and yet not alone, and so His work in which He meets us and in which we may know Him, is in itself a living work, moved within itself.<sup>58</sup>

Hence, Baum is correct in his assessment that Barth treated creation as the presupposition of grace, but claims too much when he implies that this coincides with his own conclusion. With Leslie Dewart, Baum proposes:

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>55</sup>Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 51.

<sup>56</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 215.

<sup>57</sup>Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, p. 42. <sup>58</sup>Ibid.

It is possible to say that creation is God's gift of himself or his self-communication, in a process where man is a passive recipient, while redemption is the same divine self-communication in a process that implies the active participation of man in faith, hope and love.<sup>59</sup>

Here, however, I would contend that Baum is using language which obscures his real position. Creation as the act of God's self-giving in which man is the passive recipient involves either one or the other of the following assumptions. In defiance of the Creed that God is Creator of everything "visible and invisible," one assumes that the "passive recipients" have an uncreated, eternal existence. Or, if the foregoing is rejected, one construes the divine "giving" as the self-realization of the One in the many--in which case the "manifold" is denied any real self-identity. Thus, on any reading, Baum's formulation here leads to either monistic naturalism or idealism and, hence, a form of pantheism which in Tillich's view, for example, must be overcome by a concept of "underlying substance" as ". . . an underlying in which substance and accidents preserve their freedom."<sup>60</sup> And, of course, insofar as Baum does not really identify God with the "world" but stresses the meaning of God's immanence as finite creation's permanent creative ground, he should have avoided the attempt to translate the language of "creation" into the language of "giving" and "self-communication." Still, Baum's unfortunate language here is not entirely accidental: it may be attributed to a tendency toward ideology. What God is for us in the freedom of his creativity, Baum stresses not so much as a reality for faith than as an experiential

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<sup>59</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 215.

<sup>60</sup>Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, 238.

reality and, thus, granted its universality, it can then be grasped in a Weltanschauung. But here Baum's tendency, from a Barthian viewpoint, would once again confine God to a "musty Christian religious self-consciousness" and therefore undercut God's otherness. Indeed with regard to the creatio ex nihilo Barth would have us understand: "Where nothing exists--and not a kind of primal matter--there through God there has come into existence that which is distinct from Him."<sup>61</sup> As a consequence Barth clearly preserved a doctrine of Creation in the "originating" sense. Therefore, in maintaining the utter dependence of the created on the Creator without sacrificing its relative autonomy, Barth can do more justice to the importance of faith as responsible decision than Baum.<sup>62</sup> Says Baum:

Since man's cooperation with the divine summons and the grace of freedom is not always conscious to him, since it may take place on deep levels of his personality which are partially hidden from him, he is unable to distinguish in himself which is of creation and which is of redemption.<sup>63</sup>

Nevertheless, one might well ask: Is the ambiguity as to what is of redemption and what of creation sufficient reason to spell out the uniqueness of the Church in terms of consciousness alone? The uniqueness of the Church in terms of faith, one may hold, is not necessarily

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<sup>61</sup>Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, p. 54.

<sup>62</sup>Baum, of course, might insist that this might lead to objectifying metaphysical speculation, that is, the Trinity as a doctrine of God's being. H. Berkhof, however, argues precisely the opposite: ". . . according to biblical thinking to make separation between God in his revelation and God in his eternal being, on the contrary, is speculative" (The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, p. 118).

<sup>63</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 215.

the equivalent of no faith outside of the Church and, therefore, by necessity a form of ecclesiastical imperialism. Yet, more importantly, if it can be shown that consciousness is not sufficient by itself, then one may well question Baum's procedure to solve the Church-World problematic in terms of consciousness alone.

From the point of view where God's universal will to save and its fulfilment in history are kept in tension, the Church-World problematic, though consciousness or a knowing-in-faith must be a relevant factor, will be more in terms of the question, "How does the Church come into being?" And, thus, the Pauline answer, by faith through grace: through the Spirit a people in communion with God and with one another and the world, which it is God's universal will to save, in response to God's self-revelation in Christ. And indeed it may be shown that it is this Spirit created response and responsibility which consistency also demands in Baum's thinking.

Having asked the question whether it is really enough to expound the uniqueness of the Church in terms of a new consciousness, Baum proceeds to illustrate that this is so by pointing out the power of human awareness in a number of examples. What one finds in these examples, however, is that consciousness does not by itself imply liberation as does the New Testament understanding of faith. Rather, consciousness has the role of clearing the ground for decisions that may or may not liberate. For example, says Baum:

I may be exposed to the destructive influence of another person who has a certain power over me. But as soon as I become conscious of this . . . I am called to a decision: either I reject the evil influence and become free or I acknowledge the evil

influence and submit to the destruction of my life.<sup>64</sup>

In this example it is obvious that faith is not equivalent to consciousness. In Baum's own analysis there is an element, namely, decision, which, though made possible by consciousness, is not explained by the latter. Hence, the Church more than a "knowing" body is also a responding, responsible communion--much as the current practice of Infant Baptism and Child or Adolescent Confirmation in both the Roman Catholic and major Protestant communions may obscure this. But what kind of decision does the Church make qua Church? If one is not to fall into Pelagianism, the Church's response must be conceived as Spirit-created. Yet, in order to avoid a demonic view of Predestination or a form of sheer determinism, "Spirit-created" may not be so construed as to deny human freedom. Further, if the response of faith is not to be mere self-realization and responsibility to self, there must be a real interpersonal divine-human relationship. However, it is precisely such a relationship which Baum questions and it is no doubt this factor which more than anything else compels him to reduce faith to the perception of divine truth as a dimension of human life. Says Baum, "The divine mystery revealed in the New Testament is a dimension of human life . . . ."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 65.   <sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 283.

## CHAPTER IV

### BAUM'S TRANSCENDENTALISM

In brief the thesis of this chapter is that Baum's method of immanentism represents a form of transcendentalism. In what follows it will be my responsibility to fill out the content of this statement.

Focusing on Baum's second principle of interpretation, the point here raised is that this principle--because it admits the convertibility of God-talk into talk about man--destroys the distinction between philosophical and theological anthropology. What lies at the heart of the second principle is thus the assumption, some years ago already spelled out by R. Bultmann, that "existence in faith is still, in any case, existence."<sup>1</sup> Hence, for Baum the event-character of revelation and the event-character of belief are to be imagined within the ontological-existential possibilities of existence. In that case, however, as Bonhoeffer pointed out:

. . . revelation may be envisaged among the standing possibilities of existence, but then it does not possess its essential character of an event--one originating in God's freedom . . . . If revelation is essentially an event brought about by the free act of God it outbids and supersedes the existential-ontological possibilities of existence. Then there is no longer an essential identity of existence per se in all instances . . . . Then

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<sup>1</sup>R. Bultmann, "Die Geschichtlichkeit des Daseins und Der Glaube" Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, 1930, No. 5, p. 343, cited by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Act & Being, p. 74.

revelation claims to initiate the unity of existence and to have the sole right to proclaim it; philosophy sees the deepest root of its claims excised.<sup>2</sup>

Thus Bonhoeffer accused Bultmann of threatening the freedom of God by "adjusting" revelation to Heidegger's existential thought. Yet since in Baum, too, revelation is much influenced by a particular conceptual synthesis, namely, the new perspective, does not the same charge apply to him?

With his second principle Baum posits a God-man relationship which inevitably makes all human history revelatory. Now, of course, he does distinguish between the hidden provisional revelation apart from Christ and the final, definitive revelation in Christ. Nevertheless, as noted, the content of this revelation is for Baum exclusively salvational in the sense of denying "objective" reference to God's being as distinct from the human reality. Consequently, the question for Baum is no longer "Who is revealed?" but "What is revealed?" And his answer: The presence of transcendent mystery, which, though no doubt truly reflected by the Christian tradition, above all confirms what a phenomenologist--provided his assumptions are correct--may discern. Thus, the interpretation of revelation becomes interpretation of an experiential reality. In that case, however, our conceptual apparatus and the pre-conceptions that enter into our thinking about the world become critically important.<sup>3</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>2</sup>Bonhoeffer, Act & Being, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup>May one so stress the importance of thought-forms so as to make the apprehension of revelation dependent on them? This would be necessary if the reality disclosed in revelation is conceived as a universally available constant and then one could also hold that, for example, the lesser consciousness of it outside of the Church is

no wonder that Baum comes to stress the role of the Spirit in the Church's interpretation, and indeed that, as such, he must make the Church the decisive hermeneutical principle:

Because the Church with her collegial magisterium is infallible, it is possible to arrive at a consensus on the central thrust and message of the Gospel in a given age, a consensus which is recognized as normative in the Whole Church and hence becomes an acknowledged principle of reformulating Catholic teaching of the past.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, one of the ways in which the Spirit is operative is in the crystallization of the Church's deep convictions. And, of course, the work of the Holy Spirit must be an undeniable element if the Church in one's ecclesiology is to be more than a mere human institution. However, Baum's proposal that ecclesiology be a word about the human situation in general or what he calls the "theological study of human society"<sup>5</sup> does place the work of the Spirit in a questionable perspective. Since for Baum the ongoing "Word" is everywhere present and discernible, he minimizes any difference between the work of the Spirit in the "Word" witnessed to by tradition and its work in "general revelation." Indeed, considering the power of Baum's perspective, it follows that the tradition is wholly translatable in the light of what, in principle, is accessible quite apart from

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entirely a case of inadequate conceptions. But, indeed, this position is not tenable if, with Bonhoeffer, one judges that according to the biblical witness revelation is an existential event in which ". . . the existential structures of existence are attacked and transmuted" (ibid., p. 75).

