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From Pietism to Pluralism: Boston Personalism and the Liberal Era in American Methodist Theology, 1876-1953

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ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Amos Yong for the Master of Arts in History presented 11 May 1995.

Title: From Pietism to Pluralism: Boston Personalism and the Liberal Era in American Methodist Theology, 1876-1953.

Boston personalism has generally been recognized as a philosophic system based upon a metaphysical idealism. What is less known, however, is that the founder of this school of thought and some of the major contributors to the early development of this tradition were committed members of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The purpose of this study is to examine the contributions made by the early Boston personalists to the cause of theological liberalism in the Methodist Church. It will be shown that personalist philosophers and theologians at Boston University ushered in and consolidated the liberal era in Methodist theology. Further, it will be argued that the religious demands of the philosophy of personalism eventually led some members of the

tradition from theological liberalism to modernism and the beginnings of a religious pluralism. In other words, the thesis of this study is that the early Boston personalists were theological innovators in the Methodist Church, leading the denomination from its nineteenth-century evangelical pietism to the modernism and pluralism that was part of mid-twentieth century American Protestantism.

The focus of this study will therefore be on the first two generations of personalists at Boston University: the founder of the personalist tradition, Borden Parker Bowne, and two of his most prominent students, Albert Cornelius Knudson and Edgar Sheffield Brightman. One chapter is devoted to each of figure, focused upon the impact of their personalist philosophy and methodology on their theology and philosophy of religion, and their influence on American Methodist theology.

The period this study, which commences from the time of Bowne's appointment to the Department of Philosophy at Boston University in 1876 to the death of both Knudson and Brightman in 1953, reveals how Methodism grappled with the theological implications raised by the complexities of modernity and the emerging sciences. Attention will be focused on how the philosophical method of the personalists dictated their

movement from pietism toward liberalism and onto modernism and pluralism. As such, this study demonstrates the integral role played by the Boston personalist tradition in theological development during the liberal era of American Methodism.

FROM PIETISM TO PLURALISM:

BOSTON PERSONALISM AND THE LIBERAL ERA

IN AMERICAN METHODIST THEOLOGY, 1876-1953

by

AMOS YONG

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I initially stumbled onto Boston personalism in a course on metaphysics under Professor John Hammond during the winter of 1993 when I read a critique of Edgar S. Brightman's doctrine of The Given in Charles Hartshorne's *Creativity in American Philosophy*. After a little further digging, I felt that I had found, in Boston personalism, the convergence of philosophy, theology, and religion which I wanted to explore in my degree on intellectual history. As I conclude my work on this thesis, I am glad to report that I have not been disappointed in my expectations.

I have accrued much indebtedness during the research and writing of the last two years. Special thanks to the interlibrary loan staff at Fort Vancouver Regional Library for their endless patience and professionalism in processing the voluminous number of requests that were submitted. I am also appreciative of the staffs at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, Indiana, and the Mugar Library of Boston University for their assistance in securing sources otherwise inaccessible to me.

I am grateful to the members of my committee who have endured the inquiries I have made as a student of religion attempting to attain some proficiency as an intellectual historian. I have learned much about intellectual history from Professors Michael Reardon, Craig Wollner, and Ann Fulton which the following pages do not reveal. Professor Wollner's persistent questioning regarding the structure of this thesis has been especially invaluable.

Professor Hammond, my first teacher in philosophy, introduced me to Kant, and has patiently worked with me through a number of independent study courses on the history of American philosophy. I am grateful for his keen philosophical eye in this study as well as the stylistic suggestions that he has volunteered.

I also consider myself providentially blessed in having had the services of an outside reader, Rufus Burrow, Jr., fifth-generation personalist and presently Associate Professor of Church and Society at Christian Theological Seminary. As the foremost interpreter and proponent of the Boston personalist tradition today, Dr. Burrow has, since the summer of 1993 when I was first advised to contact him regarding my interest in the subject, been an inestimable resource. His perspicuity for details regarding the Boston

personalist tradition was evident in the extensive comments which he jotted throughout the first draft of my manuscript. He and the others, however, are completely absolved from any remaining errors of fact or interpretation as these are mine alone. In repayment for his kindness in going beyond the call of duty to provide criticism, assistance and encouragement throughout, I can only hope that this study contributes something to the renaissance of personalism of which he has been the most recent and ardent advocate.

Every effort to use inclusive language has been made in this study. Because such was not a consideration for the early Boston personalists, I have retained the patriarchal language prevalent throughout their writings whenever directly quoted. It is important to note, however, that consistent personalism cannot but include and acknowledge the worth and full personhood of both genders.

Finally, my wife, Alma, has been extremely supportive throughout this period, and I am especially grateful to her for her labor of love--which I will never be able to repay--in nurturing our three children: Aizaiah, Alyssa and Annalisa. My prayer is that her efforts will be rewarded as they make their journeys as little selves toward full personhood.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study will focus on the Boston personalist tradition and on its role as the dominant school of liberal theology in American Methodism from 1876-1953. Central to my purpose will be to show how the first two generations of personalist philosophers and theologians of Boston University --Borden Parker Bowne, Albert Cornelius Knudson, and Edgar Sheffield Brightman--ushered in and consolidated the liberal era in the Methodist church. Further, I will argue that the religious demands of personalism eventually led some members of the tradition from theological liberalism to modernism and the beginnings of a religious pluralism. In other words, I will show how the Boston personalists performed as theological innovators in the Methodist church, leading the denomination from its nineteenth century evangelical pietism to liberalism and later onto the modernism and pluralism that was part of mid-twentieth century American Protestantism.

Surveys of American philosophy have generally neglected the

personalist tradition. So also have introductory textbooks on theology in American Protestantism. This research paper will seek to fill the lacuna in both fields with this account of select personalists at Boston University.

The import of this study is further heightened when one observes the almost complete neglect of the role played by the Boston personalists in the histories of American Methodism.[1] Even when they are discussed (however meagerly), the focus is usually on their theological contributions and almost never on the intellectual foundations and philosophical method so crucial to the personalist enterprise.[2] While some attention has been paid to the development of Methodist theology up through the middle of the twentieth century, and while Bowne himself has been the subject of an intellectual biography, to my knowledge no booklength monograph deals adequately with the philosophical and intellectual issues which the Boston personalists grappled with during the era of theological liberalism which my study

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[1] This oversight is especially noticeable in Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), who refers to Bowne, Knudson, and Brightman a combined total of six times in a volume of almost 450 pages.

[2] So *The History of American Methodism*, gen. ed., Emory S. Burke, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964); see the essay by William J. McCutcheon, "American Methodist Thought and Theology, 1919-1960," 3:261-327. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism*, 319, mentions "personalism" only once, and that inconsequentially, a rather unforgivable slight considering that two of his chapters are titled "New Theology" and "New Liberalism. . . ."

covers.[3] This investigation will seek to bring to light the incisive role which personalist philosophy played in the development of Methodist theology.

Focusing on the early Boston personalists limits this study in three ways. Firstly, our attention will be on the *early* generations of personalists--Bowne, Knudson, and Brightman. *Later* Boston personalists will be referred to only as they inform our understanding of these individuals. Secondly, centering on the personalist tradition at *Boston* University means that mine will not be an exhaustive investigation of liberalism in American Methodism. It does, however, highlight the fact that while there were many

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[3] I have been able to identify one book and two dissertations on the history of American Methodist theology, all covering parts of the period proposed in my study: Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism, 1790-1935* (New York/ Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965); Leland Howard Scott, "Methodist Theology in America in the Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1954); and William J. McCutcheon, "Theology of the Methodist Episcopal Church During the Interwar Period (1919-1939)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1960; reprint, Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilm Int., 1990). Chiles, focusing strictly on theological development, limits his discussion of Knudson to theology; further, his work is admittedly an exposition of theological systems rather than a strictly historical investigation. Scott's discussion of Bowne is limited to three (out of over 500) pages. McCutcheon's dissertation does deal with both Knudson and Brightman, but understandably neglects Bowne. None of these address the relationship between philosophy and theology, much less the influence of Boston *personalism* on Methodist theology. Another earlier dissertation, William Henry Bernhardt's "The Influence of Borden Parker Bowne upon Theological Thought in the Methodist Episcopal Church" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1928), is a comparative analysis of Bowne's influence in theological method and content on his colleagues and students (including Knudson and Brightman). The strength of this somewhat dated work, however, lies in its systematic assessment rather than in its historical treatment of the subject.

other liberal Methodist theologians of repute who influenced the denomination, it is only in the personalist tradition at Boston University that we find a "school of thought" rallying around a common liberal theme.[4] Finally, this study converges on *Boston personalism* over and against the vast spectrum of personalist philosophies.[5] These others will receive brief mention only as they influenced the early Boston personalists.

A word regarding the dates of this study is appropriate. For the *terminus a quo*, I have chosen the year when Bowne accepted his first appointment to the Department of Philosophy at Boston University. Aside from one book and a few essays, most of his publications followed after this date. The year 1953 saw the death of both Knudson and Brightman, and thus serves as an appropriate *terminus ad quem.*

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[4] Other early personalists include Bishop Francis J. McConnell (later Bowne's biographer), the philosopher Ralph Tyler Flewelling, and the religious educator, George Albert Coe. Flewelling's and Coe's impact on Methodism, however, would be much more difficult to ascertain since neither taught at a Methodist institution, whereas Bowne, Knudson and Brightman were all teachers at Boston University.

[5] There is as yet no detailed comparative study on the variety of personalist philosophies. Albert C. Knudson's *The Philosophy of Personalism: A Study in the Metaphysics of Religion* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1927) leans too much towards Bowne's personal idealism. Edgar S. Brightman's "Personalism (Including Personal Idealism)," *A History of Philosophical Systems*, ed. Vergilius Ferm (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1950), 340-52, is still the most useful succinct statement. For an excellent discussion of personalist philosophies in America through the early part of this century, see Hiram Chester Weld, "Some Types of Personalism in the United States" (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1944).

It is important at this juncture to briefly define the primary "-isms" which will be used frequently in this study: the all important personalism, evangelical pietism, liberalism, evangelical liberalism, modernism, and pluralism. These concise definitions will be more fully explicated in the course of this study.

"Personalism" and its cognates in this study will refer to the philosophy of Bowne and his disciples. Briefly stated, it is a philosophical idealism which understands persons or personality to be the fundamental metaphysical category;[6] it is also unabashedly theistic. In answer to the question "What is Boston personalism?", Paul Deats, a fourth generation personalist, answered as follows:

> Personalism is a species of Personal Idealism. . . . Persons experience self-identity in change (memory), are active in knowing and choosing, are purposive and value-seeking, and are at least potentially rational. Personalist methodology is empirical in consulting human experience as a whole. Personalist epistemology is dualistic, postulating an objective order that we find and do not construct. . . . Boston personalists are metaphysical pluralists, to account for the facts of error, evil, and ignorance. In social

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[6] The idealism of the personalists held to the primacy of mind over matter in contrast to "realism" which posited the object of knowledge as having existence independent of (any) mind. It is important to note here, however, that the Boston personalists did not understand these as disparate categorizations. They were metaphysical idealists on the one hand, and epistemological realists on the other. More on this below.

> philosophy, the inter-personal focus typically becomes democratic and reformist.[7]

The remainder of this paper is devoted to explicating this brief statement and relating it to the theological views of the early personalists.

The term "evangelical pietism" captures the religious sentiments of many Methodists (including Bowne) at the end of the nineteenth century. These sentiments combined Wesleyan pietism, Edwardsean and Finneyite revivalism, and the individual and social perfectionism of the nineteenth-century.[8] Especially important for the purposes of my thesis is that the theology of evangelical pietism was authoritarian in method and traditional in nature, erected as it was primarily upon the Bible and the historic creeds of the Christian church.

When using the term "liberalism," I will be referring primarily to the rationalistic methodology of American Protestant theology at the turn of the

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[7] Paul Deats, "Introduction to Boston Personalism," *The Boston Personalist Tradition in Philosophy, Social Ethics, and Theology*, eds. Paul Deats and Carol Robb (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 3. To my knowledge, this collection of (auto)biographical and expository essays is the only published work devoted to the Boston personalist tradition. Because of its format, however, it lacks the cohesiveness which a historical study would offer regarding the first two generations of Boston personalism.

[8] See Bruce L. Shelley, *Evangelicalism in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967). Especially important for understanding nineteenth-century social Christianity in America is Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1976).

twentieth-century. While I am aware of the normal association of liberalism with the Ritschlian School and the Social Gospel, theological details varied from movement to movement if not from individual to individual. I will therefore emphasize the theological method of liberalism as defined by the University of Chicago Divinity School liberal, Gerald Birney Smith (1868-1929). Smith adequately defined "liberal theology" as "a term designating a type of religious thinking in which freedom of discussion and the right of dissent from traditional doctrine is encouraged for the sake of a closer relation between religion and culture."[9] Along these lines, "evangelical liberalism" would then refer to the attempted synthesis of the evangelical pietism representative of the nineteenth-century and the theological and doctrinal rationalism which flowered at the turn of the twentieth.

In a real sense, the terms "liberalism" and "modernism" are in many ways synonymous. In this study, however, I agree with James Livingston who follows a consensus that defines "modernism" as a more radical movement of theological liberalism in America in the years 1910-1940. Known also as the "Chicago School," this movement was characterized by

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[9] Gerald Birney Smith, "Liberal Theology," in *A Dictionary of Religion and Ethics*, eds. Shailer Matthews and Gerald B. Smith (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), 258.

an empirical and naturalistic theological method which was much more exacting than that espoused by the evangelical liberals.[10] I will therefore use the term to denote this more rigorous and radical theological method.

Finally, when I use "pluralism," I want to avoid the contemporary ethical, social, and economic implications of the phrase, and focus instead on its theological and religious significance. Theologically, "pluralism" denotes the belief that all religions are viable paths to salvation, and that none are intrinsically superior to any other.[11] This is a step beyond the "inclusivism" of liberalism that asserts the validity of all religions, albeit ultimately inferior to and subsumed under Christianity. Both stand against the "exclusivism" of traditional orthodoxy which insists on Christianity alone as true, and all other religions as false, in the quest for salvation.

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[10] See James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought from the Enlightenment to the Vatican II* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 418 ff. The chief members of the "Chicago School" were either faculty members or former students of the Divinity School including Smith himself, Shailer Matthews (1863-1941), Douglas Clyde Macintosh (1877-1948), and a little later, Henry Nelson Wieman (1884-1975). It is important to note that during the first half of this century, the "modernist" label was more of a prejorative one by which conservative thinkers referred to the more radical liberals. Only later did the distinction between "liberalism" and "modernism" obtain, and that for purposes of historical organization; it is in this later sense that this term and concept will be used here.

[11] Grant Wacker, "A Plural World: The Protestant Awakening to World Religions," *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*, ed. William R. Hutchison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 253-77, tells of the growing attraction of the pluralistic view among liberal Protestants during the years between the 1893 World's Exposition in Chicago and the 1950s.

In attempting this historical theology, my primary approach will be via a combined biographical and intellectual history. I have therefore attempted to acquaint myself with the lives and thought of the main characters of this study. This includes being thoroughly conversant with both the primary as well as secondary literature on the subject.

I will devote one chapter each to Bowne, Knudson, and Brightman, wherein I attempt three things. First, I will delineate their intellectual journeys. Second, in the body of these chapters, I will seek to explicate the impact of their personalist philosophy and methodology on their theology and philosophy of religion. In conclusion, I will identify the ways in which their formulations significantly influenced the development of American Methodist theology.

My task also demands an awareness of the history of American Christianity (especially of Methodism) during the period covered by this study, along with some familiarity with the history of American philosophy. These will be the subject of Chapter II. There, I will establish, in order, the philosophical, theological and religious contexts which form the background to this study.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS

American theology and philosophy in the middle of the nineteenth century was complicated during the 1860s and 70s by the eruption of Darwinian biology. Darwin's evolutionary theory by means of natural selection had not only undermined the age-old argument from design, but also shattered the traditional "block universe" of Greek metaphysics, positing in its place a new *Weltanschauung* that emphasized dynamism, process, and change. Various efforts were made to conceive the urgent synthesis demanded by the intellectual situation. The most distinguished of these may have been the famous Metaphysical Club that met at Harvard University. Members of this group developed Darwin's ideas both in the direction of the materialistic agnosticism propounded by the Englishman, Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), and in the evolutionary metaphysics of the logician, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). Philosophers and theologians now had to wrestle with the questions raised by modern science.

PHILOSOPHICAL CURRENTS

The early Boston personalists were by no means isolated from these issues. They understood the demands of the hour and rose to integrate science and theology. Above all, as men profoundly impacted by the thought of the Enlightenment, they, like many others, sought a critical and rational foundation. The personalism that they formed cannot be understood in isolation from the other philosophical movements of their times.

Among the leading schools of thought during the last half of the nineteenth century was the philosophy named after its Scottish originators. Herbert Schneider, a leading historian of American philosophy, has noted that "the Scottish Enlightenment was probably the most potent single tradition in the American Enlightenment."[1] Known also as "Scottish Common Sense" or "Scottish Realism," its advocates appealed to both "reason" and "moral sense" in opposition to such idealisms as the mentalistic spiritualism of the Irish philosopher, George Berkeley (1685-1753). Against Berkeley's denial of the existence of material things, they affirmed an epistemology that posited the real, independent existence of

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[1] Herbert W. Schneider, *A History of American Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), 246

objects of perception as attested by popular sensibility. Centered in America primarily at Princeton, the latter half of the nineteenth century saw president James McCosh (1811-94) and his Presbyterian colleagues (including the venerable Charles Hodge), vigorously attempt a theological synthesis of philosophy and evolutionary science. In their scheme, Darwinism was objected to only where it was at odds with the idea of teleological design.[2] In 1887, McCosh went on to call for a realistic American philosophy, "opposed to idealism on the one hand and to agnosticism on the other."[3] Personalists like Bowne, however, questioned the metaphysical adequacy of the Scottish realists and insisted on going beneath the surface appearance of things for a more accurate understanding of reality.

The rise of idealism in America during the latter half of the nineteenth century can be attributed in part to the rejection of the realistic philosophies of the previous generation whose materialistic and naturalistic systems of

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[2] For a more complete discussion of these figures as well as the broad spectrum of evangelical responses to Darwin, see David N. Livingston, *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders: The Encounter Between Evangelical Theology and Evolutionary Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987).

[3] James McCosh, *Realistic Philosophy*, quoted in Schneider, *A History of American Philosophy*, 249. McCosh was referring primarily to the speculative idealism of the German philosopher, G. W. F. Hegel, and his American followers at St. Louis, and to the English agnostic, Herbert Spencer, and his doctrine of the "Unknowable."

thought neglected concepts such as mind and consciousness. As such, idealists posited the primacy of mind, both as the foundational priority for metaphysics and in its activity in epistemology.

