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of Schubert Ogden

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Existence and Process: A Study of the Theology of Schubert Ogden

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THE AUTHOR EXAMINES THE CONCEPTIONS OF EXISTENTIALISM AND PROCESS PHILOSOPHY by which Schubert Ogden formulates his understanding of Christian theology and expresses his apologetic interests.

The theology of Schubert Ogden displays a strong apologetic interest. It could be said that it is essentially apologetic, for Ogden's concern is with a Christian natural theology that corrects the mistakes of the older liberalism but continues and serves its positive intention of enabling understandable witness to modern man. Aligning himself with neoliberalism, Ogden has set for himself the task of going beyond liberalism in a constructive way. He would not say, however, that the task is required primarily by the demand for apologetics inherent in the contemporary situation. He would rather say of his program, as Rudolf Bultmann said of his own, that it is required by faith itself.

In his concern to do philosophical theology, Ogden has a vested interest in the retention and rehabilitation of metaphysics. The school of process theology, to which Ogden belongs, is marked, in fact, by a strong affinity with the school of neo-classical metaphysics (also designated as realist metaphysics or process philosophy).

The theological problem of our time, Ogden steadfastly maintains, is the problem of bearing witness to the reality of God. The reality of God is taken by Ogden as a reality beyond question, as the underlying structure of all reality. Further,

the reality of God is the reality of God's love, the reality of "pure unbounded love." (The phrase is Charles Wesley's; Ogden employs it repeatedly; it states concisely what Ogden holds to be the sole theme and the sole justification of theology.) Because theology must bear witness to this reality, theology embarks on a fool's errand, Ogden would say, when it seeks to "overcome" metaphysics. On the contrary, theology needs to find the "right" philosophy, one that will provide an adequate conceptuality for communicating the reality of God in our time. With this we have located the premise of Ogden's critical and constructive work.

A characterization of Ogden's theological stance must call attention to four checkpoints to which he refers theological formulations. First, theological formulations must be appropriate to the witness of faith expressed in Scripture and the proclamation of the church and decisively re-presented in Jesus Christ. Second, theological formulations must be understandable in terms of the common experience of human existence as such. Third, they must be consistent with the system of norm, method, and intention out of which they arise. Fourth, theological formulations, to be maximally significant, must

provide a comprehensive account of the reality to which they point.¹

There are also a number of assumptions with which Ogden approaches his task. Two of them are explicitly acknowledged. With Bultmann he holds that theology must not obscure the infinite qualitative difference between God and man. Also with Bultmann he holds that statements about God are at the same time statements about man—and vice versa. Not so explicitly acknowledged but also of determinative force in his work are two other assumptions, which are Arminian in character and presumably have fallen to him from his Methodist heritage. These are the assumptions of prevenient grace and freedom of the will.

In the existential interpretation of Rudolf Bultmann (Ogden's doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago was a study of Bultmann's theology),² Ogden believes he has found the right method for appropriate interpretation of the Biblical witness. In the process philosophy of Charles Hartshorne (whom Ogden ranks with H. N. Wieman as the two most influential members of the Chicago school of neoliberalism)³ Ogden believes he has found the conceptual resources for explicating that witness within a comprehensive account of reality. Although existential theology and process philosophy have hardly a thing in common as schools of

thought, Ogden holds good hopes for a marriage of the two. Existence and process; subjectivity and objectivity; microcosm and macrocosm—the wedding of such opposites is good for both and good for theology, Ogden would say. For then theology can address itself in a consistent way to both the self-understanding which is faith and a comprehensive and satisfying view of the world. Process theology in an existential key, therefore, is recommended by Ogden as being maximally significant.

A study of the theology of Schubert Ogden would appear to be worthwhile because witness to the reality of God is a critical problem and Ogden in turn is confident that we are in a position to achieve a constructive solution. This study is directed to an analysis of Ogden's theology through attention to significant moments in its development. Ogden's debt to, and eclectic utilization of, the thought of Rudolf Bultmann, Martin Heidegger, Stephen Toulmin, and Charles Hartshorne will be indicated. Critical comment will be recorded at points which appear most problematic on the way to a summary evaluation.

I. THE THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM

As has been indicated, the theology that Ogden is concerned to construct addresses itself to the question: How do we bear meaningful witness to the reality of God in our secular age? Ogden accepts the reality of God without reservation; he holds that conviction of this reality is inescapable (as will be discussed in section IV). Why should witness to God's reality be problematic? The answer is twofold.

