

Foundations of Christian Faith

AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE IDEA
OF CHRISTIANITY

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· II ·

Man in the Presence of Absolute Mystery

This second chapter is a conceptual reflection upon that transcendental experience in which a person comes into the presence of the absolute mystery which we call "God," an experience which is more primary than reflection and cannot be recaptured completely by reflection. What has to be said here has already been said less explicitly in the first chapter. If man really is a subject, that is, a transcendent, responsible and free being who as subject is both entrusted into his own hands and always in the hands of what is beyond his control, then basically this has already said that man is a being oriented towards God. His orientation towards the absolute mystery always continues to be offered to him by this mystery as the ground and content of his being. To understand man in this way, of course, does not mean that when we use the term "God" in such a statement, we know what this term means from any other source except through this orientation to mystery. At this point theology and anthropology necessarily become one. A person knows explicitly what is meant by "God" only insofar as he allows his transcendence beyond everything objectively identifiable to enter into his consciousness, accepts it, and objectifies in reflection what is already present in his transcendentality.

1. Meditation on the Word "God"

THE EXISTENCE OF THE WORD

It is natural to begin with a brief reflection on the word "God." This is so not merely because, in contrast to a thousand other experiences which can get a hearing even without words, it could be that in this case the word alone is capable of giving us access to what it means. But for a much more simple reason we can and perhaps must begin a reflection on God himself

with the word "God." For we do not have an experience of God as we have of a tree, another person and other external realities which, although they are perhaps never there before us absolutely nameless, yet they evoke their name by themselves because they simply appear within the realm of our experience at a definite point in time and space, and so by themselves they press immediately for a name. We can say, therefore, that what is most simple and most inescapable for man with regard to the question of God is the fact that the word "God" exists in his intellectual and spiritual existence.

We cannot evade this simple, although ambiguous fact by looking to a possible future and asking if a human race could ever exist in which the word "God" would absolutely disappear. In this case, either the question whether this word has a meaning and refers to a reality outside of itself would not arise any more, or it would arise at a completely new point where what had earlier been the origin of this word would have to achieve presence in a new way and with a new word. In any case, the word exists among us. Its existence is prolonged even by an atheist when he says that there is no God, and that something like God has no specifiable meaning; when he founds a museum without God, raises atheism to the level of a party dogma, and devises other similar things. In this way even the atheist is helping the word "God" to survive longer. If he wanted to avoid that, he would not only have to *hope* that this word would simply disappear in human existence and in the language of society. He would also have to contribute to this disappearance by keeping dead silence about it himself and not declaring himself an atheist. But how is he to do that if others, with whom he must speak and from whose language sphere he cannot completely withdraw, talk about God and are concerned about this word?

The mere fact that this word exists is worth thinking about. When we speak about the word "God" this way, we do not only mean of course the German word. Whether we say *Gott* or "God" or the Latin *deus* or the Semitic *El* or the old Mexican *teotl*, that makes no difference here. It would, however, be an extremely obscure and difficult question to ask how we could know that the same thing or the same person is meant by these different words, because in each of these cases we cannot simply point to a common experience of what is meant independently of the word itself. But for the time being we shall pass over this problem whether the many words for "God" are synonymous.

There are also, of course, names of God or of gods in places where a pantheon of gods is worshipped polytheistically, or where, as in ancient

Israel, the one, all-powerful God has a proper name, Yahweh, because they were convinced that they had quite definite and specific experiences with him in their own history. Without prejudice to his incomprehensibility and hence his namelessness, these experiences characterize him and thus bestow upon him a proper name. But we shall not discuss here these names of God in the plural.

WHAT DOES THE WORD "GOD" MEAN?

The word "God" exists. This by itself is worth thinking about. However, at least the German word says nothing or nothing more than that *about* God. Whether this was always the case in the earliest history of the word is another question. In any case the word "God" functions today like a proper name. One has to know from other sources what or who it means. Usually we do not notice this, but it is true. If we were to call God "Father," for example, or "Lord," or the "heavenly being," or something similar, as happens all the time in the history of religion, then the word by itself would say something about what it means because of its origins in other experiences we have and in its secular usage. But here it looks in the first instance as though the word confronts us like a blank face. It says nothing about what it means, nor can it simply function like an index finger which points to something encountered immediately outside of the word. Then it would not have to say anything about what it means, as is the case when we say "tree" or "table" or "sun."

Nevertheless, because this word is so very much without contour (and it is because of this that the first question has to be: What is this word really supposed to say?) it is obviously quite appropriate for what it refers to, regardless of whether the word may have originally been so "faceless" or not. We can prescind, then, from the question whether the history of the word began with another form of the word. In any case, the present form of the word reflects what the word refers to: the "ineffable one," the "nameless one" who does not enter into the world we can name as a part of it. It means the "silent one" who is always there, and yet can always be overlooked, unheard, and, because it expresses the whole in its unity and totality, can be passed over as meaningless. It means that which really is wordless, because every word receives its limits, its own sound and hence its intelligible sense only within a field of words. Hence what has become faceless, that is, the word "God" which no longer refers by itself to a definite, individual experience, has assumed the right form to be able to speak to us of God. For it is the final word before we become silent, the

word which allows all the individual things we can name to disappear into the background, the word in which we are dealing with the totality which grounds them all.

DOES THIS WORD HAVE A FUTURE?

The word "God" exists. We return to the starting point of our reflection, to the plain fact that in the world of words, by which we form our world and without which even so-called facts do not exist for us, the word "God" also appears. Even for the atheist, even for those who declare that God is dead, even for them, as we saw, God exists at least as that which they must declare dead, whose ghost they must banish, and whose return they fear. One could not be at peace about him until the word itself no longer existed, that is, until even the question about him would not have to be asked any more. But it is still there, this word, it is present. Does it also have a future? Marx thought that atheism too would disappear, hence that the very word "God," used in affirmation or in denial, would disappear. Is a future for the word "God" conceivable? Perhaps this question is meaningless because a genuine future is something radically new which cannot be calculated in advance. Or perhaps this question is merely theoretical and in reality it becomes a challenge to our freedom, whether we shall go on saying "God" tomorrow as believers or as unbelievers, challenging each other by affirming, denying or doubting. However the question about the future of the word "God" might be settled, the believer simply sees only two possibilities and no other alternative: either the word will disappear without a trace and leave no residue, or it will survive, one way or another a question for everybody.

REALITY WITHOUT THIS WORD

Consider for a moment these two possibilities. The word "God" will have disappeared without a trace and without an echo, without leaving any visible gap behind, without being replaced by another word which challenges us in the same way, without at least only a question, or better, *the* question even being raised by this word because people do not want to say or hear this word as an answer. What would it be like if this hypothesis about the future is taken seriously? Then man would no longer be brought face to face with the single whole of reality, nor with the single whole of his own existence. For this is exactly what the word "God" does and it alone, however it might be defined phonetically or in its genesis. If the word "God" really did not exist, then neither would these two things exist any

more for man, the single whole of reality as such and the single whole of human existence in the mutual interpenetration of both aspects.

Man would forget all about himself in his preoccupation with all the individual details of his world and his existence. *Ex supposito* he would never face the totality of the world and of himself helplessly, silently and anxiously. He would not notice any more that he was only an individual existent, and not being as such. He would not notice that he only considered questions, and not the question about questioning itself. He would not notice anymore that he was only manipulating in different ways different aspects of his existence, and never faced his existence in its unity and totality. He would remain mired *in* the world and *in* himself, and no longer go through that mysterious process which he *is*. It is a process in which, as it were, the whole of the "system" which he is along with his world reflects deeply about itself in its unity and totality, freely takes responsibility for itself, and thus transcends and reaches beyond itself to that silent mystery which seems like nothingness, and out of which he now comes to himself and his world, affirming both and taking responsibility for both.

Man would have forgotten the totality and its ground, and at the same time, if we can put it this way, would have forgotten that he had forgotten. What would it be like? We can only say: he would have ceased being a man. He would have regressed to the level of a clever animal. We can no longer say so readily today that man exists when an earthly being walks upright, makes fire, and fashions stone into tools. We can only say that man exists when this living being in reflection, in words and in freedom places the totality of the world and of existence before himself in question, even if he might become helplessly silent before *this* one and total question. Perhaps it would even be conceivable, and who can know for sure, that the human race, although it would survive biologically and technologically, would die a collective death and regress back into a colony of unusually resourceful animals. Whether this is a real possibility or not, the believer who uses the word "God" would not have to dread this would-be "utopia" as a disavowal of his faith.

For he is familiar with a merely biological consciousness and, if we want to call it such, an animal intelligence in which the question about the totality has not arisen and for which the word "God" has not become part of its destiny. Nor would he be all that confident about saying what such a biological intelligence can accomplish without entering into that destiny which is characterized by the word "God." But man really exists as man only when he uses the word "God" at least as a question, at least as a

negating and negated question. The absolute death of the word "God," including even the eradication of its past, would be the signal, no longer heard by anyone, that man himself had died. As we said, perhaps such a collective death is conceivable. This would not have to be any more extraordinary than the death of an individual person and of a sinner. When the question would no longer exist, when the question would simply have died and disappeared, then naturally one would no longer have to give an answer, but neither could he give a negative answer. Nor could this lacuna, if one conceived of it as a possibility, be made an argument that what is meant by "God" does not exist, because if it were, one would have to give an answer, although only a negative answer, to this question. Hence the fact that the question about the death of the word "God" can be raised shows again that the word "God" still survives even in and through the protest against it.

THE SURVIVAL OF THE WORD "GOD"

The second possibility to be considered is: the word "God" will survive. Every individual in his intellectual and spiritual existence lives by the language of all. He has his ever so individual and unique experience of existence only in and with the language in which he lives, from which he does not escape, and whose verbal associations, perspectives and selective a priori he appropriates, even when he protests against them and when he is himself involved in the ever-ongoing history of language. One has to allow language to have its say because one has to use it to speak and use it to protest against it. A final and basic trust cannot reasonably be denied it if one does not want to be absolutely silent or contradict himself. Now the word "God" exists in the language in which and from which we live and accept responsibility for our existence.

But it is not just some accidental word which appeared suddenly in language at some arbitrary moment and at another disappeared again without a trace, like "philologist" and other words. For the word "God" places in question the whole world of language in which reality is present for us. For it asks about reality as a whole and in its original ground. Moreover, the question about the totality of the world of language exists in that peculiar paradox which is proper precisely to language because language itself is a part of the world, and at the same time it is the whole of it as known. When language speaks of anything it also expresses itself, itself as a whole and in relation to its ground, which is distant but present in its distance. It is precisely this that is pointed to when we say "God,"

although we do not mean thereby identically the same thing as language itself as a whole, but rather its empowering ground. But for this very reason the word "God" is not just any word, but is the word in which language, that is, the self-expression of the self-presence of world and human existence together, grasps itself in its ground. This word *exists*, it belongs in a special and unique way to our world of language and thus to our world. It is itself a reality, and indeed one that we cannot avoid. This reality might be present speaking clearly or obscurely, softly or loudly. But it is there at least as a question.