The euphoria of evolutionary theism found among the Scottish realists also caught the attention of some idealists philosophers. One, George Holmes Howison (1834-1916) at the University of California, named his system "personal idealism."[4] In his spiritualistic and pluralistic cosmology, he emphasized teleology and understood God as final cause while denying the doctrine of creation. Although he taught at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for a time (1872-78), his personal idealism was developed concurrently with Bowne's personalism after he landed on the other coast at

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[4] Howison's major work was *The Limits of Evolution and Other Essays Illustrating the Metaphysical Theory of Personal Idealism* (1901). The concept of persons and personality loomed large on the philosophical and theological horizons during this time, especially among the British idealists. In looking just at book titles, both Bowne and Howison were anticipated by A. S. Pringle-Pattison's 1887 *Hegelianism and Personality,* and J. R. Illingworth's 1894 Bampton Lectures, *Personality Human and Divine* (reprinted in 1913). In addition, a collection of essays was published in 1902 by a group of Oxford philosophers under the title *Personal Idealism* (from whom Howison took great pains to distinguish himself). Of greatest circulation may have been C. C. J. Webb's 1918-19 Gifford Lectures published in two volumes: *God and Personality* and *Divine Personality and Human Life.* Theological treatises included R. C. Moberly, *Atonement and Personality* (1901), and, somewhat later, John Oman, *Grace and Personality* (1925). This brief listing serves to highlight the idealistic emphasis on mind, consciousness, and personality which reigned during this period over the realism, atomism, and materialism of the previous generation.

Berkeley.[5]

Whereas there were various idealistic philosophies promulgated at the turn of the twentieth century, all were overshadowed by the Absolute Idealism of the Harvard philosopher, Josiah Royce (1855-1916). Royce introduced his Infinite or Absolute as a resolution to the fragmented (atomic) conception of reality posited by the realistic philosophies of the previous generation. As will be seen, in this doctrine Royce found himself in substantial agreement with Bowne's doctrine of the World-Ground.[6]

It is also important to realize that Royce's Absolutism was developed in part against the pluralism of his more distinguished Harvard colleague, the psychologist-turned-philosopher William James (1842-1910). James, in turn, refined his own philosophy, known also as radical empiricism or

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[5] This distinction is important since there are significant differences between Howison's and Bowne's philosophies in spite of the similar names. It is doubtful that they were completely ignorant of each other, although there is no evidence of any mutual influence. Here, I have been assisted by Rufus Burrow, Jr., who in personal correspondence, has cautioned that "there are at least a dozen types!" of personalisms, and that one need to be clear in identifying which one is being referred to (Letter to the author, 2 July 1993); more on this below.

[6] Of Bowne, Royce wrote, "I suppose that our agreements were rather on the increase toward the end of his work. I always prized him much" (initially in the *Methodist Review* 105 [1922], reprinted in Edgar S. Brightman, "The Sources of Bowne's Power," *Studies in Personalism: Selected Writings of Edgar Sheffield Brightman,* eds. Warren E. Steinkraus and Robert N. Beck [Utica, NY: Meridian Publishing Co., 1984], 96).

pragmatism, in his efforts to refute Royce. For James, idealistic monisms (such as Royce's Absolute) could not adequately account for the disparate facts of reality such as human freedom and the problem of evil. Further, the abstract speculations characteristic of the idealisms at that time did not suit the more empirically minded James.[7] Ironically, the idealism of the Boston personalists would be more consonant in many ways with James' pluralism. While they agreed with Royce in the primacy of mind, they sided with James in asserting the ontic reality and freedom of the individual.

The next generation at Harvard brought the arrival from England of the mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947). Whitehead's philosophy of organism posited a panpsychistic cosmology that emphasized sentience, dynamic movement, and atomic realities. In this way, he succeeded in combining both idealistic and realistic elements, integrating science and metaphysics. There was both sympathy and criticism expressed by later personalists such as Brightman for Whitehead and his disciples.

It is by no means insignificant that Whitehead's philosophy included a healthy dose of realism since the resurgence of realism was given impetus by

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[7] For a detailed treatment of the James-Royce debates, see Bruce Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1860-1930* (1977; reprint ed., New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), Part III.

two of his colleagues at Cambridge.[8] The first realistic reaction, known as "Neo-Realism," was led by a student of James, Ralph Barton Perry (1876-1957), and consolidated by a his joint efforts with five others in their 1912 publication, *The New Realism*. Advancing beyond the Scottish realism of the previous century, the Neo-Realists attempted both to answer Royce's attack on realism and to set forth a scientifically based reformed program of constructive realistic philosophy. These in turn were followed by the Critical Realists whose strength "lay in attack."[9] This offensive against idealism aggressively combined an empirical method, a realistic epistemology, and naturalistic materialism. As will be shown, second generation personalists were much more empirical than Bowne had been. In addition, the epistemological dualism of the personalists paralleled the realistic theory of knowledge to a certain extent. The personalists, however, soundly rejected the naturalism and materialism of these later realistic philosophies.

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[8] Namely, G. E. Moore (1873-1958), the analytic philosopher, with his famous essay titled "The Refutation of Idealism" in 1903, and Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), the naturalist philosopher, whose influence was felt across the Atlantic. Their chief targets were the absolute idealisms of their countrymen, F. H. Bradley (1846-1924) and Bernard Bosanquet (1848-1923).

[9] Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. VIII: *Bentham to Russell* (1967; reprint ed., New York: Image Books, 1985), 391. Members of this group included George Santayana (1863-1952) of Harvard, Arthur O. Lovejoy (1873-1962) of John Hopkins, and Roy Wood Sellers (1880-1973) of the University of Michigan.

None of these currents escaped the attention of the personalists. While similar in many ways to the various schools of idealism because of their idealistic vision, there were just as many crucial points of divergence which separated the personalists from their philosophical relatives. In a very real sense, the Boston personalists hammered out their system in response to both their idealistic kinsmen and their realistic opponents while attempting to reconcile their theistic philosophy with modern science.

THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM IN AMERICAN PROTESTANTISM

The Boston personalists, however, were also committed churchmen. As such, their task was complicated by another complex variable, that of doctrinal orthodoxy. Their personalistic theology was forged against the developing liberalism among Protestant denominations.

Orthodoxy in the nineteenth century had to weather one theological storm after another. From the Unitarianism and universalism in the first half to the post-Darwinian debates and the rise of Fundamentalism during the latter part of the century, the winds of doctrine teemed with ideas from Europe. From Germany came Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), whose "theology of feeling" subjectivised the nature of theology; F. C. Baur (1792-

1860), whose historical-critical method disavowed the supernatural origins of Christianity; and Albrecht Ritschl (1822-89), whose moral theology rejected all forms of mysticism and metaphysics. From France came the positivism of August Comte (1798-1857), who asserted that the advance of science had effectively displaced the theological and metaphysical speculations of past generations, and Ernst Renan (1823-92), whose celebrated *Life of Jesus* (1863) bore the stamp of Comte in leading toward theological skepticism. From England came the already mentioned evolutionary philosophy and religious agnosticism of Herbert Spencer, and the imposing character of the renowned atheist, Bertrand Russell. The struggle of the various denominations during this period to maintain theological orthodoxy while adjusting to modernity was marked by both ecclesiastical squabbles and heresy trials.[10]

Central to the theological revolution which was occurring at this time was the issue of theological method. The preeminent historian of dogma, Jaroslav Pelikan, has said that

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[10] For a brief, yet thorough discussion of the intellectual turmoil in American Protestantism during this later period, see Kenneth Scott Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*, vol. III: *The 19th Century Outside Europe* (1961; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969), Chapter VII.

> . . . the modern period in the history of Christian doctrine may be defined as the time when doctrines that had been assumed more than debated for most of Christian history were themselves called into question: the idea of revelation, the uniqueness of Christ, the authority of Scripture, the expectation of life after death, even the very transcendence of God.[11]

The battle lines were thereby drawn, separating the conservative (and later Fundamentalists) from the evangelical liberals and the modernists especially on the questions surrounding authority and revelation. The conservatives, following the Princeton apologists, continued to stand on the doctrine of the divine inspiration and infallibility of Scripture, and clung to both the Bible and the historical creeds as authoritative revelations of the one true God and the Christian religion. On the other end of the spectrum, the modernists repudiated dogmatic reliance on these sources and subjected both to the findings of modern science and scholarship. As a mediating group, the evangelical liberals (including the Boston personalists) sought to de-emphasize dogmatic theological and doctrinal speculations while retaining the centrality of Christ and the Christian ethic; their objective was to harmonize religion and science, and to make Christianity intelligible to the

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[11] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 5, *Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (since 1700)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), viii.

modern mind.

Sydney Ahlstrom has identified seven main tenets in the liberal creed of American Protestantism at the turn of the twentieth century:

1. tolerance for intellectual and creedal diversity
2. Arminian/Pelagian view of humanity
3. emphasis on ethical preaching and moral education
4. optimism regarding human progress
5. a historical understanding of religion
6. a strong monistic tendency in philosophical and theological issues
7. emphasis on God's immanence rather than transcendence.[12]

All of these were exemplified in a movement known as the Social Gospel.

The champion of the Social Gospel was Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918). Deeply influenced by the Ritschlian theology, he called for a social understanding of Christianity and for moral responsibility. The emergence of this movement at this point in history can be understood as reflective of the general mood of American intellectual life, finding other expressions in political Populism and the great agrarian crusades. As heirs of both the social revivalism and individual pietism of nineteenth century Wesleyan Methodism, the personalists also emphasized social themes in their theological works. World War I shattered the optimism of the Social

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[12] Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1972), 779-81.

Gospellers, and whatever impulse sustained by the movement in the 1920s was effectively ended by the Great Depression of the following decade.

The demise of the vitality of the Social Gospel also heralded the advent of Neo-Orthodoxy after the first World War. Taking their cue from the Danish thinker, Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55), whose theology of paradox called for a fideistic response to the ambiguities of human existence, Lutheran theologians like Karl Barth (1886-1968) and Emil Brunner (1889-1966) resoundingly rejected both the rationalism and the optimism of the liberalism which preceded them. In calling for a return to biblical theology, Barth was especially hostile toward all forms of natural theology. While it is true the Neo-Orthodox theologians were severely critical of the rationalism of much of liberal theology, they by no means advocated a return to a simplistic biblicism. Rather, they were historically erudite both theologically and philosophically. As such, the Boston personalists recognized the threat posed by the Neo-Orthodox thinkers and took these assailants of reason to task in defense of their own philosophical and theological method.

In contrast to Barth who rejected natural theology, the modernists sought to develop theology as an empirical science. With the arrival of the various scientific disciplines at the turn of the century, these thinkers denied

that theology occupied a ruling position over other fields of knowledge. Rather, as Kenneth Cauthen has summarized, the modernists insisted that

> the standard by which the abiding values of the Christianity of the past were to be measured was derived from the presuppositions of modern science, philosophy, psychology, and social thought. Nothing was to be believed because it was to be found in the Bible or Christian tradition. . . . The thinking of these men was not Christocentric. Jesus was important--and even unique--because he illustrated truths and values which are universally relevant. However, these truths and values can be validated and even discovered apart from Jesus.[13]

Because personalists like Brightman agreed that liberal theology needed to be more empirical, he himself was, at certain points, hard pressed to reject the radical conclusions called for by strict empiricism.[14]

As Protestants, the personalists were very much concerned with the theological movements sketched here. In addition, however, they were also loyal Methodists, and as such, also had to reckon specifically with the Wesleyan theological tradition.

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[13] Kenneth Cauthen, *The Impact of American Religious Liberalism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 29.

[14] Interestingly, Brightman's radical conclusions reached via his radical empiricism have led some to question whether or not he even believed in God at all (see Walter G. Muelder, "Edgar S. Brightman: Person and Moral Philosopher," in Deats and Robb, eds., *The Boston Personalist Tradition*, 107).

METHODISM AT THE END OF NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICA

Early nineteenth century Methodist theology stood on the foundation of its Wesleyan origins. Initially reliant on their British predecessors, American Methodist theologians did not make substantial contributions of their own until the latter part of the nineteenth century.[15] The Methodist historian, Leland Scott, concludes that the quest of American Methodist theology during this time was motivated by the dual concerns of individuality and of evangelicalism. The former emphasized personal experience (including moral agency) and personal holiness (perfectionist piety), and the latter doctrinal orthodoxy (especially a Calvinistic soteriology which underscored the divine initiative of salvation based upon the centrality of Christ and his atoning work).[16] Thus, for example, the Methodist doctrine of entire sanctification--the belief in the possibility of attaining a

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[15] Theologians of distinction included Daniel Denison Whedon (1808-85) who edited the *Methodist Quarterly Review* from 1856-81, Miner Raymond (1811-97) at Garrett Biblical Institute, Thomas O. Summers (1811-97 also) at Vanderbilt University, John Miley (1813-95) at Drew Theological Seminary, and William F. Warren (1833-1929) at Boston University. For a compact statement of the contributions of these men, see David C. Shipley, "The Development of Theology in American Methodism in the Nineteenth Century," *London Quarterly & Holborn Review* 28 (1959): 249-64.

[16] Leland Howard Scott, "Methodist Theology in America in the Nineteenth Century," 517-519.

state of heart holiness purged from the corruption of original sin--while formulated in such a way as to inspire personal holiness and social action, was also understood as resting on divine favor rather than on earned merit.

With the onslaught of modern science and scholarship, after 1870 the stubborn determination of the Methodists to sustain theological orthodoxy gave way to "a desire to encourage contemporary intellectual relevancy, even if it meant the revision of traditional doctrinal formulations."[17] It is not coincidental that this same period featured the rise to prominence of several Methodist educational institutions as well as the first sustained period of theological productivity by the denomination's thinkers. The emergence of personalism at Boston University was the most aggressive effort within Methodist circles to come to terms with the complexities of modernity.

Boston University was incorporated on 26 May 1869. Its Board, a group of loyal Methodists, followed their founder, John Wesley, in upholding a tolerant attitude with regard to the non-essentials of doctrine.[18]

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[17] Leland H. Scott, "The Methodist Episcopal Church in the Postwar Era," in Burke, ed., *The History of American Methodism*, 2:385.

[18] The Boston University Charter read, "No instructor in said University shall ever be required by the Trustees to profess any particular religious opinions as a test of office..., nevertheless, that this section shall not apply to the theological department of said University" (quoted in Kathleen Kilgore, *Transformations: A History of Boston University*

The progressive posture of the University is best exemplified in its first president, William F. Warren.

Having studied at the Universities of Berlin and Halle, Warren was one of the first Methodists to wrestle with the philosophic tradition of Leibnitz, Kant and Hegel. He also understood that rather than fearing German scholarship, American Methodism needed to interact critically with all that the Continent had to offer in order to adequately respond to the crisis posed by the emergence of modern science. To supply this need and to train a generation of intellectually armed Methodist ministers, Warren amassed a staff of German-trained faculty for the theological department. Those who received part of their education at Leipzig were Henry Clay Sheldon, who arrived in 1875 (to teach church history and historical theology), Hinckley G. Mitchell, in 1884 (biblical studies), and Olin Curtis, in 1889 (systematic theology).[19] Bowne, who studied at Paris, Halle, and Gottingen, was added to the philosophy department in 1876. His tenure eventually resulted in the birth of the Boston personalist tradition.

[Boston: Boston University Press, 1991], 31). The theological department merged with Boston Theological Seminary in 1871.

[19] For an account of these and other members of the first School of Theology faculty, see Richard M. Cameron, *Boston University School of Theology, 1839-1968* (Boston: Boston University School of Theology, 1968).

CHAPTER III

BOWNE: FROM PIETISM TO EVANGELICAL LIBERALISM

BIOGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS

Borden Parker was born on 14 January 1847, to Joseph and Margaret Parker Bowne.[1] One of six children, he grew up in a New Jersey farmhouse not far from the sea. His father was a morally direct preacher of Puritan stock, and a champion of abolitionism. As a religious mystic of sorts, his mother was an avid consumer of the widely circulated devotional, *Guide to Holiness*, a periodical which promoted holiness and perfectionist ideas amongst Methodists in mid-nineteenth century America. Her pietistic leaven permeated the family home and left an indelible imprint on the young Bowne. Peter A. Bertocci correctly surmises that these parental influences left the young Bowne "with a sense of moral tidiness, an enjoyment of

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[1] Although devoted primarily to Bowne's philosophy, Francis J. McConnell's *Borden Parker Bowne* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1929) contains detailed biographical information. My sketch of Bowne's life relies on this work unless otherwise noted.

nature, and a feeling for religious transcendence that was no flight from orderly thought, nor from firm moral practice."[2]

At seventeen, Bowne left home for Brooklyn and drove a delivery wagon in preparing himself for further education. He attended Pennington Seminary for one year, and then entered New York University in 1867 where he received his B.A. as a valedictorian four years later after a fairly standard humanistic education.[3] This was furthered by a year of study in Europe (1873-74) and completed with the granting of his M.A. by New York University in 1876.

Although he was always critical of officialism, Bowne remained a devoted Methodist throughout his life.[4] He joined the New York Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1872, served a brief pastorate in the Conference at Whiteside (1872-73), and was ordained ten

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[2] Peter A. Bertocci, "Borden Parker Bowne and His Personalistic Theistic Idealism," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 2:3 (1979), reprinted with some alterations in Deats and Robb, eds., *The Boston Personalist Tradition*, 55-80; quote from p. 56.

[3] A transcript listing Bowne's undergraduate curriculum can be found in McConnell, *Borden Parker Bowne*, 28.

[4] Bowne's student, George A. Coe, tell us that it was his "simple loyalty to the church--loyal to his local society, to the denomination as a whole and the whole church" which allowed Bowne to be "so uncompromising in his criticisms" ("Borden Parker Bowne," *Methodist Review* 93 [July 1910]: 517).

years later. Bowne's commitment to his denomination is further evidenced by the fact that he turned down an attractive salary and post at the new University of Chicago to continue his work at Boston University. His lifelong piety also found regular expression in his faithful attendance at the weekly prayer meeting of St. Mark's Methodist Church in Brookline.

In 1876, after a year on the editorial staff of *The Independent* (a New York journal to which he also contributed a number of articles and book reviews) and a stint as assistant professor of modern languages at New York University, Bowne was extended the professorship of philosophy by President Warren.[5] He remained in this position for the next thirty four years, maintaining an indefatigable teaching and writing schedule.[6] This was broken only by his year-long world tour beginning in the fall of 1905. Bowne died abruptly of a heart attack on 1 April 1910, at the age of 63.

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[5] Warren undoubtedly saw in the twenty-nine year old Bowne the promise to fulfill what he (Warren) had earlier foreseen as an "impending revolution in Anglo-Saxon theology." In a two-part article written in the early 1860s, Warren surmised that the change from the mechanical theory of physics to the dynamic theory would necessitate a similar transition in theology (see Warren's "The Impending Revolution in Anglo-Saxon Theology," *Methodist Review* 45 [July 1863]: 455-74 and 579-600). Bowne's life work would confirm the president's intuition.

[6] Bowne authored seventeen books and over 150 articles and book reviews throughout the course of his career, most of them while teaching at least eight course hours per week.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF BOWNE'S PERSONALISTIC THEISTIC IDEALISM

One of Bowne's foremost interpreters, Albert C. Knudson has observed that "with the revision of his *Metaphysics* in 1898 and his *Theism* in 1902 Bowne's creative work in philosophy was virtually done. After this he devoted himself largely to popularizing the conclusions he had reached and to applying them to the problems of religion."[7] Since Bowne's more strictly theological work in the last decade of his life was drawn from his philosophical conclusions, it is important that some attention be given first to his personalistic philosophy.

