

1. One way of putting the insight that my study of Maurice has more and more borne in upon me is this: the very meaning of my existence as a human being is my existence in God. But for God's having created me and immediately thereupon claimed me by offering me the gift of eternal life in Godself, I would not be a human being at all. To be human, which is to say, to be given the possibility and the necessity of ever and again *becoming* human, is to be confronted with the gift and demand of God's love, which calls me beyond myself to God. But although my *acceptance* of God's gift is indeed contingent upon my own free response of obedience to the demand it implies, the gift and demand themselves are in no way thus contingent, being contingent solely on God's free decision, which is nothing other than God's decision ever and again to *become* God in relation to the creatures of God's love. Thus, although I am never without the possibility of faith, in the sense of the acceptance of God's gift and obedience to God's demand, this is in no way because this possibility belongs to me in abstraction from God's ever-renewed gift of Godself and the demand it implies. Rather, I have the possibility only because, over and above all that I myself can be and do, God never ceases to be and to act as God toward me, always summoning me beyond myself and my past to Godself as alone my final future. In short, the possibility of faith, and hence of hope and love as well, is a strictly *eschatological* possibility, which I have thanks only to the consequent, eschatological activity of God. And this is true even though, because God is "primordially consequent," my eschatological possibility is never other than my *protological* possibility, which itself—as Maurice insists—is nothing I ever had in myself, in abstraction from God, but something I have only by virtue of God's ever-renewed self-relation to me in love.

2. The merit of an integral existentialist philosophy, or, alternatively, a neoclassical metaphysics comprising ontology, cosmology, and theology as well as anthropology, is that it enables one to appropriately conceive just this basic insight: that I as a human being exist only in relation to God, by virtue of whose ever-renewed relation to me I alone have the eschatological possibility—the "impossible possibility"—of existing in faith, hope, and love.

3. But what I also see more clearly now than before is the point of both Wesley's "The Almost Christian" and many of Bultmann's essays, such as, for example, "*Die Krisis des Glaubens*" and "*Formen menschlicher Gemeinschaft*." In both cases, to be sure, the point seems to be a *christological* point; and in a sense, of course, it is. But, clearly, in both cases, it is not *only* a christological point, since what is also at issue for Wesley and Bultmann alike is whether faith is a human act or attitude, either in the sense of Schleiermacher, as Senft interprets him, with his conception of faith in terms of "formation" (= *Bildung*), or in the sense of Heidegger, Sartre, and other existentialists, for whom faith is a matter of taking one's existence upon oneself in face of nothing, in despair, in the boundary situation of being shattered, and so on; or whether, on the contrary, faith is the response of obedience evoked from a human being and made possible for her or him solely by God's prevenient love. As Bultmann says, "Christian faith is distinctive because it speaks of an event that gives faith this right [*sc.* to address God], because it hears a word that even demands of it the acknowledgement of God as other. For Christianity, faith in God is not faith and trust in God in general, but faith in a specific word proclaimed to it. The event is Jesus Christ, in whom, as is said in the New Testament, God has spoken, whom the New Testament itself speaks of as 'the word.' This means that, in what has happened in and through Christ, God has decisively revealed Godself to women and men; and in this occurrence a proclamation is established and legitimated that encounters them as God's word, that does not teach a new concept of God but rather gives them the right to believe in the God in whom they would fain believe" (GV 2: 10). Or again, "It seems to me a question whether the statement of existentialism that a human being comes to her- or himself in that she or he now independently takes her or his being upon her- or himself in despair (Sartre), in face of the imminently threatening nothing (Heidegger), or in the boundary situation of being shattered (Jaspers) must be understood as the acme of human hybris or as the expression of humility and radical openness. I mean that this is ambiguous and in the nature of the case has to be so. For here is *the point of decision*" (290). In Wesley's words, being "altogether a Christian" is, first, loving God, which means that one is "crucified to 'the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life.' Yea, [one] is dead to pride of every kind:

for 'love is not puffed up'; but '[one] that dwelling in love, dwelleth in God, and God in [one], is less than nothing in [her or] his own eyes.'" In other words, faith is the exclusion of all boasting, including that which would base itself on one's own righteousness and sincerity, instead of being "'a sure trust and confidence which [one] hath in God, that, by the merits of Christ, [one's] sins are forgiven, and [one] is reconciled to the favour of God; whereof doth follow a loving heart, to obey [God's] commandments.'"

4. As for the christological point that Bultmann and Wesley both make, I would wish to stress that there is an important difference between saying, as they both do, that Christ *gives* us the right to believe in God; and saying, as I should wish to say, that Christ *vindicates* that right. Our right to believe in God is, as Maurice would say, a "constitutional" right, always already given by God in creating us and claiming us for Godself. Still there is the need, from God's side as well as our own, for the decisive *revelation* of that right, or, as we might put it, following John Oman, for the historical *reconciliation* of human beings to God by the express vindication of our right at the level of language, and so on.

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