THE ORIGINAL WORD SPOKEN TO US

At this point and in this context we are not yet concerned with how we respond to this word and this event, whether we accept it as pointing to God himself, or whether in despairing rage we refuse to allow this word to make demands upon us, because, as part of the world of language, it would force us, who are also a part of the world, to face the totality of the world and of ourselves without being able to be the whole or to master it. And at this point we are also leaving entirely open the question how this original totality is defined and related to the world of plurality and to the multiplicity of words in the world of language.

At this point we can only call attention to one thing somewhat more clearly than before, since it touches upon the topic of the word "God" directly. If we understand correctly what has been said about the word "God" up to now, then it is not the case that each of us as an individual thinks "God" in an active process and that *in this way* the word "God" enters into the realm of our existence for the first time. Rather we *hear and receive the word "God."* It comes to us in the history of language in which we are caught whether we want to be or not, which poses questions to us as individuals without itself being at our disposal. The history of language which is given to us, and in which the word "God" occurs as a question to us, is in this way an image and likeness of what it announces. We should not think that, because the phonetic sound of the word "God" is always dependent on us, therefore the word "God" is also our creation. Rather it creates us because it makes us men.

The real word "God" is not simply identical with the word "God" which appears in a dictionary lost among thousands and thousands of other words. For this dictionary word "God" only represents the real word which becomes present for us from out of the wordless texture of all words through their context and through their unity and totality, which itself exists and

is present for us. This real word confronts us with ourselves and with reality as a whole, at least as a question. This word exists. It is in our history and makes our history. It is a word. For this reason one can fail to hear it, with ears, as scripture says, which hear and do not understand. But it does not cease to exist because of that. In antiquity Tertullian's insight about the *anima naturaliter Christiana*, that is, the soul that is Christian from its origins, is derived from the inescapability of the word "God." It exists. It comes from those origins from which man himself comes. Its demise can be thought of only along with the death of man himself. It can still have a history whose changing forms we cannot imagine in advance precisely because it is what keeps an uncontrollable and unplanned future open. It is our opening to the incomprehensible mystery. It makes demands on us, and it might irritate us because it disturbs the peace of an existence which wants to have the peace of what is clear and distinct and planned.

It is always open to Wittgenstein's protest, which bids us to be silent about things which we cannot speak about clearly. Notice, however, that he violates this rule in formulating it. The word itself agrees with this maxim if correctly understood. For it is itself the final word before wordless and worshipful silence in the face of the ineffable mystery. It is the word which must be spoken at the conclusion of all speaking if, instead of silence in worship, there is not to follow that death in which man becomes a resourceful animal or a sinner lost forever. It is an almost ridiculously exhausting and demanding word. If we were not hearing it *this way*, then we would be hearing it as a word about something obvious and comprehensible in everyday life, as a word alongside other words. Then we would have heard something which has nothing in common with the true word "God" but its phonetic sound. We are familiar with the Latin expression *amor fati*, the love of one's destiny. This resolve in the face of one's destiny means literally "love for the word that has been uttered," that is, for that *fatum* which is our destiny. Only this love for what is necessary liberates our freedom. This *fatum* is ultimately the word "God."

2. The Knowledge of God

TRANSCENDENTAL AND A POSTERIORI KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

What we are calling transcendental knowledge or experience of God is an *a posteriori* knowledge insofar as man's transcendental experience of his

free subjectivity takes place only in his encounter with the world and especially with other people. To that extent the scholastic tradition is correct when it emphasizes against ontologism that man's *only* knowledge of God is an a posteriori knowledge from the world. This is still true even with verbal revelation because this too has to work with human concepts. Hence our transcendental knowledge or experience has to be called a posteriori insofar as every transcendental experience is mediated by a categorical encounter with concrete reality in our world, both the world of things and the world of persons. This is also true of the knowledge of God. To that extent we can and we must say that all knowledge of God is an a posteriori knowledge which comes from and through encountering the world, to which, of course, we ourselves also belong.

The knowledge of God is, nevertheless, a *transcendental* knowledge because man's basic and original orientation towards absolute mystery, which constitutes his fundamental experience of God, is a permanent existential of man as a spiritual subject. This means that the explicit, conceptual and thematic knowledge, which we usually think of when we speak of the knowledge of God or of proofs for God's existence, is a reflection upon man's transcendental orientation towards mystery, and some degree of reflection is always necessary. It is not, however, the original and foundational mode of the transcendental experience of this mystery. It belongs necessarily to the very nature of human knowledge that thought is self-reflexive, that we think of a concrete object *within* the *infinite* and apparently empty horizon of thinking itself, that thinking is conscious of itself. We must get used to taking account of the fact that when we think and when we exercise freedom we are always dealing with more and always have to do with more than that which we are talking *about* in our words and concepts, and that *with which* we are occupied here and now as the concrete object of our activity. If one cannot see both the distinction *and* the unity in this bipolarity in knowledge and in freedom, that is, objective consciousness and subjective consciousness, or, as Blondel puts it, *willed* will and *willing* will, then basically he cannot see the point of what we are saying: that *speaking* of God is the reflection which points to a more original, unthematic and unreflexive knowledge of God.

We become conscious of ourselves and of the transcendental structures that are given with our subjectivity only in the fact that the world presents itself to us concretely and in quite definite ways, and hence in the fact that we are involved in the world both passively and actively. This is also true of the knowledge of God. In this sense it is not a knowledge which is

grounded entirely in itself. But neither is it simply a mystical process within our own personal interiority, nor, in the light of this, does it have the character of a personal, divine self-revelation. But the a posteriori character of the knowledge of God would be misunderstood if we were to overlook the transcendental element in it and understand the knowledge of God after the model of an a posteriori knowledge whose object comes entirely from without and appears in a neutral faculty of knowledge. In the knowledge of God a posteriority does not mean that we look out into the world with a neutral faculty of knowledge and then think that we can discover God there directly or indirectly among the realities that present themselves to us objectively, or that we can prove his existence indirectly.

We are oriented towards God. This original experience is always present, and it should not be confused with the objectifying, although necessary, reflection upon man's transcendental orientation towards mystery. This does not destroy the a posteriori character of the knowledge of God, but neither should this a posteriority be misunderstood in the sense that God could simply be indoctrinated from without as an object of our knowledge.

This unthematic and ever-present experience, this knowledge of God which we always have even when we are thinking of and concerned with anything but God, is the permanent ground from out of which that thematic knowledge of God emerges which we have in explicitly religious activity and in philosophical reflection. It is not in these latter that we discover God just as we discover a particular object of our experience within the world. Rather, both in this explicitly religious activity directed to God in prayer and in metaphysical reflection we are only making explicit for ourselves what we already know implicitly about ourselves in the depths of our personal self-realization. Hence we know our subjective freedom, our transcendence and the infinite openness of the spirit even where and when we do not make them thematic at all. We also know them when such a conceptual, objectifying thematization and verbal expression of this original knowledge perhaps does not succeed at all, or succeeds very imperfectly and distortedly. Indeed we even know them when we refuse to engage at all in such a process of thematization.

For this reason the meaning of all explicit knowledge of God in religion and in metaphysics is intelligible and can really be understood only when all the words we use there point to the unthematic experience of our orientation towards the ineffable mystery. And just as it is of the nature of transcendent spirit, because it is constituted in an objective world, always to offer along with this objectivity the possibility, both in theory and in

practice, of running away from its own subjectivity, from taking responsibility for itself in freedom, so too a person can also hide from himself his transcendental orientation towards the absolute mystery which we call God. As scripture says (Rom. 1:18), he can in this way suppress the most real truth about himself.

The individual realities with which we are usually dealing in our lives always become clearly intelligible and comprehensible and manipulable because we can differentiate them from other things. There is no such way of knowing God. Because God is something quite different from any of the individual realities which appear within the realm of our experience or which are inferred from it, and because the knowledge of God has a quite definite and unique character and is not just an instance of knowledge in general, it is for these reasons very easy to overlook God. The concept "God" is not a grasp of God by which a person masters the mystery, but it is letting oneself be grasped by the mystery which is present and yet ever distant. This mystery remains a mystery even though it reveals itself to man and thus continually grounds the possibility of man being a subject. There can then follow from this ground, of course, the so-called concept of God, explicit language about him, words and what we mean by them and try to say to ourselves reflexively, and certainly a person ought not to avoid the effort involved in this process of reflexive conceptualization. But in order to remain true, all metaphysical ontology about God must return again and again to its source, must return to the transcendental experience of our orientation towards the absolute mystery, and to the existentiell practice of accepting this orientation freely. This acceptance takes place in unconditional obedience to conscience, and in the open and trusting acceptance of the uncontrollable in one's own existence in moments of prayer and quiet silence.

Since the original experience of God is not an encounter with an individual object *alongside* of other objects, and since in the human subject's transcendental experience God is absolutely beyond us in his transcendence, we can speak of God and the experience of God, and of creatureliness and the experience of creatureliness only *together*, in spite of the difference of what is meant in each instance.

It could be asked at this point: But if these two things are connected in this way, then are we only able to say something about what God is *for us*, and not able to say anything about what God is *in himself*? But if we have understood what is meant by the absolutely unlimited transcendental of the human spirit, then we can say that the alternative of such a radical

distinction between a statement about "God in himself" and "God for us" is not even legitimate. What is meant by the deepest characteristic of the human subject in his freedom and his dependence, and hence in his creatureliness, and what is meant by God himself can be understood only by taking into account that basic situation in which human existence finds itself, a situation in which man is in possession of himself and is radically alienated from himself because of the fact that the mystery addresses him in its absoluteness and remains at a distance as distinct from man. For this reason neither can we form a concept of God in the proper sense and then ask afterwards if it exists in the real order. The concept in its original ground and the reality itself to which this concept refers move beyond us and enter the unknown together.

THE DIFFERENT WAYS OF KNOWING GOD AND THEIR INTRINSIC UNITY

Before we begin to discuss the knowledge of God, we have to reflect briefly on other distinctions in the knowledge of God which are made in traditional theology. *First of all*, it is customary in Catholic theology to speak of a so-called natural knowledge of God in which, as the First Vatican Council said (*D.S.* 3004), God can be known at least in principle by the light of natural reason without revelation in the proper sense. This is an a posteriori knowledge, but this must be understood correctly. *Secondly*, besides this so-called natural knowledge of God the school theology speaks of a knowledge of God by means of what we call the Christian revelation *in word* in the proper sense: a knowledge of God by means of his own revelation. It presupposes the knowledge that such a divine revelation in word has taken place and then asks what God has communicated about himself in this divine revelation, for example, that he absolves man's guilt, that he has a universal, supernatural salvific will for man, that he has created on man's behalf a historically concrete existence for himself in what we call the Incarnation, and so on.

