

FRED C. RUTZ FOUNDATION LECTURE

A Philosophical-Theological Critique of the Death of God Movement

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THE SUBJECT of this lecture is the new theological science of Theothanatology, wherein God's mortal illness or demise serves as the starting point for a radically secular approach to the modern world.¹

The national publicity lately given to this movement in general periodicals (*Time*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, etc.)² may produce the false impression that here Protestantism has again spawned an unstable lunatic fringe which will disappear before one knows it—or quickly be replaced, as the Beatles edged out Elvis Presley. A closer look, however, reveals that the death-of-God movement is no flash in the theological pan. Stokes, a critical colleague of theothanatologist Altizer at Emory University, has recently and accurately mapped "the nontheistic temper of the modern mind"; the death-of-God theologies are consciously relating to this temper.³ Carl F. H. Henry, on closely observing the present European theological climate, has noted that, after the relatively brief Barthian interlude, the cold winds of rationalism are blowing again; in the death-of-God movement America is beginning to feel these winds turning icy cold as they are directed through an ideological morgue. *Christian Century's* editor, while varying the temperature, does not minimize the impact of the new theology; on December 1 he wrote of the so-called "Christian atheism": "Debate now rages: it looks as if we shall have a long, hot winter."⁴ Cold or hot (Altizer would like this conjunction of opposites!), the movement is indeed to be reckoned with. Says one of its prime spokesmen, William Hamilton: "Members of this group are in touch with each other; plans are under way for a major meeting of the group and there is even some talk of a new journal devoted to the movement."⁵

Protestants in the Reformation tradition should especially examine this new theology with care, for it is not accidental that Hamilton regularly appeals to Luther and to motifs of Reformation theology,⁶ or that a critic of the movement has shrewdly written: "Soon, I predict, Luther will become the dominant symbol of the God-is-dead theology because he left the cloister and went into the 'world'—whatever that is."⁷ Even more important, as we shall see, the God-is-dead movement takes its rise from the consistent appropriation and use of a central theme in Neo-Orthodoxy—the very Neo-Orthodoxy that many Lutheran and Reformed theologians here and abroad are naively embracing today.⁸ Perhaps this lecture will aid some members of the theological community to check their tickets more carefully before they board contemporary trains of thought.

As to the lecture's posture, let it be plainly stated at the outset: in Merrill Tenney's words, "We are not ready to be God's pallbearers yet";⁹ nor are we going to function as pseudo-sophisticated embalmers of the Infinite. Rather, I find myself at the presumed death of God in the role of a coroner. My dictionary defines a coroner as "a public officer whose principal duty is to inquire into any death which there is reason to suppose is not due to natural causes." I have become convinced that there is some foul play involved in this particular death; and we shall discover, if I am not mistaken, that the death-of-God theology represents a classic case of what mystery writers call "the wrong corpse."

The Morticians in the Case

Five names have become associated, for good or for ill, with the new "Christian atheism." They are: Gabriel Vahanian of Syracuse, a French Calvinist by origin, whose 1961 book, *The Death of God*, gave the new movement its name; Baptist Harvey Cox of the Harvard Divinity School, rocketed to fame by his paperback, *The Secular City* (1965), which had sold over 135,000 copies at last count; Thomas J. J. Altizer, an Episcopal layman on the faculty at Emory, whose next book will carry the title, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*; William Hamilton of Colgate Rochester, a Baptist, best known for his book, *The New Essence of Christianity*, which, however, now represents an earlier, more conservative stage in his development; and Paul M. van Buren, an Episcopal priest teaching in the religion department at Temple University, who took his doctorate under Karl Barth at Basel and whose book, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*, is the most substantial production yet to arise from the death-of-God camp. All of these men are "younger theologians": Cox is 36, Vahanian and Altizer are 38, and Hamilton and Van Buren are 41.

Whether these five theologians actually constitute a "school" is still a matter of debate among them. Cox, speaking in Evanston several weeks ago at the seventh Annual Meeting of the American Society of Christian Ethics, denied the existence of a unified movement (but then observed important common elements among the

"Christian atheists");¹⁰ Paul Van Buren has remarked: "Langdon Gilkey says we belong to a 'God is dead' movement, but I think Altizer and Bill Hamilton and I are saying different things."¹¹ Hamilton, on the other hand, has argued cogently for the existence of a definite ideological focus shared at least by Altizer, Van Buren, and himself.¹² Of course the question of a "school" depends on one's definition of the term. The fact that the above five theologians are already linked in the common mind with the God-is-dead stir requires that we look at the position of each. Having done so, we can proceed to note the common elements in their views.

We shall take up the theothanatologists in the order already employed: Vahanian, Cox, Altizer, Hamilton, and Van Buren. This order represents, roughly, a continuum from "more conservative" to "more radical," with the caesura between Cox and Altizer. Such an arrangement takes into account a basic clarification made both by Cox and by Hamilton: Cox's distinction between the theologians (such as himself) who use the phrase death-of-God with quotation marks around either or both of its nouns, and the theologians (such as Van Buren) who use the phrase with no qualifications, to signify that God is no longer alive, even if he once existed;¹³ and Hamilton's separation of the "soft" radicals ("they have God, but sometimes for strategic reasons they may decide not to talk about him") from "hard" radicals such as himself:

The hard radicals are really not interested in problems of communication. It is not that the old forms are outmoded or that modern man must be served but that the message itself is problematic. The hard radicals, however varied may be their language, share first of all a common loss. It is not a loss of the idols, or of the God of theism. It is a real loss of real transcendence. It is a loss of God.¹⁴

In terms of these typologies, Vahanian and Cox are "soft" radicals who use quotation marks, while Altizer, Hamilton, and Van Buren, by eschewing qualifications (though admittedly not always in the most clean-cut fashion) and by endeavoring to assert the ontological demise of deity, warrant classification as "hard" radicals.

The five death-of-God theologians may be further distinguished by the way of their academic specializations and temperamental orientations. Thus Vahanian is principally concerned with the relations between literature and theology, and writes as an urbane litterateur himself; Cox is basically a sociologist of religion,¹⁵ endeavoring to unite Talcott Parsons with Karl Barth(!);¹⁶ Altizer is "mystical, spiritual, and apocalyptic . . . all élan, wildness, excessive generalization, brimming with colorful, flamboyant, and emotive language";¹⁷ Hamilton is the theologian's theologian, having produced (before his conversion to death-of-God thinking) such standard fare as *Modern Reader's Guides* to various biblical books, and *The Christian Man* in Westminster Press's *Layman's Theological Library*; and Van Buren—"ordered, precise, cool"¹⁸ is ever the mod-

ern linguistic philosopher: he "has neither wept at God's funeral nor, like Altizer and the dancers at a Hindu procession to the burning ghat, leaped in corybantic exultation. He plays the role of the clinical diagnostician of linguistic maladies."¹⁹ Let us consider in turn the peculiar ideological orientation of each of these thinkers, who, in spite of their wide divergencies, are united in focusing the attention of theology on contemporary secular man rather than on transcendental deity.

Gabriel Vahanian: Mortician-Litterateur. Though Rudolf Bultmann regards Vahanian's *Death of God* as one of the most exciting books he has read in recent years, its author is now considered hopelessly conservative by the advocates of Christian atheism.²⁰ Why? because he unabashedly uses the expression "death of God" in a metaphorical-literary, not literal, way. The subtitle of his book reveals his major concern: "The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era." "God's death" is evident in the fact that ours is a post-Christian world where (1) "Christianity has sunk into religiosity," (2) "modern culture is gradually losing the marks of that Christianity which brought it into being and shaped it," and (3) "tolerance has become religious syncretism."²¹ In his latest book, *Wait Without Idols*, Vahanian explicates: "This does not mean, obviously, that God himself no longer is but that, regardless of whether he is or not, his reality, as the Christian tradition has presented it, has become culturally irrelevant: God is *de trop*, as Sartre would say"²²—and he illustrates with the opening scenes of the film *La Dolce Vita*, where a huge crucifix suspended from a helicopter hovers incongruously over indifferent sunbathers below.

What is the cause of this "demise of God"? Like Paul Tillich or Christian philosopher of history Eric Voegelin,²³ Vahanian finds the basic issue in "the leveling down of transcendental values to immanent ones,"²⁴ i.e., the worship of the idolatrous gods of cultural religiosity. In a penetrating analysis of Samuel Beckett's 1952-53 play, *En attendant Godot* (*Waiting for Godot*), where Godot represents God, Vahanian concludes: "No wonder then that life is lonesomely long, when one lives it out wandering from meaninglessness to meaninglessness, from idol to idol—and not a hope in sight. Modern man's place is the right place; only his religiousness is at the wrong place, addressing itself to the Unknown God."²⁵

But Vahanian has an answer for post-Christian man: he must, as his book title says, "Wait without idols." As a Calvinist and as a follower of Barth (he translated and wrote the introduction for Barth's book *The Faith of the Church*), Vahanian believes that secular "immanentism can show that God dies as soon as he becomes a cultural accessory or a human ideal; that the finite cannot comprehend the infinite (*finitum non est capax infiniti*)."²⁶ What then does modern man wait for? The breaking in of the Wholly Other—the transcendent God who can never be "objectified."²⁷

The Christian era has bequeathed us the "death of God," but not without teaching us a lesson. God is not necessary; that

is to say, he cannot be taken for granted. He cannot be used merely as a hypothesis, whether epistemological, scientific, or existential, unless we should draw the degrading conclusion that "God is reasons." On the other hand, if we can no longer assume that God is, we may once again realize that he *must* be. God is not necessary, but he is inevitable. He is wholly other and wholly present. Faith in him, the conversion of our human reality, both culturally and existentially, is the demand he still makes upon us.²⁸

Harvey Cox: Mortician-Sociologist. Bishop John A. T. Robinson, of *Honest to God* fame, recently commended Cox's *Secular City* as "a major contribution by a brilliant young theologian" and pointed up its major theme: that secularization is "the fruit of the Gospel."²⁹ For Cox, secularization (as opposed to secularism) is a positive phenomenon, whereby "society and culture are delivered from tutelage to religious control and closed metaphysical world-views."³⁰ Following Eric Voegelin and Gerhard von Rad, Cox interprets the Genesis account of Creation and the Exodus narratives of the deliverance from Egypt and the Sinai covenant as secularizing-liberating myths—myths of which the secular city becomes a modern counterpart. Urban life, with its anonymity and mobility, can free modern man from bondage to closed, idolatrous value systems, and open him to that which is truly transcendent. He quotes Amos Wilder approvingly: "If we are to have any transcendence today, even Christian, it must be in and through the secular."³¹ How will the liberating transcendence manifest itself? Cox suggests art, social change, and what he calls the "I-You partnership" (a team-work relationship). Through such means the transcendent may eventually reveal to us a new name, for the word "God" has perhaps outlived its usefulness owing to its association with old idolatries. "This may mean that we shall have to stop talking about 'God' for a while, take a moratorium on speech until the new name emerges."³² But this should not appear strange to us, since "hiddenness stands at the very center of the doctrine of God."³³ Even "in Jesus God does not stop being hidden; rather He meets man as the unavailable 'other'. He does not 'appear' but shows man that He acts, in His hiddenness, in human history."³⁴ Modern urban-secular life, then, is the vehicle (the "means of grace"!) by which man in our age can be freed from bondage to lesser gods and meet the Transcendent One again.