Christ Without Myth makes clear that Ogden fully accepts Bultmann's analysis

¹ See especially Chapter IV of Schubert M. Ogden, *Christ Without Myth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), pp. 127—64.

² Published in revised form as *Christ Without Myth*. Ogden is now a member of the faculty of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago.

³ *Christ Without Myth*, pp. 131 f.; footnote, p. 132.

of the situation which poses the contemporary theological problem. Modern man does not understand the theological propositions of the New Testament because they reflect a mythological picture of the world which he does not share. All of the ways in which modern man understands himself and his world form a "common basis" which theology must of necessity accept. This basis, in Bultmann's words, is "on the one hand, the world picture formed by modern natural science and, on the other hand, the understanding man has of himself in accordance with which he understands himself to be a closed inner unity that does not stand open to the incursion of supernatural powers."⁴ Traditional theology's attempts to communicate fail because they are saddled with the mythological world view; and the use of classical metaphysical categories simply perpetuates that world view without significant correction. Such a theology is bound to say incredible things about the world and irrelevant things about man.

Ogden also accepts the solution implicit in Bultmann's statement of the problem: the program of demythologization. This requires not the elimination of mythology (as the old liberalism mistakenly assumed) but its critical interpretation. And that interpretation is precisely existential interpretation: an interpretation of New Testament mythology in the categories clarified by existential analysis. On this ground, the New Testament must be interpreted in accord with man's self-understanding. Biblical statements about God are not accepted. Theology is thereby reduced to anthropology but for one stipulation: The-

ology must preserve the "infinite qualitative difference" between God and man. God transcends the relation to man affirmed existentially in Christian faith.

It needs to be stressed that the concept of "infinite qualitative difference" underlies the unity of Ogden's thought as it does Bultmann's.⁵ But Ogden is not simply Bultmannian. He is indebted to Bultmann more for analysis and methodology than for content and solution. Of profound import for Ogden's theology is the conviction that God's relation to His creatures is "immediate and direct."⁶ Bultmann wants to be thoroughly Lutheran on this point; Ogden is Arminian. Bultmann is committed to a soteriology which attaches decisive significance to the means of grace; Ogden is not so committed. By the same token, Bultmann is committed and Ogden is uncommitted to a Christology which attaches decisive significance to the Christ event. (Although Ogden does come to speak of the Christ event as decisive, it is in a sense different from Bultmann's; section V will take this up.) The parting of the ways turns on yet another antithesis between Lutheranism and Arminianism, namely, in the area of man's ability. Bultmann holds that the possibility of faith (that is, the possibility of authentic human existence) is a possibility in principle but not in fact for man in his fallenness. For Ogden a

⁵ On Bultmann see Schubert M. Ogden, ed., *Existence and Faith* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1960), p. 14; on Ogden see the title essay in his book *The Reality of God and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 67 f. Hereafter essays in that volume will be referred to by their individual titles.

⁶ "What Sense Does It Make to Say, 'God Acts in History?'" p. 177.

⁴ Quoted in *Christ Without Myth*, p. 32.

possibility in principle must also be a possibility in fact if we are to speak seriously of human freedom and responsibility. He quotes with approval Kant's dictum: *Du kannst, denn du sollst*. Ogden goes on, however, to qualify his approval in a way congenial with the semi-pelagianism of Arminianism: ". . . this possibility is not man's own inalienable possession, but rather is constantly *being made possible for him* by virtue of his inescapable relation to the ultimate source of his existence. To be human means to stand *coram deo* and, by reason of such standing, to be continually confronted with the gift and demand of authentic human existence."⁷ This statement has an important bearing, as will be shown later, on the scope of demythologizing.

II. THE THEOLOGICAL TASK

Given the theological problem and the pre-understanding that informs his attempt at solution, how does Ogden conceive of the theological task? The essay "Theology and Objectivity" is taken as Ogden's most thoroughgoing answer. Traditional theism is inadequate for the task because its thinking and speaking about God "objectifies." It treats in categories of space, time, causality, substance what cannot be so treated. It thinks and speaks of God in a manner appropriate to objects treated in the scientific approach to the world. Though traditional theism may protest that its statements are not meant to objectify in the manner of science, they can only be taken that way and hence dismissed as unintelligible.