Thirdly, we would perhaps have to speak of a knowledge of God which comes about by means of his self-revelatory *salvific activity* in the history of the human race and in that of the individual. In this knowledge God's action and his existence are known together through the effective witness he gives to himself. Even if one is not interested in mysticism and "visions," he cannot deny a priori that there can be a knowledge of God from and in man's individual and collective personal experience of existence. This does not have to be identified either with what is meant by the natural knowledge of God, nor with what is meant by the universal self-revelation

of God in *word* and in the history of revelation understood merely verbally.

In its Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*, Chapter 1), the Second Vatican Council tried to associate and to link together as closely as possible the historical action in and through which God reveals himself and revelation as divine self-communication in human *word*. Consequently, we can join together in our consideration the third way of knowing God just mentioned and the second, namely, the knowledge of God by means of his own *verbal* revelation in grace. But we shall have to go into this in more detail later.

If it is our intention to discuss the knowledge of God, we are not concerned primarily with the distinctions of school theology. We are aiming rather at a more original unity among these three modes of knowledge in concrete human existence. That is also legitimate from a philosophical starting point. If we reflect upon our knowledge of God as upon a historically constituted transcendental experience which, by the very nature of the situation in which man knows, always implies a philosophical knowledge in the proper sense, but which also cannot in principle be completely recapitured in such knowledge, then we must simply reckon with the fact that this knowledge contains elements which a subsequent theological reflection will appeal to as elements of grace and revelation. Everything which we say here about the knowledge of God is indeed said in words, but it refers to a more original experience. That is both possible and legitimate philosophically. The philosopher too can recognize that his philosophical reflection cannot completely recapture that original knowledge.

What we are referring to here is not a natural philosophical knowledge of God, although it includes an element of this. At least in principle, however, it goes beyond that. What we want to discuss refers to the historically constituted transcendental experience of God which is not supposed to be transposed by our discussion of it merely into metaphysics in a strictly philosophical sense. Our discussion will rather simply appeal to this experience of God. Not only can our discussion of the knowledge of God not take the place of the original, transcendental, and yet historically constituted experience of God, but it is not even intended to be a complete philosophical discussion of it.

The original and fundamental unity of the three ways of knowing God which were mentioned is also completely legitimate for a theological reason. According to the Christian and Catholic understanding, in the concrete order of salvation there is no realization of man's being which does not take place within the dimension of that finalization of man's self-

realization towards the immediacy of God which we call grace. And in this grace there is included a moment of revelation in the proper, although transcendental, sense.

In the concrete actualization of existence, therefore, there is no knowledge of God which is purely natural, since even theological knowledge is an activity of man which takes place in freedom. In a subsequent theological reflection I can indeed specify elements in the concrete knowledge of God which I ascribe and can ascribe to nature, to the realization of man's essence as such. But the concrete knowledge of God as a question, as a call which is affirmed or denied, is always within the dimension of man's supernatural determination. From a theological point of view, even the rejection of a natural knowledge of God, an unthematic or thematic atheism, is at the same time always and inevitably the at least unthematic "no" by which a person closes himself to the orientation of human existence towards the immediacy of God. We call this orientation grace, and it is an inescapable existential of man's whole being even when he closes himself to it freely by rejecting it.

To put it in other words: from a theological point of view, the *concrete* process of the so-called natural knowledge of God in either its acceptance or its rejection is always more than a merely natural knowledge of God. This is true when the knowing takes place unthematically in the basic and original self-interpretation of human existence as well as when it is reflexive, thematic knowledge.

The knowledge of God we are concerned with, then, is that concrete, original, historically constituted and transcendental knowledge of God which either in the mode of acceptance or of rejection is inevitably present in the depths of existence in the most ordinary human life. It is at once both natural knowledge and knowledge in grace, it is at once both knowledge and revelation-faith, so that distinguishing its elements is a subsequent task of philosophy and theology, but not really a reflexive act for this original knowledge itself.

TRANSCENDENTAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AS EXPERIENCE OF MYSTERY

The knowledge of God we are referring to here is rooted in that subjectivity and free transcendence and in that situation of not being at one's own disposal which we tried at least to sketch. Now this transcendental experience, which is always mediated by a categorical experience of the concrete and individual data of our experience in the world and in time and space (all of our experience, including so-called "secular" experience), may not

be understood as a neutral power by which, among other things, God can be known. It is rather the basic and original way of knowing God, so much so that the knowledge of God we are referring to here simply constitutes the very essence of this transcendence.

The transcendence in which God is already known, although unthematically and nonconceptually, may not be understood as an active mastering of the knowledge of God by one's own power, and hence also as a mastery of God himself. For this transcendence appears as what it is only in the self-disclosure of that towards which the movement of transcendence tends. It exists by means of that which gives itself in this transcendence as the other, the other which distinguishes this transcendence from itself and enables it to be experienced as mystery by the subject who is constituted as such by this transcendence. By its very nature subjectivity is always a transcendence which listens, which does not control, which is overwhelmed by mystery and opened up by mystery. In the midst of its absolute infinity transcendence experiences itself as empty, as merely formal, as necessarily mediated to itself by finiteness, and hence as a finite infinity. If it does not want to mistake itself for an absolute subject and divinize itself, it recognizes itself as a transcendence which has been bestowed upon it, which is grounded in mystery, and is not at its own disposal. For all its infinity it experiences itself as radically finite. It is precisely in and through the infinity of its transcendence that it is a transcendence which can grasp its own finiteness and must grasp it.

Transcendence strictly as such knows only *God* and nothing else, although it knows him as the condition which makes possible categorical knowledge, history and concrete freedom. Transcendence exists only by opening itself beyond itself, and, to put it in biblical language, it is in its origin and from the very beginning the experience of *being known* by God himself. The word which says everything by saying "*God*" is always experienced in its origin and by its very nature as a response in which the mystery, while remaining mystery, offers himself to man.

The unity between transcendence and its term cannot be understood as a unity between two elements related equally to each other, but only as the unity between that which grounds and disposes freely and that which is grounded. It is a unity in the sense of a unity between an original word and the response to it which is made possible by the word. This unity can be described in different ways because the unity as well as the primary and the ultimate element in it can only be expressed helplessly by means of the second and conditioned element, by means of the second and conditioned

element which never really comprehends the first element. We can speak of transcendence only by speaking of its term, and we can make the specific nature of the term intelligible only by speaking about the specific nature of transcendence as such.

If we wanted to understand this basic and original knowledge of God in transcendence only from its subjective pole, that is, if we wanted to clarify the nature of transcendence in order to clarify from this vantage point what the term towards which the transcendence moves really is, then we would have the difficulty of having to describe intentionality as such without discussing its term. Besides that, we would also have the burden of having to look for an existentiell mystagogy which would describe and focus the attention of each individual in his concrete existence on those experiences in which he in his individuality had the experience of transcendence and of being taken up out of himself into the ineffable mystery. Since the clarity and persuasiveness of the various individual experiences of this kind—for example, in anxiety, in the subject's absolute concern, in love's unshrinking acceptance of responsibility in freedom, in joy, and so on—vary a great deal in individual persons corresponding to the differences in their historical existence, such a mystagogy into one's own personal and individual experience of transcendence would have to vary a great deal from person to person. Such a mystagogy, in which the individual person is made aware of the fact that this experience of transcendence really takes place repeatedly and without being called such in his immediate involvement with the concrete world, could be possible for the individual person only in individual conversation and in individual logotherapy.

Therefore, we want to attempt a description of this basic and original knowledge of God here by pointing out where this transcendence is directed and what it encounters, or better, what is the source by which it is opened up. But the situation is such that our description of the term or the source of transcendence can only be understood if it calls attention repeatedly to transcendental experience as such, which is so obvious and unobtrusive that it can easily be overlooked.

Even when we look to the term and the source of transcendence in order to call attention to the original and unthematic knowledge of God, the difficulty of bringing this knowledge to awareness is still not overcome. For the names which have been given to the term and source of transcendence in the history of man's reflexive self-interpretation as transcending spirit are very numerous. Nor does each of these names mediate for each individual in the concrete experience of his existence in an equal and equally accessible

way a reflexive approach to this original experience of God.

To begin with, this term and source by which transcendence is borne can be called "God." We can also speak of being, of ground, of ultimate cause, of illuminating, revealing logos, and we can appeal to what is meant by a thousand other names. When we say "God" or "primordial ground" or "abyss," then of course such a word is always fraught with images which go beyond what the word really wants to say, and which have nothing to do with what it really means. Each of these notions always has the patina of history on it, including the individual's history, so much so that what is really meant by such a word is hardly discernible any more. When we call God "Father" with the Bible and with Jesus himself, and notice the criticism which this name provokes today, we can understand how a word like this, a word in which Jesus dared to express his ultimate understanding of God and his relationship to God, can be misunderstood or not understood at all.

The philosopher might give further reflection especially to the question of how a transcendental relationship to what he calls being, and a transcendental relationship to God are related and how they are to be distinguished. Since we want to consider directly only the original, transcendental knowledge of God, which is antecedent to and is not able to be recaptured completely by reflexive ontology, we can take a shorter, although to be sure less cautious, route here, because the hesitant caution of philosophy cannot become a substitute for risking an understanding of existence which is always prior to philosophy.

But this still does not solve the difficulty of what name we should give to the term and the source of our original experience of transcendence. We could, of course, following the venerable tradition of the whole of western philosophy, a tradition to which we are certainly responsible, simply call it "absolute being" or "being in an absolute sense" or the "ground of being" which establishes everything in original unity. But when we speak this way of "being" and "ground of being" we run the deadly risk that many contemporaries can hear the word "being" only as an empty and subsequent abstraction from the multiple experience of the individual realities which encounter us directly. For this reason we want to try to call the term and the source of our transcendence by another name, a name, of course, which cannot claim to be the key which opens every door. But maybe, nevertheless, it clarifies what we mean by circumventing the problematic about "being" which we just mentioned. We want to call the term and source of our transcendence "the holy mystery," although this term must

be understood, deepened, and then gradually shown to be identical with the word "God," and although we shall have to revert frequently to other terms which are available elsewhere in the humane and philosophical traditions. We shall have to consider later in a separate reflection why we call this mystery "holy."

We are considering the term of the experience of transcendence and we are defining it as the holy mystery not in order to express it in the most unintelligible and complicated way, but for another reason. For if we were simply to say that "God" is the term of our transcendence, then we would have to be continually afraid of the misunderstanding that we were speaking of God in the way that he is already expressed, known and understood beforehand in an objectifying set of concepts.