When Cox revisited his secular city in a conference several weeks ago, he made his position vis-à-vis the "death of God" even more explicit.³⁵ No, he did not accept the literal demise of deity; as a close admirer of Karl Barth, he firmly believes in a transcendent, wholly other God.³⁶ Indeed, it is on this basis that his book strikes out against those styles of life that capture and immanentize deity. With Friedrich Gogarten, he is convinced that apart from transcendent reality—an extrinsic point of reference—the world cannot be a world at all. (He illustrated with Muzak: if it were to go on

all the time, then music would cease to exist; an anti-environment is necessary for an environment, and the wholly other God is such an anti-environment for our world.) But as to the identification of the Absolute, Cox was no less vague than in his book. There he spoke of atheists and Christians as differing not in their factual orientation but in their "stance"; in his lecture, he employed an aesthetic model for Christian social decisions, and when asked for the criteria whereby one could know that the transcendent is indeed working in a given social change, he optimistically asserted that "the hermeneutical community, with its eyes of faith, discerns 'where the action is'." Whereupon the questioner shrewdly retorted: "Carl MacIntyre's church or yours?" Cox then readily admitted his enthusiast-anabaptist frame of reference, and noted that Lutherans and Calvinists (mainline Reformation Protestants) had been the chief critics of his *Secular City*.

Thomas J. J. Altizer: Mortician-Mystic. In spite of their radical terminology, Vahanian and Cox are familiar territory to those acquainted with the twentieth century Protestant thought world. Beginning with Barth's radical transcendence, they condemn the false gods of cultural immanentism and see the collapse of these idols in our day as the entrée to a new appreciation of the Wholly Other. They differ from Barth chiefly in the means by which the Transcendent One will now show himself; for Barth, it is always through the (erring but revelatory) Word of Scripture; for Vahanian and Cox, it is through the pulsating secular life of our time.

With Altizer, however, we move into a more distinctively radical radicalism, where God's death is passionately affirmed as a real (though dialectical) event. Altizer's difficult world-view is best comprehended through the influences that have played upon him. (1) From the great phenomenologist of religion Mircea Eliade, Altizer came to see that modern man has lost his sense of the sacred;³⁷ but Altizer "refuses to follow Eliade's tempting advice to return to some sort of precosmic primitivism and to recover the sacred in the way archaic religion did."³⁸ Altizer picks up the principle of the "coincidence of opposites" (*coincidentia oppositorum*) so vital to the thinking of Eliade (and of Carl Gustav Jung), and endeavors to apply it with ruthless consistency: the only way to recover the sacred is to welcome fully the secularization of the modern world.

(2) Altizer's studies in comparative religion, particularly the Eastern religions, provided considerable grist for his mill.³⁹ He came to identify the basic thrusts of Christianity and atheistic Buddhism;⁴⁰ in his judgment both religions seek to liberate man from all dependence on the phenomenal world (in Buddhism, the negation of Sam-sara is the only means to Nirvana), yet at the same time there is "a mystical apprehension of the oneness of reality" (Nirvana and Sam-sara are mystically identified).⁴¹ Here, according to Altizer, is a telling parallel with the Christian Kingdom of God, which is "in the world but not of it."

(3) From modern Protestant theology Altizer has acquired his basic understanding of Christianity. Søren Kierkegaard has contributed the dialectical method: "existence in faith is antithetically related to existence in objective reality; now faith becomes subjective, momentary, and paradoxical."⁴² Rudolph Ott⁴³ and Karl Barth have provided a God who is wholly transcendent—who cannot be adequately represented by any human idea. But Barth, Bultmann, and even Tillich have not carried through the Kierkegaardian dialectic to its consistent end, for they insist on retaining some vestige of affirmation; they do not see that the dialectic requires an unqualified coincidence of opposites. If only Tillich had applied his "Protestant principle" consistently, he could have become the father of a new theonomous age. Wrote Altizer not long before Tillich's death:

The death of God (which Tillich, who refuses to be fully dialectical, denies) must lead to a repetition of the Resurrection, to a new epiphany of the New Being. Moreover his own principles lead Tillich to the threshold of this position. If Christianity will be a bearer of the religious answer not so long as it breaks through its own particularity, only to the degree in which it negates itself as a religion, then obviously it must negate its Western form. Until Christianity undergoes this negation, it cannot be open to the depths of the ground of being. Nor will Christianity continue to be able to embody the New Being if it remains closed both to non-Western history and to the contemporary historical present. Potentially Tillich could become a new Luther if he would extend his principle of justification by doubt to a theological affirmation of the death of God.⁴⁴

Altizer now clearly sees *himself* in this role.

(4) "If radical dialectical thinking was reborn in Kierkegaard, it was consummated in Friedrich Nietzsche,"⁴⁵ says Altizer, who sees in Nietzsche's vision of Eternal Recurrence the ideal myth of the coincidence of opposites, and in his passionate proclamation of God's death—the death of metaphysical transcendence—the essential key to a new age. For "only when God is dead, can Being begin in every Now."⁴⁶ Therefore, to turn the wheel of the world we must dare with William Blake to "name God as Satan," i.e., to "identify the transcendent Lord as the ultimate source of alienation and repression."⁴⁷ Only then can we affirm "the God beyond the Christian God, beyond the God of the historic Church, beyond all which Christendom has known as God."⁴⁸

(5) By a thoroughgoing acceptance of Albert Schweitzer's eschatological interpretation of Jesus in his *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Altizer claims Jesus as the prime symbol of his world-view. "To grasp Jesus as an historical or an objective phenomenon is to live in unbelief."⁴⁹ Jesus is significant because of his single-minded

attention to the coming Kingdom and his sacrifice of himself for it; he thus becomes the Christ figure—the symbol of a total rejection of the old to achieve the new—and this “mythical symbol of Christ” is “the substance of the Christian faith.”⁵⁰ So Altizer calls on radical Christians to “rebel against the Christian churches and their traditions” and to “defy the moral law of the churches, identifying it as a satanic law of repression and heteronomous compulsion.”⁵¹ As “spiritual or apocalyptic” Christians, they must “believe only in the Jesus of the third age of the Spirit, a Jesus who is not to be identified with the original historical Jesus, but who rather is known here in a new and more comprehensive and universal form, a form actualizing the eschatological promise of Jesus.”⁵² The incarnate Word is thus seen to be fully kenotic—capable of a totally new expression in the new age ushered in when dialectically we “accept the death of God as a final and irrevocable event”:

Neither the Bible nor church history can be accepted as containing more than a provisional or temporary series of expressions of the Christian Word. . . . Not only does Christianity now have a new meaning, it has a new reality, a reality created by the epiphany of a fully kenotic Word. Such a reality cannot be wholly understood by a word of the past, not even by the word “kenosis,” for the Christian Word becomes a new reality by ceasing to be itself: only by negating and thus transcending its previous expressions can the Incarnate Word be a forward-moving process.⁵³

William Hamilton: Mortician-Theologian. Though Altizer out-barths Barth in his employment of the transcendence principle, thus apparently leaving the “soft” radicals far behind, his affirmation of God’s death is, after all, still a dialectic affirmation: from the ashes of God’s pyre will arise, like the Phoenix, a “God beyond God.” Now let us consider a theathanatologist who has come to reject the dialectic as well.

In a revealing autobiographical article, Hamilton states that he did not attain his present “hard” radical position until 1964, after he had turned forty.⁵⁴ This is quite true, and much of the current interpretation of Hamilton falls wide of the mark because it is based on his 1961 book, *The New Essence of Christianity*, which explicitly disavows “the non-existence of God”⁵⁵ and even affirms Jesus’ resurrection “as an ordinary event” (though it is insignificantly relegated to a footnote!).⁵⁶ But even at that time, the influence of Barth,⁵⁷ Niebuhr, and John Baillie⁵⁸ on Hamilton’s thought was leading to a more radical position. Thus in the Spring of 1963 Hamilton wistfully attempted to save Mozart’s Don Giovanni through the employment of Kierkegaard’s dialectic of good and evil; Don Giovanni seems to typify the limbo state of the contemporary theologian—neither damned nor saved.⁵⁹ Then came Hamilton’s first direct attempt to “see if there is anybody out there”⁶⁰—if there were others who shared his growing dissatisfaction with the state of theological

life: his essay, "Thursday's Child," in which he depicted the theologian of today and tomorrow as "a man without faith, without hope, with only the present and therefore only love to guide him"—"a waiting man and a praying man."⁶¹ When interviewed in 1965 by Mehta, he said: "I am beginning to feel that the time has come for me to put up or shut up, for me to be an in or an out."⁶²

The decision to be an "out"—a "hard" radical affirming the literal death of God—was made by Hamilton last year. In his *Christian Century* article previously referred to, he described the breakdown of his "good old world of middle-of-the-road, ecumenical neo-orthodoxy,"⁶³ and outlined his new position in three particulars: (1) God is indeed dead; the Neo-Orthodox "dialectic between the presence and absence of God" has now "collapsed." (2) A free choice is made to follow the man Jesus in obedience—to stand where he stands.⁶⁴ (3) A new optimism will "say Yes to the world of rapid change, new technologies, automation and the mass media." The last two points are clarified somewhat in Hamilton's recent analysis of the death-of-God movement, wherein he stakes out his position as compared with the views of Altizer and Van Buren.⁶⁵ Christologically, Hamilton, like Altizer, commits himself to a radically hidden, kenotic Jesus: "Jesus may be concealed in the world, in the neighbor, in this struggle for justice, in that struggle for beauty, clarity, order. Jesus is in the world as masked." Moreover, "Become a Christ to your neighbor, as Luther put it."⁶⁶

Yet the theme of the Christian as "both a waiting man and a praying man" still remains. How is this possible if "the breakdown of the religious a priori means that there is no way, ontological, cultural, or psychological, to locate a part of the self or a part of human experience that needs God"—if "there is no God-shaped blank within man"? "Really to travel along this road means that we trust the world, not God, to be our need fulfiller and problem solver, and God, if he is to be for us at all, must come in some other role."⁶⁷ Having rejected Augustine's claim that our hearts are restless till they find their rest in God, Hamilton draws in another Augustinian theme: the distinction between *uti* and *frui*—between using God and enjoying Him.