Here we have a fitting place to focus

⁷ *Christ Without Myth*, p. 140. Emphasis original.

on Ogden's understanding of "myth." A full discussion is given in the essay "Myth and Truth," where Ogden takes up Gilbert Ryle's notion of a "category mistake" which involves "the presentation of facts belonging to one category in the idioms appropriate to another."⁸ Ogden turns this insight to his purpose by saying: "Although the 'facts' myth presents are our selves and the world as fragments of the totality of being, the 'idioms' in which it speaks are those appropriate to the world itself as disclosed through the particular perceptions of our senses."⁹ Typical instances of this would be myth's representation of God's transcendence as immense spatial distance and of God's eternity as timelessness.

But, to return to "Theology and Objectivity," Ogden is by no means willing to separate theology from any objectifying activity. There is a sense in which theology objectifies; this sense must be established and insisted upon. Otherwise theology must abandon the claim that it makes cognitive statements; more than that, it would have to abandon the claim that it thinks and speaks about *God*. Here Ogden is sensitive to the arguments of analytic philosophy. His answer owes its force to the case the language philosopher Kenneth Toulmin makes against "too narrow a view of the uses of reasoning" on the part of those who assume "too readily that a mathematical or logical proof or a scientific verification can be the only kind of 'good reason' for any statement."¹⁰ Arguing from the uses of language that many statements point to a reality beyond the

⁸ "Myth and Truth," p. 105.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁰ "Theology and Objectivity," p. 88.

reach of sense perception, Ogden concludes that theological assertions are not empirically falsifiable because they "represent not the variable details of our experience of reality, but its constant structure — that which *all* states of experience, regardless of their empirical content, necessarily have in common."¹¹ Since the constant structure of our experience of reality is God Himself, theology simply abdicates its task if it allows that its statements about man are *only* about man. They are also about God; and (*contra* Paul van Buren) we cannot say that they only assert something about man's subjective attitude toward life.

Ogden's attempt to define the special sense in which theology objectifies does not display his usual clarity. But the point appears to be on this order. Along with our subjective awareness of our selves and our objective perception of the world, there is yet (after Heidegger) a third form of knowledge operative in our ability to distinguish between the two. This form of knowledge is objective inasmuch as it reflects upon the other two forms of knowledge; but it is also subjective inasmuch as it is only relatively disinterested or detached. Theological thinking and speaking is of this type, Ogden declares. He distinguishes between faith, witness, and theology by seeing them as points on a continuum between the poles of existential self-understanding and objectifying knowledge. Witness (to which Ogden assigns "spontaneous confession and preaching, prayer, and the more nonreflective forms of the church's teaching") represents "a type of thinking and speaking distinct from the more original existential understanding

of faith, on the one hand, and the more derived reflection of theology proper, on the other."¹² The kind of definition and distinction attempted here is helpful in pointing out what theology aims to do: to state within the framework of an adequate conceptuality the reality of God known existentially by faith and expressed more or less concretely by witness. Theology proper is not the sole province of the man of faith. Yet for the theologian, as a faithful man, God can be both "the object of the objectifying thinking and speaking of theology" and "the eminent Subject whom I can know as *my* God here and now in my own existential understanding of faith."¹³ Bultmann too speaks of theology as objectifying in this sense, but, Ogden declares, Bultmann was unable to break out of the subjectivist pocket for lack of adequate conceptual resources.¹⁴

In the face of all this, Ogden is nevertheless committed to the principle that "all 'statements about God and his activity' may be interpreted *without remainder* as 'statements about human existence.'" ¹⁵ How are we to prevent theology from being merely anthropology, then, and in what way do we make talk about God possible? The use of "analogy," to which Ogden would assign much of the work traditionally borne by myth and symbol, provides an answer and at the same time forms a bridge to process philosophy.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 81 f.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 83. Emphasis original.

¹⁴ Ogden ascribes the same lack to Bonhoeffer, while he faults Tillich for not overcoming the classical concept of God as unchanging being, "The Reality of God," pp. 53 ff.

¹⁵ *Christ Without Myth*, p. 141. Emphasis added.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93. Emphasis original.

III. THE USE OF ANALOGY

The principle of analogy bears relation to Anselm's ontological proof, but that cannot be explored here. Interestingly, Ogden derived a major lead for developing his use of analogy from a single footnote in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, which says something about the pregnancy of Heidegger's footnotes and about the obstetrical skills of Schubert Ogden. The debt to Heidegger is paid in the essay "The Temporality of God."