If we use a less familiar and less well-defined phrase like "holy mystery," in order to express the term of transcendence and the source from which it comes, then the danger of misunderstanding is somewhat less than when we say: "The term of transcendence is God." We must first describe the experience and the term of the experience together before what is experienced can be called "God."

THE TERM OF TRANSCENDENCE AS THE INFINITE, THE INDEFINABLE AND THE INEFFABLE

The term of our experience of transcendence, for which we first of all have to look for a name, is always present as nameless and indefinable, as something not at our disposal. For every name defines, every name distinguishes and characterizes something by giving what it means a particular name selected from among many names. The infinite horizon, which is the term of transcendence and which opens us to unlimited possibilities of encountering this or that particular thing, cannot itself be given a name. For this name would situate the term among the realities which are understood within the horizon of this term and this source. Indeed we can and must reflect upon the mysterious and the incomprehensible which can never be situated within our system of coordinates, and can never be defined by being distinguished from something else. For that would be to objectify it, to understand it as one object among other objects, and to define it conceptually. Indeed we must express it as something distinct from everything else because, as the absolute ground of every particular existent, it cannot be the subsequent sum of these many individual existents. But all the conceptualizing which we have to do remains true only to the extent that, in this act of defining and expressing objectively the term of transcen-

dence as the act's condition of possibility, once again an act of transcendence towards the infinite term of this transcendence takes place. In the act of reflection, which only intends to reflect upon and objectify transcendence, another original act of transcendence takes place.

Hence this original transcendence's pre-apprehension reaches out towards what is nameless and what originally and by its very nature is infinite. By its very nature the condition which makes possible distinguishing and naming cannot itself have a name. We can call this condition the nameless one or the nameless thing, that which or that who is distinct from everything finite, or the "infinite," but in doing this we have not given the term and source of transcendence a name, but have called it nameless. We have really understood this process of naming only if we understand it as simply pointing to the silence of transcendental experience.

What transcendence moves towards, then, is also indefinable. By the fact that the horizon or the term of transcendence extends beyond our reach and thus offers to knowledge the space for its individual objects of knowledge and love, this horizon or term always and essentially and by its very nature is distinct from anything which appears within it as an object of knowledge. To this extent the differentiation between this ineffable term and the finite is obviously not only a distinction which has to be made, but this differentiation is the *one and original* distinction which is experienced. This is so because it is the condition which makes possible all distinguishing of objects, both from the horizon of transcendence itself and among themselves. But this means that this ineffable term of transcendence is itself indefinable, for as the condition of possibility for all categorical distinguishing and differentiating it cannot itself be differentiated from others by means of the same norms for distinguishing.

It is in the light of the distinction between the transcendental term and individual categorical objects on the one hand, and the differentiation of categorical objects among themselves on the other hand, that we can understand the error involved both in a real *pantheism* as well as in a more popular form of *dualism* which places God and the non-divine simply as two things alongside of each other, a dualism which is also found in religion.

When we say against pantheism that God and the world are different, this statement is radically misunderstood if it is interpreted in a dualistic way. The difference between God and the world is of such a nature that God establishes and is the difference of the world from himself, and for this reason he establishes the closest unity precisely in the differentiation. For if the difference itself comes from God, and, if we can put it this way, is

itself identical with God, then the difference between God and the world is to be understood quite differently than the difference between categorical realities. Their difference is antecedent to them because they presuppose as it were a space which contains and differentiates them, and no one of these categorically distinct realities itself establishes its difference from the other or is this difference. Pantheism could therefore be called a sensitivity to (or better, the transcendental experience of) the fact that God is the absolute reality, the original ground and the ultimate term of transcendence. This is the element of truth in pantheism.

Conversely, a religious dualism which in a primitive and naive way understands the difference between God and the reality of the world created by him simply as a categorical difference is basically very unreligious because it does not grasp what God really is, that is, because it understands God as an element within a larger whole, as a part of the whole of reality.

God to be sure is different from the world. But he is different in the way in which this difference is experienced in our original, transcendental experience. In this experience this peculiar and unique difference is experienced in such a way that the whole of reality is borne by this term and this source and is intelligible only within it. Consequently, it is precisely the difference which establishes the ultimate unity between God and the world, and the difference becomes intelligible only in this unity.

These very abstract-sounding things are fundamental for an understanding of God which can have religious meaning for people today. For *that* God really does not exist who operates and functions as an individual existent alongside of other existents, and who would thus as it were be a member of the larger household of all reality. Anyone in search of such a God is searching for a false God. Both atheism and a more naive form of theism labor under the same false notion of God, only the former denies it while the latter believes that it can make sense out of it. Both are basically false: the latter, the notion that naive theism has, because this God does not exist; and the former, atheism, because God is the most radical, the most original, and in a certain sense the most self-evident reality.

The term of transcendence is indefinable because the horizon itself cannot be present within the horizon, because the term of transcendence cannot itself really be brought within the scope of transcendence and thus distinguished from other things. The ultimate measure cannot itself be measured. The limit by which everything is "defined" cannot itself be defined by a still more ultimate limit. The infinite expanse which can and does encompass everything cannot itself be encompassed. But then this

nameless and indefinable term of transcendence, which is distinguished from everything else only from its own side, and hence differentiates everything else from itself, and which is the norm for everything and is beyond all other norms, this term becomes that which is absolutely beyond our disposal. It is always present only as that which disposes.

It is beyond the control of the finite subject not only physically, but also logically. The moment the subject would define this nameless term with the help of his formal logic and his ontology, the defining itself takes place by means of a pre-apprehension of that which is supposed to be defined. Ontology is that mysterious process in which the first principles show themselves to be unable to be measured, and man recognizes that he is what is measured. The term of transcendence admits of no control over itself because then we would be reaching beyond it and incorporating it within another, higher and broader horizon. This contradicts the very nature of this transcendence and of the real term of this transcendence. This infinite and silent term is what disposes of us. It presents itself to us in the mode of withdrawal, of silence, of distance, of being always inexpressible, so that speaking of it, if it is to make sense, always requires listening to its silence.

Since we experience the term of transcendence only in the experience of this bottomless and endless transcendence, we have avoided any kind of *ontology* in the usual sense. For this term is not experienced in itself, but is only known unobjectively in the experience of subjective transcendence. The presence of the term of transcendence is the presence of this transcendence, which is only present as the condition of possibility for categorical knowledge, and not by itself. We can see by this statement (and it is one of the most fundamental statements about the real understanding of God and is a really correct approach to the knowledge of God) that the tendency today to talk not about God, but about one's neighbor, to preach not about the love of God, but about the love of neighbor, and to use not the term "God," but "world" and "responsibility for the world"—we can see that this tendency has an absolutely solid foundation. However, going to the extreme of banishing God and of being radically silent about him is and remains false and does violence to the true nature of Christianity.

But what is correct about all of these statements is the plain fact that we do not know God by himself as one individual object alongside others, but only as the term of transcendence. This transcendence takes place only in a categorical encounter in freedom and in knowledge with concrete reality, which indeed appears as world only *vis-à-vis* God as absolutely other than world. Hence the term of this transcendence is present only in the

mode of otherness and distance. It can never be approached directly, never be grasped immediately. It gives itself only insofar as it points wordlessly to something else, to something finite as the object we see directly and as the immediate object of our action. And for this reason the term of this transcendence is mystery.

THE TERM OF TRANSCENDENCE AS THE "HOLY MYSTERY"

We have already and by way of anticipation called the term of transcendence the *holy* mystery. The reason why we had to call it "mystery" consisted ultimately in the fact that we experience it as that which cannot be encompassed by a pre-apprehension which reaches beyond it, and hence it cannot be defined. But why do we characterize it as the "holy" mystery?

We have already emphasized in the first chapter that when we speak of transcendence we do not mean only and exclusively the transcendence which is the condition of possibility for categorical knowledge as such. We mean also and just as much the *transcendence of freedom, of willing, and of love*. This transcendence, which is constitutive of the subject as a free and personal subject of action within an unlimited realm of action, is just as important, and is basically just another aspect of the transcendence of a spiritual, and therefore knowing, and precisely for this reason free subject. Freedom is always the freedom of a subject who exists in interpersonal communication with other subjects. Therefore it is necessarily freedom *vis-à-vis* another subject of transcendence, and this transcendence is not primarily the condition of possibility for knowing *things*, but is the condition of possibility for a subject being present to himself and just as basically and originally being present to another *subject*. But for a subject who is present to himself to affirm freely *vis-à-vis* another subject means ultimately to love.

Hence when we reflect here upon transcendence as will and as freedom, we must also take into account the character of the term and source of transcendence as love. It is a term which possesses absolute freedom, and this term is at work in freedom and in love as that which is nameless and which is not at our disposal, for we are completely at its disposal. It is what opens up my own transcendence as freedom and as love. But the term of transcendence is always and originally the source of the mystery which offers itself. This term itself opens our transcendence; it is not established by us and by our own power as though we were absolute subjects. Hence if transcendence moves in freedom and in love towards a term which itself opens this transcendence, then we can say that that which is nameless and

which is not at our disposal, and at whose complete disposal we exist, that this very thing is present in loving freedom, and this is what we mean when we say "holy mystery."

For what else would we call that which is nameless, that at whose disposal we exist and from which we are distanced in our finiteness, but which nevertheless we affirm in our transcendence through freedom and love, what else would we call this if not "holy"? And what could we call "holy" if not this, or to whom would the name "holy" belong more basically and more originally than to this infinite term of love, which love in the presence of the incomprehensible and the ineffable necessarily becomes worship.

In transcendence, therefore, dwells the holy, nameless and infinite, disposing but not being disposed, forbidding and distant. And this we call mystery, or somewhat more explicitly, the holy mystery, lest in focusing upon the knowledge element we overlook the transcendentality of freedom and love, and so that both elements remain present in their original and personal unity. The two words "holy mystery," which are understood as a unity, but between which nevertheless there is an intrinsic difference, express equally the transcendentality both of knowledge and of freedom and love.

Every experience of transcendence is a basic and original experience which is not derived from something prior, and it receives this character of being undervived and irreducible from what is encountered and becomes manifest in it. The designation of this term of transcendence as the "holy mystery," therefore, does not employ concepts derived from elsewhere and applied extrinsically to this term. It derives them rather from this original "object," which is its own ground and the ground and horizon of the knowledge of it, and which discloses itself in and through transcendental experience itself.

If we have arrived in this way at the basic and original idea of mystery and of the holy, and if it is correct to designate the term of transcendence by this name, there can be no question, of course, of giving a *definition* of the essence of this holy mystery. Mystery is as indefinable as every other transcendental "concept." They do not admit of definition because what is expressed in them is known only in transcendental experience, and transcendental experience, as always and everywhere given antecedently, has nothing outside of itself by which it and its term could be defined.