<sup>4</sup>Baum, Faith and Doctrine, p. 132.

<sup>5</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 69.

the tradition.<sup>6</sup> Yet, I suspect, the power which Baum grants present perception is only tenable if at all times the Spirit functions within this perception in a "non-over-against" manner--a conclusion which is entirely consistent with Baum's doctrine of God. But the significance of Baum's immanentism is that we must now speak of revelation as Spirit-created values, perception and community. And, no doubt, the emphasis on "Spirit-created" is the correct implication of any view where knowledge of revelation is held to be salvational. Nevertheless, Baum's emphasis on the work of the Spirit in the perception of the divine comes in a context which lacks objective, analogical reference to God as our eternal Thou. Hence, in view of the fact that Baum grants a flexible, Spirit-created knowledge of God-in-his-effect but negates a knowledge of God as "over-against," may one not object that Baum posits an element of arbitrariness in the divine life itself? In the context of a Word which, whatever "the more" it reveals, also reveals a "Personal over-against," I have in the case of any doubt in perceiving its meaning no other alternative but to allow myself to be addressed again. However, in the context of a Word which is exclusively a word about my life and world, albeit about reality in its deepest dimension, I have no other choice but to question myself or my community: "Are we reading this correctly?" And, of course,

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<sup>6</sup>One must, of course, immediately recognize that insofar as Baum acknowledges the definitiveness of Christ's revelation and thus the Gospel as ongoing Critique, that in actuality he does not practise what in principle he deems possible. If it was earlier stated that Man Becoming is a modern soteriological statement, it is equally true that it is a statement on how in Baum's opinion tradition may come alive.

in the latter case I may then take comfort in a consensus--this is really the way it must be. But it is a different matter when one believes that precisely in leading us into truth the Spirit also confronts us as Truth--the Paraclete, for example, as Christ's alter ego (John 16). If the Spirit also confronts us as Truth, then transcendence means more than sheer mystery beyond and, in fact, implies an intelligibility which is "there" to be open to in faith. On the basis, therefore, of an understanding which involves an element of objective intelligibility in God, Baum's position does raise a few questions. To begin with, insofar as Baum correlates revelation with "greater humanization" and, thus, with existential-ontological possibilities, does he predetermine the content of revelation in the light of some preformed "ideal of existence"?<sup>7</sup> Further, as will have to be shown more thoroughly, insofar as Baum resolves all being in God into act and, thus, ontology into dynamic existential-ontological reality, must one not contend that this is a form of trans-

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<sup>7</sup>Crucial in Bonhoeffer's argument is the distinction between ontic-existential and ontological-existential structures. The former are concepts developed in existential analysis, the latter are the concepts in the more ambitious programme of an existentially oriented ontology and, hence, the more general concepts of existence such as "historical," "care," "being unto death." About the latter he says that these are ". . . for revelation no less an abstraction and hypothesis than a merely biological definition of man" (Act & Being, p. 75). Baum, of course, does not use any of the Heideggerian distinctions, but it is not hard to see that his psychologically oriented phenomenology, as he calls it, yields existential-ontological categories. According to Chapter III of Man Becoming, dialogue, communion, and the gift-dimension are constitutive of human becoming, that is, universal structures. Hence, I feel justified in pressing the charge: revelation in Baum retreats from the ontic into existential-ontological, and, thus, as in the transcendentalist thesis, revelation is treated as the apperception of reality in its deepest, transcendental dimension.

cidental idealism? The criticism suggested in the foregoing questions is of course vague, but I believe can be clarified and substantiated by a look at Baum's approach both as phenomenology and as apologetic theology.

### Baum's Phenomenology

Baum does not, of course, claim to be doing phenomenology. Suggests Baum: "What is original in this study is the application of a psychologically-oriented phenomenology . . . ." <sup>8</sup> What is presupposed is thus the truth of a certain psychologically-oriented phenomenology and the novelty is its application in theological interpretation. In actuality, however, Baum spends considerable efforts in defence of his phenomenology when he defends and explains the "method of immanentism." The reason for this effort, I suppose, is obvious. The method of immanentism must be recognized as valid if Baum's psychologically-oriented categories are to be persuasive. However, what is striking in Baum's argument for the validity of the new perspective is his unnecessary ambiguity: he insists that his phenomenological method is not a system or impartial to any system, while at the same time maintaining that " . . . the presupposition of this entire approach . . . is the redemptive involvement of God in human life." <sup>9</sup>

The method of immanentism, Baum tells us, was given birth

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<sup>8</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. xiii.

<sup>9</sup>Baum, Faith and Doctrine, p. 87.

by the conviction " . . . that the only way to come to truth is to examine carefully man's experience of reality and hence that no truth can be acknowledged by the human mind which does not in some way proceed from it."<sup>10</sup> The method thus has an empirical ring. However, at the outset Baum had already qualified whatever empiricism the method might deliver:

From the outset of his reflections, the Christian vision espoused by Blondel convinced him that God is present to human history and that his presence is the source of new life in the aspirations, conflicts, and thought-forms constituting the human reality in every generation.<sup>11</sup>

In the service of theology, Baum thus recognizes, the method is useless unless it can be rooted in a religious vision of reality. Moreover, the vision, one may hold, demands a method which at least in theory will be able to confirm, and perhaps alter, but never negate the "vision." Obviously, should a method of enquiry be able to negate a metaphysical "vision," that would only be so because the method in question applies an inappropriate criterion of truth. Thus negation would occur, for example, when one applies rules for verification and, thus, falsification, which reduce the "vision" from an empirically-oriented conceptual synthesis to bare empirical assertion. Hence, method is at least in part determined by the nature of an inquiry. Further, insofar as in metaphysical conception the empirical orientation can only be in terms of adequacy of description, the method cannot be said to have verificational value--that would be too

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<sup>10</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

strong a word. Rather, the method here has the value of confirmation in the sense of more or less plausible explanation. Therefore, as Paul Tillich observes, there is an inescapable element of circularity in theological and metaphysical explanation from which the method does not escape:

. . . method is not a tool to be handled at will. It is neither a trick nor a mechanical device. It is itself a theological assertion . . . and ultimately it is not different from the system which is built upon it.<sup>12</sup>

A circularity, however, is not at all cause for despair:

. . . it can be observed that the a priori which directs the induction and the deduction is a type of mystical experience . . . And if in the course of a 'scientific' procedure this a priori is discovered, its discovery is possible only because it was present from the very beginning. This is the circle which no religious philosopher can escape. And it is by no means a vicious one. Every understanding of spiritual things (Geisteswissenschaft) is circular.<sup>13</sup>

Curiously, though, even if Baum acknowledges the importance of presuppositions, he still manages to speak as if the method were quite neutral. For, indeed, is there not talk of some sort of neutral scientific tool, if one says about a method:

This as we shall see, does not lock man into an inevitably finite framework; if there is a transcendent in the finite, then the experience of reality itself and man's sustained reflection on it will eventually lead to its recognition.<sup>14</sup>

What's wrong with the above statement is that it is misleading if from the outset God's redemptive involvement is presupposed. Granted that Blondel's or Baum's vision is not immanentism in the sense of naturalism, their method is nevertheless inseparable from an a priori

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<sup>12</sup>Tillich, Systematic Theology, I, 8. <sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>14</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 14.

reality hypothesis, and it is of course the latter that calls for the particular method in question. Were it the other way around, that is, should a so-called neutral method necessitate Baum's vision, then it would follow that not only all sensitive and loving men but also all reasonable men must draw the conclusion that even in their ignorance they were anonymous Christians! But, of course, not all loving nor all reasonable men can draw this conclusion. Nor for that matter is the professional philosopher going to be particularly impressed by Baum's advice that if only he makes the correct pre-rational and "crucial options in regard to the meaning of life," he may come to acknowledge "the message inscribed in man's experience of reality."<sup>15</sup> Even if he agrees that his pre-rational orientation to life inevitably influences his work, what philosopher could be interested in the proposition that, if only he will take such and such a road, he is bound to proclaim the truth preached by the Church? He is bound to regard this as an attack upon the integrity of philosophy; or, if he is more kindly disposed, he will regard it as an invitation to become a theologian in disguise. In principle the philosopher's pursuit of truth must be capable of altering his pre-critical orientation and judgment--and, of course, to the extent a theologian is not bound by specific interpretations but by a specific datum for interpretation, this is also true for him. Should philosophy lack a self-critical dimension, then that discipline would be a mere euphemism for expounding uncritically held beliefs and decisions. What is dubious,