If God is not needed, if it is to the world and not to God that we repair for our needs and problems, then perhaps we may come to see that He is to be enjoyed and delighted in. . . . Our waiting for God, our godlessness, is partly a search for a language and a style by which we might be enabled to stand before Him once again, delighting in His presence.⁶⁸

In the meantime, modern secular man must grow up—from an Oedipus to an Orestes, from a Hamlet to a Prospero⁶⁹—by moving beyond the anguished quest for salvation from sin to a confident, optimistic, secular stance "in the world, in the city, with both the needy neighbor and the enemy." Thus is the orthodox relation between God and the neighbor "inverted": "we move to our neighbor,

to the city and to the world out of a sense of the loss of God."⁷⁰ Man, not God, becomes the center of focus while we wait prayerfully for the epiphany of a God of delight.

Paul van Buren: Mortician-Philosopher. Officially, Hamilton rejects a dialectic view of God's existence; yet, remarkably (or paradoxically, in spite of Hamilton's formal break with neo-Protestant paradox!), a *frui* God is hoped for at the death of a *uti* divinity. Prayer is the revealing element in Hamilton's theology: he continues to pray in spite of God's death—thus forcing the conclusion that the dialectic of divine presence-absence that he claims to have rejected has not been rejected at all in practice. Through the contemporary dark night of the soul God is in some sense still there, waiting as we wait, the recipient of our prayers. In Paul van Buren, however, this inconsistency is overcome through the cool and rigorous application of linguistic philosophy. Significantly, Van Buren recently admitted: "I don't pray. I just reflect on these things."⁷¹

Like the other death-of-God theologians, Van Buren began his reflecting as a Barthian. We noted earlier that he took his doctorate under Barth at Basel.⁷² Subsequently, however, he came into contact with the *Philosophical Investigations* of the later Wittgenstein and the writings of the so-called linguistic analysis who have followed him.⁷³ In the process of subjecting his own Neo-Orthodox theology to rigorous analytic and linguistic criticism, he wrote his *Secular Meaning of the Gospel*, a book which, he says, "represented an important step in a personal struggle to overcome my own theological past"⁷⁴—but "what I'm thinking now is a lot more radical even than what I said in my book."⁷⁵

What is Van Buren's current position? It may be represented as a five-point argument, the total importance of which can hardly be overemphasized since it forms the philosophical backbone of consistent "Christian atheism": (1) Assertions compatible with anything and everything say nothing, and this is precisely the status of Neo-Orthodoxy's affirmation concerning a transcendental, wholly-other God. At the beginning of *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*, Van Buren approvingly quotes the well-known parable by Antony Flew and John Wisdom, demonstrating the meaninglessness of such God-statements:

Once upon a time two explorers came upon a clearing in the jungle. In the clearing were growing many flowers and many weeds. One explorer says, "Some gardener must tend this plot." The other disagrees "There is no gardener." So they pitch their tents and set a watch. No gardener is ever seen. "But perhaps he is an invisible gardener." So they set up a barbed-wire fence. They electrify it. They patrol with bloodhounds. (For they remember how H. G. Wells' *The Invisible Man* could be both smelt and touched though he could not be seen.) But no shrieks ever suggest that some intruder has received a shock. No movements of the wire ever betray an in-

visible climber. The bloodhounds never give cry. Yet still the Believer is not convinced. "But there is a gardener, invisible, intangible, insensible to electric shocks, a gardener who has no scent and makes no sound, a gardener who comes secretly to look after the garden which he loves." At last the Sceptic despairs, "But what remains of your original assertion? Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even from no gardener at all?"⁷⁶

An important section of Van Buren's book is devoted to showing that Bultmann's existential assertions about God do not escape this "death by a thousand qualifications," and that the same holds true of Schubert Ogden's attempts (God is "experienced non-objective reality," etc.) to stiffen existential affirmations with Whitehead's process-philosophy. God, then, is literally and unqualifiedly dead, and future divine epiphanies have no more meaning than present-day expressions of God's existence.

(2) Modern life is irrevocably pluralistic and relativistic, a market-place where a multitude of "language games" are played, not a Gothic cathedral where a single comprehensive world-view is possible. The non-cognitive language game of theology has to be played relativistically in this milieu.⁷⁷

(3) If metaphysical, transcendental God-statements are literally meaningless, what is their "cash value"? The actual worth of these affirmations of faith can be obtained only by translating them into human terms, an operation to which the concluding portion of *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* is devoted. As Van Buren put it in his recent *New Yorker* interview: "I am trying to argue that it [Christianity] is fundamentally about man, that its language about God is one way—a dated way, among a number of ways—of saying what it is Christianity wants to say about man and human life and human history."⁷⁸

(4) This translation of God-language to man-language must be carried out particularly in reference to the central figure of Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth.

One of the ways in which the New Testament writers speak about Jesus is in divine and quasi-divine terms—Son of God, and what have you. . . . What I'm trying to do is to understand the Bible on a naturalistic or humanistic level, to find out how the references to the absolute and the supernatural are used in expressing on a human level the understanding and convictions that the New Testament writers had about their world. For by using these large cosmological terms in speaking about this particular happening, this event—the history of Jesus—they were saying the most that they could say about this man. If a man in the first century had wanted to

say of a certain person that he had given him an insight into what human life was all about, he would have almost normally said, "That man is divine."⁷⁹

Van Buren claims that his secular translation of the Gospel "stands or falls with our interpretation of the language connected with Easter."⁸⁰ What is this interpretation?

Jesus of Nazareth was a free man in his own life, who attracted followers and created enemies according to the dynamics of personality and in a manner comparable to the effect of other liberated persons in history upon people about them. He died as a result of the threat that such a free man poses for insecure and bound men. His disciples were left no less insecure and frightened. Two days later, Peter, and then other disciples, . . . experienced a discernment situation in which Jesus the free man whom they had known, themselves, and indeed the whole world, were seen in a quite new way. From that moment, the disciples began to possess something of the freedom of Jesus. His freedom began to be "contagious."⁸¹

(5) Admittedly, theology is here reduced to ethics, but in our secular age we are unable to find any "empirical linguistic anchorage" for the transcendental. After all, "alchemy was 'reduced' to chemistry by the rigorous application of an empirical method."⁸² So let us frankly embrace the secular world of which we are a part. Religious thought is "responsible to human society, not to the church. Its orientation is humanistic, not divine. Its norms must lie in the role it performs in human life. . . . Any insights into the 'human situation' which our religious past may provide us, therefore, can be helpful only insofar as we bring them into a dynamic conversation with and allow them to be influenced by our rapidly changing technological culture."⁸³

And here *la ronde* is complete, for in his stress on our modern cultural situation Van Buren reminds us of the "soft" radicals Vahanian and Cox as much as of his "hard" compatriots Altizer and Hamilton. Is there then a death-of-God school? Even with the qualifications introduced in our discussion of each of the five theodanalogists, the answer must be Yes. For in all of these thinkers the theological center shifts away from a God whose transcendence causes him to become more and more indistinct, until finally, in Van Buren, he passes into the realm of analytic meaninglessness. And for all of these morticians of the Absolute, God's vague or vacated position on the theological stage is replaced by Man—literary man (Vahanian), urban man (Cox), mystical man (Altizer), social man (Hamilton), ethical man (Van Buren). Correspondingly, the Christ of these "Christian atheists" moves from divine to human status: his kenosis becomes continually more pronounced until finally the divine "hiddenness" in him is absolutized, yielding a human-

istic Jesus with whom modern man can truly and optimistically stand in "I-You" partnership in a world of secular challenge and dynamic change.

Efforts at Resuscitation

As the theothanatologists have taken their positions around the divine bier, ready to convey it to its final resting place, resuscitator squads of theologians and clergy have rushed to the scene in a frantic effort to show that the Subject of discussion "is not dead but sleepeth." In the five years since the appearance of Vahanian's *Death of God*, vocal opposition to the movement has increased not arithmetically but geometrically. The protests have ranged widely in scope and quality—from the revival of the anti-Nietzsche quip ("God is dead!" signed, Nietzsche; "Nietzsche is dead!" signed, God) to Eric Mascall's *The Secularization of Christianity*, a book-length criticism of the common theological orientation of Van Buren and J. A. T. Robinson.⁸¹ In general, it must be said that the attempts to counter "Christian atheism," though occasionally helpful in pointing up weaknesses in the theothanatologists' armor, do not cut decisively to the heart of the issue. In most instances, the reason for the critical debility lies in the dullness of the theological swords the critics wield. Let us observe several representative efforts to slay the God-is-dead ideology, after which we will be in a better position to offer our own critique.

Early in this paper we cited Hamilton's colleague Charles M. Nielsen of Colgate Rochester, who evidently has taken all that he can bear from Hamilton and his death-of-God confrères. Nielsen is the best example of the anti-theothanatological critics who oppose the movement through satire and ridicule. Here is a delightful sample:

On the subject of freedom: there is nothing quite like some Protestant seminaries. Presumably a medical school would be upset if its students became Christian Scientists and wanted to practice their new beliefs instead of medicine in the operating rooms of the university hospital. And a law school might consider it unbecoming to admit hordes of Anabaptists who refused on principle to have anything to do with law courts. But almost nothing (including atheism but excluding such vital matters as smoking) seems inappropriate in some Protestant settings—nothing, that is, except the traditions of Christianity and especially of Protestantism. Traditions are regarded as "square," supposedly because they are not new. The modern theologian spends his time huddled over his teletype machine, like a nun breathless with adoration, in the hope that out of the latest news flash he can be the first to pronounce the few remaining shreds of the Protestant tradition "irrelevant." So powerful is the thrust toward novelty that a famous Protestant journal is considering a series of articles by younger theologians under 60 called "How My Mind Has Changed in the

Past Five Minutes." The only thing that is holding up the project is the problem of getting the journal distributed fast enough. A great aim of the liberal Protestant seminary is to be so relevant that no one would suspect Protestantism had a past, or at least a worthwhile one. The point is for the seminary to become so pertinent to modern culture that the church has nothing to say to that culture.⁸⁵

Though such passages are great fun and make an important point, they by-pass the root question, namely, Are the death-of-God theologians *correct* in what they claim? Is God dead? The obvious incongruity in Hamilton's presence on the Colgate Rochester faculty, in Van Buren's retention of Episcopal ordination, etc. pales before the truth question. Nielsen never faces this problem, for he sees the difficulty simply to be a surfeit of "eccentrics" in the church, and pleads for (as the subtitle of his article puts it) "more Benedictines, please!" As a professor of historical theology who highly values the corporate tradition of the historic church, he prays: "Dear Lord, we are grateful for all the individualists and gadflies you have sent us. Hermits *are* interesting, but next time may we please also have a few Benedictines to build, organize and serve the church?" But if the God of the historic church is not dead, then "gratitude" for theothanatological gadflies seems hardly appropriate; and if he is, then Nielsen's Benedictines are a positive menace.