TRANSCENDENTAL EXPERIENCE AND REALITY

We often speak of the *concept* of God. Hence we express the original term of our unthematic transcendentality subsequently in a concept, a name.

This raises the question whether what is expressed in an essential concept this way is only something in the mind, or is also something real. It must be said right away that it would be the greatest misunderstanding, a misunderstanding which would lose all connection with the original experience, if this term were explained as something in the mind, as an *idea* which human thought established as its own creation. For this term is what opens up and makes possible the process of transcendence. Transcendence is borne by this term, and this term is not its creation.

The basic and original knowledge of what "being" is comes from this act of transcendence, and is not derived from an individual existent which we know. Something real can encounter us only in knowledge, and to state that there is something real which is a priori and in principle inaccessible to knowledge is a self-contradictory statement. The very statement and assertion about something which in principle cannot be experienced brings what is supposed to be absolutely unable to be experienced within the realm of knowledge, for one is thinking about it, and hence it is self-contradictory. It follows from this that what is not yet known and what is merely thought are deficient and secondary modes of being the object of knowledge, modes which in principle are ordered to the real to begin with, because without this presupposition it cannot even be said what is meant by the real as such.

Therefore the term of transcendental and hence of original and encompassing experience and knowledge is posited in this experience and knowledge from the outset as that which is genuinely real, as the original unity of essence and existence. We can and must also say, of course, that the reality of the absolute mystery does not simply disclose itself to finite, transcendental spirit in the same kind of an encounter as we have in sense experience, and it should not be understood after the model of the corporeal experience of an individual, material existent. If we were to think that God is experienced in this way we would have wound up in ontologism, and we have already distinguished what we are saying from that, or we would have asserted something which in fact is not true. The affirmation of the reality of the absolute mystery is grounded for us, who are finite spirits, in the necessity with which the actualization of transcendence as our own act is given for us. This repeats from another point of view what we said about the a posteriori character of the knowledge of God, in spite of and without prejudice to the transcendental nature of the experience of God. If we were not inescapably present to ourselves, if we could ignore the act of transcendence, then we would escape the necessity of affirming the absolute reality of the term of transcendence. But this would also eliminate the possibility of an act in which the reality of this transcendence

could be denied or doubted. In the act of transcendence the reality of the term is necessarily affirmed because in this very act and only in it do we experience what reality is.

The term of transcendence, therefore, is the holy mystery as absolute being, or as the existent existing in an absolute fullness of being and possession of being.

REMARKS ON THE PROOFS FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

We have discussed both the holy mystery, which exists absolutely and which we can call by the familiar name "God," and our transcendence to this holy mystery together. In the original unity of this transcendental experience, the two are mutually dependent on each other for their intelligibility. Therefore we do not need to discuss in any great detail those assertions which are the elaboration of a more original knowledge and which are usually called "proofs for the existence of God." In the same way as ontology at the level of the original self-possession of a knowing and freely self-disposing human existence is related to scientific and reflexive ontology, so is our original experience, which we do not have in concepts and words and to which we can only point in words, related to that knowledge which is had in a reflexive proof for God's existence.

The question whether this process should be called a "proof" is secondary. Although reflexive, scientific knowledge is derivative and secondary and can never completely recapture the original experience, it is nevertheless altogether necessary and required. But this reflexive and thematic knowledge of God which is conceptualized objectively and works with concepts is not the primary and most basic and original knowledge, nor can it replace the latter.

As we have already said, a reflexive proof for God's existence is not intended to communicate a knowledge in which a previously and completely unknown and therefore also indifferent object is presented to people from without, an object whose significance and importance for them becomes evident only subsequently and through further determinations which are ascribed to the object. If the proofs are understood in this way, it could be objected to begin with that nothing is known of God. And then how could it be shown that one *must* be concerned about this question? But theology, ontology, the natural knowledge of God, and so on, all of these can appear with the claim to be taken seriously by everyone only if and insofar as they can show the listener that he already has something to do with this question.

A theoretical proof for the existence of God, then, is only intended to mediate a reflexive awareness of the fact that man always and inevitably has to do with God in his intellectual and spiritual existence, whether he reflects upon it or not, and whether he freely accepts it or not. The peculiar situation of giving the grounds subsequently for something which actually does the grounding and is already present, namely, the holy mystery, is what constitutes the specific character, the self-evident nature, and the difficulty of giving a reflexive proof for God's existence. That which does the grounding is itself grounded, as it were, and what is present in silence and without a name is itself given a name.

The point of the reflexive proofs for the existence of God is to indicate that all knowledge, even in the form of a doubt or a question or even a refusal to raise the metaphysical question, takes place against the background of an affirmation of the holy mystery, or of absolute being, as the horizon of the asymptotic term and of the questioning ground of the act of knowledge and of its "object." It is a relatively secondary question what this nameless and distant presence is called, whether the "holy mystery" or "absolute being," or, bringing into the foreground the freedom aspect of this transcendence and the personal structure of the act, the "absolute good," the "personal and absolute Thou," the "ground of absolute responsibility," the "ultimate horizon of hope," and so on. In all the so-called proofs for the existence of God the one and only thing which is being presented and represented in a reflexive and systematic conceptualization is something which has already taken place: in the fact that a person comes to the objective reality of his everyday life both in the involvement of action and in the intellectual activity of thought and comprehension, he is actualizing, as the condition which makes possible such involvement and comprehension, an unthematic and non-objective pre-apprehension of the inconceivable and incomprehensible single fullness of reality. This fullness in its original unity is at once the condition of possibility both for knowledge and for the individual thing known objectively. As such a condition of possibility it is always affirmed unthematically, even in an act which denies it thematically.

The individual person, of course, experiences this fundamental and incapable structure best in that basic situation of his own existence which occurs with special intensity for him as an individual. If, therefore, he is really to understand this reflection on "proofs" for God's existence, the individual person must reflect precisely upon whatever is the clearest experience *for him*: on the luminous and incomprehensible light of his spirit; on

the capacity for absolute questioning which a person directs against himself and which seemingly reduces him to nothing, but in which he reaches radically beyond himself; on annihilating anxiety, which is something quite different from fear of a definite object and is prior to the latter as the condition of its possibility; on that joy which surpasses all understanding; on an absolute moral obligation in which a person really goes beyond himself; on the experience of death in which he faces himself in his absolute powerlessness. Man reflects upon these and many other modes of the basic and transcendental experience of human existence. Because he experiences himself as finite in his self-questioning, he is not able to identify himself with the ground which discloses itself in this experience as what is innermost and at the same time what is absolutely different. The explicit proofs for God's existence only make thematic this fundamental structure and its term.

The experience that every act of judgment takes place as an act which is borne by and is moved by absolute being, which does not live by the grace of our thought, but is present as that by which thought is borne and not as something produced by thought, this experience is made thematic in the metaphysical principle of causality. This must not be confused with the functional law of causality in the natural sciences. According to this law, for every phenomenon as "effect" there is coordinated another phenomenon of quantitative equality as "cause." When understood correctly the metaphysical principle of causality is not an extrapolation from the scientific law of nature, nor is it an extrapolation from the causal thinking that we use in everyday affairs. It is grounded rather in the transcendental experience of the relationship between transcendence and its term. The metaphysical principle of causality, which is applied in the traditional proofs for the existence of God, is not a universal principle which is applied in these proofs to a particular, individual instance alongside of others, although even many scholastic philosophers understand it this way. Rather it only points to the transcendental experience in which the relationship between something conditioned and finite and its incomprehensible source is immediately present, and through its presence is experienced.

We do not need to treat in detail here the usual proofs for the existence of God in the theology and Christian philosophy of the schools. We need not discuss these proofs, be they cosmological, theological, kinetic, axiological, deontological, noetic or moral proofs. For all of these proofs only designate certain categorical realities in human experience and place them explicitly within the realm of that human transcendence within which

alone they can be understood. They trace all of these categorical realities and the act of knowing them back to the condition of possibility which is common both to this knowledge and to this reality together. To that extent the different proofs for God's existence can really only clarify the one proof for the existence of God from the different points of departure for the same transcendental experience.

3. God as Person

ANALOGOUS LANGUAGE ABOUT GOD

We can speak about transcendental experience only by means of what is secondary to it. For this reason we always have to speak about it in the language of "on the one hand . . . and on the other hand" and "not only . . . but also." This way of speaking about God comes from the fact that whenever we make this original, transcendental orientation to God explicit and thematic, we have to speak about God by means of secondary and categorical concepts which are contraries within the realm of the categorical. When we say that God is the innermost reality by which a finite subject and the categorical reality which confronts him are borne from within, and say at the same time that God holds sway in absolute and untouchable self-possession and that his reality is not simply the function of being the horizon for our existence, then this "on the one hand . . . on the other hand," this dialectical, bipolar statement, which can never be conceptually synthesized into a higher synthesis, is not the original experience. It results rather from the fact that the original experience of transcendence must be transposed and made thematic, it must as it were be incorporated into its own realm as an individual object.

All of the statements that we just made about God are meant in the sense that that upon which every reality is based and grounded in its innermost self discloses itself on the one hand in what is based and grounded, and can be named from the latter. Otherwise a relationship between the ground and what is grounded cannot even be conceived. On the other hand, however, this ground is given only as ground, and hence it cannot be incorporated into a common and antecedent system with what is grounded. A relation to this ground is real and is always conscious of transcendence and the origins of transcendence in and from absolute mystery. Hence a statement about this mystery is always an original statement caught in an irresolvable

tension between the categorical origin of our reflexive statement and its attaining that towards which the statement is really pointing, namely, the term of transcendence. It is a tension which is not produced by us at a logically subsequent midpoint between a univocal "yes" and an equivocal "no." It is rather a tension which we ourselves as spiritual subjects originally *are* in our self-realization, and which we can designate by the traditional term "analogy" if we understand what this word means in its original sense.

Hence we may not understand the word "analogy" as a hybrid between univocation and equivocation. When I call a desk "desk" I have used a univocal concept, that is, I relate it to this piece of furniture in the same sense because I have left out individual differences and have abstracted from them. Hence I apply a univocal predication in exactly the same meaning. If, on the other hand, I call the money which I must pay the state "tax" (*Steuer*), and use the very same word to designate what you can steer a boat with (*Steuer* = rudder), then the word *Steuer* has a completely different sense in these instances, an equivocal sense. There are two concepts here which in our understanding have nothing to do with each other.

In the school philosophy the so-called analogy of being is frequently presented as though it were a subsequent midpoint between univocation and equivocation. It is as though one had to say something about God, but then would see that he cannot really say that because the original understanding of the content of the statement comes from elsewhere, from something which does not have much to do with God. Hence analogous concepts have to be formed which are a middle ground between the univocal and the equivocal.