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

therefore, is not the debatable claim that the truth of theology may coincide with a philosopher's findings. Rather what is questionable is the claim that a philosopher's agreement with the theologian is the result of the philosopher's crucial pre-rational decisions. Such a claim implies that philosophy must either learn the right pre-rational decision from theology or simply admit to impotency and inadequacy because of an, in principle, non-justifiable, non-rational, extra-intellectual bias. Hence, we see the meaning of Bonhoeffer's indictment: ". . . philosophy sees the deepest roots of its claims excised."<sup>16</sup> An outlook which ultimately attributes a difference or similarity in theology and philosophy to pre-rational decisions in the same breath asserts that initially, at least, and in their respective qualities there is no difference between theology and philosophy. In Baum's thought, therefore, Christian theology becomes in effect a direct contender for a place among the world's philosophies. As a universal explanation, however, theology must then embrace a phenomenology which, more than an ontic description of the concrete life in faith, entails a hypothesis about reality in general. Thus, ontic description in Baum is quickly dissolved into a general hypothesis. Further, and for a good reason, one may call his phenomenology a "christianized" metaphysical synthesis: Baum views the world through universalized aspects of Christian experience such as dialogue and communion. Yet, inasmuch as the accent falls on how Baum's

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<sup>16</sup>Bonhoeffer, Act & Being, p. 75.

hypothesis renders our world and existence intelligible, there is a reversal of Anselm's dictum. The dominant thrust in the Christian conceptions which are now universalized is no longer faith in search of understanding, but an "understanding"--"explanation" is a better word--in search of confirmation and thus credibility, and this is particularly evident in the function of language in Baum's theology.

In accord with the axiom that there is no truth "which does not in some way arise from man's experience of reality,"<sup>17</sup> Baum wishes to show how "the Gospel of Christ explains, purifies and multiplies . . . depth experiences."<sup>18</sup> Hence, Baum demands that the Gospel, which, he claims, has risen out of man's experience of reality, should be able to clarify our perception and, consequently, alter and deepen our response to reality. But how--without in the least wishing to imply that the Gospel should make no difference for Christians--is Baum's explanation different from asserting that the Gospel presents a good reality thesis which, if only you will assent to it, will change your perception and behaviour? It seems to me inevitable: if divine revelation can be translated, without anything being lost in the translation, into wholly anthropological terms--even if set in a grand perspective--, then the Gospel itself becomes nothing but perspective. But the consequence of theology's transition into anthropology is, needs be, that theological and kerygmatic language may not claim a uniqueness which would go beyond anthropology,

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<sup>17</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup>Baum, Faith and Doctrine, p. 68.

and, thus, anything distinctively theistic about the logic of theological language must be sacrificed. Hence, it is not difficult to show how Baum's usage of theological language conforms to a number of theories which assume precisely that the language of theology can be explained solely as a more or less peculiar instance of "ordinary" language.

For example, how, one might ask, is Baum's equivalent of "God is Father," that is, "Man is a being with a destiny" different, say, from Hare's proposal that theology offers us a "blik"--some sort of view about people or things very important to the believer?<sup>19</sup> Now, true, one may immediately qualify Baum's position in that his blikks are not irrational and fideistic--they are experience-oriented-- and thus that he is really in Basil Mitchell's company who also proposes some rational justification for one's blikks.<sup>20</sup> And, indeed, further to this, one may well contend that Baum's blikks with their explanatory power of every-day phenomena quite nicely suit John Hick's idea of psychological verification, that is, verification as the removal of grounds for rational doubt.<sup>21</sup> And, more than this, Baum's eschatology of greater humanization, like the idea of life after death lends itself to the idea of "eschatological verification," that is, that

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<sup>19</sup>R. M. Hare in New Essays in Philosophical Theology, ed. by Anthony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (London: S.C.M. Press, 1966), pp. 99-103.

<sup>20</sup>Basil Mitchell in New Essays in Philosophical Theology, pp. 103-105.

<sup>21</sup>John Hick, Philosophy of Religion (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 100.

in the end this view is, in principle, verifiable but not, in principle, falsifiable. Says Hick:

This hypothesis entails a prediction that one will, after the date of one's bodily death, have conscious experiences, including the experience of remembering that death. This is a prediction which will be verified in one's experience if it is true but which cannot be falsified if it is false. That is to say, it can be false, but that it is false can never be a fact which anyone has experientially verified.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, different as Baum's theological orientation may be from those who try to justify theological language in the face of verificational analysis, insofar as for him too the accent falls on anthropological relevance, he, in some respects, shares in the characteristics of this school of thought. However, as F. Ferré then observes in Language, Logic and God with regard to Hick:

It may be questioned whether Hick's version of the role of verification, which makes it more a psychological than a logical requirement, is entirely adequate; but despite flaws it would seem that this fourth approach to the logical status of theological language has most to commend it if the basic tenet of verificational analysis is correct that all assertions gain their meaningfulness from relevance to actual or possible specific perceptual experiences.<sup>23</sup>

And, of course, Ferré's if is no small matter. But how does one decide that verificational analysis is correct in its basic tenet? Agreement with verificational analysts does not necessarily entail that one embrace empirical positivism. As, no doubt, is the case in Baum, in theology one might decide in favour of the criterion for relevance to "actual or possible perceptual experiences" on the basis of some conception of God's immanence. Thus, a theologian may well accept

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>23</sup>Ferre', op. cit., p. 53.

verificational analysis' basic tenet; however, if he does, he has the choice of two directions. With Hick, he could develop concepts that are applicable to theology. Or, on the basis of a broadened view of empiricism, such as underlies Wittgenstein's analysis of language and its many functions,<sup>24</sup> he may construe theology as a legitimate linguistic enterprise for conveying meaning. But what "meaning"? Granted that functional analysis applied to theological language may lead one in different directions, for Baum the verificational analyst's concept of empiricism exerts enough influence to necessitate that theological language must yield meanings about experiential reality. Thus, theological language for Baum must be identifiable with certain familiar functions in "ordinary" language. Further, as Baum's use of the word "perspective" suggests, the case may be made that theological language as it functions in Baum is a good illustration of John Wisdom's view of theological language as "attention-directing" discourse. The function of theological discourse, says Wisdom, is to direct our attention to patterns in "the facts,"<sup>25</sup> a theory which he illustrates with his parable of the two gardeners disputing the existence of an invisible gardener. And, indeed, this dispute whether or not there is an invisible gardener is not to be reduced to a mere attitudinal and hence non-cognitive difference:

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<sup>24</sup>Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1922), pp. 11-12.

<sup>25</sup>John Wisdom, "Gods," Logic and Language, First Series, ed. by Anthony Flew (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1951), p. 191.

. . . the disputants speak as if they are concerned with a matter of scientific fact, or of trans-sensual, trans-scientific and metaphysical fact, but still of fact and still a matter about which reasons for or against may be offered, although no scientific reasons in the sense of field surveys for fossils or experiments on delinquents are to the point.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, for Wisdom, theological language, in the sense that it embodies reality perceptions is really related to "the facts." But must one not say that Baum's "perspective" functions also precisely in Wisdom's way? If one supposes that the question "Does God exist?" is the question of the gardeners in Wisdom's parable, then Baum certainly confirms Wisdom's thesis. Says Baum: "'There is a God' does not deal with a being having a supposed existence independently of man."<sup>27</sup> Consequently, Baum too speaks of God's reality as a "trans-sensual, trans-scientific and metaphysical" fact which is inseparable from "the facts," namely, in his case, human existence. Now Wisdom's parable does give the impression of God as an independently existing being. However, his choice of words here does not contradict the logical status of theological language which he advances: Wisdom's point is simply that however God or the gods are conceived, they remain hypotheses about factual reality. And thus Baum, as Wisdom, makes a theological statement function as a hypothesis concerning factual reality. "God exists," for example, comes to mean that "Man's tomorrow will be a new day."<sup>28</sup> But, quite clearly, such an attention directing

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>27</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 185.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

role which draws out what may or may not be the case--even if of great existential import--is not the exclusive property of theology. Declarations that ". . . man is alive by a principle which transcends him . . ." <sup>29</sup> and that ". . . man's future will not simply be determined by causes in the present, . . ." <sup>30</sup> could be made on a number of different assumptions. For that reason, with Ferré', one may well ask, "What is the difference between affirming one's situation in existence by means of theological language with Marcel, and by means of self-consciously atheistic language with Sartre?" <sup>31</sup> Is it merely a difference in choice of hypothesis?

The idea of theology as a way of speaking about factual reality certainly rescues it from non-relevance. Yet, if theology is to be a special reality hypothesis, the "theos" in the "logos" must be such as to fall, at least in a tentative way, within man's cognitive grasp. Further, as a God-hypothesis of universal experiential relevance, the knowing I must have the power of perceiving God as a reasonable foundation for life's prediction and predication. And, thus, Baum's attempt to translate Christian theology into a special anthropology, rests on a hypothesis which presents a thrust in the direction of epistemological idealism.