The November 17, 1965 issue of *Christian Century* featured a section titled, "Death-of-God: Four Views," with the following explanation from the editor: "Letters constituting entries in the death-of-God debate . . . continue to crowd the editor's desk. To print them all would be impossible, so as a way out of the dilemma we present four articles which in one or another aspect seem to inculcate most of the views, mainly critical, advanced in the letters." These articles are indeed representative of the general reaction to the movement, and their common theme is the *inconsistency* of the theothanatologists: their impossible attempt to retain love, joyful optimism, the Christian ethic, or Jesus himself while giving up a transcendent God. Warren L. Moulton argues that "without our faith in the reality of God we can know little or nothing about the love which we call *agape*"; he notes that "for the joy that was set before him Christ endured the cross; with the arrival of 'optimism' and the departure of this particular joy, a central nerve is frayed"; and asks: "Can we stick by Jesus just because we like the toys in his sandbox?"⁸⁶ Larry Shiner writes: "To get rid of God and keep a 'Jesus ethic' of involvement with the present human situation is a species of absent-mindedness amazing to behold in a movement that takes its motto from Nietzsche. *He* at least knew better; he never tired of pointing out that Christianity is a whole and that one cannot give up faith in God and keep Christian morality."⁸⁷

But as sound as these criticisms are from the standpoint of the biblical world-view, they overlook the plain fact that the death-of-

God theologians are quite willing to follow Nietzsche, if need be, in a "transvaluation of all values." Altizer, as we have seen, has already called upon radical Christians to "defy the moral law of the churches"; and Van Buren, in his article for *Christian Century's* "How I Am Making Up My Mind" series, does not mention the name of Jesus once, and defines the task of theology entirely in humanistic terms.⁸⁸ It is therefore painfully evident that the charge of inconsistency toward the Christian tradition will not move the theothanalogists to repentance; they are fully prepared to embrace "creative negation" on all fronts. The basic issue remains: Is such negation justified?

The scholarly attempts to meet this fundamental truth question have thus far issued chiefly from the theological camps the "Christian atheist" have endeavored (quite successfully) to demolish: existentialism, Whiteheadian process-philosophy, and Neo-Orthodoxy. The result is a rather painful example of the defense of vested interests. Existential theologian John Macquarrie⁸⁹ is willing to admit, with Van Buren, that "our modern scheme of thought affords no place for another being, however exalted, in addition to the beings that we encounter within the world"; but he still sees as a viable alternative the Heidegger-Tillich-Robinson existential-ontological conception of God as Being itself:

The alternative is to think of God as Being itself—Being which emerges and manifests itself in and with and through every particular being, but which is not itself another such being, which is nothing apart from particular beings, and yet which is more beingful than any particular being, since it is the condition that there should be any such beings whatsoever. . . . It is Heidegger's merit that he has shown the empirical anchorage of this question in certain moods of our own human existence—moods that light up for us the wider Being within which we live and move and have our own being.⁹⁰

Process-philosophy is made the bulwark of defense against "Christian atheism" by theological advocates of this philosophical school. Stokes claims that a program to counter "the threat of a world view which repudiates the belief in a personal God . . . can best succeed with the aid of personalistic modes of thought which are informed and enriched by some of the insights of Whitehead and Hartshorne."⁹¹ John B. Cobb, Jr., author of the Whitehead-oriented *Living Options in Protestant Theology*⁹² (which does not even include orthodox Reformation theology as an option!), informs us that "once one enters the strange new world of Whitehead's vision, God becomes very much alive. . . . Insofar as I come existentially to experience myself in terms of the world to which Whitehead introduces us, I experience myself in God; God as in me; God as law, as love, as grace; and the whole world as grounded in him. . . . If Whitehead's vision should triumph in the years ahead, the 'death of God' would indeed turn out after all to have been only the 'eclipse

of God'.⁹³ Bernard Meland argues in terms of process-philosophy and comparative religion that "ultimacy and immediacies traffic together," and that "while notions of the Absolute have dissolved in our modern discourse, the vision of a *More* in experience, as a dimension that is lived rather than thought, is not unavailable."⁹⁴

Even the Neo-Orthodox theology out of which the death-of-God theologians have carved their casket for the Infinite is presented as an answer to "Christian atheism." Langdon Gilkey, in his *Crozer Lectures on the God-is-dead movement*, holds that the theothanatologists are influenced solely by the "negative elements" of Neo-Orthodoxy and "not at all by the balancing positive elements."⁹⁵ On the positive side, when one looks deeply into human experience, one finds "a special kind of Void and loss," the character of which is best expressed by such terms as "ultimate", "transcendent", and "unconditioned." Here "there is either no answer at all and so despair, or, if there be an answer, it comes from beyond the creaturely." At this point revelation puts in its claim: "Revelation is that definite mode of experience in which an answer to those ultimate questions is actually experienced, in which, that is, the reality and truth of language about God is brought home to the experiencer, in which propositions about God are 'verified'."⁹⁶ In the Neo-Orthodox spirit, Gilkey quickly adds: "No proof here is possible; only confession and conviction based on this experience." In sum: "The 'verification' of all we say about God occurs, then, in the life of faith lived by the Christian community, and from that living experience springs the usage and the reality of its God-language."⁹⁷

The existential-ontological, process thinking, and Neo-Orthodox arguments against "Christian atheism" ring more and more hollow as analytical philosophy intensifies its barrage against these increasingly anachronistic theologies. Theothanatology was built over the wreckage of these positions, and in itself it has marshalled overwhelming analytical evidence of their debility. Listen to Van Buren's decimation of such arguments as have just been presented:

Along comes the knight of faith and speaks of "reality breaking in upon us!" Or he speaks to us in the name of "absolute reality," or, even more confusing, his faith is placed in "an objective reality." And here I would suggest that language has gone on a wild binge, which I think we should properly call a lost weekend.

This knight of faith is presumably speaking English, and so we take him to be using words which we have learned how to use. Only see what he does with them. "Reality," which is ordinarily used to call our attention once more to our agreements about how things are, is used now to refer to what the knight of faith must surely want to say is radically the opposite of all of our ordinary understandings. Why not better say, "Unreality is breaking in upon us"?

I think we can say something about what has gone wrong

here. There was a time when the Absolute, God, was to be the cause of a great deal of what we would today quite real phenomena, from rain and hail to death and life. God was part of what people took to be the network of life and factors of everyday existence, as real and as objective as the thunderbolts he produced. But today we no longer have the same reference for the word "reality." The network of understandings to which the word points has undergone important changes. The word "reality" has taken on an emotional coloration which makes it now a bit confusing to speak of "reality breaking in upon us," unless we are referring to something, for example, a sudden and unexpected visit from the police or a mother-in-law.⁹⁸

The point Van Buren cleverly makes here applies equally to potential ontologies, process philosophies, and Neo-Orthodox theologies, for all of these positions offer concepts of Deity which, though compatible with anything and everything, say precisely nothing. Macquarrie's "beingful Being" may be nothing but an animistic name for the universe (the existence of which is hardly in dispute!);⁹⁹ the God of Whitehead and Hartshorne, as worshipped by Ogden, Cobb, Meland, *et al.*, may likewise be little more than a pantheistic projection of their personalities on an impersonal universe (even William James, whose notion of "the More" Meland appropriates, admitted that it might be only an extension of the seminal parapsychological life of man);¹⁰⁰ and Gilkey quite rightly encloses the word "verification" in quotation marks when he uses it for Neo-Orthodoxy's experience of revelation as filling a "Void" no more a validation of God's ontological reality than the existentialist's "moods that light up the wider Being within which we live" or the process theologian's experience of non-objective reality.¹ In all of these cases, the source of the experience could be purely psychological, and an appeal to a more-than-human level of explanation totally without warrant.¹⁰²

Some efforts have been made to oppose the God-is-dead ideology from the standpoint of traditional orthodox theology, but the attempts, operating from presuppositionalist or fideist orientations, have had little impact. Paul Holmer of Yale, whose theology falls within the Lutheran spectrum,¹⁰⁴ makes the excellent points that the God-is-dead school has misinterpreted Bonhoeffer, who was not an advocate of atheism, and that the theothanatologists have falsely assumed that Christianity can be modified so as to become universally acceptable to modern man while still remaining true to itself. On the latter point he writes: "The Christian idea of God has never been the coin of a very large realm. . . . Theology never did have the allegiance of the intelligentsia in the West, nor did the church or other powers extend over the whole of European social life. . . . The theologian must understand the world and the people in it not to make Christianity relevant to them as much as to help them become relevant and amenable to Christianity."¹⁰⁵ But when he

moves to a positive defense of the Christian view of God, Holmer vitiates his effectiveness by presuppositionally driving a wedge between theology (which, presumably, could remain true no matter what) and secular knowledge (whose development cannot touch theological truth): "Theology was never so much a matter of evidence that it had to change as the evidence advanced."¹⁰⁶

Robert E. Fitch of the Pacific School of Religion unmercifully castigates the God-is-dead mentality, arguing that "if there is anything worse than bourgeois religiosity, it is egghead religiosity" and that "this is the Age of the Sell-Out, the age of the Great Betrayal. We are a new Esau who has sold his spiritual birthright for a secular mess of pottage."¹⁰⁷ Particularly telling is Fitch's case for the permanent and culture-transcending impact of Scripture; he tells of the current wave of interest on the part of east Africans in the first published Swahili translation of *Julius Caesar*, and comments:

Perhaps some cultural relativist would like to explain how an event in ancient Rome could have meaning almost 1,500 years later in Elizabethan England and how it could now, centuries later, be reborn in meaning in east Africa. What is striking is not just the continuity of meaning in the event but the continuity of expression in Plutarch-North-Shakespeare-Nyerere [the Swahili translator]. Our Bible can do as much. Indeed, it always has done so.¹⁰⁸

But the universality of literary impact establishes the cognitive truth of the Bible's claims, and it is the latter that the death-of-God theologians dispute. Moreover, when Fitch opposes existentialistic-experiential thinking with the argument that secular concepts and categories "yield but an erudite darkness until they are illuminated by a vision which sees this world in the light of another world," he does not move beyond the "soft" radical Cox whom he criticizes.¹⁰⁹ Even if Reinhold Niebuhr, with his transcendental perspective on the human predicament, accomplished more than secularist John Dewey¹¹⁰ (a debatable assumption, in any case), the basic question of the *de facto* existence of the transcendent still remains. The "world seen in light of another world" is an argument subject to infinite regress, and the pragmatic effect of belief in Deity can hardly establish the independent existence of Deity. Fitch appears to operate from a presuppositional orientation which (sound though it may be) leaves death-of-God thinking basically untouched.