A fairly descriptive summary of Bowne's philosophy is found in a letter written toward the end of his life. In it, he wrote,

> It is hard to classify me with accuracy. I am a theistic idealist, a personalist, a transcendental empiricist, an idealist realist, and a realist idealist; but all these phrases need to be interpreted. They cannot well be made out from the dictionary. Neither can I well be called a disciple of anyone. I largely agree with Lotze, but I transcend him. I hold half of Kant's system but sharply dissent from the rest. There is a strong smack of Berkeley's philosophy, with a complete

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[7] Albert C. Knudson, "Bowne as Teacher and Author," *The Personalist* 1:2 (July 1920): 10. Bowne's *Metaphysics* was originally published in 1882, and his *Theism* was a revision of his *Philosophy of Theism* (1887) for the occasion of the Deems Lectures at New York University in 1902.

> rejection of his theory of knowledge. I am a Personalist, the first of the clan in any thoroughgoing sense.[8]

It is fair to say that Bowne found support for his personalism chiefly from the three philosophers mentioned here.[9]

In a dissertation completed under Brightman on Bowne's relationship to the philosopher-cleric Berkeley, Gail Cleland deduces that in all probability, Bowne became acquainted with and approved of the general outlines of the Irish Bishop's theistic idealism before his year of studies in Europe.[10] Bowne, however, objected to Berkeley's doctrine of thoroughgoing immaterialism, wherein the Irishman denied material existence and identified being with perception. Also called spiritualism or subjective idealism, Berkeley held that physical objects were ideas presented to the human mind and the human perception by God. In contrast to this view of material reality as but an effect in us, Bowne posited the objective

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[8] Borden Parker Bowne, letter, 31 May 1909, in *The Personalist* 1 (1921), reprinted in McConnell, *Borden Parker Bowne*, 280.

[9] I am indebted at various points in the following account of Bowne's relationship to Berkeley, Kant, and Lotze to Chapter One of Rufus Burrow, Jr.'s forthcoming *Personalism: A Critical Introductory Exposition.*

[10] Gail Cleland, "The Relation Between Berkeley and Bowne" (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1924), 161. Unfortunately, Bowne referenced other thinkers sparingly and even then, usually critically. Attempts to discern possible influences on his philosophy must therefore be partially inferred and thus perhaps tentative in its conclusions.

existence of things apart from the human mind.[11] Against Berkeley's "*esse est percipi*" ("to be is to be perceived"), Bowne asserted an epistemological dualism which distinguished between the human knower and the known object. Thus, by the time his *Studies in Theism* was submitted for publication in 1879, he called his system "rational idealism" or "objective idealism" in contrast to the Bishop's subjective idealism.[12]

Bowne was probably initially exposed to Kant at about the same time he was to Berkeley, and engaged with the critical philosophy of the Koenigsberger all his life. Kant, as is well known, held not only that knowledge was mediated through sense experience of the phenomenal realm but also that the structures of knowledge were determined by the human understanding (or, the categories of the mind). In recognition of the import of Kant's epistemology as an ally against Berkeley's immaterialism, Bowne called his system "Kantianized Berkeleianism."[13] He understood Kant's

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[11] Bowne, however, agreed with Berkeley that nothing existed independently of *any* or *all* mind, since all phenomenal reality was dependent on the divine mind.

[12] Borden Parker Bowne, *Studies in Theism* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden, 1880), 38 ff. Again, Bowne emphasized that objects of human knowledge existed apart from human minds, but not independent of *any or all* mind--hence his "idealism."

[13] Borden Parker Bowne, *Metaphysics* (1882; rev. ed., 1898; reprint ed., Boston: Boston University Press, 1943), 423; future references to Bowne's *Metaphysics* will be to this edition unless otherwise noted.

doctrine of the activity of the mind in the knowledge process as a valuable corrective to Berkeley's (and Locke's) theory of the mind as a *tabula rasa*.

Bowne, however, chided Kant for denying that we can know anything of the noumenal reality which lay behind the phenomenal world. Unlike Kant who neglected applying the categories of thought to the *Ding an sich*, Bowne insisted that "intelligence cannot be understood through the categories, but the categories must be understood through our living experience of intelligence itself."[14] At the very least then, Bowne argued that the Kantian epistemology led to the recognition of the metaphysical self as a valid object of knowledge. Therefore, insofar as Kant failed to follow through with this step, Bowne was prepared to call into question the validity of the the Kantian doctrine of agnosticism regarding things-in-themselves.[15]

By 1905, then, in discussion with his former student Francis McConnell, Bowne was considering changing the name of his system to that of "personalism." Over and against that of "personal idealism," he insisted

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[14] Ibid., 424-5; thus Bowne also called his system "transcendental empiricism," denoting the "active self-experience of intelligence."

[15] Bowne argued against this aspect of Kant's philosophy all his life as he rightly saw that it led ultimately to an agnosticism similar to Spencer's Unknowable. For his most thorough statement, see his chapter "Noumena and Phenomena" in *Kant and Spencer* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1912), 109-60.

--based on a richer notion of personality--on having "the emphasis kept unmistakably on the personal element."[16] This transition may very well be understood to constitute the combined result of years of reflection which Bowne had given to metaphysics, his own theistic predisposition, as well as the influence, in 1874, of his teacher at Gottingen, Rudolf Hermann Lotze (1817-81). As with Berkeley, Bowne found in the personalistic elements of Lotze's theistic idealism confirmation of his own philosophical conclusions.

At the same time, Bowne faulted his teacher for granting, as Kant also did, more prominence to the categories of thought than to the self. Further, Lotze's was not a thoroughgoing personalism in that he did not apply the category of person to God. For Bowne, however, the end result of philosophical inquiry could be none other than a completed personalistic-theistic-idealism which he felt was partially obscured in his former teacher.[17]

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[16] Bowne, quoted in Francis J. McConnell, "Borden Parker Bowne," *Methodist Review* 105 (May 1922): 342.

[17] This may explain Bowne's early acknowledgment of Lotze's influence along with his later silence regarding the latter. Bowne confesses his obligation to Lotze in *Studies in Theism*, vi, and the first edition of his *Metaphysics* ([New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882], vii); interestingly, this indebtedness is missing from the preface to the revised edition even though Bowne says that "for 'substance of doctrine' the teaching is the same" (*Metaphysics*, rev. ed., iii).

Cleland, "The Relation Between Bowne and Berkeley," 162, tells us by the authority of Knudson that "Bowne had worked out the main outline of his philosophy while in college before he knew anything about Lotze." While I have not been able to corroborate this in any of Knudson's writings, Bowne's essays on Spencer in the *New*

This profoundly theistic character of Bowne's idealistic philosophy has led Rufus Burrow, Jr. to liken Bowne to Spinoza as a "God-intoxicated philosopher."[18] The important question at this juncture therefore is how Bowne arrived at his theistic conclusion. Although Bowne was raised in a pietistic Christian home, his mature theism was not a sentimental construct, but rather, for the most part, the result of rigorous philosophic reasoning.[19] It is fortunate for us that Bowne clearly delineated his philosophic method in two places: an early essay, "The Logic of Religious Belief" (1879), and later, in the introductory chapter to his *Theism.*

Bowne's essay focused on what he called at the time the "psychology of belief."[20] Religious belief, Bowne argued, differed from scientific or

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Englander in 1872-73 (revised and published as *The Philosophy of Herbert Spencer* in 1874) appear to provide ample confirmation of this statement.

[18] Rufus Burrow, Jr., "Borden Parker Bowne's Doctrine of God," *Encounter* 53:4 (Autumn 1992): 397; Burrow is simply pointing to Bowne's encompassing theism and not at all suggesting that Bowne's is a pantheism like Spinoza's. McConnell, *Borden Parker Bowne*, 76-77, preserves an interesting illustration of this point when he reports on how Bowne's contemporary at Harvard, William James, would when presenting an alternative theistic perspective on a philosophical issue during the course of his lectures, refer to one of Bowne's volumes in hand and declare, "Now lets see what God Almighty has to say."

[19] I will later raise the question of whether or not Bowne was fully consistent in applying the principles of personalism to his theism.

[20] Borden Parker Bowne, "The Logic of Religious Belief," *Methodist Review* 61 (1879), reprinted in *Representative Essays of Borden Parker Bowne*, ed. Warren E. Steinkraus (Utica NY: Meridian Publishing Company, n.d.), 152. In a later book, Bowne

logical belief. Science and mathematics, for example, required that "nothing may be believed which is not proved, or at least made probable, by objective facts." In contrast, religion followed what Bowne called the "law of the mind." This law was none other than our guide to life: "Whatever the mind demands for the satisfaction of its subjective interests and tendencies may be assumed as real, in default of positive proof."[21] Bowne concluded that "the principles of mental movement are to be sought, not in logic, but in life."[22] As such, Bowne had in essence adjudicated the religious question by a sort of pragmatism.

Bowne's "pragmatism" was similar to that articulated later by William James. James himself acknowledged this in a letter to Bowne after reading the latter's *Personalism*: ". . . our emphatic footsteps fall on the *same spot*. You, starting near the rationalist pole, and boxing the compass, and I traversing the diameter from the empiricist pole, reach practically very similar positions and attitudes. It seems to me that this is full of promise for

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dealt at length on the psychology of mind itself; see *Introduction to Psychological Theory* (New York: American Book Company/Harper & Brothers, 1886).

[21] Bowne, "The Logic of Religious Belief," 156.

[22] Ibid., 161.

the future of philosophy."[23] While one student of Bowne's thought has argued cogently that James was Bowne's "most direct and decisive pragmatic influence," it should be noted that James laid greater emphasis on the *will* to believe, whereas Bowne focused more on the *rationale* behind that will.[24]

This method was developed and refined over the years. By the time Bowne prepared his *Theism* for publication in 1902, he was able to sum up his approach in the following sentences:

> . . . most of our time will be devoted to discussing the question of intelligence versus non-intelligence. The idea of God may be treated from a double standpoint, metaphysical and religious. In the former, God appears as the principle of knowing and explanation. In the latter, he is the implication of the religious consciousness, or that without which that consciousness would fall into discord with itself.[25]

Loosely defined, this was a four-pronged argument for theism--from intelligence, epistemology, metaphysics and religious consciousness--which

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[23] William James to Bowne, 17 August 1908, in McConnell, *Borden Parker Bowne*, 278; italics James'.

[24] Edward T. Ramsdell, "The Sources of Bowne's Pragmatism," *The Personalist* 16 (Summer 1935): 133 ff. For more detailed comparisons, see Wilbur Long, "The Religious Philosophy of Bowne and James," *The Personalist* 5 (1924): 250-63, and Herbert Schneider's introductory essay, "Bowne's Radical Empiricism," in Steinkraus, ed., *Representative Essays of Borden Parker Bowne*, xi-xv

[25] Borden Parker Bowne, *Theism* (New York and Cincinnati: American Book Company, 1902), 39.

can be seen in all of Bowne's philosophical publications. A brief review of these arguments will shed light on the final form of Bowne's personalism.

The crux of Bowne's theistic arguments turned on the question of whether or not the world could be better explained by the appeal to intelligence (idealism) or to non-intelligence (materialism), since there could be no "third something higher than either, and transcendental to both."[26] There was therefore no contest between theistic and non-theistic systems of philosophy--whether they be nihilistic skepticism, agnosticism, mechanistic naturalism, materialism, or atheism, against all of which Bowne waged a lifelong battle--since it was all too obvious to him that "the non-intelligent does not explain the intelligent."[27] Thus, for example, while Darwinism had bequeathed to Bowne's generation the general conception of the "organic connection and unity in the world of living things," yet, this connection and unity "must be found not in the space and time world, where everything is outside of every other, but rather in the world of thought, where alone things

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[26] Borden Parker Bowne, *Philosophy of Theism* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1887), 27.

[27] Bowne, *Studies in Theism*, 168.

are truly united in one systematic whole."[28] Here, of course, one can discern Bowne's own modified version of the traditional cosmological and teleological arguments, combining elements of design and purpose found in the universe.

Closely related to this was the epistemological argument. Skeptics such as Spencer and his American disciple, John Fiske, were invariably targets of Bowne's polemical criticism.[29] Via his epistemological dualism--that objects of human knowledge exist independently of human minds--Bowne defined "knowledge" as "the certainty that our conceptions correspond to reality or to truth. By reality, we mean any matter of fact, whether of the outer or inner world. By truth, we mean rational principles."[30] On the one hand, to deny the possibility of attaining reality would ultimately lead to solipsism, a generally anathematized conclusion

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[28] Borden Parker Bowne, "Darwin and Darwinism," *The Hibbert Journal* 8 (1909-10): 138.

[29] A condensed version of the argument in the two books Bowne wrote refuting Spencer can be found in his "Mr. Spencer's Philosophy," *Methodist Review* 86 (July 1904): 513-31. On Bowne's repudiation of Fiske's *Outlines of the Cosmic Philosophy* (1874), see his early review article, "The Cosmic Philosophy," *Methodist Quarterly Review* 58 (1876): 655-78.

[30] Bowne, *Studies in Theism*, 13-14; Bowne discusses the matter extensively in *Theory of Thought and Knowledge* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1899), 267 ff.

among philosophers. On the other, to reject the notion of truth altogether would be to abandon the scientific quest since it was clear to Bowne that "the possibility of objective science depends on the assumption of perfect parallelism between the rational and the real, between mind working according to its law and things working according to their laws."[31] For Bowne, therefore, "the cognitive ideal of the universe, as a manifestation of the Supreme Reason, leads to theism."[32]

Bowne devoted an entire volume to the discussion of metaphysics. In it, he argued from the notion of being, the nature of things, change and identity, and causality, to God.[33] Bowne explained the antithesis between being and becoming by reconceiving being as action:

> Action is a dynamic consequence of being, and is coexistent with it. Neither can be thought without the other, and neither was before the other. Being did not first exist, and then act; neither did it act before it existed; but both being and action are given in indissoluble unity.

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[31] Bowne, *Studies in Theism*, 133.

[32] Bowne, *Philosophy of Theism*, 264. Bowne never relinquished the epistemological argument, as seen in an essay dictated to his stenographer two days before his death: "The problem of knowledge implies that nature is a world of meanings, and this implies thought at both ends--thought at the further end to make nature the bearer of meanings, and thought at the nearer end to receive and rethink the meanings" ("Present Status of the Conflict of Faith," *Methodist Review* 105 [May 1922]: 369).

[33] Bowne, *Metaphysics*, Part I, Chapters I-IV.

> Being has its existence only in its action, and the action is possible only through the being.[34]

Nature was thus constituted by this law of activity. Further, only conscious intelligence could resolve the antinomy between permanence and change; this, Bowne was prepared to call the personal soul, whose permanence consisted "in thought, memory, and self-consciousness."[35] It was also in this same "self-determining intelligence" that Bowne found the explanatory key to the concept of causality: "Volitional causality, that is, intelligence itself in act, is the only conception of metaphysical causality in which we can rest."[36]

These inquiries led Bowne to conclude that "active intelligence cannot be understood through the metaphysical categories, but these categories must be understood as realized in active intelligence."[37] The evidence thus pointed to a fundamental cosmic reality which Bowne identified as the World-Ground. By this, Bowne spoke not of "spatial support [nor] a raw material out of which things are made, but rather of that basal causality by

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[34] Ibid., 24.

[35] Ibid., 63.

[36] Ibid., 92.

[37] Ibid., 91.

which the world is produced and maintained."[38] Bowne challenged the opponents of idealism to look beyond the phenomenal world. Phenomena are "real," albeit dependent on and revealing of a deeper abiding reality. "Materiality is but the phenomenal product of a dynamism beneath it,"[39] and this dynamism is none other than the World-Ground. As a unity, the World-Ground therefore points away from a cosmic dualism (or pluralism--whether in terms of polytheism or atomism) towards an ontological monism, and it is only within such a reality that a viable pluralism (e.g., human individuality and freedom) can subsist.

Finally, Bowne called on the religious consciousness of the race as a witness to the fact that "religion is founded in human nature as one of its essential needs and constitutional tendencies."[40] So deeply embedded within the human experience is religion that efforts to exorcise it have not succeeded. Bowne, however, was careful not to claim following either this or the totality of his argument that theism was proven. Rather, he followed his philosophic method and asserted that "theism is the fundamental

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[38] Ibid., 93.

[39] Ibid., 18.

[40] Bowne, *Theism*, 9.

postulate of our total life. It cannot, indeed, be demonstrated without assumption, but it cannot be denied without wrecking all our interests."[41] Further, "in these matters it is never a question of finding a line of no resistance for thought, but the line of least resistance."[42] It was, for Bowne, theism which followed the latter since it provided the most satisfactory solutions to many of the knotty problems posed by philosophy as well as life's experiences.

Both *Philosophy of Theism* and *Theism* were expositions of Bowne's doctrine of the World-Ground. In the Preface to the latter book, Bowne captures fully the essentials of his theistic philosophy in a pregnant paragraph which deserves to be recited:

> And as epistemology reveals the suicidal nature of atheistic thought, so metaphysical criticism shows the baselessness of its metaphysics. The crude realism of popular thought, when joined with the notion of mechanical necessity, furnishes excellent soil for an atheistic growth. This realism in its popular form may be regarded as finally set aside, and also the mechanical naturalism based on it. Philosophy is coming to see the emptiness of all philosophizing on the mechanical and impersonal plane; so that the choice for both science and philosophy is either a theistic foundation or none. Both the abstractions of mechanical theory and the impersonal categories of philosophical dogmatism are found to cancel themselves when taken apart from

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[41] Bowne, *Philosophy of Theism*, iv.

[42] Bowne, *Theism*, 42.

> living and self-conscious intelligence, in which alone they have either existence or meaning.[43]

Life demonstrated intelligence in the universe, and all of this demanded explanation. Against the non-theistic, impersonal philosophies which he had repudiated, Bowne opted for his personalistic theism.[44] His philosophic method led him there, and did not allow otherwise.

After 1905 (as noted above) Bowne preferred "Supreme Person" over "World-Ground." In his classic text, *Personalism*, he defined "personality" as "selfhood, self-consciousness, self-control, and the power to know."[45] The traditional conundrums of philosophy--unity and plurality, change and identity, causality, phenomenality and reality, and the finite and the infinite--could be resolved only if personality were posited as the fundamental metaphysical principle of reality. As he summarized in his *Metaphysics*,

> . . . the notion of the impersonal finite vanishes, upon analysis, into phenomenality. In seeking for identity, we found it only in the personal. In seeking for causality, we found it only in the personal. In studying interaction, we found that the causality of the finite cannot extend beyond its own subjectivity, and the impersonal has no

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[43] Ibid., vi.

[44] See Bowne's famous chapter, "The Failure of Impersonalism" in *Personalism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1908).

[45] Ibid., 266. In *Theism*, 162, Bowne understood the essence of personality as "selfhood, self-knowledge, and self-direction."

> subjectivity. On all these accounts, we must hold the impersonal is possible only as dependent phenomenon, or process of an energy not its own. Only selfhood serves to mark off the finite as substantial reality. . . .[46]

Given the centrality of personality in his system, it is appropriate to acknowledge Bowne as the "Father of American personalism."