#### Baum's Apologetic Theology

Faithfulness to the Blondelian maxim that truth must in some

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid. <sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ferré', Language, Logic, and God, p. 134.

sense arise from man's experience of reality--one could also call this the pragmatist's conception of truth--demands, if theology is now to be possible, at least, either (a) a concept of experience which grants a rightful place to transcendental apperception, or (b) a concept of God as finite (William James), or (c) a di-polar, infinite-finite God (theologians influenced by Whiteheadian metaphysics--for example, Hartshorne and Cobb). Now possibly Baum might find the last alternative acceptable, and, indeed, it might be urged that an appropriation of process philosophy could make his views more convincing. However, the fact remains that Baum prefers to develop his thought in continuity with developments in Catholic theology and especially with the school of thought initiated by Maréchal which adopted for its epistemology the "transcendental" method from nineteenth century German philosophy.<sup>32</sup> Hence, Baum's attempt to root theology in an experientially relevant framework in some way embraces the first of the afore-mentioned alternatives. But how does Baum employ the transcendental method? If, in keeping with Tillich's observation, method is not ultimately distinct from the system which is built upon it, is it the case, epistemologically, that Baum wholly commits himself to the transcendentalist thesis? More specifically: does Baum transform the transcendentalist thesis in the light of revelation; or, on the contrary, does he accommodate revelation to the thesis? Further, if the latter is the case, is there a tendency to shift from genuine

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<sup>32</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, pp. 26-27.

transcendentalism to idealism?<sup>33</sup>

Bonhoeffer says:

So long as the resistance of transcendence to thought is asserted, that is, so long as the thing-in-itself and transcendental apperception are understood as irreducibly definitive concepts, neither of which is involved in the other, we may speak of genuine transcendentalism.<sup>34</sup>

Yet, as Bonhoeffer's analysis shows, genuine transcendentalism is always in danger of shifting into either idealism or materialism. Submits Bonhoeffer: ". . . questions of being are unknown to genuine transcendentalism, and it must be so, since its very sense and purpose is to transcend the 'dogmatism' of ontology."<sup>35</sup> Hence, what is characteristic of the transcendental approach, insofar as knowledge cannot be a simple reflection of reality, is that knowing is now ". . . possible only by virtue of a synthesis originally founded in the cognitive subject in the unity of transcendental apperception . . ."<sup>36</sup> In effect, the transcendental approach holds that the knowing subject logically precedes the empirical. Consequently, the validity of knowledge is no longer based on its correspondence with the object of knowing but comes to be rooted in an inner, necessary, transcendental characteristic of the knowing subject's conceptual apparatus. Thus in Kant the question "How is knowledge possible?" is answered with the thesis that our mental apparatus a priori supplies the general

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<sup>33</sup>It is important to recognize that the answer to this question here is not held to be automatically applicable to Baum's mentors, Marechal, Blondel, Rahner, etc.

<sup>34</sup>Bonhoeffer, Act & Being, p. 20.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 22. <sup>36</sup>Ibid.

concepts, the "categories," by means of which we understand experience.<sup>37</sup> What, however, does the Kantian thesis imply for our self-understanding? Obviously, the truth in our experience of the world--though not of the world as it is "in-itself"--is now given with the truth of an a priori. Further, Kant's a priori, by definition renders our experience intelligible in the act of receptivity to the manifold of sensations and, thus, truth is ever in that act, that is, in pure subjectivity. However, applied to our self-understanding Kant's thesis can only mean that ultimately the "I" in my self-understanding is not to be understood from any empirical encounters but solely from itself as the a priori synthesis which logically precedes the empirical. But, indeed, the preceding also means that in principle my self-understanding can never attain my transcendent self. The very attainment of the self would imply cessation of the self as the attaining act. Yet how then is it possible for me to assert that the "I" is in fact pure subjectivity and yet so constituted as to be the a priori synthesis with reference to which the world, including myself, find structure and meaning? Surely the stress on the "I" as pure subjectivity--that is, that the "I" is something which cannot be thought--is contradicted by a concept of its constitution that again gives thought the power (because of the a priori character of the categories) not merely to present but to create experience as intelligible. Little wonder, therefore, as Russell observes, that "Kant's inconsistencies were such as to make it inevitable that philosophers who were influ-

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<sup>37</sup>According to Bertrand Russell this is Kant's main thesis in the Critique of Pure Reason (A History of Western Philosophy New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964, p. 707).

enced by him should develop rapidly either in the empirical or in the absolutist direction . . . ."38 Of particular relevance for this study, however, is Bonhoeffer's comment on the "profound contradiction":

As "what is always already there," as the very act and its intrinsic precondition, the I logically precedes thought. But inasmuch as everything determinable about the I is imbued with the character of noesis, thought precedes the I. This means that thought lies on the brink of the "non-objective" without which, since it is the condition of the conditional, there is nothing objective . . . . From the outset we are thus confronted with the impossibility that human existence should understand itself in its capacity as performance of acts, for the very reason that its essence is the spontaneous performance of acts.<sup>39</sup>

And what can one do in the face of this barrier in concepts of the I and thought? Bonhoeffer suggests two alternatives: (1) Genuine Transcendentalism--whereby " . . . exercising and testing itself against the I, thought suspends itself, . . ."40 though even here it is again " . . . thought which reasserts itself as the only thing which makes such a severance possible"<sup>41</sup>--or (2) Idealism-- " . . . thought can promote itself to be lord and master of the non-objective, in that it takes the doing and thinking I into itself and makes the self-thinking I no longer the ne plus ultra of philosophy but its point of departure."<sup>42</sup>

Now, of course, it may readily be argued that on Bonhoeffer's terms Baum represents the genuine transcendentalist thesis. Afterall,

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 718.

<sup>39</sup>Bonhoeffer, Act & Being, pp. 23-24.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 24. <sup>41</sup>Ibid. <sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 24-25.

Baum's perspective as transcendental apperception at all times only grasps the transcendent "object" in its experiential effect. Thus, for Baum the transcendent "object" and the transcendental apperception are distinct and irreducible. However, as Bonhoeffer indicates, the shift from Kant (genuine transcendentalism) to Hegel and Marx is a radicalization of genuine transcendentalism. On the basis of the notion that already in genuine transcendentalism it is still reason which makes the critique of reason and which suspends itself from incarcerating the unconditional, one may hold that a shift easily occurs: "There is nothing to oblige thought, as free thinking, not to annex the unconditional or empower itself of its I."<sup>43</sup> Consequently, the real test whether we have to do with genuine transcendentalism or an idealistic version is whether in the end being is wholly resolved into act or whether it still remains that to which thought has reference. Says Bonhoeffer:

This 'with-reference-to' characterising the original form of transcendentalism still leaves room for thought's essential reference back to the transcendental, whereas any substituted 'by virtue of' or 'through' would imply the omnipotence of reason over transcendence.<sup>44</sup>

And what must one judge is the case with Baum? If, as Baum himself indicates, Barth represents the transcendentalist thesis insofar as God is held to be subjectivity,<sup>45</sup> it is also clear that Baum suggests a radical departure from Barth. For Barth a transcendental concept of knowledge philosophically most clearly expressed God's non-objec-

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 25.   <sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-23.

<sup>45</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, pp. 176-178.

tivity and the repudiation of objectivity. Hence, Barth emphasized that God can never become the object of consciousness. Indeed that God is solely act and, as such, act which ". . . is at all times free so that there can be no inference from one act to the next . . . ."46 For Baum, however, God's subjectivity has a different result. God is for Baum not merely the never to be objectified "over-against": he is never simply our "over-against." But, further, precisely as the never to be objectified transcendent mystery, God, Baum maintains, is nevertheless so constituted so that we can ". . . conceptualize him by expressing the changes he summons forth in human life."47 But how is Baum's position possible? How can a never to be objectified subjectivity receive conceptualization by virtue of its effects? For Baum, of course, a flexible, empirically oriented conceptualization of God is possible because it avoids God's reification. In faithfulness, therefore, to the transcendentalist thesis, the idea of God as a datum for consciousness in the sense of an object of the I subject is rejected. Nevertheless, what is rejected finds itself back in another form. Unlike Barth, Baum does not negate natural theology. Rather, Baum makes a strong plea for a natural theology on the basis that the Gospel in fact asserts that "God has entered the definition of man."48 But quite clearly, Baum's natural theology is only possible if, to borrow Bonhoeffer's terms, God is located in man's ". . . non-objective I-hood, in its coming to itself!"49 The translation

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<sup>46</sup>Bonhoeffer, Act & Being, p. 82.