Representing fideistic attacks on the theothanatologists, we have Episcopal rector David R. Matlack, who speaks eloquently for most Christian believers: "Even if their assumptions were granted and their logic airtight—and this is far from the case—they would not be touching the real life experiences I believe I have had of God's grace, and the real life experiences other Christians have had."¹¹¹ Here the issue is, of course, whether Matlack's "real life experiences" and those of other believers necessarily demand the ex-

istence of a transcendent God. Suppose, as philosopher Kai Nielsen has argued in a paper written from Van Buren's analytical stance, fideistic claims such as Matlack's "are in reality no claims at all because key religious words and utterances are without intelligible factual content?"¹¹² How does the orthodox believer (any more than the existentialist) know that his experiential "encounters" require a transcendental explanation?¹¹³ It is the contention of "hard" death-of-God thinking that such "encounters" must be translated into purely human terms to make sense. Attempts by Christian believers to meet this issue—which lies at the very heart of the God-is-dead movement—have thus far fallen wide of the mark.

A Closer Pathological Examination

In endeavoring to strike to the root of the theothanatological problem, we shall focus attention on the theoretical underpinning which Van Buren has provided for the movement. Our concern will not center on the metaphorical uses of the God-is-dead formula as employed by the "soft" radicals, since their claims that people have difficulty in believing today and that theological language lacks relevance for modern man simply highlight the perpetual need to preach the gospel more vigorously and communicate its eternal truth more effectively. Likewise, we shall spend little time on the positions of the "hard" radicals Altizer and Hamilton, for, as already noted, these thinkers, in spite of the ostensibly atheistic character of their affirmations, do in fact allow for the reintroduction of Deity (Altizer's "God beyond God," Hamilton's "God of delight") at the back door even while ejecting him from the front. Cox is right when he says of Altizer, "he will have to be more precise if he's going to be taken seriously,"¹¹⁴ and the recent television discussion in which Oxford philosopher-theologian Ian Ramsey went to work on Hamilton showed clearly that the same charge of confused ambiguity must be leveled at him.¹¹⁵ The trenchant character of God-is-dead thinking comes not from these basically emotive outcries but from Van Buren's straightforward attempt to show that God-statements are meaningless unless they are translated into Man-statements. What, then, of Van Buren's argument?¹¹⁶

First, unlike most theological opponents of the death of God,¹¹⁷ we readily concede the validity of Van Buren's basic epistemological principle, namely, that assertions compatible with anything and everything say nothing. Contemporary analytical philosophy, in arriving at this principle, has made an inestimable contribution to epistemology, for by way of the principle, vast numbers of apparently sensible truth-claims can be readily identified as unverifiable, and time and energy can thereby be saved for intellectual pursuits capable of yielding testable conclusions. We also agree with Van Buren that this verification principle¹¹⁸ should be applied in the religious realm as fully as in other areas, and we find the Flew-Wisdom parable of striking value in illustrating the technical meaninglessness of numerous God-claims made in the history of religions and by

many religious believers today, including those Protestants addicted to Neo-Orthodoxy, existentialism, and process-philosophy.¹¹⁹ The God-is-dead issue, however, depends not upon whether non-Christian religions or contemporary Protestant theologians make meaningless assertions about God's existence, but whether biblical Christianity is subject to this criticism. Van Buren is thus quite correct to focus attention on the New Testament picture of Jesus, and especially on his Resurrection; but it is exactly here that Van Buren's analysis fails—and, ironically, proves itself to suffer from the very analytical nonsensicality it mistakenly sees in Christianity's continued affirmation of a transcendent God.

The New Testament affirmation of the existence of God (the Divine Gardener in the Flew-Wisdom parable) is not a claim standing outside the realm of empirical testability. Quite the contrary: the Gardener *entered* his garden (the world) in the person of Jesus Christ, showing himself to be such "by many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3). Mascall illustrates with Jesus' miraculous healing of the blind man in John 9, observing that "one can hardly avoid being struck by the vivid impression of eyewitness reporting and by the extremely convincing characterization of the persons involved."¹²⁰ To drive the latter point home, Mascall renders the beggar's remarks into cockney, e.g.: "Yesterday I couldn't see a ruddy thing and now I can see orl right. Larf that one orf!" (John 9:25). The Resurrection accounts, as I have argued in detail elsewhere,¹²¹ provide the most decisive evidence of the empirical focus of the biblical affirmation that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." In I Cor. 15 the Apostle, writing in A.D. 56, explicitly states that the Christian God-claim, grounded in the Resurrection of Christ, is not compatible with anything and everything and therefore meaningless: after listing the names of eyewitnesses who had had contact with the resurrected Christ) and noting that five hundred other people had seen him, most of whom were still alive), Paul says: "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." The early Christians were quite willing to subject their religious beliefs to concrete, empirical test. Their faith was not blind faith; it was solidly grounded in empirical facticity.¹²²

But, argues Van Buren, the New Testament claims only *appear* to be of an empirical nature. When the writers speak of Jesus as God and describe his miracles, "they were saying the most that they could say about this man." The Resurrection accounts are but the final proof of how thoroughly Jesus' liberating personality changed the lives of his disciples; here we see Jesus' followers experiencing what R. M. Hare has called a "blik"—a "discernment situation" in which they place a quite new evaluation on their whole experiential world.

On looking closely at Van Buren's superficially plausible interpretation, we discover that, being compatible with anything and everything, it says nothing! Consider: *any* point of evidence cited from the New Testament documents to refute Van Buren (e.g., the

doubting Thomas episode) will be dismissed by him as simply indicating how *powerful* the "discernment" was for the disciples. A peculiar situation therefore arises that *no* amount of evidence (including Peter's direct statement, "we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty"—Pet. 1:16) could dislodge Van Buren from his humanistic reduction of the biblical narratives.

The meaninglessness of Van Buren's approach will become clearer by the use of analogies drawn from non-religious spheres. Suppose you were to say to me: "Napoleon conquered Europe in a remarkably short time with amazing military resourcefulness, and after suffering defeat and exile, he escaped and came close to overwhelming Europe once again";¹²³ and I were to reply, "You really are impressed by Napoleon, aren't you?" Obviously irritated, you retort: "Yes, I am impressed by Napoleon, *but* I'm trying to tell you some facts about him, and here are documents to prove what I have just said." Then I would blandly answer: "How wonderful! The very interest you show in marshalling such material shows how great an impact Napoleon has had on you." Your frustration would be boundless, for no matter what evidence you produced, could, following Van Buren's approach, dismiss it simply as an empirical code representing a non-empirical "blik" situation.

Or suppose I were to say: "My wife studied art history and enjoys painting"; and you commented: "You really love her, don't you?" "Well, yes," I would say, "but she *does* have artistic interest. Here are her transcripts representing art courses she's taken, her paintings she's done, and" At which point you interrupt with a sweep of the hand: "Come, come, no need to bother with that; I can recognize true love when I see it! How commendable! My composure would be retained with great difficulty, since I would find it impossible under the circumstances to get across a genuinely factual point.

In this way Van Buren endeavors to "lark off" the empirical claims of Scripture to the existence of God in Jesus Christ; but his endeavor lands him squarely in the abyss of analytical nonsensicality where he mistakenly tries to place the biblical witness to the supernatural. Indeed, Van Buren is not even being faithful to the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*, whose principles he seeks to follow: for Wittgenstein saw the necessity of respecting the "language game" actually being played and the absurdity of reductionistically trying to say that a given language game really means something else. Wittgenstein asks if it is proper to assert that the sentence "The broom is in the corner" really means "The broomstick is in the corner, and the brush is in the corner, and the broomstick is attached to the brush." He answers:

If we were to ask anyone if he meant this he would probably say that he had not thought specially of the broomstick or espe-

cially of the brush at all. And that would be the *right* answer, for he meant to speak neither of the stick nor of the brush in particular.¹²⁴

By the same token, Van Buren's reductionistic translation of the empirical language game of biblical incarnation-claims into non-cognitive, ethical language is artificial, unwarranted, and at cross-purposes with the whole thrust of the biblical narratives. The same is true of the literary, urban, eschatological-mystical, and social reductionisms of scriptural God-assertions carried on respectively by Vahanian, Cox, Altizer, and Hamilton. The God proclaimed by the Bible as having entered the empirical world in Jesus is not dead, though an obvious attempt has been made to murder him using the lethal weapon of reductionistic, humanistic bias. But the murder of God in the interests of Man has always had consequences exactly the opposite of those anticipated, as our Lord indicated when he said, "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." It is ironic that the theothanatologists have not learned from the experience of Sartre's Goetz: "J'ai tué Dieu parce qu'il me séparait des hommes et voici que sa mort m'isole encore plus surement."¹²⁵

The Case History Yields a Moral

Why have the God-is-dead theologians so easily run into this humanistic dead-end? The answer lies in their starting point, and a sobering moral can be drawn therefrom. As we pointed out through primary and secondary sources employed in the early portion of this paper, every one of the death-of-God thinkers was profoundly influenced by the dialectic orientation of Neo-Orthodoxy. Alasdair McIntyre, in his incisive critique of Robinson's *Honest to God*, draws the connection between Neo-Orthodoxy and "Christian atheism":

We can see the harsh dilemma of a would-be contemporary theology. The theologians begin from orthodoxy, but the orthodoxy which has learnt from Kierkegaard and Barth becomes too easily a closed circle, in which believer speaks only to believer, in which all human content is concealed. Turning aside from this arid in-group theology, the most perceptive theologians wish to translate what they have to say to an atheistic world. But they are doomed to one of two failures. Either they succeed in their translation: in which case what they find themselves saying has been transformed into the atheism of their hearers. Or they fail in their translation: in which case no one hears what they have to say but themselves.¹²⁶

And why does the Kierkegaardian-Barthian theology operate as a "closed circle"? Because of its basic premise that, as MacIntyre well puts it, "the Word of God cannot be identified with *any* frail human

attempt to comprehend it."¹²⁷ Since the logical consequences of such a principle are a fallible Scripture and a kenotically limited Jesus, the Bible appears to secular man as no different qualitatively from other human writings, and the Incarnate Christ becomes indistinguishable from other men. The believer thus moves in a closed circle of irrational commitment, which the unbeliever finds impossible to accept. The God of such an irrational faith has no recourse but to become a transcendent Wholly Other, and when analytical philosophy poses the obvious verification question as to the ontological existence of the transcendent, no answer is possible. In the Flew-Wisdom parable, the Gardener-God of Neo-Orthodoxy *cannot* be discovered empirically in the garden, for his transcendence would thereby be profaned;¹²⁸ thus the garden of the world looks as secular to the believer as to the unbeliever, and the latter rightly asks: "Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even from no gardener at all?" To this, the "yes-and-no" dialectic of Neo-Orthodoxy can say nothing whatever; and the obvious result is the death of God. For contemporary theological thought, the Bible would be no more erroneous if there were no God; the Resurrection of Christ in Barth's theology would be no more unverifiable if God did not exist; and Tillich's "Protestant principle" would make Jesus no more kenotic if there were no "Ground of all being." The God-assertions of mainline theology in the twentieth century are compatible with anything and everything, and therefore can be dispensed with as meaningless. God dies, and only modern secular man is left.