When we notice, however, that even in the 1870s Bowne was already placing emphasis on the "divine will and purpose" and declaring that "full personality exists only where the nature is transparent to self, and where all the powers are under absolute control . . . [belonging] only to the infinite,"[47] we can see that while his terminology had changed, the contours of his personalistic theism had long been settled. But it was not until the last decade of his life that Bowne began applying his personalism to the questions of religion and theology in a more sustained manner.

BOWNE'S "GAINS FOR RELIGIOUS THOUGHT..."

Having briefly reviewed the highlights of Bowne's personalistic theism, we are now much better equipped to assess his contributions to

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[46] Bowne, *Metaphysics*, 99.

[47] Bowne, *Studies in Theism*, 324, 275.

Methodist theology.[48] Since Bowne's theological liberalism needs to be understood within the context of his conservative orthodoxy, I will begin by looking at the latter.

Although progressive with regard to non-essentials of the faith, Bowne was in thorough agreement with the cardinal doctrines of Christianity.[49] As a youngster, Bowne was "saturated" in the Bible,[50] and in a very real sense, his vision for the Christian life was representative of the evangelical pietism found in the Methodist church at the turn of the twentieth century. He defended, for example, the classical attributes of God such as immutability, omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence, the validity of miracles, and the belief in personal immortality.[51] His orthodoxy was practically

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[48] Bowne's theology has been systematically examined both by William H. Bernhardt, "The Influence of Borden Parker Bowne upon Theological Thought in the Methodist Episcopal Church" (see Chapter I, note 3), and Frederick Thomas Trotter, "The Christian Theology of Borden Parker Bowne" (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1958). My task will be the more modest one of seeking to trace the trajectory of Bowne's personalism within the larger framework of the era of theological liberalism within the Methodist church.

[49] Here, of course, Bowne was simply following the founder of Methodism who was tolerant of differing opinions as regard non-essential doctrines; see Umphrey Lee, "Freedom from Rigid Creed," *Methodism*, ed. William K. Anderson (Cincinnati: The Methodist Publishing House, 1947), 128-38.

[50] Kate M. Bowne, "An Intimate Portrait of Bowne," *The Personalist* 2:1 (January 1921): 7.

[51] On Bowne's adherence to the absolutistic tenets of classical theism, see Chapter IV of *Theism*, titled "The Metaphysical Attributes of the World-Ground." With regard to

unimpeachable as seen in a "doctrinal statement" which he drew toward the end of his life: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ his Son our Lord. I believe in the Holy Spirit, in the forgiveness of sins, in the kingdom of God on earth, and in the life everlasting."[52] This was centered in the person of Jesus Christ.

In his christology, Bowne refused to follow the lead of liberal biblical scholarship which, under the strain of historicism, separated the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith. For Bowne, the latter was not just an afterthought created by the early Christian community, but was rather integrally connected with the former.[53] In a sermon titled "The Supremacy of Christ," he asserted the superiority of Christianity. Christ is also the basis of an optimistic view of history. Further, he is the center and completion of biblical revelation, the chief source of personal inspiration, and finally, the

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miracles, Bowne rejected the thaumaturgic, yet defended the Incarnation and resurrection of Christ; see his synoptic article, "Concerning Miracle," *Harvard Theological Review* 3:2 (April 1910): 143-66. On his apologetic for personal immortality, see "Present Status of the Argument for Life After Death," *North American Review* 191 (1910): 96-104.

[52] Borden Parker Bowne, *Studies in Christianity* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909), 372-3; the first three chapters in this volume on revelation, the incarnation and atonement, and the Christian life, are revisions of three of Bowne's earlier books.

[53] See Bowne's apology in "Jesus or Christ?" *Methodist Review* 92 (March 1910): 177-93. McConnell, "Borden Parker Bowne": 344, tells us that Bowne held to a "stiff kenotic Christology," believing in the preexistence of Christ as the Son of God.

supreme motivator to social regeneration.[54]

Bowne sincerely vouched for the validity of religious experience. He held that personal religion was the ideal of religious development.[55] As further indication of his personal piety, Bowne preached, for example, that "the life of prayer is the only thing that gives prayer any meaning."[56] His more restrained form of pietism, however, can be seen as a reaction to the emotionalism that pervaded some revivalistic circles of American Methodism. Critical of its excesses, Bowne cautioned against dogmatic theologizing about spiritual experiences. Thus, in discussing the Wesleyan concept of "the witness of the Spirit," he insisted on distinguishing between the doctrine "as a truth of theology and as a fact of consciousness," and warned that failure to do so would lead to "doubtful exegesis and into theological and metaphysical speculations." [57]

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[54] Borden Parker Bowne, "The Supremacy of Christ," *Methodist Review* 92 (November 1910): 881-89, reprinted in a book of sermons published posthumously, *The Essence of Religion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910), 1-22. No more vibrant testimony to Bowne's evangelical pietism appears than in this collection of sermons.

[55] Borden Parker Bowne, *The Christian Life* (Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye, 1899), 142 ff.

[56] From Bowne's sermon on "Prayer" in *The Essence of Religion*, 159.

[57] Bowne, *The Christian Life*, 80, 87. For Wesley, the "witness of the Spirit" was the inner assurance believers received which confirmed their salvation. Wesley himself understood his "heart-warming" Aldersgate experience in this way. Various interpretations

Bowne's meliorism (a corollary doctrine of his cosmic monism--the World-Ground as a unity) allowed him to take both individual and social regeneration seriously.[58] He thus believed that the Kingdom of God found concrete expression in the world--in government, industry, justice, the arts, hospitals, schools, the sciences, and economics--and that redemption was for both the individual as well as society. He insisted that central to Christianity is "life, large, full, and abundant, lived, however, in the filial spirit . . . . Forgiveness of sins is essential but it is only introductory."[59]

In all of this, the pietistic and social evangelicalism of nineteenth century American Methodism is clearly demonstrated. Bowne's loyalty to

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were posited by later Methodist theologians in an effort to explicate this doctrine, including dogmatic speculations regarding the nature of the experience which Bowne rejected. In discussing this dimension of Bowne's life and thought, McConnell notes that the former "did not object to thrills, but he wanted ethical and spiritual content above all" ("Borden Parker Bowne": 348).

[58] Regarding his meliorism, Bowne wrote that "neither a finished optimism nor a final pessimism is warranted by knowledge; but experience shows the possibility of indefinite meliorism, and with this for the present we must be content" (*Theism*, 282); the influence of the doctrine of evolution on Bowne's liberalism is here evident.

[59] Bowne, *Studies in Christianity*, 320. Later in this same book, Bowne affirms that the aim of religion is not only to motivate prayer, church attendance and spiritual activity, but to "make men conscious of the divine will and presence in life, until the world shall become God's temple, in which men perpetually offer up the daily life, with all its interests and activities pervaded and sanctified by the filial spirit, as their spiritual worship of God" (Chapter V, "The Church and Moral Progress," 344-45). Bowne more fully addressed various social issues in *The Principles of Ethics* (New York: American Book Company, 1892), 247-303.

his church was never in doubt, even when under the fire of a trial for heresy. The following, written in 1899, summarizes his evangelical piety: ". . . our sole duty is to proclaim the forgiveness of sins, to call the prodigals home to the Father's house, and to bring up the children to be sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. All beyond this is theology, and is of no practical moment."[60]

Against this background, Bowne's liberalism would appear to be rather tame. While this may be true, it is undoubted that Bowne exercised a tremendous liberating influence on his church in theological matters. One student has testified to the salvific nature of Bowne's work as follows:

> By the study of the philosophy of Doctor Bowne . . ., he [the author] has obtained the abiding conviction that changing beliefs are the progressive and temporal embodiment of the eternal. He has come to view the world from the theistic angle, and come to see that after the worst is spoken, theism is more reasonable than atheism, and that religion is the deepest instinct of man.[61]

The following examines more specifically Bowne's liberal contributions to Methodist theology.

As seen above, Bowne drew two conclusions from his ventures in

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[60] Bowne, *The Christian Life*, 141.

[61] Charles Bertram Pyle, *The Philosophy of Borden Parker Bowne and Its Application to the Religious Problem* (Columbus OH: S. F. Harriman, 1910), 5-6.

philosophical theology: the World-Ground is the Supreme Person, and the phenomenal universe exists in dependence on God. This led to the central pillar of Bowne's evangelical liberalism: the Fatherhood of God and the corollary doctrine of the divine immanence in the world.

The doctrine of the Fatherhood of God was Bowne's decidedly Christian formulation to what he had, in *Theism*, discussed in a chapter titled "God and the World." In this chapter, Bowne emphasized God as creator, sustainer, and goal of the world.[62] When translated into theology, this led away from the traditional (Augustinian-Calvinistic) view of God as judge and the emphasis on divine retribution to the belief in God as loving father and the related doctrine of the "brotherhood of humankind."[63] As a result, God is no longer understood as a transcendant magistrate, but rather as one to whom we are personally related.

In his *The Immanence of God*, Bowne developed this doctrine in detail. He described "divine immanence" as the view

> that God is the omnipresent ground of all finite existence and activity. The world, alike of things and of spirits, is nothing existing and acting on its own account, while God is away in some extra-sidereal region,

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[62] Bowne, *Theism*, 226 ff.

[63] Bowne, *Studies in Christianity*, 218; *The Christian Life*, 36.

> but it continually depends upon and is ever upheld by the ever-living, ever-present, ever-working God.[64]

With this doctrine, the antithesis between the natural and the supernatural is thus dissolved. As Bowne put it,

> in the new conception, the supernatural is nothing foreign to nature . . . but insofar as nature as a whole is concerned, the supernatural is the ever-present ground and administrator of nature; and nature is simply the form under which the Supreme Reason and Will manifest themselves.[65]

Similarly, with regard to history, Bowne shifted the emphasis from divine government to divine family: "God works his will in history not apart from men, but through men and in partnership with them; and the work is no less divine on that account."[66] The end result is that religion is purged from "that great cloud of difficulties, born of crude materialism;" further, the doctrine of divine immanence recalls God

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[64] Borden Parker Bowne, *The Immanence of God* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1905), 3.

[65] Ibid., 17; later in the book, Bowne turned his guns on cosmic dualism and insisted that "the term 'supernatural' should be abandoned because of its misleading associations" (ibid., 150). He had earlier written that "God's immanence in the law [of the world] renders unnecessary any interference from a realm beyond the law" (*Theism*, 239); See also Bowne's discussion of the continuity of nature in *Metaphysics*, 263 ff., and his essay, "Natural and Supernatural," *Methodist Review* 113 (1895), reprinted in *Representative Essays of Borden Parker Bowne*, 37-46.

[66] Bowne, *The Immanence of God*, 65.

> from the infinite distance in space and time to which sense thought must banish him, and where we so often lose him, and makes him the omnipresent power by which all things exist and on which all things continually depend.[67]

Thus, to use the Pauline phrase which Bowne was fond of quoting, in God "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Two other doctrines which Bowne briefly touched upon were that concerning revelation and the atonement. His personalistic method can be seen in each.

Bowne refused to draw a static equation between the Christian revelation and the Bible just as he did not agree that its inspiration was dependent on the doctrine of dictation. The latter theory which held that the words of Scripture were dictated by God to the biblical authors was, he maintained, the result of the "picture thinking" of popular common sense. Instead, Bowne preferred to understand the Christian revelation dynamically as God's self-disclosure.[68] This revelation was completed and objectively manifested in the *person* of Jesus Christ,[69] and not, he was careful to insist,

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[67] Ibid., 151.

[68] Bowne, *Studies in Christianity*, 6 ff.

[69] Ibid., 77.

in dogmatic christological speculation. This doctrine of revelation therefore concerned the supreme person of God and the Christ, and thus resisted the tendency to abstract bibliolatry.

Likewise, with the doctrine of the atonement Bowne warned about distinguishing "between the Christian fact and the theological theory."[70] In place of the traditional theories, Bowne followed the liberals of his time in advocating the Subjective View or Moral Influence understanding of the atonement. In this scheme, Bowne sought to understand "the Savior's work by the principles and analogies of the ethical realm, rather than by those of the governmental and juristic realm."[71] Thus, the traditional doctrine of salvation was understood in personal terms, in that the deliverance was not just from the *penalties* of sin, but from *sin itself*; the end result was the call to discipleship.[72]

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[70] Borden Parker Bowne, *The Atonement* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Pye, 1900), 3. By "theological theory," Bowne probably had in mind such treatises as *The Atonement in Christ* (1879) by the respected Methodist theologian, John Miley. In fact, as can be seen from the above discussion, Bowne also objected to the "governmental theory"--the atonement understood within the scheme of divine justice--set forth in Miley's book, and countered it with his own view of the "divine family."

[71] Bowne, *The Atonement*, 118

[72] Ibid., 152; here, as elsewhere, Bowne's "pragmatism" is clearly in evidence: "With this practical discipleship we shall receive all the benefits of the Savior's work without any theory; and without this discipleship we are lost, whatever the theory" (*Studies in Christianity*, 193).

Bowne's estimation of his contributions to the development of Methodist theology can be seen in an essay he published shortly before his death. In "Gains for Religious Thought in the Last Generation,"[73] he argued that the struggle to reconcile science and religion which was of preeminent concern early in his career was resolved by the conception of "adequate philosophical equipment"--including his own personalistic theistic idealism. Philosophically, crude naturalism had given way to a personalistic monism. Theologically, the Christian God of word and deed, intellect and will, can be understood as the "one supreme and all-embracing causality of which the physical order is but the continuous manifestation."[74] Religiously, spirituality is revitalized to reclaim the totality of life via a personalistic pragmatism. The venue of debate has been changed "from the court of logic and speculation to the court of life, action, and history."[75]

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[73] Borden Parker Bowne, "Gains for Religious Thought in the Last Generation," *The Hibbert Journal* 171 (1909), reprinted in *Representative Essays of Borden Parker Bowne*, 166-72.

[74] Ibid., 169.

[75] Ibid., 171.

SUMMARY OF BOWNE'S ROLE IN METHODISM'S CONFRONTATION WITH MODERNITY

Bowne's theology was premised on his personalism, which combined metaphysical idealism and ontological monism. His idealism posited mind and intelligence as the ground of the cosmos. His monism (which he opposed to both cosmic dualism and polytheism) secured a meliorism which allowed for a this-worldly emphasis. Wedded to his personalism Bowne was thus able to maintain with vigor the personal nature of the Christian God. Further, against the static theologies resulting from the influence of deism (in the seventeenth century) and mechanical realism, he reinterpreted Methodist theology along more dynamic and personalistic lines.

Because of his liberalism, Bowne had for years championed the integrity of the scholarly process. Bowne's commitment to academic freedom can be seen in his advocacy on behalf of his colleague in the Bible department at Boston University, Hinckley G. Mitchell. The orthodoxy of Mitchell, the Professor of Old Testament who studied at Leipzig under the renowned German orientalist, Franz J. Delitzsch (1813-90), was repeatedly questioned from 1895-1905 because of his erudition in matters pertaining to the higher criticism of Scripture. His use of this philological method led, for

example, to his denying the import of a literal reading of the early chapters of the book of Genesis. Mitchell was finally dismissed from his position by the Bishops of the Conference in 1905.[76]

By allying with Mitchell, however, Bowne opened up his own views to increasing scrutiny by the conservative faction of the Conference. This culminated in his heresy trial in the spring of 1904. Of the five charges brought against him--regarding his views on the Trinity, miracles, the atonement, immortality, and soteriology--Bowne was convicted on none and completely exonerated of all.[77] With this acquittal, it was generally agreed that the new theology had gained acceptance within the Methodist church.[78]

From his position at Boston University, Bowne exerted an important

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[76] For an autobiographical account of this affair, see Mitchell's *For the Benefit of My Creditors* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1922). Bowne was not Mitchell's only advocate. President Warren also supported Mitchell's scholarship, although he tended to be more conservative in his conclusions than the Old Testament professor; see Warren's "Current Biblical Discussions--The Proper Attitude of Theological Faculties with Respect to Them," *Methodist Review* 81 (May 1899): 368-81.

[77] The most complete account of the trial which I have been able to find is "The Orthodoxy of Bowne," collated by the editor of the *Methodist Review* 105 (May 1922): 399-413; this is also reprinted in McConnell, *Borden Parker Bowne*, 189-201.

[78] The religious periodicals reported that by this action, "the Methodist Church, as represented in this Conference at least, declares that it regards sound logic, acute reasoning, and profound scholarship as entirely compatible with piety and spirituality, and even as aids to growth in the religious life" ("Echoes of the Trial and Acquittal of Professor Bowne," *The Christian Advocate* 79 [28 April 1904]: 657, quoting *The New York Observer*, an organ of conservative Presbyterian orthodoxy).

influence upon American higher education. Edgar S. Brightman tells us that while at Boston,

> . . . every student in the College was required to study under Bowne; and substantially every student in the School of Theology elected to do so. From 1888 to 1910, he was Dean of the Graduate School and a good proportion of the advanced degrees conferred by the University were for work done in philosophy under him.[79]

Besides those who studied under Bowne at Boston, William H. Bernhardt notes that by the 1920s, over 57 percent of the ministers in the Methodist Episcopal Church received their theological training through the Conference Course of Study. The texts in the doctrinal portion of this Course included, among its five books, Bowne's *Studies in Christianity*, Sheldon's *System of Christian Doctrine* (1903), and Francis L. Strickland's *Foundations of Christian Belief* (1915). Both Sheldon (as colleague) and Strickland (as student whose Ph.D. under Bowne was conferred in 1903) were heavily influenced by Bowne. Bernhardt concludes that Bowne's influence "on the method and content of the theology of the Methodist Episcopal Church is being felt in *more than* half of the pulpits of this church."[80]

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[79] Edgar Sheffield Brightman, "Personalism and the Influence of Bowne," *Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Philosophy*, ed. E. S. Brightman (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927), 164.

[80] Bernhardt, "The Influence of Borden Parker Bowne," 242, 243, 254 (emphasis mine). For a later assessment, see F. Thomas Trotter, "Borden Parker Bowne, 1847-1910:

In spite of his various theological writings and his influence in American Methodist theology, it should not be forgotten that Bowne was a philosophy professor and considered himself first and foremost as a philosopher. Such being the case, he has been nominated by one writer as the most deserving to receive the title of "philosopher of American Protestantism."[81] His philosophy of personalism had enabled American Methodism to move theologically from its evangelical pietism toward an evangelical liberalism. It remained for one of his students, Albert C. Knudson, to apply systematically the principles of Bowne's personalism toward developing an evangelically liberal, Methodist, theology.

An Estimate of His Contribution and Continuing Influence," *The Philosophical Forum* 18 (1960-61):51-8.

It is fascinating to note that Bowne's influence can just as well be measured negatively. With the rise of the Fundamentalist movement in the middle-war period, a conservative reaction developed within American Methodism which contingent included a theologian and a pastor who both took issue specifically with Bowne's religious and theological writings; see John Faulkner, *Modernism and the Christian Faith* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1921), 68 ff., and Harold Paul Sloan, *Historic Christianity and the New Theology* (Louisville KY: Pentecostal Publishing House, 1922), 36-67.

[81] Albert Cornelius Knudson, "Bowne in American Theological Education," *The Personalist* 28 (1947): 256.