But this is not true. Transcendence is the more original in relation to individual, categorical, univocal concepts. For transcendence, that is, this reaching beyond towards the unlimited horizon of the whole movement of our spirit, is precisely the condition of possibility, the horizon, and the basis and ground by means of which we compare individual objects of experience with one another and classify them. This transcendental movement of the spirit is the more original, and this is what is designated as analogy in another sense. Analogy, therefore, has nothing to do with the notion of a secondary, inexact middle position between clear concepts and those which designate two completely different things with the same phonetic sound.

Rather, because transcendental experience is the condition which makes possible all categorical knowledge of individual objects, it follows from the nature of transcendental experience that the analogous statement signifies what is most basic and original in our knowledge. Consequently, however

familiar equivocal and univocal statements are to us from our scientific knowledge and from our everyday dealings with the realities of experience, they are deficient modes of that original relationship in which we are related to the term of our transcendence. And this original relationship is what we are calling analogy: the tension between a categorical starting point and the incomprehensibility of the holy mystery, namely, God. We ourselves, as we can put it, exist analogously in and through our being grounded in this holy mystery which always surpasses us. But it always constitutes us by surpassing us and by pointing us towards the concrete, individual, categorical realities which confront us within the realm of our experience. Conversely, then, these realities are the mediation of and the point of departure for our knowledge of God.

ON THE PERSONAL BEING OF GOD

The statement that God is a person, that he is a personal God, is one of the fundamental Christian assertions about God. But it creates special difficulties for people today, and rightly so. When we say that God is a person, and this in a sense which as yet has nothing to do with the question about the so-called three persons in God, then the question about the personal character of God becomes a twofold question: we can ask whether God in his own self must be called a person; and we can ask whether he is person only in relation to us, and whether in his own self he is hidden from us in his absolute and transcendent distance. Then we would have to say that he is a person, but that he does not by any means for this reason enter into that personal relationship to us which we presuppose in our religious activity, in prayer, and in our turning to God in faith, hope and love. We shall not have touched the real difficulties which such an assertion about God as person creates for people today until we have discussed explicitly the relationship between God and man, the self-communication of God to man in grace as the transcendental constitution of man.

If we prescind from these difficulties for the time being, then the assertion that God is a person, is the absolute person who stands in absolute freedom vis-à-vis everything which he establishes as different from himself, this assertion is really self-evident, just as much as when we say that God is the absolute being, the absolute ground, the absolute mystery, the absolute good, the absolute and ultimate horizon within which human existence is lived out in freedom, knowledge and action. It is self-evident first of all that the ground of a reality which exists must possess in itself beforehand and in absolute fullness and purity this reality which is grounded by it,

because otherwise this ground could not be the ground of what is grounded, and because otherwise the ground would ultimately be empty nothingness which, if the term is really taken seriously, would say nothing and could ground nothing.

Of course the subjectivity and personhood which we experience as our own, the individual and limited uniqueness through which we are distinguished from others, the freedom which has to be exercised only under a thousand conditions and necessities, all of this signifies a finite subjectivity with limitations which we cannot assert with these limitations of its ground, namely, God. And it is self-evident that such an individual personhood cannot belong to God, who is the absolute ground of everything in radical originality. If, then, we wanted to say that in this sense God is not an individual person because he cannot experience himself as defined in relation to another or limited by another, because he does not experience any difference from himself, but rather he himself establishes the difference, and hence ultimately he himself is the difference *vis-à-vis* others, then we are correct in saying that personhood in this sense cannot be asserted of God.

But if we proceed this way, then we could do the same with regard to every transcendental concept which is applied to God. When I say that God is the original meaning, the ground, the absolute light, the absolute being, and so on, then I have to know what ground, meaning, and so on are supposed to mean, and I can make all of these assertions only in an analogous sense. This means that I can make them only within that movement in which the comprehending subject allows his comprehension, as it were, to flow into the holy, ineffable and incomprehensible mystery. If anything at all can be predicated of God, then the concept of "personhood" has to be predicated of him. Obviously, the statement that "God is a person" can be asserted of God and is true of God only if, in asserting and understanding this statement, we open it to the ineffable darkness of the holy mystery. Obviously, precisely as philosophers we know what this statement means more concretely and more exactly only if, following an ultimate maxim of genuine philosophizing, we do not fill the philosophical *a priori* in its empty formality and formal emptiness arbitrarily, or arbitrarily leave it empty, but rather allow this formal assertion to receive its content from our historical experience. In this way we allow God to be person in the way in which he in fact wants to encounter us and has encountered us in our individual histories, in the depths of our conscience, and in the whole history of the human race.

Hence we must not make the formal emptiness and empty formality of the transcendental concept of person, which is asserted of God, into a false god, and refuse from the outset to allow him to fill it through personal experience in prayer, in one's personal and individual history where God draws close to us, and in the history of Christian revelation. From this perspective a certain religious naïveté, which understands the personhood of God almost in a categorical sense, has its justification.

The ground of our spiritual personhood, which in the transcendental structure of our spiritual self always discloses itself as the ground of our person and at the same time remains concealed, has thereby revealed itself as person. The notion that the absolute ground of all reality is something like an unconscious and impersonal cosmic law, an unconscious and impersonal structure of things, a source which empties itself out without possessing itself, which gives rise to spirit and freedom without itself being spirit and freedom, the notion of a blind, primordial ground of the world which cannot look at us even if it wants to, all of this is a notion whose model is taken from the context of the impersonal world of things. It does not come from that source in which a basic and original transcendental experience is really rooted: namely, from a finite spirit's subjective and free experience of itself. In its very constitution a finite spirit always experiences itself as having its origins in another and as being given to itself from another—from another, therefore, which it cannot misinterpret as an impersonal principle.

4. Man's Relation to His Transcendent Ground: Creatureliness

With regard to the topic of creatureliness as the characterization of our relationship to God, at this point we only have to consider it in its basic and ultimate and very formalized characteristics. For this relationship to God is expressed completely only in and through the whole of the Christian message. With regard to these very formal and fundamental characteristics, we shall discuss first of all the relationship itself insofar as it can be characterized in its ultimate nature as a relationship of creatureliness.

At this point we are perhaps justified in prescinding from the question whether, first of all, this is a purely philosophical assertion in which assertion and object are both merely natural, or, secondly, whether we are indeed

dealing with a philosophical assertion by a philosophical subject, but one where the object of the assertion is a reality for which God's action in grace is co-constitutive, although it can be so interpreted only subsequently and theologically, or, thirdly, whether this assertion of our creatureliness belongs completely to the realm of revealed theology even with regard to the object which is asserted and the subject doing the asserting. In school theology the question comes up again and again whether the teaching of the First Vatican Council that God can be known by the so-called light of natural reason also refers to God insofar as he is not only some primordial ground of the world, but the creator of the world in the strict sense, that is, whether our creatureliness in the strict sense also belongs to the data which, according to the teaching of Vatican I (*D.S.* 3004), can be known by the light of natural reason. Vatican I does not answer this question. It does indeed teach that God is the creator of all things, and that he has created and continues to create them out of nothing. But Vatican I says nothing about whether this assertion can be a merely philosophical assertion, or whether it can be made only within the framework of revelation, and hence of God's personal self-communication.

CREATURELINESS:

NOT A PARTICULAR INSTANCE OF A CAUSAL RELATIONSHIP

In any case, in our transcendental experience, which necessarily and inescapably orients us towards the ineffable and holy mystery, we experience what creatureliness is and we experience it immediately. The term "creatureliness" interprets this original experience of the relationship between ourselves and God correctly. Analogously to a statement we have already made, and developing it a bit further, we can say that creatureliness does not signify a particular instance of a universal causal relationship between two realities. It is not a relationship which is also found elsewhere, although a bit differently. In the first instance and originally creatureliness refers to a relationship whose nature we can discover only within transcendental experience as such. We cannot discover it in the relationship of one thing being grounded on or in another thing alongside of it, nor in the empirical phenomenon which consists in one phenomenon within the realm of our categorical experience having a functional connection with another phenomenon.

If we were to think that creatureliness is an extrapolation from such a functional relationship between two categorical realities which we meet within the realm of our experience, then right off we would have missed

the point of what creatureliness means. Precisely what creatureliness is not is one instance among many of a causal or functional relationship between two things, both of which exist within some superimposed unity. Creatureliness expresses an absolutely unique relationship which occurs only here and therefore has its own unique place, a relationship which is mediated to us only in transcendental experience as such. Just as the metaphysical principle of causality cannot be regarded as an extrapolation from the functional law of causality in the natural sciences, so too creatureliness cannot be regarded or understood as an instance or an application or an extrapolation or an intensification of such a categorical, causal or functional relationship.

Hence what it really means to have a created origin is experienced basically and originally in the process of transcendence. This means that in the first instance the terms "creatureliness," "being created" or "creation" do not point back to an earlier moment in time at which the creation of the creature in question once took place. They mean rather an ongoing and always actual process which for every existent is taking place now just as much as at an earlier point of time in his existence, although this ongoing creation is that of an existent extended *in time*. In the first instance, then, creation and creatureliness do not mean a momentary event, namely, the first moment of a temporal existent, but mean the establishing of this existent and his time itself, and this establishing does not enter into time, but is the ground of time.

CREATURELINESS AS RADICAL DIFFERENCE FROM AND RADICAL DEPENDENCE ON GOD

To understand what is meant by creatureliness as a person's fundamental relationship to God, let us begin with the transcendental experience of it. As a spiritual person, man implicitly affirms absolute being as the real ground of every act of knowledge and of every action, and affirms it as mystery. This absolute, incomprehensible reality, which is always the ontologically silent horizon of every intellectual and spiritual encounter with realities, is therefore always infinitely different from the knowing subject. It is also different from the individual, finite things known. It is present as such in every assertion, in all knowledge, and in every action.

Proceeding from this basic starting point, we can accordingly define from two points of view the relationship between both the knower and the known as finite existents, and the absolutely infinite: as the absolute and the infinite, God must be absolutely different. Otherwise he would be an

object of our knowledge and comprehension, and not the ground of such comprehension. He is and remains so even when he is named and objectified in metaphysical and conceptual reflection. For this reason, then, he cannot be in need of the finite reality called "world," because otherwise he would not really be radically different from it, but would be part of a larger whole as in the understanding of pantheism. Conversely, the world must be radically dependent on God, without making him dependent on it as a master is dependent on his servant. It can have absolutely nothing which is independent of him, any more than the totality of things in the world in their unity and variety can be known without the pre-apprehension of spirit's transcendence towards God. This dependence must be established freely by God, because as finite and as coming to be it cannot be necessary. Moreover, the necessity of what has been established, if such a necessity did exist, could originate only in some necessity in God to establish it, a necessity which would allow the world to be made a necessity of God, and hence would not allow him to be independent of the world. This radical dependence must be ongoing, and therefore not just affect the first moment, for what is finite is related now and always to the absolute as its ground.