This appalling situation—what Fitch calls the theological Sell-Out—is the direct result of a refusal to acknowledge God's power to reveal himself without qualification here on earth. The ancient Calvinist aphorism, *finitum non capax infiniti*, has been allowed to obscure the central biblical stress on God's incarnation and on his ability to speak the Word of truth through human words. The Bible does not present God as Rudolf Otto's transcendent, vague Wholly Other or as Tillich's indescribable Being itself, but as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who through the entire expanse of scriptural revelation speaks inerrant truth to men and who manifestly enters the garden of this world in Jesus Christ (cf. John 20:15). For orthodox Christianity, unafraid of a miraculous Savior or of an inerrant Scripture, God's existence does make a difference in the world, for only on the basis of his existence is revelation explainable. Mainline Protestant theology, having lost its doctrine of revelation and inspiration in the days of liberalism and never having recovered it, now finds itself incapable of showing why God is necessary at all.

The moral, then, is simply this: Physicians of the soul will inevitably find themselves faced with the corpse of Deity if they lose their confidence in God's special revelation. The final and best evidence of God's existence lies in his Word—in the triple sense of Christ, the gospel he proclaimed, and the Scripture that infallibly conveys

it. The historicity of the Resurrection, the facticity of the Biblical miracles, the internal consistency of Holy Writ and its freedom from empirical error: these must be sustained, or the God of Scripture will fade away into a misty transcendence for us too, and eventually disappear. Conversely, if we do maintain the doctrine of God's *historische* revelation through an inerrant Bible, we will find that, in an age of almost universal theological debility, we will be able to present a meaningful God to an epoch that desperately needs divine grace. The only living God is the God of the Bible, and for the sake of secular man today we had better not forget it.

Final Autopsy: A Mistaken Identity Revealed

The God-is-dead movement is a reflection and special case of an abnormal preoccupation with Death in our time. On the popular level we have sick comedies such as *The Loved One*; on the sociological level, analyses such as *The American Way of Death*; on the psychological level, the wide acceptance of Freud's theme of the *mortido*; and on the plane of theoretical analysis revealing works such as Feifel's anthology, *The Meaning of Death*, containing essays by Jung, Tillich, Kaufmann, and many others.¹²⁹

It is interesting to note other eras when death was an over-arching concern. Huizinga, in his classic, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, notes how "the vision of death" embraced late medieval man, and how the dance of death, the surrealist horrors of Hieronymous Bosch's depictions of hell, and the satanic black masses blended into a symbolic projection of a collapsing culture. Fin de siècle France is another illustration of the same phenomenon: J.-K. Huysmans' description in his novel *A Rebours* of a "funeral feast" in which the orchestra played dirges while guests, dressed in black, silently ate dark foods served by negresses was no less based on fact than his accounts of satanic rites in *La-Bàs*; the Parisian society of the 1880's and 1890's, living in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War, had fallen into degeneration and corruption, and the preoccupation with death and hell was the cultural equivalent of psychological sublimation.

Today's death-of-God thinking is likewise symbolic. Holy Scripture speaks of death also, but it is *man's* death upon which the Bible dwells: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). Scripture finds the human race, not God, in the throws of death. And when God does die, it is on the Cross, as an expiation for man's mortal disease; and God's conquest of the powers of death is evidenced in his Resurrection triumph.¹³⁰

"The sting of death is sin," however, and from Adam on the sinner has sought above all to hide himself. Thus in our day men unwilling to face their own mortality have projected their own deserved demise upon their Maker and Redeemer. As suggested at the beginning of this essay, the theothanatological movement could

provide a mystery writer with a classic case of the "wrong corpse"; for when one examines the body carefully, it turns out to be, not God but *oneself*—"dead in trespasses and sins." And *this* corpse (unlike that of Deity) fully satisfies the empirical test of verifiability, as every cemetery illustrates.¹³¹

In romantic literature, the *Doppelgänger* motif (a character meeting himself) is employed as a device to symbolize the individual's attainment of self-awareness. Let us hope that the present autopsy, insofar as it brings a sin-sick theology to a realistic confrontation with itself, may contribute to *such self-knowledge*.¹³² How revealing it is, for example, to read William Hamilton's autobiographical description of his entrée into the death-of-God sphere at age forty: "Time was getting short and I saw I needed to make things happen."¹³³ When we realize the true identity of the theathanatological corpse, such a remark fits into place. It is the natural man, the builder of towers of Babel, who must "make things happen" theologically. For the essence of the scriptural gospel is that sinful man cannot make things happen in the spiritual life; the living God has made them happen in Jesus Christ, and the only true theology endeavors, above all, to remain faithful to the one who "after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God."

And if, as Christian believers, the silence of God in our age sometimes make us wonder in the depth of our souls if he still remains with us, let us soberly consider Sir Robert Anderson's profound observation that God's silence is a reminder that the amnesty of the Cross is still available to men: "A silent Heaven gives continuing proof that this great amnesty is still in force, and that the guiltiest of men may turn to God and find forgiveness of sins and eternal life."¹³⁴ The task then stands: to work while it is yet day, for the night cometh when no man can work. As for the nature of that work, Henry van Dyke described it well in his touching allegory, *The Lost Word*; it is to proclaim to our generation the word which has been lost through preoccupation with lesser words:

"My son, you have sinned deeper than you know. The word with which you parted so lightly is the key-word of all life and joy and peace. Without it the world has no meaning, and existence no rest, and death no refuge. It is the word that purifies love, and comforts grief, and keeps hope alive forever. It is the most precious thing that ever ear has heard, or mind has known, or heart has conceived. It is the name of Him who has given us life and breath and all things richly to enjoy; the name of Him who, though we may forget Him, never forgets us; the name of Him who pities us as you pity your suffering child; the name of Him who, though we wander far from Him, seeks us in the wilderness, and sent His Son, even as His Son has sent me this night, to breathe again that forgotten name in the heart that is perishing without it.

Listen, my son, listen with all your soul to the blessed name of God our Father."¹³⁵

FOOTNOTES

1. We prefer the neutral term "Theothanetology" to J. Robert Nelson's "Theothanasia" (implying that the new theologians have put God to death; except for Altizer, who speaks, à la Nietzsche, of "passionately willing God's death," the death-of-God theologians regard the divine demise as a "natural" phenomenon of our time, over which one has little or no control) or "Theothanatopsis" (which conjures up the shade of William Cullen Bryant, who would have been horror-struck at this whole movement).
2. *Time* initially described the movement in the Religion section of its October 22, 1965 issue; the Easter Cover Story in the April 8, 1966 issue deals with the question of God's existence in light of current death-of-God thinking. For *The New Yorker's* valuable account of theothanatology in the contemporary theological scene, see note 11 below.
3. Mack B. Stokes, "The Nontheistic Temper of the Modern Mind," *Religion in Life*, XXXIV (Spring, 1965), 245-57.
4. "Why This Non-God-Talk? An Editorial," *The Christian Century*, LXXXII (December 1, 1965), 1467.
5. William Hamilton, "The Shape of a Radical Theology," *The Christian Century*, LXXXII (October 6, 1965), 1220. Paul Van Buren, however, "expressed astonishment at Hamilton's announcement that there would soon be an organization of death-of-God theologians, with a new journal, etc., etc. Apparently there is less communication within this trinity [Altizer, Hamilton, Van Buren] than is assumed" (J. Robert Nelson, "Decide, Theothanasia, or What Do You Mean?" *The Christian Century*, LXXXII [November 17, 1965], 1415). In a more recent issue of *Christian Century* (LXXXIII [February 16, 1966], 223), "Penultimate" provides a satirical application blank for the "God-Is-Dead Club."
6. E.g., in his book, *The New Essence of Christianity* (New York: Association Press, 1961).
7. He continues: "One cannot deny that he left the cloister, had some doubts, stomach aches and a father. At the same time it is equally evident that he was a highly theocentric thinker ('Nothing can be more present . . . than God himself'), and that he was also what Weber and Troeltsch call an ascetic of the 'intramundane' type whose hope was in the world above—which, I take it, is not quite 'the world.' But of course Luther's asceticism and theocentrism should never keep him from being used in Protestantism as a symbol for secular theology and the God-is-dead movement. After all, Protestant theologians have a long and glorious tradition of using history, shall we say, 'freely'" (Charles M. Nielsen, "The Loneliness of Protestantism, or, More Benedictines, Please!" *The Christian Century*, LXXXII [September 15, 1965], 1121).
8. Cf. Montgomery "Lutheran Hermeneutics and Hermeneutics Today," in *Aspects of Biblical Hermeneutics* ("Concordia Theological Monthly. Occasional Papers," No. 1; St. Louis, Missouri, 1966), pp. 78-108 (soon to be published also in German translation in *Lutherischer Rundblick*).
9. Quoted in *Time's* report of the 17th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Nashville, Tennessee, December 27-29, 1965 (*Time*, January 7, 1966, p. 70).