Heidegger's formal ontological analysis focuses on existentiality rather than on existence, on the essential structure of being rather than on its concrete manifestation. On the basis of the suggestion in the above-mentioned footnote that God's eternity be understood as a "more primal and 'infinite' temporality," Ogden infers that the relation between existentiality and existence exactly parallels the relation between primal temporality and the actual occurrence of it as primal time. He finds support for this inference in the fact that Heidegger "can define the existentiality of existence as 'care' (*Sorge*) and can say that the meaning of authentic care is disclosed as temporality."¹⁶

Because God's being is in some sense, like man's, a "being-in-the-world," and because man's "being-in-the-world" involves a real internal relatedness to others which can be comprehended by the term "care," then, by analogy, "God must be understood as essentially related to a world of others in whose being He actively participates by reason of a similar basic structure of care."¹⁷ But analogy implies difference as

well as similarity. This is what Heidegger wants to specify, Ogden maintains, when he proposes that God's eternity be construed as "'infinite' temporality." God's care can likewise be described as infinite. Consequently, God's uniqueness is to be understood as the eminent exemplification of the temporality and relational structure which constitutes being itself. In this way Heidegger opens the way to a "dismantling" of the whole classical metaphysical concept of God as the Absolute whose relation to the world is wholly external. And the way is open for us, Ogden contends, to escape the sacrifice of either God and eternity or man and time. All are retained in the infinite temporality of God expressed as care.

Heidegger's concept of God's temporality provides Ogden with a link to Charles Hartshorne's relative pole of God and gives him a basis for the marriage of existential theology and process philosophy.

IV. THE INERADICABLE ASSURANCE OF LIFE'S MEANING

One step remains before we can explicate Ogden's constructive use of process philosophy, and that is to clarify his ascription to man of a primal confidence that life is ultimately worthwhile. The essay "The Strange Witness of Unbelief" is employed as the basic source for this purpose. An apologetic piece that takes the form of a dialog with Jean Paul Sartre, the essay expresses Ogden's conviction that a theology *post mortem Dei* is impossible. It is impossible because the reality of God is of the strictest necessity to the faith of Scripture and to the common faith or experience of all men. In the face of the "limiting questions" (Toulmin's term) posed by

¹⁶ "The Temporality of God," p. 149.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

moral decisions, finitude, and death, man persists in affirming the significance of his actions and the ultimate meaningfulness of life itself. The idea of God alone accounts for and makes fully intelligible the ground of this confidence.¹⁸

One weakness in this argument is that this confidence, on the principle of Occam's razor, could be attributed to a humanistic orientation or to a view of reality as benign world process; to bring in God is to multiply explanations. Ogden would reply that this is not playing the game; that "God" is what we mean when we talk about the ground of this confidence; that God is strictly necessary for the experience of reality as such; and, finally, that humanism itself is implicitly Christian. The only proper question for theology is whether its witness to God, which is its *cura prior*, is understandable.

In order to render understandable witness, theology must show that life is bound to the ground of its worth by ties of real internal relationship. Traditional theism cannot do this except at the price of radical inconsistency, but neoclassical theism can; it realizes the goal which traditional theism could only approximate. This new movement, of which, in Charles Hartshorne's description, "Leibniz was its Newton" and "Whitehead is its Einstein,"¹⁹ offers an alternative to the one-sidedly objectivizing and subjectivizing tendencies of traditional theism and existential theology respectively. "The defining characteristic of this new theism is that . . . it conceives

the reality of God as in principle bipolar."²⁰

A convenient orientation to this movement is given in John Macquarrie's *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought*. The school of realist metaphysics, to which Hartshorne belongs, tends to address itself to the problem of God in an attempt to give a comprehensive account of reality. In doing so, it tends "to bring God into time, to make him a natural rather than a supernatural God, perhaps a finite and evolving God. . . ." ²¹ According to Whitehead, reality is to be conceived as made up of "actual entities" involved in a process of becoming. Each actual entity is bipolar, that is, it has a physical and a mental pole. God Himself is to be conceived as bipolar since He is an actual entity. God's physical pole, His contingent pole, shares in the creative advance of the world and is therefore both limited and involved in becoming.²² Following Whitehead, Hartshorne contends that God must be sought in the world process itself. He posits a dynamic social relationship in which God and His creatures are involved together, in which God acts upon them and is acted upon in return.²³

The key to Ogden's use of the new theism is clearly put in the title essay of *The Reality of God*. The context is a discussion of God's being as "wholly other" than the world but also "wholly for" the world.

