

*Some Thoughts After Re-Reading Religion in the Making One More Time*

1. If I ever had any doubt about it, I'm now convinced that Whitehead understands religion, quite precisely, as a world view, in just the sense in which Bultmann, for one, and Wesley, for another, strongly protest that it—or, at any rate, Christian faith—isn't. In fact, if one keeps in mind Wesley's portrait of "the almost Christian," one can say, not too unfairly, that the person Whitehead portrays as religious is, as it were, only "almost" religious. For the closest he comes to recognizing what either Bultmann or Wesley, or I myself, would think of as real religion is to define it, "on its doctrinal side," as "a system of general truths which have the effect of transforming character when they are sincerely held and vividly apprehended." As he presents it, "[y]our character is developed according to your faith," in the sense that both "your character and your conduct of life depend upon your intimate convictions." But, then, religion may be said to be "the art and the theory of the internal life of man, so far as it depends on the man himself and on what is permanent in the nature of things" (15 f.).

2. The curious notion that it's not before Whitehead came to write Part V of *Process and Reality* that he thought and wrote of God as anything more than "the principle of concretion," or "the primordial appetition," is completely negated by what he actually says several times over in *RM*. The following are some of the more important passages:

There is a quality of life which lies always beyond the mere fact of life; and when we include the quality in the fact, there is still omitted the quality of the quality. It is not true that the finer quality is the direct associate of obvious happiness or obvious pleasure. Religion is the direct apprehension that, beyond such happiness and such pleasure, there remains the function of what is actual and passing, that it contributes its quality as an immortal fact to the order which informs the world (80).

The world is at once a passing shadow and a final fact. The shadow is passing into the fact, so as to be constitutive of it; and yet the fact is prior to the shadow. There is a kingdom of heaven prior to the actual passage of actual things, and there is the same kingdom finding its completion through the accomplishment of this passage (87).

Thus if God be an actual entity which enters into every creative phase and yet is above change, He must be exempt from internal inconsistency which is the note of evil. Since God is actual, He must

include in himself a synthesis of the total universe. There is, therefore, in God's nature the aspect of the realm of forms as qualified by the world, and the aspect of the world as qualified by the forms. His completion, so that He is exempt from transition into something else, must mean that his nature remains self-consistent in relation to all change.

Thus God is the measure of the aesthetic consistency of the world. There is some consistency in creative action, because it is conditioned by his immanence (98 f.).

The order of the world is no accident. There is nothing actual which could be actual without some measure of order. The religious insight is the grasp of this truth: That the order of the world, the depth of reality of the world, the value of the world in its whole and in its parts, the beauty of the world, the zest of life, the peace of life, and the mastery of evil, are all bound together—not accidentally, but by reason of this truth: that the universe exhibits a creativity with infinite freedom, and a realm of forms with infinite possibilities; but that this creativity and these forms are together impotent to achieve actuality apart from the completed ideal harmony, which is God (119 f.).

God is the one systematic, complete fact, which is the antecedent ground conditioning every creative act.

The depths of his existence life beyond the vulgarities of praise or of power. He gives to suffering its swift insight into values which can issue from it. He is the ideal companion who transmutes what has been lost into a living fact within his own nature. He is the mirror which discloses to every creature its own greatness (154 f.).

He is the binding element in the world. The consciousness which is individual in us, is universal in him: the love which is partial in us is all-embracing in him. Apart from him there could be no world, because there could be no adjustment of individuality. His purpose in the world is quality of attainment. His purpose is always embodied in the particular ideals relevant to the actual state of the world. Thus all attainment is immortal in that it fashions the actual ideals which are God in the world as it is now. Every act leaves the world with a deeper or a fainter impress of God. He then passes into his next relation to the world with enlarged, or diminished, presentation of ideal values.

He is not the world, but the valuation of the world (158 f.).

3. It's clear that Whitehead operates in terms of his own version of the distinction that others have made between—in my words—axial and preaxial religion. His term for the first is, of course, "rational religion," whereas he speaks of the second variously as "communal religion," or "social religion" (in such phrases, e.g., as "the antecedent social religions of ritual and mythical belief," or "the antecedent type of religion, ceremonial, mythical, and sociable"), or "the more primitive type," or "the less-developed religious forms." But, unfortunately, some of his several "Religion is . . ." kind of statements, including such well-

known definitions, or quasi-definitions, as "Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness" (16), are not, as they appear to be, definitions of "religion" simply as such, but only of "*rational religion*," or "purified religion." Thus, having repeated the above definition, he says, "This point of the origin of *rational religion* in solitariness is fundamental" (58; italics added). Or, again, "In a communal religion you study the will of God in order that He may preserve you; in a purified religion, rationalized under the influence of the world-concept, you study his goodness in order to be like him. It is the difference between the enemy you conciliate and the companion you imitate" (41).

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