CHAPTER IV

KNUDSON: AN EVANGELICAL LIBERAL IN METHODIST THEOLOGY

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

On 23 January 1873, Asle and Susan Knudson had their fourth of nine children.[1] Growing up in a pastor's home in Grandmeadow, Minnesota, prepared their son, Albert Cornelius Knudson, for a lifetime of service in the Methodist church. The love for the Scriptures which the parents instilled in Albert was such that by the age of fifteen, he had read through all five volumes of Adam Clarke's *Commentary on the Pentateuch*.[2]

Knudson entered the University of Minnesota the next year. He began his philosophical studies in earnest during his junior year, being influenced,

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[1] I am indebted in this section primarily to Elmer A. Leslie, "Albert Cornelius Knudson, The Man," *Personalism in Theology: A Symposium in Honor of Albert Cornelius Knudson*, ed. E. S. Brightman (Boston: Boston University Press, 1943; reprint ed., New York: AMS Press, 1979), 1-20.

[2] Ibid., 4; one of Wesley's appointed circuit rider preachers, Adam Clarke (1762-1832) was Methodism's most respected commentator and theologian in the nineteenth century.

among other books, by Royce's *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy*.[3] After receiving his B.A. in 1893, Knudson was encouraged by his pastor (a former student of Bowne) to study further at Boston. Knudson finished his S.T.B. (Bachelor of Sacred Theology) in 1896, but still philosophically unsatisfied, spent the next year under Bowne's tutelage.[4] He later described this experience as a "veritable *Aufklarung*":

> What Bowne did for me was first to clarify the field of thought, to mark out its great highways, and to show where each led. Then he laid bare with extraordinary lucidity the grounds of faith, and gave me an insight into the conditions of a sound metaphysic that has guided me in all my subsequent thinking. . . . It brought me a mental relief and an intellectual illumination that may be described as akin to a redemptive experience.[5]

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[3] By the time of its publication in 1892, the main outlines of Royce's absolute idealism had already been formed.

[4] For his S.T.B., Knudson studied Old Testament under Hinckley Mitchell, Church history and historical theology under Henry Sheldon, and systematic theology under Olin Curtis. During the 1880s, both Sheldon and Curtis were still laboring under what William H. Bernhardt calls "modified orthodoxy" (reflecting the more conservative views of nineteenth century Methodism) while being influenced by the implications of Bowne's philosophy on theological method ("The Influence of Borden Parker Bowne," 15 ff). Sheldon's gradual transition to a position substantially that of Bowne's can be seen in the former's *System of Christian Doctrine* published in 1903. By 1905, Curtis was also ready to be explicit in acknowledging his indebtedness to Bowne's personalism (see Curtis' *The Christian Faith Personally Given in a System of Doctrine* [1905; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1956], x). This explains in part Knudson's dissatisfaction with the course of study for his S.T.B. and his decision to study further directly with Bowne.

[5] Albert Cornelius Knudson, "A Personalistic Approach to Theology," *Contemporary American Theology*, vol. I, ed. Vergilius Ferm (New York: Round Table Press, Inc., 1932), 223.

Knudson followed this with studies in 1897-98 at Jena and Berlin under such noted Ritschlian liberals as the Church historian, Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930), and the theologian, Julius Kaftan (1848-1926).[6]

Upon his return to the States, Knudson began his teaching career as Professor of Church History at Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. This was followed by two other brief stints (as Professor of Philosophy at Baker University and Thoburn Professor of English Bible and Philosophy at Allegheny College) before he received a call from his alma mater in December, 1905.

Knudson accepted the challenge of filling the position vacated by the dismissal of his former Old Testament teacher, Hinckley Mitchell, and after an intense period of preparation during which he read the entire Old Testament in the original language, began teaching at Boston officially in the fall of 1906. Although he was invited in 1911 to Bowne's professorship of philosophy after the latter's death, he declined partly in order to complete his work in the field of Old Testament which had now occupied his energies for five years. He later agreed to succeed Henry Sheldon as Professor of

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[6] He was conferred an honorary Doctor of Theology by the University of Berlin in December, 1923.

Systematic Theology, and did so after the latter's retirement in 1921.

Far from being only an academician, however, Knudson was also a very involved administrator and churchman throughout his career. In 1926 he began a twelve year term as Dean of the School of Theology. During the 1930s, he was a faithful participant at ecclesiastical Conferences,[7] as well as a regular worshipper at the Epworth Methodist Church in Cambridge throughout his life. Due to ill health, he resigned from his Deanship and took a sabbatical leave in 1937. He continued teaching, however, until 1943, and writing up to the final years before his death on 28 August 1953.

KNUDSON AND THE ADVANCE OF LIBERALISM IN BIBLICAL STUDIES

Knudson tells us that during his studies under Bowne, he "formed the purpose of rethinking Christian theology in the light of the philosophy that I had found so significant in my own thought life."[8] Although he did not begin to focus his energies directly on this task until he began his duties as

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[7] In a separate essay, Leslie briefly discusses Knudson's involvement at the 1932 and 1936 General Conferences, the 1937 Edinburgh Conference on Faith and Order, and the 1939 Methodist Unification Conference which saw a merger of three large Methodist bodies into The Methodist Church ("Albert Cornelius Knudson: An Intimate View," *The Personalist* 35:4 [October 1954]: 361-62).

[8] Knudson, "A Personalistic Approach to Theology," 224.

Professor of Systematic Theology in 1921, the work in biblical studies which he did as Professor of Old Testament laid a solid foundation for this task. It is therefore of some import to now focus on the achievements of Knudson's evangelical liberalism in the field of biblical studies.

In succeeding the controversial Mitchell, Knudson was well aware of the antagonism which conservatives harbored against the methods of modern biblical scholarship. When added to the rise of Fundamentalism during the early part of this century, Knudson saw that an evangelical liberal theology of Scripture was urgently needed. Such a view would not only have to remain within the Wesleyan exegetical tradition, but also satisfy the critical inquiries of the modern mind. As he saw it early in his career, the problem with the Bible as a whole (and the Old Testament specifically), was how its religious values could be commended to the modern Christian consciousness. He attempts in his first book, occasioned by his inauguration as Professor of Old Testament at Boston University, a resolution to this matter. There, he indicates that he found in personalism a wonderful ally in forming his own theology of Scripture. Thus, he proposed that

> the Old Testament is the connecting link between heathenism and Christianity. It presents religion in the process of transformation from superstition *to rationality*, from sorcery and divination *to rational*

> *faith*, from particularism to universalism, and from nationalism *to individualism*."[9]

This rationalism characteristic of the personalistic approach to Scripture undoubtedly bore the imprint of Bowne. This is also seen in an early essay titled "The Evolution of Modern Bible Study."[10] In it, Knudson bridged the chasm between the natural and the supernatural (man's word versus God's word) by the doctrine of divine immanence. Further, he saw that the Kantian doctrine of the activity of the mind allowed the Church to transcend the static views of biblical inerrancy and inspiration, and that the idea of evolution admitted the development of the doctrine of progressive revelation. Finally, the reception of the results of higher criticism enabled a more sophisticated hermeneutic to be applied to Scripture. These, Knudson held, were the main developments in modern philosophy which made it possible for the Church to adjust Christian thought to modernity "so as to preserve the ancient reverence for Scripture."[11]

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[9] Albert Cornelius Knudson, *The Old Testament Problem* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1908), 52; italics mine. This book was occasioned by Knudson's inauguration as Professor of Old Testament at Boston University.

[10] Albert Cornelius Knudson, "The Evolution of Modern Bible Study," *Methodist Review* 93 (November 1911): 899-910.

[11] Ibid., 907.

Like Bowne then, Knudson objected to abstract infallibility, forced inerrancy, mechanical inspiration and dogmatic authoritarianism.[12] In almost typical Bownean fashion, he sought to divert attention away from the "impersonalism" of all of the above toward an emphasis on the ethical inspiration of the Bible. The crucial issue was that of authority, and here, Knudson insisted that "the real authority of Scripture is to be found in the realm of the spirit. . . . The Bible has lost, then, for us the authority of force, but it has not lost the force of authority."[13] In other words, for Knudson, the power of Scripture lay in its ability to move the person, rather than in any magical quality of the text itself.

As one who had received part of his theological training in Germany, Hinckley Mitchell's student turned out to be every bit the higher critic of Scripture that the teacher had been. Knudson accepted, for example, the main outlines of the source theory of Pentateuchal origins proposed by the

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[12] Knudson later summarized his thoughts on these issues in Chapter II of his *Present Tendencies in Religious Thought* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1924), titled "The Problem of Biblical Authority."

[13] Ibid., 128, 131. Earlier, Knudson appealed to Bowne's pragmatism: "For the ultimate test of religious truth is not to be found in any absolute objective authority. It is to be found in experience. . . . The significant thing, then, in connection with the Bible is not its technical infallibility, in case that could be proven, but its ability to deepen and enrich the religious life and so to produce conviction" ("The Evolution of Modern Bible Study": 909).

famous German religious historian, Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918), the division of the prophecies of Isaiah and Zechariah into two authors, and a second century BC dating for the book of Daniel.[14] The liberal emphasis on the historical-grammatical method and the historical aspects of religion was also manifest in Knudson. In the volume devoted to the theology of the Old Testament, his explicit objective was "to give an account of the origin and development of the leading religious ideas of the Old Testament."[15]

At the same time, however, Knudson's evangelical commitment could be detected amidst his liberalism. For Knudson, liberalism taken to its extremes would result in a reductionism of biblical religion.[16] Thus, he had no problem adhering to traditional notions of Scriptural authorship should

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[14] On the Pentateuch, see Knudson's *The Religious Teaching of the Old Testament* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1918), 26-28; on Isaiah, see his *Beacon Lights of Prophecy* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1914), Chapter VII; on Zechariah, Daniel, and other books, *The Religious Teaching of the Old Testament*, 43-45, has an "Outline of Development" which gives a synoptic view of Knudson's critical conclusions to introductory matters of the Old Testament in the form of a chart.

[15] Knudson, *The Religious Teaching of the Old Testament*, 13. In "The Evolution of Modern Bible Study": 908, Knudson spoke of revelation as "an organic movement covering centuries of time."

[16] In commenting on the Old Testament prophets, for example, Knudson wrote that "a pure rationalistic religion is no religion at all. The great achievement of the prophets lie in the fact that while purifying and spiritualizing religion to a degree never before attained, they still preserved its pristine power. This fact, once for all, sets them high above all philosophers and sages" (*Beacon Lights of Prophecy*, 48-9).

the evidence not dictate otherwise.[17] Further, Knudson also did not insist on an a priori rejection of either miracles or of predictive prophecy. With regard to the former, Knudson scorned what he considered to be the "dogmatic rejection of the miraculous" by liberal German scholarship.[18] As for the latter, Knudson held, for example, that "eschatology preceded literary prophecy instead of the reverse. There is, therefore, no valid ground for eliminating the Messianic passages from the writings of the pre-exilic prophets."[19]

While in critical matters Knudson simply confirmed the path trod by Mitchell, in the social aspects of Biblical theology the student advanced far beyond the teacher. From *The Old Testament Problem* to *The Prophetic Movement in Israel* almost thirteen years later, Knudson's biblical theology

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[17] See, e.g., Albert Cornelius Knudson, "The So-Called J Decalogue," *The Journal of Biblical Literature* 28:1 (1909): 81-99, where he argues against Wellhausen that the evidence does not preclude Mosaic authorship of certain portions of the Pentateuch, in this case, the "J Decalogue" (Exo. 34:10-26).

[18] Albert Cornelius Knudson, "The Philosophy and Theology of Leading Old Testament Critics," *Bibliotheca Sacra* LXIX:273 (January 1912): 16 ff. It is important to note, however, that Knudson was careful to insist that by voicing his objection to the German critics, he did not himself "feel constrained to accept any particular Old Testament miracle" (Ibid.: 20).

[19] Knudson, *Beacon Lights of Prophecy*, vii. Knudson, however, qualifies his endorsement of predictive prophecy by insisting that the Old Testament prophets were not primarily predictors; even when they were, what was of significance was not in the "mere unveiling of the future, but in the moral quality of the prediction" (Ibid., 30-1).

reflected his concern with the moral and social attitudes of the Hebrew prophets. Thus, in the latter work, a resolute indictment is heaped on the existing social oppression, followed by a call for social transformation.[20] Knudson's exegesis of the Old Testament had led him earlier to identify prophetic nationalism both as opposed to individualism and as a summons for social solidarity.[21] He therefore spoke approvingly of the Social Gospel and argued that the belief in social progress would have to emphasize external and material well-being against the eschatological millenialism, individualism, spiritualism, and asceticism of certain segments of pietistic Christianity.[22] In these matters, Knudson was both evangelical and liberal.

Knudson's work as a biblical scholar should not be ignored in any estimation of his labors in systematic theology. Although he was well versed in the critical methods of theological liberalism, he maintained a distinct commitment to evangelical faith. As we have seen above, the personalism of

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[20] Albert Cornelius Knudson, *The Prophetic Movement in Israel* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1921), 113-16.

[21] See Chapter XIV of Knudson's, *The Religious Teachings of the Old Testament*, titled "Nationalism and Individualism," 316-350.

[22] Knudson, *Present Tendencies*, 284 ff; Knudson discusses the Social Gospel extensively in a lengthy final chapter to this volume titled, "The Social Gospel and Its Theological Implications."

Bowne is clearly evidenced in Knudson's understanding of revelation, his doctrine of Scripture, and biblical formulation of his social ethics.

KNUDSON AND THE ADVANCE OF LIBERALISM IN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

While the foundations of Knudson's evangelical liberalism were formed during this first part of his career, it is indisputable that his theology was erected upon a much broader base than Biblical studies. In fact, Knudson called his approach "historical as well as personalistic."[23] The former denoted the history of the Church and its creedal pronouncements, and the latter the additional theological sources of reason and experience.[24] Knudson's view of these additional sources of theology requires that some understanding be gained about his overarching theological method.

For the eightieth birthday of Henry Sheldon, Knudson wrote an article for his predecessor wherein he called Sheldon "Methodism's most learned

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[23] Knudson, "A Personalistic Approach to Theology," 233.

[24] See Knudson's discussion of "Sources and Method" in *The Doctrine of God* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1930), 182 ff. In insisting on these four sources of theology, Knudson was simply echoing what has since come to be characterized as the spirit of Wesley's own theological method: "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral" (see Donald A. D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990]).

and most influential theologian."[25] He expressed gratitude to his teacher for boldly making "the transition from the older to the newer type of Methodist theology," especially in the field of apologetics.[26] Knudson praised Sheldon's approach which was "at once more empirical and more rational, truer to the genius of Methodism, and more in accord with modern science."[27] It is therefore, not surprising that Knudson himself employed both a rational and empirical method in formulating his systematic theology, and devoted a great deal of energy in defense of this method.[28] Both need to be outlined here since the theological conclusions that he drew would be inexplicable apart from them.

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[25] Albert Cornelius Knudson, "Henry Clay Sheldon," *Methodist Review* 107 (March 1925): 175.

[26] Ibid.: 179. In contrast to John Miley and other reputable nineteenth century Methodist theologians in the "older" camp, Knudson applauded Sheldon's "newer" theology, which other primary differences included an anthropocentric approach to the doctrine of the Trinity, an accent on the human factor in christology, an understanding of the atonement similar to Bowne's "moral theory," and an emphasis on divine immanence.

[27] Ibid.: 184. Bowne's influence on Sheldon is also noted by Knudson. This essay is referenced rather extensively by Bernhardt's "The Influence of Borden Parker Bowne" in his assessment of Sheldon's relationship to Bowne.

[28] Aside from his many articles on the subject, see also Chapters III and IV of *Present Tendencies in Religious Thought* (on experience and reason as bases of religious belief), Chapter V of *The Doctrine of God* ("Sources and Method"), *The Validity of Religious Experience* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1937), and *Basic Issues in Christian Thought* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), Chapter I. Our discussion in the remainder of this section will draw on all of these writings.

In the same way that Kant's doctrine of the rational a priori countered both the sensationalistic empiricism and metaphysical dogmatism of his time, Knudson considered the religious apriori first given currency by Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), the German historian of religion, as indispensable in meeting the perils of naturalistic positivism and theological dogmatism.[29] By "religious apriori," Knudson meant three things: that religion

> 1). . . in spite of all its uniqueness, is not an isolated phenomenon, but stands in a structural relation to life or reason as a whole. . . . 2) is not something secondary and derivative, but something fundamental and irreducible, so much so as the intellectual, moral and aesthetic interests of men. . . . 3) rests upon as sure a basis as does either science or ethics.[30]

Simply put then, Knudson advocated "reason" as a "supplementary and *regulative* or formal source of theology."[31] Later in his life, Knudson re-affirmed the import of reason in much stronger terms when he insisted that we must "try the spirits" of revelation before the bar of human reason; "the authenticity of revelation is dependent wholly upon its inherent spirituality

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[29] Albert Cornelius Knudson, "Religious Apriorism," *Studies in Philosophy and Theology*, ed. E. C. Wilm (New York: Abingdon Press, 1922), 93-127; pp. 101-10 of this essay is an exposition of Troeltsch's own views.

[30] Ibid., 126. Bowne found himself holding a similar view when he wrote in 1902, "We must assume that religion is founded in human nature as one of its essential needs and constitutional tendencies" (*Theism*, 9).

[31] Knudson, *The Doctrine of God*, 185; emphasis mine.

and rationality. The human mind quickened by the divine Spirit is *the sole judge* of its validity."[32]

This explains Knudson's offensive against what he saw to be the theological irrationalism of the emerging school of Neo-Orthodoxy. Also known as "dialectical theology" (following Kierkegaard's insistence on the "infinite qualitative distinction between God and man"), the new theology launched by Karl Barth's *Der Roemerbrief* (1919) had, by the late 1920s, exerted an enormous theological influence on American theologians. Knudson, however, objected strongly to Neo-Orthodoxy and judged it a failure on three fronts: its ontological dualism, its philosophical positivism, and its celebration of theological paradox.[33] First, he denied the chasm between God and man by arguing that "creation binds the two together and makes forever impossible an absolute antithesis between them."[34] Secondly, he insisted that "if reason is not trustworthy beyond the phenomenal realm,

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[32] Knudson, *Basis Issues in Christian Thought*, 40; italic mine.

[33] Albert Cornelius Knudson, "The Theology of Crisis," *Report of the Sixth Biennial Meeting of the Conference of Theological Seminaries in the United States and Canada Bulletin* 6 (September 1928): 52-77. The influence of Bowne's emphasis on cosmic monism and the absolute trustworthiness of reason underscores the first two points.

[34] Ibid.: 75.

there is no valid ground for holding that 'faith' is."[35] Finally, he saw that the dialectical nature of the new theology resulted in an endless series of paradoxes leaving faith ultimately unsecured.

Like Bowne, Knudson was careful to emphasize the distinction between what he espoused in contrast to the dogmatic authoritarianism of the older rationalism.[36] Formally, the religious a priori interpreted religious experience (rather than creating it), and justified "not an abstract religion of reason, but actual historic religion."[37] Reason and experience were therefore both integral to a personalistic theology, and were correlative terms as the form and content of Christian theology.