²⁰ "The Strange Witness of Unbelief," p. 141.

²¹ John Macquarrie, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 258.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 264 f.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 274 f.

¹⁸ "The Strange Witness of Unbelief," pp. 122—24, 138—41. An example of a "limiting question" would be: "Why try to do anything good at all?"

¹⁹ Quoted in "Theology and Objectivity," p. 94.

It is precisely and only eminent love, in the distinctively scriptural sense of pure personal relationship, that could relate God to his world by such a profound dialectic of difference and identity. But the question the Protestant theologian must ask is how this eminent love is to be clarified *conceptually*, if not by means of something like the new theism. Is it not evident, in fact, that this dipolar theism is an analysis in the general terms of philosophy of just that love and its dialectic?²⁴

God is both the transcendental Absolute and the supremely relative One. He is so related to the world that events constitute the internal relations of the deity. Because nothing is external to Him, He is always the eminent Subject. Yet He can also be the object of theological statements in the sense that these interpret the witness given by the existential understanding which is faith. *That* God is is strictly necessary; *what* He is is contingent upon all His relations to His creatures. Hence the transcendence and freedom of God and the freedom and contingency of man are preserved. God Himself is in the process of becoming, and what He becomes depends in part on man himself, who both responds to and is taken up into God's own limitless life. Therefore, in affirming the reality of God as "pure unbounded love," not by historicizing His love in an event in time but by pointing to it in terms of God's internal relation to His creatures, we are able to make meaningful to man the ground of the confidence which cannot be disappointed.²⁵

²⁴ "The Reality of God," p. 68. (Emphasis original)

²⁵ This paragraph is an attempt to summarize Ogden's argument in a number of places.

Because the dipolar conception of God satisfies man's conviction concerning the significance of his life without vitiating man's inner unity and freedom, Ogden concludes that process philosophy provides a proper basis, and in fact the philosophical counterpart, of a "secular" Protestant theology whereby we may witness to the reality of God in our time. And thereby Ogden realizes his aim of extending the scope of demythologizing to the redemptive event itself. All that is needed to interpret all statements about God and His activity as statements without remainder about human existence is, Ogden had said in *Christ Without Myth*, "to accept without condition that the redemptive grace of God is always given to us and to all men in every situation of our lives, and therefore the authentic existence in faith and love it continually makes possible is something for which each of us is primordially responsible."²⁶ The dipolar conception provides the basis for such acceptance.

V. THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

Ogden intends to do Christian theology. Yet it seems that he has satisfied himself as to the solution of the contemporary theological problem without reference to Christ. How does Ogden demonstrate the Christian character of his theology? Although the answer is suggested in virtually all of his works, the most ample statements are in the essays "What Does It Mean to Affirm, 'Jesus Christ Is Lord?'" and "What Sense Does It Make to Say, 'God Acts in History?'"

See especially "What Sense Does It Make to Say, 'God Acts in History?'" pp. 176, 179; "The Reality of God," p. 64.

²⁶ *Christ Without Myth*, p. 141.

No man, Ogden would say, can be without faith. But this faith may be inauthentic; it may be misplaced. In the Christ event we have the decisive re-presentation of God's primordial demand and promise which summon man to authentic faith. By God's demand Ogden means that man shall understand himself solely in terms of God's free and unconditioned love by which man's true existence is secured. By God's promise he means that in the acceptance of this unending love man will be freed to fulfill God's command to love all the others whom God already loves.²⁷ The content of the demand and promise precisely parallels what Bultmann means by authentic existence. It is a question, however, whether the word "demand" is appropriate to the Gospel, whether it does not make of the Gospel no more than a restatement, in existential terms, of the First Commandment. Bultmann wants to do more than that, and for this reason Ogden takes leave of the Marburg professor. It would take us too far afield to try to spell out Bultmann's interpretation of the Christ event. It is sufficient for our purpose to note that Ogden rejects Bultmann's position that the Christ event not only *reveals* but *constitutes* God's saving act. He rejects this as historicizing God's act, as a relapse into mythology.²⁸ Ogden stresses that salvation is a *divine* event, and by this he means that it is immediate to all periods of time and that it is not susceptible to identification with any event in time.²⁹

²⁷ "What Does It Mean to Affirm, 'Jesus Christ Is Lord?'" pp. 201 f.