10. Cox's informal paper was titled "Second Thoughts on the Secular Society" and was delivered at the Seabury-Western Theological Seminary on January 22, 1966: further reference to this paper will be made below. I was privileged to attend the Annual Meeting of the American Society of Christian Ethics as Carl F. H. Henry's surrogate; my report of the sessions appears in *Christianity Today*, X (February 18, 1966), 538.
11. Quoted in an interview with Ved Mehta, "The New Theologian. I. Ecce Homo", *The New Yorker*, XLI (November 13, 1965), 144.
12. See especially Hamilton's "The Death of God Theology," *The Christian Scholar*, XLVIII (Spring, 1965), 27-48.
13. Cox made this point in his unpublished lecture, "Second Thoughts on the Secular Society"; see above, note 10.
14. Hamilton, "The Shape of a Radical Theology," *loc. cit.* The "hard" radicals have had hard things to say about their "soft" counterparts, e.g.: "Dr. Altizer considers Harvey Cox a 'phony masquerading as a member of the avantgarde', a sociologist in theologian's clothing. Dr. Hamilton of Colgate Rochester describes *The Secular City* as 'pop-Barth' . . . 'Dr. Cox will keep neo-orthodoxy alive another six months', he scoffs" (Lee E. Dirks, "The Ferment in Protestant Thinking," *The National Observer*, January 31, 1966, p. 16).
15. Cf. his article, "Sociology of Religion in a Post-Religious Era," *The Christian Scholar*, XLVIII (Spring, 1965), 9-26.
16. So Cox stated in his paper, "Second Thoughts on the Secular Society" (see note 10 above).
17. Hamilton, "The Death of God Theology," pp. 32, 34.
18. *Ibid.* p. 34.
19. Nelson, "Deicide, Theothanasia, or What Do You Mean?" *loc. cit.*
20. Mehta, *op. cit.*, p. 138. Gilkey of Chicago, a critic of the movement, is now endeavoring to compile a book of essays on the new Christian Radicalism, but Vahanian was not included among the prospective contributors. Vahanian's relative (neo-Barthian) conservatism is demonstrated in his recent article, "Swallowed Up by Godlessness" (*The Christian Century*, LXXXII [December 8, 1965], 1506), where he argues that the radical death-of-God view "not only surrenders to the secularism of our time but views it as the remedy instead of the sickness."
21. Vahanian, *The Death of God: The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era* (New York: George Braziller, 1961), p. 228.
22. Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols* (New York: George Braziller, 1964), pp. 31-32. Several essays in this book have been published in less complete form in journals, e.g., "The Future of Christianity in a Post-Christian Era," *The Centennial Review*, VIII (Spring, 1964), 160-73; "Beyond the Death of God: The Need of Cultural Revolution," *Dialog*, I (Autumn, 1962), 18-21.
23. Tillich described this phenomenon as the substitution of non-ultimate concerns for the only true ultimate concern, Being itself; Voegelin refers to such idolatry as "Metastatic Gnosis" (see Montgomery, *The Shape of the Past: An Introduction to Philosophical Historiography* ["History in Christian Perspective," Vol. 1; Ann Arbor, Michigan: Edward Bros., 1963], pp. 127-38).
24. Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols*, p. 233.
25. Vahanian, "The Empty Cradle," *Theology Today*, XIII (January, 1957), 526.

26. Vahanian, *The Death of God*, p. 231.
27. Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols*, p. 231.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
29. Quoted in Mehta, *loc. cit.*
30. Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York: Macmillan Paperbacks, 1965), p. 20. In his recent paper at the American Society of Christian Ethics (see above, note 10), Cox stated that a revised, hardbound edition of his book will soon appear, and that this second edition will become the basis of several translations in European languages.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 261. Wilder's statement appears in his essay, "Art and Theological Meaning," *The New Orpheus* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), p. 407.
32. Cox, *The Secular City*, p. 266.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
34. *Ibid.*
35. See above, note 10 and corresponding text. Cf. Cox's article, "The Place and Purpose of Theology" (*The Christian Century*, LXXXIII [January 5, 1966], 7), where he hits the "hard" death-of-God radicals for missing the prophetic challenge of the modern revolutionary polis: "Rather than helping the prophets greet a religionless, revolutionary tomorrow, some theologians are more interested in dissecting the cadaver of yesterday's pieties."
36. Not so incidentally, Cox approvingly quoted his Harvard acquaintances Krister Stendahl ("you can only have Neo-Orthodoxy after a good long period of liberalism") and Erik Erikson, author of the psychoanalytic study, *Young Man Luther*, whose view of the "identity crisis" makes Stendahl's point in psychological terms.
37. Altizer, *Mircea Eliade and the Dialectic of the Sacred* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963); the book grew out of an article, "Mircea Eliade and the Recovery of the Sacred," *The Christian Scholar*, XLV (Winter, 1962), 267-89. As Hamilton notes, Altizer's book is a mixture of Eliade's views and Altizer's and therefore is "not structurally satisfactory" ("The Death of God Theology," p. 31).
38. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
39. Altizer, *Oriental Mysticism and Biblical Eschatology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961). Some of the material in this book has been incorporated into Altizer's essay, "The Religious Meaning of Myth and Symbol," published in *Truth, Myth, and Symbol*, ed. Altizer, et al. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), pp. 87-108.
40. Like Toynbee, Altizer places Christianity and Mahayana Buddhism on the religious pinnacle together. Altizer's dependence on Toynbee would be a subject worth investigating.
41. Altizer, "Nirvana and the Kingdom of God," in *New Theology No. 1*, ed. Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman (New York: Macmillan Paperbacks, 1964), p. 164. This essay first appeared in the University of Chicago's *Journal of Religion*, April, 1963.
42. Altizer, "Theology and the Death of God," *The Centennial Review*, VIII, (Spring, 1964), 130. It is interesting to speculate whether Jaroslav Pelikan is fully aware of the consequences of his attempts theologically to baptize Kierkegaard (*From Luther to Kierkegaard*) and Nietzsche (*Fools for Christ*).
43. Cf. Altizer, "Word and History," *Theology Today*, XXII (October, 1965), 385. The degree of current popular interest in Altizer's radical-

- ism is indicated by the fact that the *Chicago Daily News* adapted this article for publication in its Panorama section (January 29, 1966, p. 4).
44. Altizer, *Review of Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* by Paul Tillich, *The Christian Scholar*, XLVI (Winter, 1963), 362.
 45. Altizer, "Theology and the Death of God," p. 132.
 46. *Ibid.* On Nietzsche vis-à-vis current thought, see the excellent article by Erich Heller, "The Importance of Nietzsche," *Encounter* (London), XXII (April, 1964), 59-66.
 47. Altizer made this point in a keynote speech at a recent conference at Emory University on "America and the Future of Technology"; it was reported in *Christianity Today*, X (December 17, 1965), 1310.
 48. Altizer, "Theology and the Death of God," p. 134.
 49. Altizer, "The Religious Meaning of Myth and Symbol," p. 95.
 50. *Ibid.*
 51. Quoted in a symposium-interview in *Christianity Today*, X (January 7, 1966), 374.
 52. *Ibid.* The expression, "third age of the Spirit," comes from the twelfth century mystic-millennial theologian Joachim of Floris (see Montgomery, *The Shape of the Past*, p. 48). As in Cox, so in Altizer we find a definite tone of anabaptist enthusiasm.
 53. Altizer, "Creative Negation in Theology," *Christian Century*, LXXXII (July 7, 1965), 866-67.
 54. Hamilton, "The Shape of a Radical Theology" (cited above in note 5), pp. 1219-20. Apparently Hamilton just made it in time, for Altizer is of the opinion that "the real barrier to this kind of thinking is mainly age, because most of those under 45 do respond to it" (*Chicago Daily News*, January 29, 1966, *loc. cit.*).
 55. Hamilton, *The New Essence of Christianity* (cited above in note 6), p. 55.
 56. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
 57. *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.
 58. Nelson, "Decide, Theothanasia, or What Do You Mean?" *loc. cit.* (in note 5 above).
 59. Hamilton, "Daring to Be the Enemy of God," *The Christian Scholar*, XLVI (Spring, 1963), 40-54. Barth's lavish appreciation of Mozart is well known.
 60. Hamilton, "The Shape of a Radical Theology," p. 1220.
 61. Hamilton, "Thursday's Child: The Theologian Today and Tomorrow," *Theology Today*, XX (January, 1964), 489, 494.
 62. Mehta, *op. cit.* (in note 11 above), p. 142.
 63. Hamilton, "The Shape of a Radical Theology," p. 1219.
 64. Cf. the following lines in "Thursday's Child": "The theologian is sometimes inclined to suspect that Jesus Christ is best understood not as either the object or ground of faith, and not as person, event, or community, but simply as a place to be, a standpoint. That place is, of course, alongside the neighbor, being for him. This may be the meaning of Jesus' true humanity, and it may even be the meaning of his divinity, and thus of divinity itself" (p. 494).
 65. Hamilton, "The Death of God Theology," pp. 27-48. Hamilton is collaborating with Altizer on a soon-to-be-published collection of articles; the book will carry the title, *Radical Theology and the Death of God*.
 66. Hamilton, "The Death of God Theology," pp. 46-47.
 67. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
 68. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
 69. Interestingly, while Hamilton was still in theological limbo, he wrote an article on Hamlet, finding portrayed there the death of a demonic idea of God: "Hamlet and Providence," *The Christian Scholar*, XLVII (Fall, 1964), 193-207.
 70. Hamilton, "The Death of God Theology," p. 46.

71. Quoted in an interview with Mehta, *op. cit.*, p. 150.
72. It is not without significance that Van Buren's thesis dealt with Calvin and was published in the United States by Eerdmans: *Christ in Our Place: The Substitutionary Character of Calvin's Doctrine of Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1957). The new interest on the part of Eerdmans in the Reformed theology of Barth (paralleling a similar interest at the Fuller Theological Seminary) does not seem to harbinger good for evangelical Protestantism in America.
73. Van Buren, "Theology in the Context of Culture," *The Christian Century*, LXXXII (April 7, 1965), 429.
74. *Ibid.*
75. Interview with Mehta, *op. cit.*, p. 143.
76. Antony Flew, "Theology and Falsification," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Flew and MacIntyre (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 96.
77. Van Buren, "The Dissolution of the Absolute," *Religion in Life*, XXXIV Summer, 1965), 334-42.
78. Interview with Mehta, *op. cit.*, p. 153.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
80. Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*, p. 200.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 198. Parenthetically, it is worth noting that Van Buren's argument is no more valid in reference to alchemy than it is in regard to theology; see Montgomery, "Cross, Constellation, and Crucible: Lutheran Astrology and Alchemy in the Age of the Reformation," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 4th ser., I (1963), 251-70 (also published in the British periodical *Ambix, the Journal of the Society for the Study of Alchemy and Early Chemistry*, XI [June, 1963], 65-86, and shortly to appear in French in *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses*).
83. Van Buren, "Theology in the Context of Culture," p. 430.
84. Reference will be made to Mascall's book in the next section of this paper. Any attempt to show the connections between the God-is-dead movement and the popular British radicalism represented by Robinson, Eric Vidler, *et al.* would carry us too far afield; see on the latter my critique of Bishop Pike's theology in the April and May issues of *Sunday School Times*.
85. Nielsen, "The Loneliness of Protestantism," *loc. cit.* (in note 7 above).
86. Moulton, "Apocalypse in a Casket?" *The Christian Century*, LXXXII (November 17, 1965), 1413.
87. Shiner, "Goodbye, Death-of-God!" *ibid.*, p. 1418.
88. Van Buren, "Theology in the Context of Culture," *loc. cit.*
89. Best known for his useful survey, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought* (London: SCM Press, 1963), which concludes with a treatment of "Existentialism and Ontology" (pp. 351 ff.); Macquarrie explicitly identifies his own position with "those philosophies of existence and being that have been developed by Martin Heidegger and other thinkers" and theologically with "the related work of men like Bultmann and Tillich" (p. 374).
90. Macquarrie, "How Can We Think of God?" *Theology Today*, XXII (July, 1965), 200-201.
91. Stokes, "The Nontheistic Temper of the Modern Mind," *op. cit.* (in note 3 above), p. 257.
92. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962.
93. Cobb, "From Crisis Theology to the Post-Modern World," *The Centennial Review*, VIII (Spring, 1964), 184-85. Cf. Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology, Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), *passim*.