<sup>47</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 178. <sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>49</sup>Bonhoeffer, Act & Being, p. 38.

of theology into anthropology demands that God, though not exhaustively identifiable, is nevertheless known by virtue of consciousness' reflection on itself. Yet to know God by virtue of his effects, and thus a knowing which infers God's subsequent acts, is precisely the claim of idealism. Suggests Bonhoeffer:

Whereas in genuine transcendentalism God's non-objectivity behind the activity of consciousness is such that the existentially God-intending act takes place in the actus directus but is inaccessible to the reflexion of consciousness on itself, in idealism the act is able to find God in the reflexion of consciousness (Bewusst-Sein).<sup>50</sup>

Now, of course, along with the argument that Baum's epistemology is idealistic one might proceed to show that for Baum God and I ultimately are one. Furthermore, one might then insist that Baum's concept of divine transcendence really means unlimited, never-ending self-transcendence and, thus, that when Baum claims to repudiate pantheism on the basis that reality is not static, he in effect merely asserts a dynamic form of pantheism. In my judgment, however, the latter kind of argumentation would go too far. It is not the case that for Baum divine transcendence is a mere name for unending human potentiality. Rather transcendence remains for Baum the source and power for human actuality in a manner that is not exhausted by human potentiality. Hence, the discernment here is that the idealism in Baum consists precisely in converting what for faith remains hope and trust into a universally valid description. And what else could one blame in Baum's case than the apologetic tendency to claim too much for itself?

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

In the eagerness to register the Gospel as a credible explanation for our experiences, there is ever the danger that in the face of the need for consistency and universal validity, the historical witness to God's acts and, thus, the conception of these acts themselves, become idealized. Hence, it is precisely the idealization of divine act in the sense of assuming the constancy of God's willing as a datum in man's self-reflection, which is the secret for the amazing simplicity with which Baum can translate God-talk into talk about man. Faith in Baum's perspective already knows somehow that God is willing. From a sub specie aeternum viewpoint, as it were, Baum views faith as able to perceive God's essence in terms of act. Ironically, however, the idealization of act, and thus a conceptualization in exclusively soteriological terms is therefore also open to the same criticism that can be made against "extrinsicist" ontological conceptualizations. Baum's immanentism no less than extrinsicism also views revelation in the light of reason rather than vice-versa!

## CHAPTER V

### BAUM'S HERMENEUTICS

How does one best assess Baum's approach as a solution to the hermeneutical question--a question which is of such critical importance to the Christian community as it faces the question of meaning in the tradition that has given rise to its existence? An evaluation here does not necessarily entail that the evaluator must expose all his assumptions. The assessment could be satisfactory by showing the basic assumptions of the proposed solution, examining its internal consistency, and finally comparing its adequacy in relation to other solutions. Inevitably, however, the whole process of evaluation cannot be separated from the evaluator's own position. Hence I propose to give a brief sketch of what I believe to be three basic tenets for an attempt to solve the hermeneutical problem in the Christian community, my reasons for them and their basic implications. Then I plan to observe how these tenets fare in Baum's position, and, finally, to draw some principal conclusions in the light of the preceding comparison.

#### Basic Tenets

##### The first hermeneutical Tenet

The first tenet emphasizes the start with tradition: theology, respectively dogmatics, must start with tradition in the sense of a

"handed-down" faith-contents.

The reason for the first tenet--the start with tradition is logical insofar as only in this way justice can be done to the peculiar fact that this tradition has continued to the present. The tradere of the tradition either rests on a mistake or it is called for by the content of the tradition itself.

Implications of the first tenet--the first tenet has a direct bearing on (1) the task of hermeneutics and (2) the relationship of dogmatics with respect to the Church's life.

(1) In order to do justice to the peculiar claim which the content of the tradition claims for itself, the fundamental question of hermeneutics is not "What can I understand?", that is, hermeneutic theory. Rather the question is "What is the meaning and purport of the passed-on faith contents?"--that is, its meaning and purport should not be prejudged by hermeneutic theory.

(2) Since the Church is the agent of the tradere, that is, receiver and transmitter, dogmatics is done neither as a function of the Church, nor as a discipline totally cut off from the Church.

Baum's position with regard to the first tenet

Says Baum:

The hermeneutical question is central in the Christian Church. What is the meaning of scriptural message and ecclesiastical doctrine? What principles do we use in order to grasp the truth that christian teaching intends to communicate? How can we faithfully proclaim the Gospel once for all revealed?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Baum, Faith and Doctrine, p. 119.

Thus Baum too begins with the assumption that theological interpretation in the Christian tradition does not take place in a vacuum but is anchored in the need to come to terms with the faith-contents of the tradition. Having said this, however, Baum varies considerably with my implications by making dogmatics very much a function of the Church. To be sure the biblical witness for Baum is normative and therefore authoritative. But the Bible for Baum is then normative not in the sense of authoritative as witness to unrepeated, special revelatory and yet-for-us significant historical events. Rather for Baum Scripture is authoritative in the sense of definitively revealing what in essence is universally accessible. Intimately tied to Baum's whole approach is the conviction that the Gospel is about an ongoing reality. Indeed divine revelation is for Baum an ongoing reality in continuity with the past and definitively revealed in the past. Nevertheless, as ongoing reality revelation for Baum is transparent in the Church's present experience. Consequently the Church can reformulate past expressions and teaching through a process of dialogue which may culminate in consensus. Hence, taking into account different historical situations, Baum can say, "The meaning of the text now is therefore different from the meaning then."<sup>2</sup> And, of course, it is the suggestion that reformulation involve the Church's experience and reflection as a whole which gives meaning to Baum's claim that "The Catholic Church is necessary for the understanding of the Gospel."<sup>3</sup> Never-

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 129. <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

theless, much as the position alters the manner in which authority is now to be arrived at and even grants it a rational and democratic character, it does not dissolve a conflict with Reformed tradition.

Basic to a hermeneutics which asserts that the meaning of a text from the past is different today is the assumption that the text in question derives its meaning from a reality which either (a) has changed itself, or (b) has to be reformulated in order to conserve the original intent in view of changed historical circumstances. The first alternative for Baum is of course unthinkable. The second alternative, however, means that the text in question can ultimately only be held to be an expression of some universal principle, truth, or world-view. Only on the basis of having to conserve the intent of a universal principle or truth, could it be said that in a changing context the text may mean different things at different times. But a view of the text as witness to a universal truth, at least for Reformed tradition, would constitute a direct attack on the authority of the Bible. In Reformation theology, the Bible's pre-eminence is of course not only based on a view of Scripture as objective-historical witness, but also on the doctrine of the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately it is the Divine Agent by which alone the meaning of the Word historically and decisively witnessed to in Scripture becomes understood and present in power. Says J. S. Whale concerning this doctrine:

What Protestantism means by the authority of the Bible here finds its religious ground and true explanation. The Bible is authoritative because of the witness of the Spirit to its truth, in the heart. It is a consentient witness, therefore: there is an accord between the Spirit and the Word . . . Calvin

means that God's Word carries its credibility within itself because it is authenticated by the Holy Spirit within the believer's heart. Holy Spirit and Holy Scripture are two inseparable aspects of one and the same testimony.<sup>4</sup>

Obviously, there is a whole range of other assumptions intimately connected with the doctrine of the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit--to name but a few, the non-repetitive character of the events witnessed to in Scripture, a notion of the past and particularly Christ's person as inclusive of our history (because it is also the story of His Resurrection), and the conception of the Church as an interim manifestation of the Spirit. But, for our purposes here, what matters is Reformed theology's resistance to a refocusing which identifies the meaning of a past text with what are deemed to be modern possibilities of its application. From a Reformed and especially a Calvinistic point of view the above identification would be either (1) a right-wing manifestation of ecclesiastical triumphalism that in view of some gnosis determines the meaning of a text, or (2) a left-wing manifestation of the "spirituals" who in their claim of being guided by the Spirit alone can do quite nicely without all outward forms in religion, including the biblical record itself.

Refocusing would be fine if the Christian exegete was merely dealing with rules of behaviour as, for example, Baum's illustration of the need for refocusing suggests. Using the case of a school which just became co-educational, then, obviously, an old sign

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<sup>4</sup>J. S. Whale, The Protestant Tradition (Cambridge: The University Press, 1962), pp. 133-34.

reading "Boys not Admitted" is easily enough translated "Students not Allowed."<sup>5</sup> However, to treat the past witness in the Christian tradition as if it were a matter of contextual principles goes too far. Pushed to its logical consistency a refocusing exegesis could then only become eisogesis of what is presently deemed applicable.