Christian doctrine calls this unique relationship between God and the world the createdness of the world, its creatureliness, its ongoing being-given to itself by a personal God who establishes it freely. This establishing, then, does not have some material already at hand as its presupposition, and in this sense it is "out of nothing." Basically creation "out of nothing" means to say: creation totally from God, but in such a way that the world is radically dependent on God in this creation. Nevertheless, God does not become dependent on the world, but remains free vis-à-vis the world and grounded in himself. Wherever we find a causal relationship of a categorical kind in the world, it is indeed the case that the effect is by definition dependent on its cause. But strangely enough this cause is itself also dependent on its effect, because it cannot be this cause without causing the effect. This is not the case in the relationship between God and creatures, for otherwise God would then be an element *within* our categorical realm of experience, and not the absolutely distant term of the transcendence within which an individual finite thing is known.

RADICAL DEPENDENCE ON GOD AND GENUINE AUTONOMY

God establishes the creature and its difference from himself. But by the very fact that God establishes the creature and its difference from himself,

the creature is a genuine reality different from God, and not a mere appearance behind which God and his own reality hide. The radical dependence and the genuine reality of the existent coming from God vary in direct and not in inverse proportion. In our human experience it is the case that the more something is dependent on us, the less it is different from us, and the less it possesses its own reality and autonomy. In the realm of the categorical, the radical dependence of the effect on the cause and the independence and autonomy of the effect vary in inverse proportion.

But when we reflect upon the real transcendental relationship between God and a creature, then it is clear that here genuine reality and radical dependence are simply just two sides of one and the same reality, and therefore they vary in direct and not in inverse proportion. We and the existents of our world really and truly are and are different from God not in spite of, but because we are established in being by God and not by anyone else. Creation is the only and unique and incomparable mode which does not presuppose the other as the possibility of an effective movement outwards, but rather creates this other as other by the fact that it both retains it as its creation and sets it free in its own autonomy, and both in the same proportion.

Of course the idea of creation can ultimately be understood and assimilated only by one who has not only had the experience of his own freedom and responsibility in the depths of his existence, a freedom and responsibility which is valid before God and in our relation to God, but has also freely accepted it in an act of his freedom and in reflection. What it really means to be something other than God and nevertheless to have come from him radically and in one's deepest self, what it means to say that this radical dependence grounds autonomy, all of this can be experienced only when a spiritual, created person experiences his own freedom as a reality, a freedom coming from God and a freedom for God. Not until one experiences himself as a free subject responsible before God and accepts this responsibility does he understand what autonomy is, and understand that it does not decrease, but increases in the same proportion as dependence on God. On this point the only thing that concerns us is that man is at once independent and, in view of what his ground is, also dependent.

TRANSCENDENTAL EXPERIENCE AS THE ORIGIN OF THE EXPERIENCE OF CREATURELINESS

The place where we have the basic and original experience of creatureliness is not in a sequential series of phenomena elapsing in empty temporality,

but in a transcendental experience in which the subject along with his time itself is experienced as being borne by an incomprehensible ground. The teaching of Christian faith, therefore, always expresses this creatureliness in the context of a prayerful experience of one's own autonomous and responsible reality, which is totally in the hands of and at the disposal of the absolute mystery which is not at our disposal, and which in this way becomes precisely our own responsibility. Creatureliness, then, always means both the grace and the mandate to preserve and to accept that tension of analogy which the finite subject is; to reflect upon and understand and accept himself as what is truly real, as having responsibility for himself and at the same time being absolutely dependent on and oriented towards the absolute mystery as his future.

Hence the subject in his tension and his analogy will always be tempted to let go of one of the two moments in this indispensable unity. A person either understands himself as only an empty appearance through which the divinity acts out its own eternal drama, runs away from his responsibility and his freedom, at least in the direction of God, and shifts responsibility for himself and his existence onto God in such a way that his burden no longer in truth really remains his own; or, and this is the other possibility of this misunderstanding, he understands the truth and the genuine reality which we are in such a way that they no longer truly come from God but have their meaning independently of him, so that God becomes a partner of man in a false sense. This false sense consists in thinking that the difference between him and us and hence the possibility of a real partnership is not established by him, but is antecedent to him and our relationship to him.

EXPERIENCE OF CREATURELINESS AS DENUMINIZING THE WORLD

The Christian teaching that the world is created, and this creation takes place primarily and originally in the establishment of the free subjectivity of finite persons, does not see here a strange and almost inexplicable exception to the general rule of things. The significance of this teaching lies rather in the fact that it demythologizes and denuminizes the world, and this is decisive for the Christian understanding of existence and of the world, and not only for the modern feeling about existence.

Insofar as the world, established by God in his freedom, does indeed have its origin in him, but not in the way in which God possesses himself, it really is not God. It is seen correctly, therefore, not as "holy nature," but as the material for the creative power of man. Man experiences his creatureliness

and encounters God in it, not so much in nature, in its stolid and unfeeling finiteness, but in himself and in the world only as known by him and as freely administered in the unlimited openness of his own spirit.

This observation, of course, does not give a complete description of the proper relationship between man and "nature" as his environment. This relationship has many other characteristics which are not brought out by speaking of denuminizing the world. This relationship itself also has a history whose possibilities we are experiencing today, and not only in a positive sense. In spite of its importance, however, we cannot go into this question any further here.

5. Finding God in the World

THE TENSION BETWEEN A TRANSCENDENTAL STARTING POINT AND HISTORICAL RELIGION

The question about finding God and his activity with us in our concrete, historical experience in the world creates special difficulties today. We have been considering God up to now as the creative ground of everything which can encounter us within the ultimate horizon which he himself is and which he alone forms. As he who cannot be incorporated along with what is grounded into a system which encompasses them both, we saw him as always transcendent, as the presupposition of everything which exists, and therefore as someone who cannot be thought of as one of these existents, that is, as someone comprehended or comprehensible by us. But this seems to have as its consequence the very thing which constitutes perhaps the basic difficulty which people have today with the concrete practice of religion.

As ineffable and incomprehensible presupposition, as ground and abyss, as ineffable mystery, God cannot be found in his world. He does not seem to be able to enter into the world with which we have to do because he would thereby become what he is not: an individual existent alongside of which there are others which he is not. If he wanted to appear in his world, he apparently would immediately cease to be himself: the ground of everything which appears but which itself does not appear. By definition God does not seem able to be within the world. If someone says too quickly that he does not need to, that he is always to be thought of as beyond the world, he has probably not yet felt this really radical difficulty. The difficulty

consists in the fact that by definition God does not seem to be able to be where by definition we are. Every objectification of God, as localized in time and space, as definable in the here and now, seems by its very nature not to be God, but something which we have to derive as a phenomenon from other phenomena in the world which can be specified or must be postulated.

But religion as we know it, as a religion of prayer for God's intervention, as a religion of miracles, as a religion with a salvation history differentiated from other history, as a religion in which there are supposed to be certain subjects with the fullness of divine power as distinguished from other subjects, as a religion with an inspired book which comes from God, as a religion with a particular word which is supposed to be God's word as distinguished from other words, as a religion with definite prophets and bearers of revelation authorized by God, as a religion with a Pope who is called vicar of Jesus Christ (and the term "Jesus Christ" functions here more or less the same as the term "God"), all religion of this kind declares phenomena existing within our experience as definite and exclusive objectifications and manifestations of God. Consequently, in this way God as it were appears within the world of our categorical experience at quite definite points as distinguished from other points.

Such a religion seems incompatible with our transcendental starting point, which, on the other hand, we cannot abandon if we want to talk about God at all today. As it is practiced by people in the concrete, religion always and inevitably seems to say: "God is here and not there," or "This is in accordance with his will and not that," or "He has revealed himself here and not there." As practiced in the concrete, religion seems neither willing nor able to avoid making God a categorical object. Religion which does avoid this seems to evaporate into a mist which perhaps does exist, but in practice it cannot be the source of religious life. Conversely, our basic starting point seems to say that God is everywhere insofar as he grounds everything, and he is nowhere insofar as everything that is grounded is created, and everything which appears in this way within the world of our experience is different from God, separated by an absolute chasm between God and what is not God.

Although we have expressed it in very formal terms, here perhaps lies the basic difficulty for all of us today. All of us, even the atheist who is troubled and terrified by the agonizing nothingness of his existence, seem to be able to be religious in the sense that we reverence the ineffable in silence, knowing that there is such a thing. It strikes us only too easily as an

irreligious indiscretion, almost as bad taste vis-à-vis this silent and religious reverence before the absolute mystery when we not only talk about the ineffable, but when beyond that we point our finger as it were at this or that particular thing among the usual pieties within the world of our experience and say: there is God. It is obvious that the historical, revealed religion which Christianity experiences its most fundamental and universal threat from this difficulty. To do justice to this difficulty we must proceed carefully and in several steps.

IMMEDIACY TO GOD AS MEDIATED IMMEDIACY

It is easy to see that however it is to be understood more exactly, either there can be no immediacy to God in his own self at all, or it cannot be impossible just because of the fact that it is mediated in some sense. If there is any immediacy to God at all, that is, if we really can have something to do with God in his own self, this immediacy cannot depend on the fact that the non-divine absolutely disappears. There can, of course, be a religious fervor which almost lives by the basic sentiment that God appears by the fact that the creature disappears. This feeling that one must vanish, as it were, if God is to become manifest is a completely understandable sentiment which is attested to repeatedly in the Old Testament. The naively religious person who imagines God in a categorical way has no difficulty with this, of course, no more than he sees a difficulty in the fact that he has freedom although he is a creature of God even in his freedom, both as faculty and as act. But the moment we experience that we come radically from God, that we are dependent on him to the last fiber of our being, then the realization that we also have freedom vis-à-vis God is truly something which is not all that self-evident.

If immediacy to God is not to be an absolute contradiction right from the start, it cannot depend on the fact that what is not God absolutely disappears when God draws near. As God he does not have to find a place by having something else which is not him make room. For at least the presence of God as the transcendental ground and horizon of everything which exists and everything which knows (and this is a presence of God, an immediacy to him) takes place precisely in and through the presence of the finite existent.

Mediation and immediacy are not simply contradictory. There is a genuine mediation of immediacy with regard to God. And when according to the understanding of Christian faith the most radical and absolutely immediate self-communication of God in his very own being is given to us,

namely, in the immediate vision of God as the fulfillment of the finite spirit in grace, this most radical immediacy is still mediated in a certain sense by the finite subject experiencing it, and thereby also experiencing itself. The finite subject does not disappear in this most immediate manifestation of God and is not suppressed, but rather it reaches its fulfillment and hence its fullest autonomy as subject. This autonomy is at once both the presupposition and the consequence of this absolute immediacy to God and from God.