94. Meland, "Alternative to Absolutes," *Religion in Life*, XXXIV (Summer, 1965), 346. For further explications of process thinking in current theology, see Schubert M. Ogden, "Faith and Truth," *The Christian Century*, LXXXII (September 1, 1965), 1057-60; Norman Pittenger, "A Contemporary Trend in North American Theology: Process-Thought and Christian Faith," *Religion in Life*, XXXIV (Autumn, 1965), 500-510; and Gene Reeves, "A Look at Contemporary American Theology," *ibid.*, pp. 511-25 (Reeves employs—with some qualification—the rubric "Christless theology" for process thinking).
95. Gilkey, "Is God Dead?" *The Voice: Bulletin of Crozer Theological Seminary*, LVII (January, 1965), 4.
96. Gilkey, "God Is NOT Dead," *ibid.*, pp. 9-10. That Gilkey's approach to revelation is neither that of Reformation orthodoxy (which regarded the Bible as God's inerrant word) nor that of classic Neo-Orthodoxy which took Scripture, though regarded as errant, as its theological *point de départ*) becomes clear when he writes: "Our theological analysis must begin with man. If we felt sure that the divine word in Scripture was the truth, then the Bible might be our starting point" (Gilkey, "Dissolution and Reconstruction in Theology," *The Christian Century*, LXXXII [February 3, 1965], 137). But in finding his answers to the human predicament in the revelation of an unconditioned, transcendent God, Gilkey places himself in the general stream of Neo-Orthodoxy.
97. Gilkey, "God Is NOT Dead," p. 11.
98. Van Buren, "The Dissolution of the Absolute," *op. cit.* (in note 77), pp. 338-39.
99. Cf. Paul Edwards, "Professor Tillich's Confusions," *Mind*, LXXIV (April, 1965), 192-214; and note the pertinence of Quine's remarks at the beginning of his essay, "On What There Is": "A curious thing about the ontological problem is its simplicity. It can be put in three Anglo-Saxon monosyllables: 'What is there?' It can be answered, moreover, in a word—'Everything' [or 'Being itself!']—and everyone will accept this answer as true. However, this is merely to say that there is what there is. There remains room for disagreement over cases [e.g., the existence of the transcendent God of the Bible!]" (Willard van Orman Quine, *From a Logical Point of View* [2d ed.; New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963], p. 1). Reference is also in order to the refutations of Hartshorne's ontological argument for God's existence; see *The Ontological Argument*, ed. Alvin Plantinga (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1965), especially pp. 123-80.
100. See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, *passim*; and cf. *William James on Psychological Research*, ed. Gardner Murphy and Robert O. Ballou (New York: Viking Press, 1960), *passim*. Note also my "Critique of William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*," in my *Shape of the Past: An Introduction to Philosophical Historiography* ("History in Christian Perspective," Vol. 1; Ann Arbor, Michigan: Edwards Brothers, 1963), pp. 312-40.
101. Cf. Brand Blanshard, "Critical Reflections on Karl Barth," in *Faith and the Philosophers*, ed. John Hick (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), pp. 159-200 (other papers in this symposium volume are also relevant to the issue); and C. B. Martin, "A Religious Way of Knowing," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (London: SCM Press, 1955), pp. 76-95.
102. This point is well made by the psychoanalyst in A. N. Prior's clever dialog, "Can Religion Be Discussed?" (*ibid.*, pp. 1-11).
103. I have endeavored to show the fallacies of the presuppositionalist and fideist viewpoints in reference to Christian apologetics; see my articles, "The Place of Reason," *His Magazine of the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship*, XXVI (February, 1966), 8-12; (March, 1966), 13-16, 21.

104. Cf. his book, *Theology and the Scientific Study of Religion* ("The Lutheran Studies Series," Vol. 2; Minneapolis: T. S. Denison, 1961).
105. Holmer, "Contra the New Theologies," *The Christian Century*, LXXXII (March 17, 1965), 330-31.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 332. Note also in this connection Holmer's article, "Atheism and Theism," *Lutheran World*, XIII (1966), 14-25.
107. Fitch, "The Sell-Out, or the Well Acculturated Christian," *The Christian Century*, LXXXIII (February 16, 1966), 202.
108. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
109. See above, our text at note 36.
110. So argues Fitch, *loc. cit.*
111. Quoted in Dirks, *loc. cit.* (in note 14 above).
112. Nielsen, "Can Faith Validate God-Talk?" in *New Theology No. 1* (*op. cit.* in note 41 above), p. 147. This penetrating essay first appeared in the July, 1963 issue of *Theology Today*.
113. Cf. Frederick Ferré, *Language, Logic and God* (New York: Harper, 1961), chap. viii ("The Logic of Encounter"), pp. 94-104.
114. Quoted in Dirks, *loc. cit.* Among the more blatant imprecisions in Altizer's thought are: (1) his highly debatable assumption that negation is the ideal way to fulfillment (does one, for example, create the best society or government by completely destroying the existing order and starting over, or by refining what already exists?); (2) his unbelievably naïve and unrealistic identification of the basic doctrines of Christianity with those of Buddhism (on this, cf. my article, "The Christian Church in McNeill's *Rise of the West: An Overview and Critique*," forthcoming in *The Evangelical Quarterly*); and (3) the utterly unverifiable, indescribable character of his "God beyond God" and of his non-objective, fully kenotic Christ—the "Jesus of the third age of the Spirit" (is he not the Jesus of Altizer's spirit? certainly he is not the biblical Jesus, who is "the same yesterday, today, and forever"!).
115. The discussion took place on Norman Ross's program, "Off the Cuff," Sunday, March 27, beginning at 12:30 P.M. (Channel 7, Chicago).
116. For Van Buren's position, see above, our text at notes 71-83.
117. E.g., M. C. D'Arcy, *No Absent God* ("Religious Perspectives," Vol. 6; New York: Harper, 1962), chap. i, pp. 15-31; and Eric Mascall, *The Secularisation of Christianity: An Analysis and a Critique* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965), pp. 103-104. Other problems with Mascall's (nonetheless valuable) book are its strongly Anglo-Catholic perspective (stress on natural theology, the visible church introduced as a kind of *deus ex machina* into arguments, and reference to such non-biblical miracles as the Holy Shroud of Turin!), and a mild incorporation of the *finitum non est capax infiniti* principle (p. 38), which, as we shall emphasize later, is actually one of the ideological roots of the death-of-God error.
118. It will be observed that the principle as here stated is not identical in form with A. J. Ayer's famous verifiability criterion that played a central role in the development of Logical Positivism. Thus the philosophical attempts to break down Ayer's principle are not relevant to the present discussion even if they are held to be successful (which is by no means certain).
119. I have developed this point in reference to Neo-Orthodox and existentialistic views of revelation in my article, "Inspiration and Inerrancy: A New Departure," *Evangelical Theological Society Bulletin*, VIII (Spring, 1965), 45-75.
120. Mascall, *op. cit.*, p. 240.
121. Montgomery, "History & Christianity," *His Magazine of the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship*, December, 1964—March, 1965 (available as a His Reprint); and *The Shape of the Past* (*op. cit.* in note 100 above), pp. 138-45, 235-37, and *passim*.

122. Cf. my paper, "The Theologian's Craft: A Discussion of Theory Formation and Theory Testing in Theology," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXXVII (February, 1966), 67-98 (soon to be published also in the *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*).
123. This analogy is suggested by that remarkable apologetic tour de force by Richard Whately, *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte* (11th ed.; New York: Robert Carter, 1871).
124. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), Pt. I, sect. 60. Cf. George Pitcher, *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), chap. vii, pp. 171-87.
125. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p. 237. Cf. Georges Gusdorf, "The Absence of God in the World Today," *Lutheran World*, XIII (1966), 1-13.
126. Alasdair MacIntyre, "God and the Theologians," *Encounter* (London), XXI (September, 1963), 7. Gilkey in his Crozer Lectures (*op. cit.* in notes 95-96 above) makes the same point. Cf. Robert W. Lunk's comment in his report on the Second Drew University Consultation on Hermeneutics (April 9-11, 1964): "Neo orthodoxy taught that God is never object but always subject, with the result that third generation neo-orthodox theologians have been forced to wrestle with the non-phenomenal character of God. They are unwilling to settle for God as noumenon (perhaps as a legacy of theologies of history, and perhaps as the result of a radical empiricism), which means that for them God does not 'appear' at all" (*Theology Today*, XXI [October, 1964], 303).
127. MacIntyre, "God and the Theologians," p. 5 (MacIntyre's italics).
128. Cf. Montgomery, "Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology of History," published both in the *Evangelical Theological Society Bulletin*, VI (May, 1963), 39-49, and in *The Cresset*, XXVII (November, 1963), 8-14.
129. Herman Feifel (ed.), *The Meaning of Death* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965).
130. Cf. Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor*, trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: Macmillan, 1956).
131. The original presentation of this essay in lecture form had to be postponed a week because of the sudden death of my wife's mother. On the day when I was scheduled to lecture on the (unempirical) death of God, I attended the overwhelmingly empirical funeral of a loved one. This was an object lesson worth pondering.
132. Ingmar Bergman's film "The Silence" offers an analogous confrontation: "A silence has befallen us, but it is connected with the cry of the inferno. The men, the women, who have 'freed themselves' from God are not those who are happy and satisfied, who have found themselves. They are the tormented who are shown no mercy, the hungry who are not filled, the separated who cannot get away from one another. . . . Bergman in his film shows 20th century man—who does not cease in his grand technological achievements to sing his own praise and who wants to liberate himself from the tyranny of God—as he is" (Vilmos Vajta, "When God Is Silent," *Lutheran World*, XIII [1966], 60-61).
133. Hamilton, "The Shape of a Radical Theology" (cited above in note 5), p. 1220.
134. Sir Robert Anderson, *The Silence of God* (8th ed.; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), p. 165.
135. Henry van Dyke, *The Lost Word: A Christmas Legend of Long Ago* (New York: Scribner, 1917), pp. 87-89.