Now, it is of course true that Baum's focus is not quite so arbitrary as to warrant no further qualification. His focus is arrived at through dialogue and reflection on the Church's modern experience of transcendence. Still, Baum's approach--excellent as it may be as a prolegomenon to the Gospel--tends to override the unique historicity of the biblical witness. From a point of view which wants to know rather how an historical witness about a past event can be of significance today, and how, as such, historical truth can have universal validity, such a solution too readily sacrifices the uniqueness of the historical moment on the altar of subjectification. Now, of course, one cannot imply that Protestantism never had its representatives of "refocusing"--one only thinks of those schools of thought where the Gospel becomes little more than an expression of authentic existential being or where it becomes a sheer matter of ethics! But what is an important question here is whether--if one is part of the Catholic tradition and one rejects a theory of homogeneous development--one must inevitably embrace a programme of refocusing. That, of course, is not a question easily answered. However, here I believe that Hans Küng<sup>6</sup> is a sign that "divine tradition"

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<sup>5</sup>Baum, Faith and Doctrine, p. 126.

does not necessarily entail that the authority of Scripture and ecclesiastical doctrine resides in interpretations determined by the Church's focus. Says K ung:

There are fundamental elements and perspectives in the Church which are not derived from the Church itself; there is an 'essence' which is drawn from the permanently decisive origins of the Church. This constant factor in the history of the Church and of its understanding is only revealed in change; its identity exists only in variability, its continuity only in changing circumstances, its permanence only in varying outward appearances.<sup>6</sup>

Further, on the development of the image of the Church in history, K ung suggests:

But precisely because it is historical, ecclesiology can and must be influenced by its origin, the origin of the Church. This origin does not simply lie in an historical situation, and still less in a transcendental 'principle,' fabricated or interpreted philosophically, which supposedly set the history of the Church in motion. Its origin is rather 'given,' 'appointed,' 'laid-down' quite concretely; according to the Church's understanding of faith through the powerful historical action of God Himself, acting through Jesus Christ among men and for men and so finally through men. God's salvific act in Jesus Christ is the origin of the Church, but it is more than the starting point or the first place of its history, it is something which at any time determines the whole history of the Church and defines its existential nature.<sup>7</sup>

Quite clearly, in these sentences K ung stresses the importance of the need for the Church to encounter its permanently decisive origins. Further, by making plain how this "essence" is by no means derivable from the Church itself, he clears the ground for a hermeneutics that will take the historical origins seriously without prejudging the meaning in the light of present experience.

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<sup>6</sup>K ung, The Church, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

The second hermeneutical tenet

The second tenet stresses the historical character of tradition: the "tradere" as a part of history is a fact. The denial of this fact robs theology of its scientific character.

The reason for the second tenet--since tradition means that the material with which Christian theology is occupied has reached us historically, theology's alienation from critical historical research would be a flight from reality.

Implications of the second tenet--the second tenet entails ramifications for (1) the nature of historical research and (2) theology's relationship with such research.

(1) Historical research is not equivalent to a subjectification of the tradition--that is, the eisogesis resultant from a particular hermeneutic theory. Hence, interpretation and rendering a text applicable for today are not identical.

(2) Theology itself must contribute to the development of a historical-critical method by ensuring that the historical-critical method does not make pronouncements over situations other than those which it can approach methodically, and, thus, does not declare as impossible any unique situations precisely because of their uniqueness.

Baum's position with  
regard to the second tenet

Baum too accepts the role of the critical-historical method in the task of exegesis. But the critical-historical method in the sense of including textual as well as literary criticism is immedi-

ately limited to "dealing with Scripture as a body of literature composed by men"<sup>8</sup> and is, as such, not really related to a second set of hermeneutical principles which deal with Scripture "as a book of divine authorship."<sup>9</sup> These latter principles, Baum admits, "tend to make us a little uncomfortable. They sound arbitrary."<sup>10</sup> But he argues that they are essential to a Catholic hermeneutics: "The faith of the Church that scripture refers to an on-going reality in history demands hermeneutical principles which go beyond the recognized rules of literary criticism."<sup>11</sup> Theologically, thus, no contribution is made to an historical-critical method in the service of exegesis. Rather, theological interpretation and an historical-critical method exist side by side, and the decisive thing in theological interpretation is the focus derived from the Church's experience today. However, the consequences of Baum's approach here are twofold.

(1) The sub-ordination of history to a principle.--a hermeneutics that can determine the meaning of a past witness wholly in the light of present experience must decide that the past historical event, about which the witness purports to be, is not the ultimately decisive matter. Indeed, it must presuppose a view of history as subordinate to and, as such, as expressive of some greater underlying reality, ever constant--even if conceived as dynamic. Only on the basis that revelation in past, present, and future is

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<sup>8</sup>Baum, Faith and Doctrine, p. 127.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 127. <sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 124. <sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

occasioned by a self same reality in the sense of an objectively available constant for all men, can it be said that a past witness to a revelatory event has a meaning which is equivalent to the meaning yielded by reflection on that constant's presence in present experience.

(2) A view of the Christian witness as unique perception of universal truth.--to determine the meaning of a text in the light of reflection on experience in the present inevitably means that the text itself is not taken as witness to decisive historical event but as a unique perception of something universally accessible. Consequently, the text being regarded as a time-conditioned expression of the truth, the task of hermeneutics is now seen as the quest for a subjective--albeit inter-subjective for Baum--expression in tune with our times.

#### The third hermeneutical tenet

The third tenet is really an amplification of the second: the tradition--the fides quae--is historically arisen and thus historically "packaged" with everything that is thereby connected with questions concerning world image, cultural context and historical determination.

The reason for the third tenet--the faith--the fides quae-- is a fortiori an historical matter: an at-a-certain-point in history place-taking fellowship with Israel's God.

Implications of the third tenet--the implications here drawn concern (1) the nature of Christian truth and (2) the manner in which

the truth is made effectual.

(1) The Christian truth only exists in historical form, but it is, as such, no concession to any Zeitgeist, nor a retreat into relativism, but is itself given with the nature of God's self-revelation. Because God's self-revelation has come about historically, the knowledge of God in the tradition stands before us in historical formulations at all points.

(2) That the truth of Christianity is historically grounded is ultimately not repudiated by the even more fundamental aspect that God himself as Holy Spirit makes the historicity of the truth effectual. Hence to attempt to overcome the time-conditioned character of human formulations by making them of eternal value is (a) to disregard human limitation, (b) to enclose God in his self-revelation in the past, and (c) to eliminate the Spirit as the way in which God would today deal with us in a renewing and liberating fashion.

Baum's position with  
regard to the third tenet

Baum's translation of the tradition into experiential, existential categories makes it clear, of course, that for him too Christian faith is an historical matter. Thus, for Baum as well, the tradition is expressed in an historically conditioned "package." Yet, must one not contend that his presuppositions lead to historical relativism?

(1) Baum's attempt to solve the hermeneutical problem by making "General Revelation" the key to interpreting Scripture-- Scripture refers to the ongoing reality which makes history far

from ordinary--inevitably involves the relativism that history then can only serve as illustration of what is presently perceived. In other terms, if the decisive criterion for the meaning of past history is the revelation perceived in today's experience, then past history is regarded as an extension of the present, or what amounts to the same, the present becomes the absolute against which the past is relativized.

(2) "People," says Baum, "become Christians and stay Christians if the Gospel of Christ explains, purifies, and multiplies their depth experience."<sup>12</sup> But this is, of course, only possible if, conversely, the Gospel itself has first of all been explained from experience and when the content of the Gospel has been identified with that contemporary religious explanation. Yet, what does this do to the character of the Gospel as the proclamation about a unique promise-filled event? Does not the equation of the Gospel with the illumination received through different data in a different context relativize the Gospel's historical character and make it a more or less flexible variable at the mercy of subsequent times? Further, is such a Gospel not quite dispensable, and would not such a Gospel have been incapable of being the motor that set the Christian tradition in motion? The logic is inexorable: a witness to a past event can teach us nothing if in advance it is already decided that the significance of the event in question is limited to what we can perceive and understand in our own experience. But, indeed, we then have to do with a hermeneutical

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

circle: one derives from the text what one's pre-suppositions determine from the beginning. Hence, Baum's delivery of tradition's meaning to the Church's reflection on its own experience strikes me as an assertion that the historicity of Christian truth not only means the need for continual interpretation but also that in fact interpretation here means a radical subjectification of the tradition insofar as it no longer needs to wrestle with the meaning of any objective "over-against."

(3) It is, of course, true that the whole process of interpretation--here charged as having become complete subjectification--is for Baum a Spirit-created and guided process which prevents the Church from imprisoning revelation in the past and from becoming itself a museum piece. Still one can say that Baum's solution to make the Gospel relevant is no less guilty of missing the historical character of Christian truth than a metaphysically oriented theology. How can this be maintained?

(a) Just as the metaphysical approach craved for timelessness and so sought to overcome the contingency of time-conditioned historical truth, so the programme of refocusing seeks eternity with the only difference that it seeks eternity in the here and now: now, in the light of present experience and in the light of our perception of God's presence in our world, we must be able to decipher the significance of a witness from the past concerning a past event. And thus the question whether a certain past may have something to say to us which isn't exactly self-evident in our own experience is by-passed.

(b) The anthropological formulations into which the witness and doctrine of the Church, according to Baum's refocusing, can be translated can only do justice to history in the sense of existential becoming. And thus Baum's focus fails to view the Gospel as a commentary on history conceived as a drama which is both simple and complex between God and his creatures and, thus, a history which is neither a web of horizontal human decisions and determinisms nor a purely vertical affair enacted between God and a few mystical souls.