Growing up in a Methodist pastorate left Knudson with a lifelong interest in religious experiences. In reflecting upon his pietistic upbringing, Knudson recalled that

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[35] Ibid. Knudson later wrote that this philosophical or metaphysical skepticism was the most serious threat to ongoing theological vitality, and that ultimately, "a theology which feeds on philosophical skepticism will perish thereby" ("Humanism and Barthianism," *Religion in Life* 1 [Winter 1935]: 31).

[36] Bowne argued for the need to distinguish between the true orthodoxy of essential Christianity from the false dogmas of speculative rationalism; see Chapter VI of his *Studies in Christianity*, "The Church and the Truth," especially pp. 377 ff.

[37] Knudson, *Present Tendencies in Religious Thought*, 249; in contrast, Knudson is careful to remind his readers that the old theology subordinated history to reason.

> in our home and in the church it was religious experience that was emphasized, a unique emotional experience at what was looked upon as the beginning of the Christian life and a life of trust and obedience thereafter. . . . By parental training I was predisposed in its favor, and this predisposition was later strengthened by a vivid personal religious experience.[38]

This inclination was re-affirmed by subjecting these experiences to the process of critical investigation. Early on Knudson came to understand that because religious experience grew out of the religious a priori, it was an error

> to separate religious experience from faith and treat it as an independent entity. . . . Religious experience is the concrete expression of faith and as such shares in its self-evidencing character. It represents an independent principle in human life that in the last analysis neither needs nor can find an external support. It thus justifies itself.[39]

Except for briefly in *The Doctrine of God*,[40] however, Knudson fails to give serious thought to the subject for the next decade. His definitive statement is finally capsulated in *The Validity of Religious Experience*, where the implicit method of his earlier systematic theology is explicated.

In this book, Knudson defined "religious experience" and "religious

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[38] Knudson, "A Personalistic Approach to Theology," 219-20.

[39] Knudson, *Present Tendencies in Religious Thought*, 180, 184.

[40] Knudson, *The Doctrine of God*, 192-5; the preliminary nature of the discussion is evident in the book leaving the reader unsatisfied. In *The Philosophy of Personalism* (1927), Knudson does discuss empiricism at various points, but does not, due to the nature of the book, address the issue of theological method.

consciousness" as involving the feeling, willing, and doing elements of religious life.[41] Central to the book is the question concerning the trustworthiness of religious experience. Knudson defended the verity of religious experience along three lines. The first two--consisting of the psychological immediacy that is most clearly felt in the intuition of the "numinous" apart from conscious meditation,[42] and the pragmatic utility of religious experience--granted the believer a certitude (rather than a certainty) that inferred and begged the theistic question.[43] Both pointed toward the metaphysical realm whereby the human religious nature is understood as a self-verifying a priori, and religious experience as having autonomous

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[41] Knudson, *The Validity of Religious Experience*, 25; this book is an expansion of an earlier article, "The Apologetic Value of Religious Experience," *Journal of Religion* 10 (1935): 448-61.

[42] Knudson denied that religious experience presented one with a metaphysical immediacy of the "numinous," because the resultant merger of the self and the Absolute obliterated the subject-object distinction and made knowledge impossible. He is here struggling with a tension. On the one hand, in approving of the concept of the "numinous" as used by Rudolf Otto in his famous book, *The Idea of the Holy*, Knudson recognizes that Otto ultimately admits a sort of metaphysical immediacy in the religious experience of the *numen* (see Otto's discussion in *The Idea of the Holy*, tr. John W. Harvey [New York: Galaxy Books, 1958]). On the other hand, because of his epistemological dualism, Knudson can only insist on "mutual otherness as an indispensable condition of man's experience and knowledge of God" (*The Validity of Religious Experience*, 69). He thus settles for what he calls psychological immediacy wherein the instantaneousness of the religious intuition of the holy is preserved within the context of a dualistic theory of knowledge.

[43] Knudson, *The Validity of Religious Experience*, 95, 144.

validity.

With the demise of ontological dualism then, Knudson was able to deny the traditional distinction between "evangelical" and "mystical": "Every truly Christian experience is an experience of Christ, and every experience of Christ is both an 'evangelical' and a 'mystical' experience."[44] The essential content of Christian experience therefore remained unchanged: "It is still faith in a living God and a living Christ; it is still a consciousness of the Divine Presence; it is still an assurance of a more abundant life, here and hereafter."[45] What had changed was that the legitimacy of religious convictions was no longer grounded in an external or infallible authority. Rather, Knudson appealed once more to the religious a priori: "The only authority that we can recognize is one that is inner and spiritual, an authority manifest in religious experience."[46]

By his appeal to both reason and experience, Knudson was simply

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[44] Ibid., 221; the doctrine of divine immanence further assured that the Christian experience of Christ was also that of God.

[45] Ibid., 230-1.

[46] Ibid. As Knudson concluded in his last book, the "essence" of Christianity is "the modern substitute for the infallible book and the infallible church of the past. But what this essence is, cannot be determined by purely inductive means. A subjective personal factor enters unavoidably into an inquiry of this kind" (*Basic Issues in Christian Thought*, 49).

applying central principles of the philosophy of personalism to the theological task. Here was the evangelical liberal at his best. On the one hand, Knudson diverged little, if any, from the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith; on the other, he sought a critical theology, and found it best erected on a rational and experiential--a personalistic--method.[47] It remains for us, then, to summarize the results of Knudson's two-volume systematic theology: *The Doctrine of God* and *The Doctrine of Redemption.*

Because personalism plays such an important role in Knudson's systematic theology, it is appropriate to see volume one as a philosophical theology. After dealing with theological prolegomena in Part I,[48] he addresses in Part II the existence, absoluteness, personality, and goodness of God, devoting the final chapter to the doctrine of the Trinity. As will be seen, Knudson demonstrates throughout the compatibility of personalism with Christian theology.

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[47] One wonders, however, whether or not Knudson was truly faithful to the rational pole of personalistic method, or if his emphasis on religious experience left him open to the charge of subjectivism. His colleague, E. S. Brightman, for one, invoked the criterion of coherence because he was not convinced that the religious a priori was self-justifying or that religious experience was self-authenticating. More on this in the next chapter.

[48] Entitled "The Province of Theology," Part I covers the relationship between religion, Christian faith, science and philosophy with theology; Chapter IV is devoted to "Sources and Method."

In his arguments for God's existence, Knudson places greatest emphasis on the religious and moral arguments since our moral and religious natures (a prioris) "can find ultimate satisfaction only in the belief in God."[49] Knudson finds further support in the epistemological and causal arguments and concludes that while these "do not demonstrate the existence of God, . . . the theistic world-view is 'the line of least resistance' [one of Bowne's most characteristic phrases] for the intellect as it is also for the moral and religious nature."[50]

Knudson then defends the classical notion of God's absoluteness. He rejects the "unrelated" absolute of agnosticism and the "unlimited" absolute of pantheism in favor of the absolute as the "independent or self-existent ground of the world [Bowne], and in this sense, practically synonymous with the idea of creatorship."[51] Under God's absoluteness, Knudson includes discussions on omnipotence, omnipresence and eternity.[52] To say

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[49] Knudson, *The Doctrine of God*, 237.

[50] Ibid., 241.

[51] Ibid., 248.

[52] As will be seen in Chapter V, Brightman departed from the evangelical tradition by abandoning these aspects of God's absolutism as incompatible with the rational and empirical demands of personalistic method.

that God is omnipotent is simply to say that "there is a unitary and absolute power upon which the world depends;"[53] God's omnipresence speaks of the divine power sustaining the world and identifies "the ultimate cosmic energy with his [God's] will;"[54] God's eternity points to the divine transcendence of time since "intelligence implies a supertemporal element and personality constitutes itself one and the same in spite of the multiplicity and change involved in its own consciousness and activity."[55]

In discussing the personality of God, Knudson admits that this is "known to us directly only in its human form."[56] By analogy, then, God is "superpersonal," but only so long as it is recognized that this is not an unbridled anthropomorphism; rather, this points to God's "life of free intelligence" and to a "higher type of consciousness and will than that represented by human personality."[57] Knudson discusses God's unity, identity, self-consciousness and self-control, "the last three of which, when

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[53] Knudson, *The Doctrine of God*, 269.

[54] Ibid., 278.

[55] Ibid., 283.

[56] Ibid., 292.

[57] Ibid., 300.

applied to the Supreme Person, may perhaps better be designated as immutability, omniscience, and freedom."[58] Echoes of this can be seen in Knudson's definition of "personalism" given in an earlier book:

> . . . that form of idealism which gives equal recognition to both the pluralistic and monistic aspects of experience and which finds in the conscious unity, identity, and free activity of personality the key to the nature of reality and the solution of the ultimate problems of philosophy.[59]

God's goodness is predicated on the divine personhood. Against dogmatic legalism, Knudson emphasizes God as "personal *love*," and against impersonal naturalism, God is "loving Person."[60] There is therefore no contradictory tension between the divine personality and divine love. "Personality is incomplete without love, and love without personality is nonexistent."[61] As benign beyond human benevolence, God is also to be

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[58] Ibid., 311. In his earlier Old Testament theology, Knudson found biblical and exegetical support for the doctrine of the personality of God. Thus, for example, God is free in his relation to nature and history; the world is a testimony to the divine will and intelligence; miracles demonstrate God's "free relationship to the world" (*The Religious Teaching of the Old Testament*, 61-65).

[59] Knudson, *The Philosophy of Personalism*, 87.

[60] Knudson, *The Doctrine of God*, 352.

[61] Ibid. Knudson does not clearly distinguish (as later personalists do) between "person" (what is given) and "personality" (that which persons develop). Unless he is prepared to admit that God is developing personality, which he is not, to speak of God's "personality" thus becomes problematic.

considered as "supermoral."[62]

Finally, in discussing the Trinity, Knudson attempts to steer away from making sharp personal distinctions within God as the older theologies. Rather, he emphasizes the Trinity as a "*symbol* of the richness of the idea of God,"[63] and prefers a modified version of ancient Sabellianism wherein "God in his essential nature is all that is indicated by the terms 'Father,' 'Son,' and 'Spirit, without attempting to define more precisely the character of the distinctions in his being so named and their relation to each other."[64]

In this second volume, Knudson covers the remaining portions of systematic theology, including the world, humanity, sin, the person and work of Christ, the Christian life, the Church, and the Christian hope. I will limit my discussion of the application of personalism to Knudson's anthropology, Christology, and soteriology.

For Knudson, the two primary biblical concepts of humanity are "image of God" and "divine sonship". The former, based on the Old

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[62] Ibid., 367.

[63] Ibid., 424; italics mine.

[64] Ibid., 425. Sabellius of Rome was branded as a heretic in the third century C.E. because of his insistence that "Father," "Son," and "Spirit" referred to successive and temporal manifestations of God rather than to essential Trinitarian distinctions.

Testament, points to the rational, moral, and spiritual nature of the human race.[65] The latter, emphasized in the New Testament, is a corollary of Bowne's doctrine of the Fatherhood of God. While all are children of God by virtue of God as creator, in a higher sense, "divine sonship" "identifies the ideal human life with Christ and implies that it consists in a spiritual achievement [process and development] rather than a passive inheritance."[66]

Against the determinism found in theological Calvinism, philosophical naturalism, and psychological behaviorism, Knudson was also an ardent champion of human freedom. What he was careful to argue for, however, was "metaphysical" freedom (in contrast to merely "moral" or "psychological" freedom), by which he meant the human ability "to conduct

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[65] Albert Cornelius Knudson, *The Doctrine of Redemption* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press 1983), 83.

[66] Ibid., 88. The model of "divine sonship" thus completes the model of "divine image." Interestingly, Knudson's anthropology was not consistent with the ethics of personalism in that he may very well, as a "man of his day," have been a racist. Thus this startling statement: "Strictly, 'person' is a narrower term [than 'self']. It applies only to selves that have attained a certain degree of intellectual and moral development; *a slave is not a person*, nor is a child" (*The Philosophy of Personalism*, 83; italics mine). Later personalists have recognized this as an abominable attitude. In fact, the third generation personalist, S. Paul Schilling, has gone as far as to confess, after his chastening experiences with Black Americans, "I surrendered all my shallow claims of white supremacy and asked the mercy of God on me, a sinner" ("Developments in My Thought," in Deats and Robb, eds., *The Boston Personalist Tradition*, 190; see also Schilling's discussion of Knudson's limitations on this issue in an earlier essay in the same volume, "Albert Cornelius Knudson: Person and Theologian," 81-104).

themselves differently from what they actually do."[67] The moral life could not be maintained with full integrity except "on the basis of metaphysical freedom or indeterminism."[68]

Against the older doctrines of sin which included the fall, original sin, and human depravity, Knudson defined sin as

> a defective attitude toward God, toward other people, and toward our true selves, for which we are accountable in God's sight. Its ultimate origin we have traced to man's power of self-determination; and the reason for its universality we have found in the enormous difficulties that stand in the way of man's perfect fulfillment of the moral law.[69]

Guilt stems from the "insuperable gulf between what we *are* and what we

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[67] Knudson, *The Doctrine of Redemption*, 123. Knudson was careful to warn that this freedom was not absolute, but limited by human constitution (physical and rational) and the environment (social and material), both of which influence conduct.

[68] Ibid., 158. Knudson maintained the Wesleyan emphasis of the priority of God and the human dependence on God by distinguishing between religious and metaphysical language. The former is that of emotion and worship whereby we properly confess our finitude in the presence of an infinite and holy God; to deny the latter, however, leads to predestinationism, of which Knudson in a later article called "the worst moral scandal that has appeared in the history of Christian thought" ("The Christian Doctrine of Man," *Theology and Modern Life: Essays in Honor of Harris Franklin Rall*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp [Chicago: Willett, Clark & Co., 1940], 91).

[69] Knudson, *The Doctrine of Redemption*, 266. What room did Knudson's theology hold for the devil? Not much due to its implicit metaphysical and cosmological monism. Knudson devotes one page to Satan in *The Doctrine of Redemption* in the context of a theoretical discussion of original sin, and concludes that "Satan occupies no logical place in the Christian system of belief" (Ibid., 251). Elsewhere, he says that "whatever be our belief in the existence of the Devil, we need, as Bowne used to say, to retain him for *rhetorical* purposes" (*The Principles of Christian Ethics* [New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943], 99; emphasis mine).

feel we *ought* to be."[70]

True human nature is therefore to be found in Jesus Christ, in whom the "divine sonship" is first and fully realized. Knudson rejects the older, speculative christologies, and opts instead for a "more historical, a more empirical, a more anthropocentric, a more ethical, and a more personalistic" approach to the person of Christ.[71] Whereas the traditional christologies emphasized the deity of Christ, Knudson's called for a renewed focus on Jesus' complete humanity; whereas previous christologies worked from the two-nature doctrine established by the Council of Chalcedon (451), Knudson found Christ's uniqueness to lie in his "dependence on the divine will and to his unique enduement with the Divine Spirit." The divinity of Christ was thus considered not ontologically but encountered in his "unique consciousness of oneness with God and [in] his creative and redemptive agency in the founding of the Kingdom of God."[72]

Following Bowne then, Knudson also advocated a moral theory of the atonement. Christ's mediatorship is no longer conceived within a dualistic

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[70] Knudson, *The Doctrine of Redemption*, 267; italics his.

[71] Ibid., 318-9.

[72] Ibid., 319; on these points, Knudson's christology differs little from that Schleiermacher himself.

framework; rather Knudson's immanental philosophy understood that

> . . . all our life is mediated to us. We derive everything from others, and so it is possible that there may be one supreme source of illumination and inspiration. Such a source we believe Christ to be, and in this sense he is our mediator . . . of *revelation*, not the only mediator, but the supreme mediator both in his life and death, and as such he is unique. His uniqueness is not absolute. It is one of degree, but it is on that account none the less real and significant.[73]

Salvation then combines both divine grace and human freedom in an indissoluble tandem. Divine enablement is needed as we "cannot in [our] own strength bridge the gulf that separates the ideal from the real."[74] Freedom of the will provides us with a "new method of realizing the ideal. Instead of trusting itself, it now trusts God. Divine grace thus supplements human freedom and the two co-operate in man's redemption."[75]

Further, from the biblical basis of his social theology, Knudson was led to conclude that redemption is "both present and future, both temporal and eternal."[76] This social emphasis had, in fact, never been absent from

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[73] Ibid., 379; emphasis Knudson's.

[74] Ibid., 166. In *The Principles of Christian Ethics*, 132, Knudson succinctly summarizes the Christian ideal as "self-realization through self-sacrifice. . . . Brotherly love is grounded in the worth of the individual, in the sacredness of personality, and in a universal moral ideal."

[75] Knudson, *The Doctrine of Redemption*, 167. Knudson remained within the Wesleyan tradition by maintaining this synergistic view of salvation.

[76] Ibid., 473.

his thought throughout his professional career. Undoubtedly, the two world wars and the great economic depression of the 1930s demanded that a systematic theologian of Knudson's caliber address such matters.[77] Here again, however, Knudson eschewed dogmatic plans and programs for social recovery, favoring instead a return to the personalistic principle enunciated by Bowne that "life is more than logic." Thus, for example, Knudson insisted at the height of World War II that Christianity did not come fully equipped with an economic doctrine, and in this light, "capitalism needs to be fused with socialism for the best of both truths."[78] In spite of the fact that socialism was quite unpopular during this time, Knudson recognized that a genuine personalism necessarily led to egalitarianism, and therefore sought to combine a biblically based socialism with the western capitalistic ideal as the most effective means toward social transformation.

In all of this, Knudson was careful to avoid the mechanical and speculative theories behind the older theologies. His personalistic method

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[77] Interestingly, Kathleen Kilgore, *Transformations*, 170 ff., tells us that there were socialist and pacifist causes located at the Boston University School of Theology throughout the 1930s; in fact, the Social Christian Club met within and under the auspices of the School of Theology during this period.

[78] Knudson, *The Principles of Christian Ethics*, 280.

allowed him to center more on the rational and empirical aspects of theology which led to an anthropocentric rather than theocentric focus. However, since Knudson defined "theology" as "the systematic exposition and rational justification of the intellectual content of religion,"[79] the end result is simply the culmination of the means.

SUMMARY OF KNUDSON'S INFLUENCE IN METHODIST THEOLOGY

The Methodist historian, William McCutcheon, is correct in saying that during the 1920s, "every major theologian in the Methodist Episcopal Church considered himself as evangelical liberal."[80] This is certainly the case with Knudson himself, and this in spite of his detractors. While critics like Robert Chiles are correct in seeing in Knudson a shift from revelation to reason, from sinful man to moral man, and from free grace to free will,[81] his condemnation of Knudson's theology as "Methodist apostasy"[82] is certainly

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[79] Knudson, *The Doctrine of God*, 19.

[80] McCutcheon, "American Methodist Thought and Theology," in Burke, ed., 3:263.