²⁸ "What Sense Does It Make to Say, 'God Acts in History?'" p. 173.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 177, 179.

Ogden looks to Pauline teaching to lend support to this assertion. In general, Ogden's handling of the material does not inspire one with confidence in his exegetical ability. Of course, Ogden is not an exegete, but he needs to do better if he is not to be charged with falsifying the witness of which he wants to give an appropriate account. In *Christ Without Myth* he displayed a handling of the Pauline doctrine of justification without works which this writer can only regard as perverse. "Without works," Ogden informs us, excludes also the work of Christ!³⁰ That Paul never meant to say that hardly needs to be demonstrated. The same charge of falsification may be leveled against Ogden's use of the witness of Protestant tradition. He claims that exclusion of the work of Christ from the salvation event fulfills the intention of the Reformation principles of *sola gratia* and *sola fide*.³¹ This is incredible from the viewpoint of reliable Reformation studies.

To return to the matter at hand, Ogden holds that although we cannot historicize God's acts in the manner of traditional theology, we can speak of God's acts in history in the sense that particular events re-present transcendent acts of God. To the extent that they do, they may be called, and are, His acts. Just as the self transcends its words and deeds but is also expressed in these deeds to the extent that they are characteristic, so there are events which are characteristic of God and thereby express His transcendent being and act as "pure unbounded love."³²

Jesus Christ, in Ogden's theology, is the

³⁰ *Christ Without Myth*, p. 145.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² "What Sense Does It Make to Say, 'God Acts in History?'" pp. 180-82.

decisive re-presentation of the primal redemptive act of "pure unbounded love" which enfolds us all.

Not only Jesus' preaching and acts of healing, but also his fellowship with sinners and (perhaps unintentionally) his eventual death on the cross are so many ways of expressing symbolically an understanding of our existence *coram deo*. They are a single witness to the truth that all things have their beginning and end solely in God's pure unbounded love and that it is in giving ourselves wholly into the keeping of that love, by surrendering all other securities, that we realize our authentic life.³³

Christ has His significance, then, as Revealer, not as Redeemer. He reveals God's sovereign love and, what is the same thing, the ultimate truth about our existence. Not because He is the only revelation of God, but because the only God there is has been decisively revealed in Him, our faith understands that to say that Jesus is Lord is the same as saying that God is our Father.³⁴ By emphasizing that the Christ event calls men to decision, Ogden would turn aside the charge that he has merely revived the old liberal picture of Jesus as the teacher of "timeless truths." The call to decision involves raising to explicit affirmation man's implicit faith in the ground of his existence. The end of such faith, as of theology itself, is the ultimate realization of God's own life.³⁵

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

³⁴ "What Does It Mean to Affirm, 'Jesus Christ Is Lord?'" pp. 201—3.

³⁵ Our final destiny is "to contribute ourselves . . . to the self-creation of God, who accepts us without reservation into his own everlasting life . . ." "What Sense Does It Make to Say, 'God Acts in History?'" pp. 178 f.

As an appendage to this section a summary is here given of the concluding essay in *The Reality of God*. "The Promise of Faith" is a beautiful but inconclusive statement of the application of process theology to the last things. Ogden's account of Christ comes to an end with the reference to His death on the cross. No doubt we are to infer, however, that the future of Christ is included in the future of man. Ogden conceives of the end not as final stage but as final significance. God will be all in all, a realization to which man himself contributes. Resurrection and immortality are to be understood not as describing the quality or the quantity of man's life but as describing the quality of God's life. Our own everlasting significance is secured in the boundless love of God's everlasting life. Ogden declines to commit himself on the question of subjective or objective immortality. Of one thing he is certain, that no one will be outside of God's love. This does not mean universalism, Ogden insists, for man is able to reject God's demand and promise. Yet even this rejection does not exclude one from God's love. The unfaithful man, however, will not achieve the peace that passes understanding. Beyond the promise of security in God's love we cannot and need not go, Ogden concludes. To ask for more, subjective survival of death, for example, is demanding a "sign" from God as a condition of trust.³⁶

VI. CONCLUSION

Schubert Ogden brings a confident and creative hand to the apologetic task. In view of what he set out to do, his work is

³⁶ My summary of "The Promise of Faith," pp. 211—30.

impressive. Ogden had worked out the essentials of his position already in *Christ Without Myth*, and the subsequent essays represent more of clarification and elaboration than of substantial advance. But that simply shows the difficulty and the slow pace of constructive work. The writer believes that Ogden, within the framework of his commitments, has shown that process philosophy holds resources for developing a theology that is consistent and maximally significant. Whether this philosophy is equally useful to theologies working out of other commitments is open to question.