(c) Finally, the notion that the truth of Christian faith may be made plain through an inter-subjective consensus attained through dialogue and reflection on the Church's present experience suggests that the Christian truth itself from a credendum is turned into an intellectually more or less probable category for self and world interpretation. Thus, though differently expressed throughout the ages, in essence the Christian truth no longer brings to our attention a decisive historic moment and its consequences for all history, but provides us with a perception of something quite timeless--the ultimate constitution of reality.

#### Bracketing Off History

According to Baum, the real reason for a doctrinal reinterpretation is that: "In the present day the tension between the traditional doctrine of the Church and the divine reality which it signifies, has become very great indeed."<sup>13</sup> Thus it follows:

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

If the doctrine of the Church replies to the questions of past generations and is expressed in a language no longer our own, it becomes very difficult for people to encounter through it the living Word of God . . . what is required is the reformulation of doctrine.<sup>14</sup>

As such, however, Baum thinks of the hermeneutical problem as something rooted in man's changing social and cultural context rather than as a given with the nature of God's self-revelation itself. Based on the quotes above, an absence of social and cultural changes could mean the satisfaction with traditional doctrines. This, however, only underlines how Baum correlates existence and revelation: "Each culture poses its own crucial questions of life and death. The Church's traditional doctrine replies to questions which, in part at least, were very different from the questions we ask today."<sup>15</sup> Revelation is thus supremely viewed as the answer to man's questions. But this means that the work of explaining revelation must override attempts at understanding!<sup>16</sup> One already understands! Before one can assert the tension between the divine reality and any doctrinal formulations one must, needs be, claim a grasp of the divine reality that will show up the tensions. The manner in which the hermeneutical question is viewed as a problem is therefore very much shaped by what Baum wishes to be its solution. In the light of the new focus the old formulations are not untrue but simply too dense to channel light--that is, for the average Christian. Hence the need

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 35. <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>16</sup>According to Heinrich Ott: "To explain something is to ground it in something already known . . . Understanding, on the other hand, is the unified act of grasping a psychological or historical situation in its unique individuality" ("Language and Understanding," New Theology, No. 4, p. 132).

to reformulate. But, further, the focus which is to make reformulation possible is not unreasonable: it is rooted in experience and therefore not without criteria when its conceptualization is at stake. Should this experiential element be lacking, then, of course, all reformulation would be sheer "non-sense" and remain idle talk. Yet what is significant in Baum's approach is that the problem of how to get from then to now, that is, from past to present, is solved by introducing a constancy factor, even if described as a principle of change, in the experiential aspect of God's presence to men. Further, of course, this constancy factor--God-in-his-effect in man's life--finds itself variously expressed in different social and cultural contexts. Consequently, Baum does acknowledge the historicity of biblical and doctrinal expressions and indeed of his own perspective. Yet, insofar as the past in its historicity must ever yield to subsequent socio-historical transformations and, thus, is dissolved in ever new perspectives, it is at least in theory denied to contribute anything not evident in present experience. Hence, it appears that Baum's vision of the solution to the hermeneutical problem is not very different from Martin Kähler's who, according to Heinrich Ott, attempted to solve Lessing's aporie<sup>17</sup> " . . . by bracketing off history (that is, the search of his day into the life of Jesus) and

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<sup>17</sup>Today, Ott says, Lessing's maxim that accidental truths of history can never constitute the proof of necessary reason becomes meaningful in the sense of: "Judgments of historical probability can never provide the ground for the certainty of faith" ("Language and Understanding," p. 130).

instead calling the Christ preached in the Church the actual Christ."<sup>18</sup>

The Dominance Of A Concept Of Man

If in existentialist theology the emphasis falls on relating the Gospel to a particular view of man as a creature called to freedom and authenticity, in Baum the view of man as the creature on the way to greater humanization is equally decisive in reinterpreting the tradition.

Without question, Baum himself admits the importance of a view of man. Concerning his first principle of reinterpretation he says:

This principle is obviously influenced by a particular view of man. But so is the new focus of the Gospel. What has taken place in the present culture is the transition from a static to a more dynamic understanding.<sup>19</sup>

Further, Vatican II's "law of evangelization," namely, "the accommodation of preaching to the exigencies of the present,"<sup>20</sup> Baum interprets, is not merely the attempt of translating the significance of tradition's claims and doctrines in today's language in view of today's concerns. Rather, for Baum, the above "law" means a programme of reinterpretation in the light of a new focus which is the "Church's Spirit-created experience of what the Gospel means in her own age."<sup>21</sup> The Spirit-created experience, however, is still an experience which yields its constitution in man's self-reflection and, thus, man's

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 141.   <sup>19</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 171.

<sup>20</sup>Baum, Faith and Doctrine, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 167.

self-understanding is of critical import. More precisely, the particular self-understanding which Baum employs is critical insofar as God's self-revelation is now suggested to be translatable into the description which that understanding provides. In short, there is the correlation of revelation and a particular concept of existence. But Baum's correlation here embraces at least two aspects.

(1) The correlation revelation-existence in the first place means that man is not only regarded as existence--the only manner to keep man authentically man--but also that revelation maintains and supports man in the position of authenticity, namely, greater humanization.

Says Baum in his reinterpretation of the significance of God's existence: "It means that man is alive by a principle that transcends him, over which he has no power, which summons him to surpass himself and frees him to be creative."<sup>22</sup> Thus, in Baum's view salvation and self-realization are inseparable and to the point that salvation is wholly explicable in terms of self-realization. For, of course, should one need to say more of salvation than what strictly speaking only refers to human becoming then the axiom that whatever the Church proclaims about God can be translated into declarations about human life, would be false. For Baum, thus, wherever men are truly becoming themselves, there is revelation--and inseparable from it--there is salvation. Hence, to put it rather bluntly, God's self-revelation is exclusively viewed as serving man's

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

becoming and his authenticity and freedom so implied--and, indeed, an authenticity and freedom over against nature and history. Says Baum: "'God exists' means that man's future will not simply be determined by causes in the present, nor is his future wholly vulnerable to the malice and blindness that mask his actions today: the new will be created."<sup>23</sup> That is, God acquires the function of guaranteeing the humanity of man through a power that will enable man to transcend the destructive powers operative in nature and history. But what is at once obvious in Baum's view is the extent to which the concept of revelation is geared to the problematic nature--humanity, or nature--authenticity and freedom, and how the whole of the Church's tradition must be thrown into this strait-jacket in order to make sense.<sup>24</sup>

Now theologically, that is from a practical standpoint, the message of salvation in Baum too remains a message of deliverance. But what this deliverance is in its content undergoes a shift in meaning. Salvation becomes: deliverance from fear, inauthenticity, absurdity, some natural inexorable logic, and from the reduction of humanity through the abuse of natural sciences. And, of course, no one can deny the truth in Baum's concept of salvation: this content too deals with fantastically important things. Yet at the same time one might object that these tremendous things signify a one-sided selection from the components that make up salvation. For Baum the

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Helmut Gollwitzer also levels this charge against existentialist theology (The existence of God as confessed by faith, trans. by J. W. Leitch [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965], p. 24).

great drama is a drama between man and world and of man against destructive forces within. The problem which Baum's concept of salvation wishes to solve is not the quest for a gracious God, but how to overcome destructive and dehumanizing forces. And, thus, the fundamental religious question, as in Van den Heuvel's terms, is a question of "mastering life."<sup>25</sup>

On Baum's terms, God's revelation in Christ comes to mean God's presence in the drama of man and world--that God confirms man qua man by maintaining him as freedom over against necessity, as person over against "thingification," and as the creator of meaning in the face of meaninglessness. And, as already indicated, Baum's conception of affairs does touch an element of evangelical truth. Yet, at the same time--because of its selective aspect--Baum's conception means a distortion of the evangelical truth. Does not the New Testament tell us rather more about salvation? To come to the point: there is also such a thing in the New Testament as a drama between God and man. And can one so reinterpret this drama that it becomes only descriptive of man's dynamic self-becoming? The disappearance of the God-initiated drama with man--God is no longer man's over-against--raises the question whether Baum's perspective involves a self-chosen role and goal for man which only afterwards invokes God's help to maintain and support him in this role.

(2) To make God's self-revelation the foundation and con-

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<sup>25</sup>Albert H. Van den Heuvel, These rebellious powers (New York, Friendship Press, 1965), p. 23.

firmation of being human involves the paradoxical result that in his self-revelation God asserts the reality of man not over against himself in a covenant relationship but over against whatever destructive forces there are both in the world and in man himself.