Something finite as such, insofar as it appears as a definite, individual thing within our transcendental horizon, cannot represent God in such a way that, by the very fact that it is given, the very self of God is also present in a way which goes beyond the possibility of mediation in our transcendental experience. Prescinding from the fact that transcendental experience and its orientation to God can be mediated by every categorical existent, we must insist that a definite, individual thing within our transcendental horizon cannot mediate God in such a way that, simply by the fact that it is given, this presence of God over and beyond his transcendentalty could have the kind of character which we seem to presuppose in a popular interpretation of religious phenomena. This is precluded simply by the absolute difference which necessarily obtains between the holy mystery as the ground, and everything which is grounded. The individual existent in its categorical individuality and limitations can mediate God to the extent that in the experience of it the transcendental experience of God takes place. But it is admittedly still not clear why and to what extent this kind of mediation should belong to one particular categorical existent rather than to another. And not until we can explain this can there be something like a concrete religion which is practiced in the concrete with its categorical religious realities.

THE ALTERNATIVE: "DEVOTION TO THE WORLD" OR TRUE SELF-COMMUNICATION OF GOD

Hence the problem which confronts us is still unresolved. For given our presuppositions, it seems that religion is respect vis-à-vis the categorical structures of the world insofar as all of these together have a transcendental orientation towards their primordial ground, and in this kind of "religion" God really plays only an indirect role. This is the one alternative. This alternative could be called man's devotion to and respect for the world, the world in its own proper structures, including its interpersonal structures, in the knowledge that this world has an ultimate orientation towards its

transcendental ground and abyss called "God." What would be left as genuine religion is a divinely encompassed "devotion to the world." One person would worship nature as divine; another would experience the world as the location and site for his own self-liberation and his own active self-understanding; a third would perhaps be a scientist who perceives reality as beautiful in the truth he has discovered. All of this would be conceivable in the context of an ultimate relation to the ineffable and silent source and term of everything, which in fear and trembling and before the final silence could be called "God." This would describe what could perhaps be called "natural religion," "natural" because it is very difficult to distinguish clearly here between nature and supernatural grace in their mutual relationship.

Or is religion really more than "devotion to the world"? Is there the possibility of an immediacy to God in which, without him ceasing to be really himself by being made a categorical object, he no longer appears merely as the ever-distant condition of possibility for a subject's activity in the world, but actually gives himself, and this in such a way that this self-communication can be received? We shall show that the essence of this "supernatural" religion and the primary and essential difference between this religion and what we just called "natural religion" cannot be subsumed under a univocal concept of religion. At this point we must state that, at least in Christianity, there can be a "presence" of God as the condition and object of what we are accustomed to call religion in the usual sense only insofar as the representation of this presence of God (in human word, in sacrament, in a church, in a revelation, in a scripture, and so on) can essentially be nothing other than something categorical which points to the transcendental presence of God. If indeed God is to remain himself even in being mediated to us, if he is to be present to us in mediated immediacy as the one infinite reality and as the ineffable mystery, and if in this sense religion is to be possible, then this event must take place on the basis of transcendental experience as such. It must be a modality of this transcendental relationship, and this relationship does allow for an immediacy to God. Moreover, the categorical appearance and concreteness of this immediacy cannot be given in its categorical finiteness as such, but only in its character of pointing to the modality of this transcendental relationship to God which gives immediacy.

Later we shall have to ask more precisely what is the exact nature of *this* mode of a transcendental relationship of man to God. In answering this question it will be shown that the Christian interpretation of the trans-

dental experience of God consists in the fact that the holy mystery is present not only as a remoteness and distance which situates us in our finiteness, but also in the mode of an absolute and forgiving closeness and of an absolute offer of himself, all of which takes place of course only by grace and in the freedom of God communicating himself. When all of this has been shown, then we shall have to ask why such an immediacy to God does not surpass from the outset every other conceivable, categorically mediated religious presence of God as it is apparently understood by concrete religions, by a religion of miracles, of powerful interventions of God in the world, by a religion of the prayer of petition, of a covenant, of definite sacramental signs and so on in which grace takes place. We shall have to explain why all of these things, which in the usual self-understanding of religion are recognized as the presence and proclamation of God in history, are a real presence of God in his own self, and hence as really grounding religion, only if and insofar as these appearances of God in our world and in time and space are the concrete and historical actualizations of God's transcendental self-communication. Otherwise they would be miracles and not the signs of the historical revelation of God.

GOD'S ACTIVITY IN AND THROUGH SECONDARY CAUSES

Moreover, we must repeat here what Thomas Aquinas said when he emphasized that God works through secondary causes. Of course this statement has to be understood as having a variable meaning. God's immediacy, his being mediated, his presence and his absence, all of these are variable notions because spirit as transcendence is not a characteristic of every existent in the world. But here our primary concern is the statement of Thomas just mentioned. If it is not to be made innocuous, the statement says that God causes *the* world, but not really *in the* world. It says that the chain of causality has its basis in him, but not that by his activity he inserts himself as a link in this chain of causes as one cause among them. The chain itself as a whole, and hence the world in its interconnectedness, and this not only in its abstract, formal unity but also in its concrete differentiation and in the radical differences among the various elements in the whole of the world's reality, this is the self-revelation of its ground. And he himself is not to be found immediately within this totality as such. For the ground does not appear within what is grounded if it is really the radical and hence the divine ground, and is not a function in a network of functions. If, then, there is nevertheless to be an immediacy of God to us, if we are to find him in his own self here where we are in our categorical world of time and space,

then this immediacy both in itself and in its categorical, historical objectification must be embedded in this world to begin with. Then the concrete immediacy of God to us as is presupposed by and takes place in concrete religions must be a moment in and a modality of our transcendental and at the same time historically mediated immediacy to God.

A special "intervention" of God, therefore, can only be understood as the historical concreteness of the transcendental self-communication of God which is already intrinsic to the concrete world. Such an "intervention" of God always takes place, first of all, from out of the fundamental openness of finite matter and of a biological system towards spirit and its history, and, secondly, from out of the openness of the spirit towards the history of the transcendental relationship between God and the created person in their mutual freedom. Consequently, every real intervention of God in his world, although it is free and cannot be deduced, is always only the becoming historical and becoming concrete of that "intervention" in which God as the transcendental ground of the world has from the outset embedded himself in this world as its self-communicating ground.

It is a fundamental problem for a contemporary understanding of Christianity how God can really be God and not simply an element of the world, and how, nevertheless, in our religious relationship to the world we are to understand him as not remaining outside the world. The dilemma of the "immanence" or "transcendence" of God must be overcome without sacrificing either the one or the other concern. In our considerations up to now we have already met at least twice the formal structure of this peculiar relationship between transcendental beyondness and categorical accessibility. We have understood our irreducible subjectivity as well as our freedom and responsibility as fundamental human existentials which we always experience and which of course objectify themselves constantly in the concrete and in time and space, but which nevertheless are not something tangible which can be taken and defined as an object alongside of other objects.

Analogously and ultimately for the same reasons, the same formal relationship of tension obtains when we ask whether God appears in his world in a tangible way, whether, for example, he hears prayers or works signs, intervenes in history with his power, and so on. When to the extent that we are religious persons we answer these questions in the affirmative, this does not mean however that what is immediately tangible in this "intervention" does not exist in a functional relationship with the world or that it could not be explained causally. Outside of a religious and transcendental

relationship to God and in certain circumstances it might not be able to be incorporated into this functional relationship because of the fact that it is disregarded as something not yet explained and as something justifiably left out of account, but not because it is in principle removed from the causal relationships of the world. The categorical presence of God means only that when the subject really remains subject with his transcendental religious experience and lives out his subjectivity in this way, then these objectifications of God's intervention have a valuable role within this transcendental experience of God. This role indeed really belongs to these phenomena in themselves, but *only insofar as* they really and truly exist within this subjective context, and therefore they can also be recognized in the special character which belongs to them only within this context.

Let us clarify what is meant by an example which is among the most modest ways in which God intervenes in his world, and so admittedly it cannot and does not intend to represent completely the more specific mode of a higher form of divine "intervention." A "good idea" strikes me which has as its consequence an important decision which proves to be valid and objectively correct. I regard this good idea as an inspiration of God. May I? I might be led to this judgment by its suddenness or by the impossibility of finding a causal or functional explanation for the origin of this good idea. But my judgment is not ultimately justified by such a subjective impression. On the contrary, I have the right, and even the obligation to explain this sudden idea, to trace it back to associations that I am not conscious of or to a physiological and psychological constitution which perhaps cannot be analyzed exactly at the moment, to regard it as a function of myself, of my history, of my world of people and of things, of the world as such. Hence I might explain it, that is, incorporate it along with all the concrete characteristics which it has in particular into the totality of the world which is not God. To this extent, therefore, I cannot see in this "good idea" any special presence of God in the world, any "intervention of God."

But the moment I experience myself as a transcendental subject in my orientation to God and accept it, and the moment I accept this concrete world in all its concreteness and in spite of all the functional interconnectedness of all of its elements, accept it as the concrete world in which my concrete relationship to the absolute ground of my existence unfolds historically for me and I actualize it in freedom, then within this subjective, transcendental relationship to God this "good idea" receives objectively a quite definite and positive significance. Hence I can and must say: it is willed by God in this positive significance as a moment of the one world

established in freedom by its ground as the world of my subjective relationship to God, and in this sense it is an "inspiration" of God. Of course it could be objected against this that in this way everything can be regarded as a special providence, as an intervention of God, presupposing only that I accept the concrete constellation of my life and of the world in such a way that it becomes a positive, salvific concretization of my transcendental relationship to God in freedom. But against this objection we can simply ask the counter-question: Why, then, may this not be the case?

If and insofar as something is incorporated positively, not just in theory, but in the concrete exercise of freedom, into one's free relationship to God as the objectification and mediation of this relationship, it is in fact an inspiration, a mighty deed, however small, of God's providence, as we are accustomed to call it in religious terms. It is a special intervention of God. But this subjective and in fact correct response of mine in freedom to this or that particular constellation within the realm of my freedom, a constellation which, though functionally explainable, concretely mediates my relationship to God, depends, in spite of the subjective nature of my own decision and response, on factors which can be favorable or unfavorable, and in this difference are not simply and absolutely subject to my disposal.

But to this extent we can and must regard, and rightly so, a particular situation which works out for the good—as distinguished from another situation, which could have been, but is not—as in fact a special providence of God, as his intervention, as his favorable hearing, as a special grace, even if the opposite situation, handled by a correct response in human freedom, could have been made such a special act of God, but in fact was not. Because the subject's response in freedom is itself really and truly for the subject himself something given to him, without it losing thereby the character of the subject's own responsible and accountable action, a good decision along with everything which it presupposes as its mediation correctly has the character of an intervention of God, even though this takes place in and through human freedom, and hence can be explained functionally to the degree that the history of freedom can be explained, namely, insofar as it is based on elements objectified in time and space.