[81] This is Chiles' argument in *Theological Transition in American Methodism.*

[82] Robert Chiles, "Methodist Apostasy: From Free Grace to Free Will," *Religion in Life* 27:3 (Summer 1958): 438-49.

too harsh. To be sure, Knudson did revise Wesley in a number of central categories. However, in light of the Christian tradition, Knudson's evangelicalism is irrefutable. He believed unequivocally in the soteriological centrality of Christ, and in Christianity as the quintessential religion.[83]

Further, Knudson's evangelical liberalism was by no means a deviant theology held by a trivial minority. In his doctoral dissertation, McCutcheon tells of Knudson's widespread influence:

> . . . no one theologian left greater impact upon the Methodist Episcopal Church in the period of 1925-1950 than did Professor Knudson. . . . In these years, the mention of "Methodist" implied "personalism" in which turn implied "Knudson." Such an extensive account of his theology is needed for as yet no one had studied him in articulate detail. To do so is to understand in large number the *prevailing Methodist theology* in the quarter century, 1925-1950.[84]

Rather than implying that the sole criterion of orthodoxy is prevalent acceptance, I am simply calling attention to the fact that Knudson's was the

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[83] Knudson wrote: "Jesus, therefore, stands out as unique among the religious founders of the world. . . . Unlike the others, he is himself essential to the religion he established. His personality is part and parcel of the church's faith. To believe in God is for the Christian to believe in Christ; and to believe in Christ is to believe in God. This unique fact sets Jesus apart from all other religious leaders. He is redeemer in a sense that they are not. He mediates between God and man. He is the perfect revealer of the Father and a redemptive power in the lives of men" (*The Doctrine of Redemption*, 283).

[84] McCutcheon, "Theology in the Methodist Episcopal Church," 155 (emphasis mine). Unfortunately, no one since McCutcheon has devoted much attention to recovering Knudson's contributions to an evangelical liberal Methodist theology.

most respected mid-twentieth century effort to make both biblical and systematic theology palatable to the modern Methodist mind. On the one hand, Knudson firmly resisted the currents of traditional conservatism, uncritical pietism and dogmatic Fundamentalism which threatened the Methodist church during the first half of the twentieth century. On the other hand, he also attempted to thorough rethinking of Christian theology in the light of a critical personalistic philosophy.

Knudson's importance is also not exaggerated by Harold DeWolf who says that Knudson "did more than anyone else to make 'Boston Personalism' a proud historical tradition."[85] The impact of the teacher Bowne upon the student was such that it would not be far from the truth to say that personalism was the driving force behind Knudson's endeavors in systematic theology. As such, following in the footsteps of Bowne, Knudson's ultimately remained a relatively conventional theology. It is only when we come to the work of his contemporary, Edgar S. Brightman, that original and creative contributions to philosophical theology can be found.

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[85] L. Harold DeWolf, "Albert Cornelius Knudson: As Philosopher," *The Personalist* 35:4 (October 1954): 366; DeWolf is a third generation personalist who sat under both Knudson and Brightman, and who taught both philosophy and theology at Boston University from 1944-65.

CHAPTER V

BRIGHTMAN: FROM LIBERALISM TO MODERNISM AND PLURALISM

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Edgar Sheffield Brightman was Knudson's younger contemporary by eleven years.[1] Like Knudson, he also was born to a Methodist clergyman, arriving on 20 September 1884, to George Edgar and Mary Sheffield Brightman in Holbrook, Massachusetts. His was a typical parsonage upbringing, full of religious influences and theological reading beginning at a young age.

Brightman attended Brown University where, during his first year, he learned from Dean Alexander Meiklejohn what he would return to all his life: the logical method of empirical coherence. As an undergraduate, he was

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[1] Brightman's biography is yet to be written. My sketch relies on the biographical sections of Paul E. Johnson, "Brightman's Contributions to Personalism," *The Personalist* 35:1 (Winter 1954): 59-72, and Walter G. Muelder, "Edgar S. Brightman: Person and Moral Philosopher," in Deats and Robb, eds., *The Boston Personalist Tradition*, 105-20, along with Brightman's own "Religion as Truth," in Ferm, ed., *Contemporary American Theology*, especially 55-7.

enchanted first by Plato, Berkeley and Nietzsche, and later by Kant, Schopenhauer, and Royce. The latter's absolutism was Brightman's "first real allegiance . . . accepted as a whole for two or three years, until, in my graduate days, James's *Pragmatism* appeared and swept me off my feet."[2]

From Brown, Brightman obtained his A.B. in 1906, and his A.M. in 1908. He then went on to Boston for his doctorate, and while there, studied under both Bowne and Knudson. He acknowledged that "Bowne gave me a personalism which seemed to me to combine the truth that there was in Royce and James with a criticism of the errors of each."[3] As part of his doctoral studies, Brightman also spent a year at the Universities of Berlin and Marburg in Germany.

After receiving his Ph.D. in 1912, Brightman taught philosophy, psychology and Bible at Nebraska Wesleyan University and at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut.[4] In 1919, he accepted the invitation

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[2] Brightman, "Religion as Truth," 57.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Brightman's biblical scholarship, often overlooked, is attested to by his *The Sources of the Hexateuch* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1918), where he outlines and analyses the critical consensus regarding the documentary source theory of the first six books of the Old Testament. He also wrote *Historical Outline of the Bible*, later revised by his student, Walter G. Muelder (Berea, KY: Berea College Press, 1936).

of the Graduate School of Boston University to the position of Borden Parker Bowne Professor of Philosophy, and remained there until his death.

Brightman maintained an exhausting schedule all his life. He wrote tirelessly, publishing fourteen books, and almost 700 articles, pieces ranging from philatelic notes and letters to book reviews and philosophic essays. He also mastered seven foreign languages--Hebrew, Greek, Latin, German, French, Spanish, and Italian--which were used in his enormous worldwide correspondence. As a teacher he was very involved with his students and also immersed in the academic world.[5] Besides all of this, he also attended Newton Center Methodist Episcopal Church twice a week, taught at pastor's schools periodically, and maintained ecclesiastical contacts. His pace detensified after a heart attack in 1949. He eventually succumbed to a stroke and passed away on 25 February 1953.

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[5] On Brightman as teacher, see Peter A. Bertocci and M. Alicia Corea, eds., "Edgar Sheffield Brightman Through His Students' Eyes," *The Philosophical* Forum 12 (1954): 53-67. Brightman's academic involvement included participation at numerous philosophical congresses, and memberships with the American Philosophical Association (Eastern Division), the American Theological Society (Eastern Section), the National Association of Biblical Instructors (all of which he has also served as president), the Mind Association (British), the Kant-Gesellschaft, the National Council of Religion and Higher Education, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and, in the last seven years of his life, a local group that he founded called the Philosophers Anonymous of Greater Boston.

BRIGHTMAN THE PHILOSOPHER

In one of his earliest books, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, Brightman defined the five main areas of philosophy as methodology, epistemology, metaphysics, axiology, and the history of philosophy.[6] Although Bowne had done some work in the area of axiology, he applied himself primarily to epistemology and metaphysics. Knudson had dealt with the history of philosophy from a personalist perspective in *The Philosophy of Personalism*. It remained for Brightman to develop a personalistic method and a more comprehensive value theory.

Brightman himself warned that "I am not a theologian and my approach to the problems of human experience has always been philosophical rather than theological."[7] As such, he was motivated by a life-long quest for philosophical truth. The question and answers of method raised by his first teacher in philosophy, Dean Meiklejohn, was one that Brightman never ceased to employ and refine throughout his life.

The first fruits of his thinking on the subject were expressed in his

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[6] Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *An Introduction to* Philosophy, 3rd. ed., rev. by Robert N. Beck (1925; New York: Holt Rinehart Winston, 1963), 9-12.

[7] Brightman, "Religion as Truth," 53.

1912 doctoral dissertation: "The Criterion of Religious Truth in the Theology of Albrecht Ritschl." Brightman concluded this study by proposing to "correct Ritschl's empiricism by a personalism (of Professor Bowne's type), that recognizes the unity of the subject, and looks on the harmonious, consistent realization of the total personal life as the ultimate criterion of truth. . . ."[8] Brightman later was prepared to say that "personality. . .is the final seat of authority, the source of all sources."[9]

What, however, did Brightman mean by "personality"? His clearest answer came in an essay on the idea of "personality as a metaphysical principle." In addition to the standard definitions proposed by Bowne and Knudson of "individuality, consciousness, and will," he said that

> personality is a complex whole, in which form, content, and activity are found in indivisible and inseparable unity. By form, I mean the laws of reason; by content, the brute facts of experience (sense data, pleasures, pains, desires, and the like); and by activity, the power of will to choose and control the course of consciousness within limits.[10]

It is clear from this definition that Brightman desired that his

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[8] Edgar Sheffield Brightman, "The Criterion of Religious Truth in the Theology of Albrecht Ritschl" (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1912), 106.

[9] Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *A Philosophy of Ideals* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1928), 128.

[10] Edgar Sheffield Brightman, "Personality as a Metaphysical Principle," in Brightman, ed., *Personalism in Theology*, 57.

philosophic method be both rational and empirical. Part of Brightman's philosophical motivation came from his sensing "the need of supplementing and correcting Bowne's thought by greater attention to empirical fact, both in psychology and in the physical and biological sciences, and also by a more concrete and adequate view of the work of reason; in other words, by more James and more Hegel."[11] The result of this was Brightman's "radically empirical" philosophic method. This he equated with being personalistic, defining it as using "the data of personal consciousness (there being no other data available), and [being guided] by the purposes and ideals of personal consciousness."[12] Personalistic method therefore is an

> empiricism which recognizes the demands of reason and of experiential fact; of descriptive fact and of value; of part and of whole. It is both deductive and inductive, both rational and empirical. It

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[11] Brightman, "Religion as Truth," 57. On Brightman's estimate of James and Hegel, see his "The Versatile James" and "Hegel's Influence," both reprinted in Steinkraus and Beck, eds., *Studies in Personalism*, 116-24 and 105-11 respectively.

[12] Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *Person and Reality: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, eds. Peter A. Bertocci, et. al. (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1958), 22. This "radical empiricism" evidences the influence of James. Robert J. Vanden Burgt has noted the parallels between James' pragmatism and Brightman's criterion of truth: both agreed that "a true idea is what fits in best with the full range of experienced data" ("Philosophical Roots of the Finite God Theories of William James and Edgar Sheffield Brightman" [Ph.D. dissertation, Marquette University, 1967], 191).

> starts with personal experience raw and moves to personal experience interpreted and growing toward rational wholeness.[13]

Also known as his principle or criterion of coherence, this was the way in which Brightman sought to take into account the entire spectrum of human experiences, including all of the empirical sciences, into a personalistic philosophy. For Brightman, since rational coherence should not be sacrificed, the laws of reason--defined as being systematically related, consistent, experientially inclusive, analytic, synoptic, experimentally active, hypothetically open, critical, and decisively committed to the best available hypothesis[14] --should not be violated. Being one of his original contributions to philosophy,[15] Brightman applied this method to every field of investigation that he undertook, including his work done in axiology.

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[13] Brightman, *Person and Reality*, 33. Brightman was careful to insist that whatever the empirical data of religion, it is inextricably mingled with valuations and therefore incompletely understood until subjected to careful philosophical reflection; see his "What Constitutes a Scientific Interpretation of Religion?" *Journal of Religion* 6 (1926): 250-58.

[14] Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *Nature and Values* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1945), 106-7.

[15] So Gustave H. Todrank, "The Empirical Evidence for Brightman's Theistic Cosmology" (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1956), 290-1, who also agreed with Brightman that this was "the irrefutable criterion of truth for philosophy. It is irrefutable in that it cannot be denied without being affirmed." Brightman himself noted that while "the criterion of truth as systematic coherence has been consciously or unconsciously employed by many of the greatest thinkers from Plato to the present time. . . here, however, the concern is. . . only with its function as a test of truth" (*An Introduction to Philosophy*, 77).

Brightman's life-long interest in axiology--the science of values and value judgments--was expounded in several volumes.[16] He distinguished early between intrinsic and instrumental value. Intrinsic value is "whatever is liked, desired, prized, enjoyed, preferred, or acknowledged as interesting, important, or worthy of approval for its own sake,"[17] and included lower (e.g., health and recreation) and higher (e.g., intellectual, aesthetic, and religious) classifications. Instrumental value is "prized as a means or a cause of intrinsic value."[18] Brightman was convinced that the existence of values itself was sufficient to uncover the deficiencies of naturalism and support a thoroughgoing personalism as the most viable philosophy of life.[19] He also insisted that personality itself is to be taken as an intrinsic value--that it was valuable in and of itself, apart from being a means to any end. Without personality, not only are "all other values corrupted," but "no other

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[16] Aside from articles and the already referred to *Nature and Values*, Brightman also published *Religious Values* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1925), and *Persons and Values* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1952). He also devoted parts of almost all of his other books to the subject.

[17] Brightman, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, 187.

[18] Ibid., 186.

[19] See esp. Chapter VII of *Nature and Values*, "The Resultant Philosophy of Life."

values exist."[20]

How were such values discerned? Brightman deals with this question in the opening chapter of his *Religious Values* where he speaks, not

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[20] Brightman, *Persons and Values*, 18. Wilbur Handley Mullen has shown that Brightman's empiricism demanded that "the *only* locus for the actualization, realization, or appreciation of values is in the experience of persons" ("A Comparison of the Value Theories of E. S. Brightman and A. N. Whitehead," [Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1955], 359; emphasis mine).

Mullen's conclusion, 360, is noteworthy: "A fruitful synthesis of the thought of the two men might begin by more emphasis on organic relatedness in Brightman's personalistic pluralism, while Whitehead's concept of God could move profitably in the direction of Brightman's clear-cut theism." "Organic relatedness," however, is not wholly missing in Brightman. With his theory of the "Datum Self," Brightman posited that "everything real is a self at some level of its existence; . . . Nothing exists except in, of, and for a self" ("Personality as a Metaphysical Principle," 41). That this bears striking similarity to Whitehead's theory of "actual occasions" (which comprise the ultimate stuff of reality) cannot be denied. Further affinities to Whitehead's panpsychism are also evident when Brightman writes as follows: "A person is a highly developed self. Any conscious being is a self, no matter how elementary its consciousness is. In fact, we may use the word self as a limit notion, and speak of the minimum self as the least possible consciousness that can be. We do not know whether such a self really exists or not, but we have good reason to believe that there are very elementary subhuman selves, unable to reason or to entertain ideals. When a self reaches the stage of being able to develop self-consciousness, reasoning powers, and experience of ideal values, we call it a person" (Ibid.). It is no wonder that Brightman felt obliged to defend his personalism against the charge of anthropomorphism. He answers instead that it is "cosmomorphic," since just like space and time, it is to be found in--rather than created by--human experience. In an earlier work, Brightman argued that personalism was "theomorphic": "Instead of taking personality to be too human a category to apply to God, it would really be more logical to take it as too divine a category to apply to man. No human being is fully personal; if he were, he would always be conscious, always intellectually, emotionally, and purposively at his best, always alert and growing. . . . Most of the time he is a mere shadow of a person, a fragmentary self, yet a fragment that contains a clue to what a person could be" (*Is God a Person?* [New York: Association Press, 1932], 53). Ultimately, Brightman may be faulted only for using personalistic terminology and concepts to relay the organicism in his thought, rather than the scientific language of Whitehead (which was quite novel in many ways but has in our time, been more in vogue).

surprisingly, of "Coherence as Criterion of Truth and Reasonableness." Any belief is true "insofar as it organizes, interprets and explains experiences more consistently, systematically, and economically than any competing belief."[21] The evidence further points to theism as the *most* (not *completely*) coherent interpretation of experience. As such, it is reasonable to accept and unreasonable to reject.[22] Values then emerge out of such "true" beliefs.

This is supported by his thoughts on the notion of ideals in a later book. There, Brightman defines an "ideal" as

1) a type of experience which we approve
2) that which forms a hypothesis about future experiences
3) a principle of unity
4) a principle of control and selection
5) a plan of action
6) a social principle, and
7) a principle of love.[23]

Characterized by these traits, the ideal is then "the pattern [and] the value is the product which conforms to the pattern."[24] Thus, for example, the

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[21] Brightman, *Religious Values*, 23.

[22] Ibid., 30-1. In fact, just as Bowne fought against epistemological and metaphysical agnosticism and atheism, Brightman wages his offensive against the naturalistic philosophies of his day on the battlefield of axiology; see his early essay "Neo-Realistic Theories of Value," in Wilm, ed., *Studies in Philosophy and Theology*, 22-64, which sets the tone for his work on this area.

[23] Brightman, *A Philosophy of Ideals*, 68-74.

[24] Ibid., 75.

question of immortality was answered affirmatively by Brightman whose reasoning included an appeal to the value of personality, and to the supposition that life was ultimately valuable--even with incompletely realized ideals that required fulfillment--rather than tragically meaningless.[25]

The "value of life," however, raised the question whether or not there were as many, if not more, disvalues that did not "conform" to the patterned ideals of life than there were values that did. By "disvalues," Brightman referred to that which was "either hostile to value or even positively offensive, painful, and otherwise worthy of disapproval."[26] Brightman understood that this aspect of reality, also known as the problem of good-

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[25] Brightman, *Religious Values*, 93. In another place, Brightman reasoned that "if value is to be found in experience. . . and if personality is a spiritual whole that finds value through its own membership in the universal order which includes but transcends all human persons, there is substantial ground for reasonable hope of immortal life" (*Immortality in Post-Kantian Idealism* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925], 60).

Later in life, Brightman raised the possibility of "conditional immortality." Premised on the goodness of God, he proposed that "immortality is not inherent in every person or every human being as such, but is conditional on the presence in the person of genuine potentialities for spiritual development" (*A Philosophy of Religion* [New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1940], 408). Because of the problematic implications of the doctrine, he was later questioned on this matter by Joseph P. Gibbons, who argued, in part, that Brightman's doctrine of freedom required the possibility of an eternal hell ("Brightman's Philosophy of Immortality," *The Personalist* 54:2 [Spring 1973]: 176-87). Warren Steinkraus, a student of Brightman's, came to the latter's defense by pointing out that Brightman's metaphysics did not address the religious doctrine of hell, and by noting much more commonality between him and Gibbons than Gibbons himself understood ("E.S. Brightman on Conditional Immortality," *The Personalist* 56:1 [Winter 1975]: 80-2).

[26] Brightman, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, 210.

and-evil, was intimately connected with the question of God, and could not be adequately answered apart from it.

BRIGHTMAN THE MODERNIST

Brightman himself was first touched by personal tragedy when his first wife of three years died in 1915 after a tortuous bout with cancer. Being fully aware of the theistic implications of the problem of evil, he recognized that anyone proposing a comprehensive philosophy of religion could not avoid the subject. The theodicy developed by Brightman evidences his departure from the evangelical liberalism of his teacher, Bowne, and his colleague, Knudson, towards modernism. This modernism was characterized by his more radically empirical theological method, utilized even in his philosophic quest for God.