Baum speaks as though his conception of God implies radical otherness: ". . . he can never be identified with any aspect of history. God is always different."<sup>26</sup> But this otherness rather indicates the inexhaustible ground inseparable from all that is human. Significantly, transcendence is spoken of as the "more than human."<sup>27</sup> Thus, to wit, God is present to human life as Word, but by the principles of interpretation the Word's transcendence signifies a "more" still within the scope of human apperception, namely, as the inexhaustible call and power to greater humanization. Now Baum's position, he openly confesses, is chiefly motivated by the modern experience for which God as Personal over-against presents immense difficulties. Says Baum:

The God problem today, I conclude, is raised by the experience of ordinary Christians. Is it still possible to believe in God, the supreme being and king of the universe? Does this outsider God exist at all?<sup>28</sup>

And, of course, a God who is entirely an outsider God, is a God who is absent from our experience and irrelevant to our existence. Yet is it necessarily so that the language which speaks as though God were a being, and, of course, the supreme being, can only serve as metaphorical language to indicate his inexhaustible grace and power as

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<sup>26</sup>Baum, Man Becoming, p. 282.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. <sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

a dimension of life? Can it not be maintained that the concrete language concerning God which has arisen in the tradition in some way points to a transcendence in the heart of God's immanence by which he is also the other One who encounters the creation in which he is present as creator and sustainer? Must the latter notion somehow be considered intolerable, as if the God alongside man beyond his presence in the mystery of life inevitably leads to a view where God and man can only be two competing powers! Now, of course, even in Baum's interpretation of transcendence it is possible to speak of a relationship with God in which man and God, for example, as "freedom" and "maintainer of freedom" or its "ground," are inseparably united. But what is the nature of this inseparability? Surely, it is no longer personal, however much this word is now clarified by the new interpretation. "Personal" only is meaningful when the term describes the relationship of two who address one another as "Thou." When theology is reshaped by an anthropology where man is conceived as the possibility for humanization, and when, consequently, being human is primarily determined by authenticity and freedom, one is no longer able to hold on to the truly personal which is the intercourse of God and man in a covenant relationship.

## CONCLUSION

Without question Baum's psychologically-oriented phenomenology provides a perceptive apology for being a Christian in today's world. However, from the point of view of this study, serious difficulties are encountered when beyond a persuasive prologue to the Gospel, Baum's perspective intends to be the basis for reinterpreting Christianity's historical witness.

Of course, it would be presumptuous to believe that Man Becoming is Baum's final word. As observed in Chapter I, if we may trust the qualities of the Catholic theologian as indicated by Schillebeeckx, we may be sure that the dialogue subsequent to Man Becoming will not leave Baum's position unaltered. Nevertheless, as it stands, the question for this study whether Baum's position in Man Becoming avoids a form of reductionism--loosely defined in the Introduction as the tailoring of the Gospel to suit philosophical (metaphysical or existential-experiential) or even institutional demands--has been answered rather negatively:

1. Baum's exclusive stress on the Truth as salvational--even if he grants the validity of a more intellectual approach--it was observed, leads to a weakening of the objective intelligibility of the mystery to which the Church witnesses. Hence, Baum certainly finds a place for human subjectivity in the Church's role of transmitting and interpreting the Gospel. However, Baum's attempt to translate the historical witness into statements about human becoming does raise

the question whether he sacrifices the extra nos aspect of the Gospel. Indeed, in view of a lack of any consequential "over-againstness" in God, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Gospel is reduced to a special anthropological description.

2. Baum's universalism--quite consistent with the direction theology receives when it becomes a reflection on man in his depth-dimension--views the concrete historical event as a window on what is universally true. Consequently, the meaning of historical formulations is for Baum immediately bound by present experiential perception.

3. Epistemologically it was shown that Baum embraces a form of transcendentalism with an idealist tendency in the sense of idealizing divine act. The idealization of divine act, it was recorded, must be regarded as an inescapable result when the historical witness and tradition concerning the living God is, in principle, held to be totally translatable into anthropology.

4. Finally, in the light of hermeneutical considerations, Baum's solution to the hermeneutical question was seen to involve a logic which inevitably means that he brackets off history. Further, insofar as present perception and experience provide the central criteria for meaning, there is in Baum's theology such a dominant conception of human existence that it pre-determines the element of revelation in the correlation revelation-existence.

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A RESUME  
of

MAN BECOMING--RELEVANCE AT THE PRICE OF REDUCTION ?--  
A Study of Gregory Baum

by  
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INTRODUCTION

Baum's position since Man Becoming has not altered and, hence, the nearly exclusive focus on Man Becoming. Baum's work is questioned from a view influenced by Barth and Bonhoeffer. Particularly Bonhoeffer's analysis of theological positions in terms of philosophical orientation is held to be relevant. Basically the concern in the study is a hermeneutical one.

CHAPTER I SETTING THE STAGE

Baum's Theological Pilgrimage : Baum has shifted from a Barthian position to the theological anthropology initiated by Rahner.

The Wider Setting : The greater weight of tradition in Catholic theology in contrast with Reformed theology is observed to be congenial to dialogue and a movement of consensus. Baum fairly represents the traits of Catholic Renewal Theology indicated by Schoof. Outstanding in Baum's approach is his apologetic concern. Given Baum's intention to be orthodox, the reinterpretation of dogma on the basis of a theology where the present plays a vital role has radical import. Baum's situation is somewhat analogous to that of Bishop Robinson in the early sixties and he has written as if in anticipation of various charges.

CHAPTER II TRUTH AS SALVATIONAL

Baum's demand for non-objectification is also met by a conceptual framework which envisions God as embracing both entity and non-entity; Baum's explorations of the salvational knowledge of faith does not escape a form of critical theology; Baum's beginning with existential-ontological categories has immediate dogmatic overtones; the new perspective as Spirit-created especially in view of Baum's desire to convert theology into anthropology implies the rejection of a correspondence theory of truth; Baum's anthropology entails that theology express itself in flexible, functional language descriptive of man's dynamic becoming.

## CHAPTER III BAUM'S UNIVERSALISM

Baum's second principle of reinterpretation, it is held, involves a questionable universalism.

Revelation : Baum's interpretation of God's self-identity in his revelation does not take into consideration the experience that the Revealer is greater than that in which he reveals himself; Baum's tenet that all theological statements are translatable into soteriological description puts his theology in danger of becoming angelology; the stress on God's non-over-againstness raises the question whether God's existence is also apart from man and means that symbols such as "God is Personal" receive a subjective interpretation.

The Concept "In Christ" : The manner in which Baum reconciles "universalist" and "particularist" themes does not heighten the urgency and importance of the historically concrete; Baum's interpretation of incarnation weakens the distinction between adoption and incarnation; in the light of Théo Preiss' view of God's action as a universalist movement of concentration and expansion Baum's universalism fails to do justice to Divine initiative, does not acknowledge an element of radical discontinuity in tradition's continuity, turns all of theology into a doctrine of sanctification, and denies the validity of personalistic conceptions.

Faith : Baum's redefinition of faith as "new consciousness" means that the difference between the Church and non-Church is a matter of cognition; brought to attention here is the failure of the "Already" and "Not Yet" aspects of God's redemption in influencing Baum's categories; this failure is particularly evident in Baum's minimization of the difference between redemption and creation; Baum's own analysis of "new consciousness" shows that it is not the equivalent of the New Testament notion of faith.

## CHAPTER IV BAUM'S TRANSCENDENTALISM

Baum's second principle of interpretation removes the distinction between philosophical and theological anthropology; hence, both our pre-conceptual orientation and our conceptual apparatus are critically important and, thus, Baum's stress on the role of the Spirit in the Church's cognition; however, Baum's translation of ontology into ontological-existential reality does raise the question whether this involves a form of transcendental idealism.

Baum's Phenomenology : Baum's psychologically-oriented phenomenology in its intent to shape theology reverses Anselm's dictum and places theology in direct contention with philosophy; as a reality hypothesis Baum's phenomenology turns theology into an instance of "ordinary" language; as a thesis of universal relevance and predication the "theos" is in some sense transparent to Baum's "logos" and thus the thrust toward epistemological idealism.

Baum's Apologetic Theology : In the light of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's and Bertrand Russell's analysis of Kant's transcendentalism Baum is judged to make a concession to idealism insofar as he idealizes the aspect of God as Act by assuming God's willing as a datum in man's self-reflection.

## CHAPTER V BAUM'S HERMENEUTICS

Basic Tenets : Baum's hermeneutical position is evaluated in the light of three tenets dictated by the character of Christian tradition; in this evaluation Baum is shown to exhibit (1) a tendency to identify the meaning of a past text with its contemporary application, (2) a tendency to subordinate history to a principle and to view the Christian witness as a unique perception of universal truth, and (3) a thrust in the direction of historical relativism.

Bracketing Off History : Insofar as Baum's approach dictates that the historical witness must ever yield to the perspectives of subsequent socio-historical transformations in man's consciousness, he brackets off history.

The Dominance of a Concept of Man ; A concept of man which is much influenced by existentialist thought, it is shown, so dominates Baum's theology that it pre-determines the content of revelation in the correlation revelation-existence.

## CONCLUSION

Baum's exposition of the new perspective, it is acknowledged, is a penetrating contemporary apologetic. Nevertheless, in the light of this study serious objections are made when Baum's perspective becomes more than a prologue and, in fact, delivers the hermeneutical solution for coming to terms with the Christian tradition. In its application to reinterpret the Gospel the conclusion is that Baum's approach involves a theological reduction by accommodating revelation to a particular conceptual framework.