Ogden does not maintain that process philosophy is the only "right" philosophy for the task, but he is convinced that it provides the best help for the present. The reason that process philosophy works so well for Ogden, however, is that it enables him to preserve all that he wants to preserve in existential theology while affording a comprehensive account of reality. That is to say, he can show that all statements about God are statements about man and at the same time think and speak of God objectively. This entails one sacrifice which Ogden is willing to make but which others may not be able to accept, namely, we can no longer speak of any acts of God *extra nos*. At one point, to be sure, Ogden does speak the language of *extra nos*. He speaks of "the God-man relationship that is the essential reality of every human life" as not only *extra nos* but, heaping up his phrases, as also *pro se*, *sine nobis*, and *contra nos*.³⁷ But surely it is a contradiction in terms to speak of an immediate God-man relationship as *extra nos*.

Process theology preserves aspects of the dynamic mode of Hebrew thought that

have been lost in the alliance of traditional theism with classical metaphysics. This is a positive side of process theology to which Lutherans have good reason to be sympathetic. One needs only to think of Luther's statements concerning God's presence and being in terms that are virtually panentheistic. Recall his well-known statements in his writings on the Lord's Supper which speak of God as simultaneously enclosed-within and all-encompassing. This concept was too dynamic, too elastic, for the static categories of classical metaphysics. Unfortunately, Luther's concept was not retained by the systematicians.³⁸ On the other hand, while there are points of contact between Luther and process theology, there is not much ground for a synthesis. Luther left God free to make up His own rules, and was quite sure that God would do just that. Process thought, aiming at a well-ordered account of reality, boggles at the exceptional and is unprepared to have God take a hand in things. The concept of God's absolute relativity, for all that it affirms about God's being-in-the-world, tends to detract from God's doing-in-the-world. Pure relationship tends to become the antithesis of pure act.

The dipolar concept of God in itself, however, may be a serviceable aid to communication with those who are enchanted with the scientific world view. One may also appreciate Ogden's employment of Toulmin's analysis of language uses as a wedge into the small and too tidy field of meaning staked out by logical positivism. Theology needs this kind of work to gain a hearing among those who assume

³⁷ *Christ Without Myth*, p. 161.

³⁸ See Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther's World of Thought* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), pp. 176—94.

that science, logic, and mathematics say all that one needs to know to live and die by. Ogden deserves a good grade in the area of general apologetics.

This writer suggests, however, that Bultmann has better apologetic aim than Ogden when we get down to the essential Christian message. Bultmann wants to remove all pseudo stumbling blocks in order to confront man with the true *skandalon*, the scandal of the cross. But Ogden, in the name of consistent application of the program of demythologizing, removes the scandal.

The problem may, however, be something more than making the virtue of consistency a necessity. The problem lies in the whole approach Ogden takes. Whereas Lutheran theology starts with the cross, Ogden starts with ontology. He has already satisfied himself on every point of concern before he ever gets to the cross. The salvation of man is already assured in the absolute relativity of "pure unbounded love." The Christ event can therefore occupy no other place in his theology than that designated as the re-presentation of the divine event. If there is no act of God *extra nos*, then the Christ event, however

much it is called decisive or ultimate, is so in fact only because faith chooses to assign it that significance.

Ogden believes Whitehead and Hartshorne when they say that God is the eminent exemplification of metaphysical principles.³⁹ If we ask whose metaphysical principles they have in mind, the answer would have to be: their own. This is not said to fault them. If a man does philosophy, he has to do it some way; he may as well do it his own way. Theirs may be a very good way. How Ogden has used their philosophy is one way of doing theology. But philosophy is after all a construction; it is an attempt to give a meaningful account of things. Ogden has used a philosophy to supply a conceptual framework for explicating his conviction that God loves us. But the Gospel keeps saying that we have not given a full account of God's love until we have set forth the atonement, have set forth Christ being made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

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³⁹ See "What Sense Does It Make to Say, 'God Acts in History?'" p. 175.