One of Brightman's most concise definitions for God can be found in his presidential address to the eastern division of the American Philosophical Association: God is "a cosmic mind, a rational, purposive experient . . . controlling cosmic factors, for an end of the highest possible value."[27] God

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[27] Address given 29 December 1936, published as "An Empirical Approach to God," *The Philosophical Review* 46 (1937): 152.

then, not only seeks a teleological achievement of value (a doctrine held also by Bowne's contemporary, Howison), but is also the Source and Continuer of values.[28] At the same time, the existence of disvalues is evidenced everywhere. As Brightman aptly put it later, "the problem of religion, of law, of statesmanship, of morality, and of philosophy and of science is all one. It is: How to build cosmos out of chaos."[29]

What, however, did Brightman mean by "chaos"? He was pointing to the what appeared to be intrinsic to the nature of reality. Beginning with religious experience, Brightman noted that life's advances always took

> the form of opposition and struggle. There is, therefore, something dualistic about all religion. Light and darkness, God and Satan, Yang and Yin, sin and redemption, being and nonbeing, thesis and antithesis, stimulus and response; religion, philosophy, and science alike testify to the dualistic structure of experience.[30]

Brightman found further evidence for the chaotic structure of reality in the evolutionary process of the cosmos. As early as 1925, in the aftermath of the famous Scopes trial, Brightman had began studying

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[28] In his own terminology, Brightman, *Philosophy of Religion*, 209, spoke of God as "axiogenesis" (producer of values) and "axiosoteria" (preserver of values); earlier in the same book, he said that God is "the *only* source of values" (Ibid., 135; italics mine).

[29] Brightman, *Nature and Values*, 86.

[30] Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *The Problem of God* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1930), 177-8; note Brightman's use of the Hegelian dialectic.

Darwin's *The Origin of the Species*. In fact, Brightman used this text in his 1926 introductory philosophy course, subjecting it to critical analysis in order to "determine what philosophical presuppositions were implicit in Darwin's interpretations and what philosophical inferences of a teleological nature could be drawn from his facts."[31] In the next few years, he gained much from Edmund Noble's *Purposive Evolution* (1926) and the creative evolution of the French philosopher, Henri Bergson. His studies in the biological sciences led him to conclude in 1930 that "the law of evolution is God's method of creation."[32] This led him to question the "slowness with which he [God] attains his ends."[33] This process testified to the existence of good and evil in the universe, value and disvalue, structure and chaos. The following quote from Brightman's presidential address summarizes his empirical observations regarding cosmic chaos:

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[31] Recollections of Angelo P. Bertocci , *Teacher from Little Italy* (Washington, DC: Legation Press, 1990), 169. Bertocci became a convinced personalist as a student of Brightman's during the mid-1920s, and later achieved some distinction in literary theory as Professor of Literature at Boston University. His younger brother, Peter, succeeded Brightman as Borden Parker Bowne Professor of Philosophy.

[32] Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *The Problem of God*, 123.

[33] Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *The Finding of God* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1931), 124.

> The empirical evidence most directly relevant to the cosmic fate of values, and hence to the power of goodness in objective reality, is to be found in the facts of evolution. . . . An impartial contemplation of the data of evolution leaves a dual impression of ineradicable teleology and ineradicable dysteleology. There is ineradicable teleology. The order, mutual adaptation, and progress in evolution, above all the so-called 'arrival of the fit', point to a power other than the curve of probability, arriving at relevance, wholeness, and value. . . . But with the teleology, there is ineradicable dysteleology. The incalculable wastage, the blind alleys, the internecine warfare, the natural plagues and disasters of the evolutionary process are empirically ineradicable evidence of dysteleology.[34]

For Brightman, to solve this problem--of structure and chaos, of telos and dystelos, of good and evil--would be in large part to solve the problem of God. Since he considered that the problem was primarily a metaphysical rather than religious one, and since metaphysics utilized a "free, rational investigation of all available evidence," the results of such a process of inquiry could never be a "mere appendage to or implication of the Christian revelation, wholly determined by it, regardless of other facts and reasons."[35]

Brightman's modernism is here plainly evident. Whereas Bowne's theistic absolutism differed little if any from classical theism, and Knudson held to Scripture as one of four sources for theological construction,

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[34] Brightman, "An Empirical Approach to God," 166-7.

[35] Edgar Sheffield Brightman, "Is Christianity Reasonable?" *Religion in the Making* 1 (1941): 414.

Brightman's radical empiricism was a thoroughgoing method which he applied even to matters traditionally reserved for theology. He insisted that

> theology is reason applied to God. Reason knows no barriers, no privileges, no separations. Its impartial eye examines every fact, every belief, every problem, with a view to finding the truth wherever it may be. Reason cannot regard traditional theology as a finality or its dogmas as infallible; . . . All faiths and revelations are in need of rational criticism and interpretation.[36]

Brightman's philosophical method thus led him to reject the theodicies of traditional theology. In his later *A Philosophy of Religion*, he discusses this issue. Religious and theological answers to the problem of evil have traditionally been premised on God as omnipotent and omnibenevolent. As such, evil has been understood a) in dualistic terms as issuing forth from a cosmic adversary such as Satan; b) as the result of the voluntary misuse of freedom (traditionally called sin) by finite creatures; c) as part and parcel of what Leibniz, the seventeenth century rationalist philosopher, called "the best of all possible worlds" set within the context of the larger purposes of God which are hidden to the human mind; d) in Augustinian terms as

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[36] Brightman, "Religion as Truth," 53; see also Brightman's extended discussion of the insufficiency of "The Way of Revelation" in *The Finding of God*, Chapter II. Likewise, Brightman chided his naturalistic and atheistic opponents for allowing their own dogmatic presuppositions to adjudicate the theistic question, rather than pursuing an empirical, rational, and impartial assessment of the evidence; see his "Dogma, Dogma, Who's Got the Dogma?" *Religion in Life* 2 (1933): 553-62.

privation; or, e) either as punishment (for moral evils) or as discipline (for non-moral evils).

None of these explanations were sufficient for Brightman as they left too many unanswered questions. (A) was not viable within a monistic framework of reality; (b) did not explain natural evils; (c) was, in some ways, a leap beyond reason, and thus, not an option; (d) did not sufficiently take into account the empirical facts of evil; and (e) undermined the notion of divine justice.[37] Since his goal was a "coherent hypothesis which will include and explain all the theses and antitheses of experience [on] the battlefield of good-and-evil,"[38] he was thereby led from the question of theodicy to his conception of God as both finite and infinite.

With the publication of *The Problem of God* in 1930, Brightman's modernism was articulated at length. Later termed "The Finite-Infinite

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[37] Brightman, *A Philosophy of Religion*, 259-72; Brightman also discusses, in a less comprehensive and less systematic fashion, the problems of traditional theodicies in Chapter IV of *The Problem of God* titled "The Contraction of God."

[38] Brightman, *A Philosophy of Religion*, 251. Not surprisingly, Brightman's emphasis on rational coherence has led some critics to fault him for an "exaggerated emphasis upon subjective and cognitive aspects of experience" (James Alfred Martin, Jr., *Empirical Philosophies of Religion* [1945; reprint, Freeport NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970], 114). As one attempting to integrate the findings of modern science into a viable philosophical theology, Brightman would have insisted that such was intrinsic to the task at hand.

God,"[39] his theory was, in spite of a long history of theistic finitism in western philosophy, an "explicit, original, and fully worked out finitism."[40] The original contribution of Brightman is to be found in his doctrine of The Given, by which he rejected the classical doctrine of divine omnipotence. His related doctrine of theistic temporalism denied the traditional notion of divine immutability. Both evidence his radical empiricism brought to full fruition and will be examined in order.

Brightman most fully defined The Given in his chapter on "The Resultant Idea of God" which deserves to be reproduced at length:

> God is a conscious Person of perfect good will. He is the source of all value. . . . Therefore his purpose controls the outcome of the universe. His purpose and his nature must be inferred from the way in which experience reveals them, namely, as being gradually attained through effort, difficulty, and suffering. Hence there is in God's very

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[39] Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *Personality and Religion* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1934), 71-100.

[40] John H. Lavely, "Edgar Sheffield Brightman: Good-and-Evil and the Finite-Infinite God," in Deats and Robb, eds., *The Boston Personalist Tradition*, 122. In *The Problem of God*, 10, Brightman pointed to Francis J. McConnell's *Is God Limited?* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1921)--which argued that God was limited by creation, human freedom, and the Incarnation--as the most influential of all the literature on theistic finitism that he consulted. Other more well known advocates of theistic finitism include Plato, the nineteenth century British philosopher J. S. Mill, the French personalist Charles Renouvier, and William James. Brightman also mentions the lesser known finitism of his contemporary, William Pepperell Montague, a student of James. For a historical sketch, see Brightman, *A Philosophy of Religion*, 286-301. For a more extensive critical analysis of nineteenth and early twenty century finitists, see Rannie Belle Baker, *The Concept of a Limited God* (Washington DC: Shenandoah Publishing House, 1934).

> nature something which makes the effort and pain of life necessary. *There is within him, in addition to his reason and his active creative will, a passive element which enters into every one of his conscious states, as sensation, instinct, and impulse enter into ours, and constitutes a problem for him. This element we call The Given.* The evils of life and the delays in the attainment of value, in so far as they come from God and not from human freedom, are thus due to his nature, yet not wholly to his deliberate choice. His will and reason acting on The Given produce the world and achieve value in it.[41]

Brightman then goes on to set forth the four types of evidence which lead to the assertion that God is limited by The Given.[42] First is the already referred to facts of evolution which reveal a cosmic drag that demands a revisioning of the classical attributes of God derived from an a priori method such as divine omnipotence and divine immutability. Secondly, the nature of consciousness and personality, when applied to God, both limit the divine will (an expression of active and passive elements, like our own) and knowledge (of the free future acts of other rational creatures, like us). Thirdly, the principle of dialectic points to the ongoing divine "struggle" in

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[41] Brightman, *The Problem of God*, 113 (emphasis mine). Brightman's later writing on The Given demonstrates further reflection: "The Given consists of the eternal, uncreated laws of reason and also of equally eternal and uncreated processes of nonrational consciousness which exhibit all the ultimate qualities of sense objects (*qualia*), disorderly impulses and desires, such experiences as pain and suffering, the forms of space and time, and whatever in God is the source of surd evil" (*A Philosophy of Religion*, 337).

[42] Brightman, *The Problem of God*, 126-38.

achieving a higher meaning or synthesis.[43] Finally, he points to the religious value of The Given and advances theological evidence for his view as demonstrated in the suffering of God and the cross of Christ. As he poignantly writes in a later book:

> Jesus reveals a God who bears an eternal cross; and it is this cross which I have called The Given. . . . The cross tells us that God somehow finds suffering and death necessary to his ends. Easter tells us that suffering and death are not final; that personality survives death; and that no obstacles can block the advance of the divine purpose. From the point of view of my own special terminology, if Good Friday is The Given, Easter is The Control of The Given. . . . In a word, there is no problem which God cannot solve. Such is the God revealed in Jesus.[44]

In *The Finding of God*, Brightman further describes five aspects of The Given[45]: as part of the conscious content and conscious experience of God; as part of the complexity of the divine nature, including the rational and moral law, and "an eternal subject-matter (conscious. . . not physical) which eternal divine thought and goodness have to reckon with in all their dealings, as human thought has to reckon with sense data;" as eternal and therefore unlikely to ever be completely eliminated, yet with the "hope that it

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[43] Here, Brightman is explicit in his indebtedness to Hegel (Ibid., 135-6).

[44] Brightman, *Is God a Person?*, 80-1.

[45] Brightman, *The Finding of God*, 174-7; quotes following cited here also.

may be raised to higher and higher levels, and that it may enter into increasingly beautiful and holy creations as the endless future advances;" as internal to God so as to avoid any cosmic dualism; as controlled (not created) by God who thus limits the evils and havoc which an unrestrained Given would wreak in the universe.[46] Rather than the traditional view of divine omnipotence, Brightman thus opts for theistic finitism as the more reasonable hypothesis for resolving the problem of evil.

To be expected, Brightman's theory of a finite God eternally confronted with this indomitable Given was the target of numerous criticisms from both conservative and liberal scholars alike.[47] Almost

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[46] In an exposition of Brightman's theism, Rufus Burrow, Jr. has rightly called attention to the cumulative significance of these aspects of The Given. He admonishes that for Brightman, consciousness "is a complex unity within which are found distinguishable but inseparable functions. The nonrational Given within God's nature is so inextricably interwoven into the being of God, along with God's reason and active will, that there is no need to worry about a dualism within the divine consciousness. The emphasis is on unity, and consequently, the indivisibility of consciousness. Much of the credibility of Brightman's theory of the Given turns on this emphasis. If one fails to understand the significance of unity in the World Ground it will not be possible to adequately understand the hypothesis of the finite-infinite God. . ." ("The Personalistic Theism of Edgar S. Brightman," *Encounter* 543:2 [Spring 1992]: 178).

[47] On the one hand, an orthodox evangelical like Gordon Clark argued that Brightman could (should) just as well conclude that God is both finite and evil, rather than finite and good (*A Christian View of Men and Things* [Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952], 277). On the other hand, the process theologian David Ray Griffin has said that Brightman's doctrine of God having an internal problem is "the unorthodox conclusion that has been lurking for centuries in the closets of classical theism" (*God, Power, & Evil: A Process Theodicy* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976], 250). One statement summarizes the feeling of most critics: God himself, because

immediately, Knudson himself raised several objections to the theory, preferring the traditional answer given to the problem of evil which combined an appeal to divine omnipotence along with a plea for human ignorance.[48] The result, conjectured by the Neo-Thomist critic, John James McLarney, is that by the time Brightman published *Personality and Religion* in 1934, he had modified his theistic finitism in the direction of a finite-infinite God.[49] While this may be true, no substantial differences can be detected in Brightman's personalistic theism. As infinite, God is "the

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of the insurmountable Given, "stands in awe of the Given" (Daniel Callahan, "Human Experience and God: Brightman's Personalistic Theism," *American Philosophy and the Future*, ed. Michael Novak [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968], 235). This was already pointed out in an early criticism by Andrew Banning who concluded that The Given, as stated by Brightman, may "at some future time develop a new emergent aspect which will either fundamentally alter the nature of God or confront him with situations for which his principles will prove inadequate" ("Professor Brightman's Theory of a Limited God. A Criticism," *Harvard Theological Review* 27:3 [July 1934]: 168).

[48] On Knudson's objections, see *The Doctrine of God*, 273-5. His evangelical spirit affirmed that "If the existence of evil requires us to affirm either the divine impotence or human ignorance, and if one theory is logically as tenable as the other, faith will have no hesitancy in making its choice in favor of the latter" (Ibid., 366). See Brightman's response in "The Given and Its Critics," *Religion in Life* 1:1 (1932): 134-45.

[49] John James McLarney, *The Theism of Edgar Sheffield Brightman* (S.T.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1936), 147. McLarney also thought that the absence of "The Given" in Brightman's *Personality and Religion* was testimony to the fact that he had abandoned the doctrine. While absent terminologically, however, The Given is an integral part of the book. McLarney overlooks the fact that *Personality and Religion* was originally intended for "the average educated man" ("Preface"), and was not meant as a technical philosophical treatise. That The Given appears again in substantially the same form in both of Brightman's later books on philosophical theology (*Philosophy of Religion* and *Person and Reality*) witnesses to the fact that he did not abandon this doctrine.

source of all being [and] his will is the energy and striving which eternally creates value and order"; as finite, God is not willfully responsible for the futility and evils of existence: "they are God's suffering as well as ours."[50]

Brightman's radical empiricism also led him to hold that a finite-infinite God should also be both temporal and eternal. This was intimated as such in *The Problem of God*.[51] This notion is further developed in a later essay, where Brightman discusses more extensively the thesis that "the God of religion, from everlasting to everlasting, is a temporal being," and that "eternity is a function of time, not time of eternity."[52] As evidence, he points to human experience, the historical process, the idea of progress, and the process of development by which moral ideals are realized.[53] He concludes that God is unbegun and unending, "a God of many universes and of many evolutions."[54]

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[50] Brightman, *Personality and Religion*, 100.

[51] Brightman wrote that, "For to call God temporal is not to deny that he is eternal; it is only to deny he is timeless, or that he is not intimately related to and concerned with events in time" (*The Problem of God*, 130).

[52] Edgar Sheffield Brightman, "A Temporalistic View of God," *Journal of Religion* 12 (1932): 544.

[53] Ibid.: 545-8.

[54] Ibid.: 554.

Thus, activity, change, and duration are to be predicated of God. As Brightman later states, "All being is temporal and therefore all being is personal."[55] While the concept of eternity is an abstraction of temporality, God is real. As really existing, God is temporal, and time acts as a divine limit. Time is, however, also the "condition of his personal perfection [and] his endless productivity."[56] Mutability, then, is intrinsic to the divine experience as it is to the human.

In another essay, Brightman questioned whether Bowne himself--who followed Kant in seeing time as existing only in the phenomenal realm and not as real in itself--was true to the personalist axiom that only personality could unravel the problem of change and identity. While there is evidence that Bowne at times saw the temporality of God as the logical personalistic conclusion, he was, as Brightman put it, "caught between his Kantianism and his personalism." Being influenced by the strong eternalistic tradition of philosophy and religion, Bowne never achieved coherence on this matter (and, as far as Brightman was concerned, neither did Knudson whose

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[55] Brightman, *Person and Reality*, 135. Against Kant's doctrine of the ideality of time, Brightman argues for the ontological reality of time in Chapter 7 of this book.

[56] Brightman, *The Finding of God*, 131. See also Chapter V of Brightman's *The Spiritual Life* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1937), titled "Spirit as Developing."

positioned differed little, if at all, from Bowne's). Brightman could only conclude that "when Bowne speaks as an eternalist, he tends toward the abstract and impersonalistic."[57]

Brightman's deviation from classical theism can be seen as the logical by product of his philosophic method. As examples of his "finite-infinite" theism, God is not simply omnipotent, but able to do only the doable. Further, rather than being metaphysically immutable, only God's moral nature--love, justice, mercy, etc.--is unchanging. By redefining such divine attributes as omnipotence and immutability, Brightman argued that the resultant idea of God was more religious and personal than absolutistic theism ever could be.[58] Further, the accompanying theodicy provided for a reconciliation of the modern mind with religion and theism. God is no longer viewed as a cosmic monarch, but rather as a fellow-sufferer.

These, however, are not the only advantages of his modernistic vision of God. A God rescued from the shackles of classical theism was now also a

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[57] Edgar Sheffield Brightman, "Bowne: Eternalist or Temporalist," *The Personalist* 28 (1947): 257-65; quotes from pp. 259 and 265. On this point, Brightman found agreement from Jose A. Franquiz Ventura, *Borden Parker Bowne's Treatment of the Problem of Change and Identity* (Rio Pedras, Puerto Rico: University of Puerto Rico Press, 1942), esp. 160-78.

[58] See Chapter II of *Personality and Religion*, titled "A Personal God."

God relieved of western parochialism and rendered universally accessible. As Brightman himself concluded, "The finite-infinite God . . . is a God who himself has a task and who seeks the cooperation of *all* men in bearing burdens, facing problems, and lifting humanity from its bondage and degradation."[59] Brightman's modernism, therefore, called for a catholic approach to religion along the road toward a religious pluralism.

BRIGHTMAN THE RELIGIOUS PLURALIST

Brightman's ecumenism and religious pluralism were based on what he called the "metaphysical ideal." In contrast to the "dogmatic ideal" that "locates ecclesiastical authority on earth in the infallible Word and the infallible Church," Brightman proposed a metaphysical ideal that

> locates authority in God alone, a God who not merely tolerates differences of opinion, but also uses those differences as a means of bringing his followers nearer to him, and nearer to one another. . . . The metaphysical ideal may not offer any greater prospect of immediate agreement among churches than does the dogmatic, but it proposes a method of growth toward harmony and a more generous view of divine purpose.[60]

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[59] Ibid., 128; italics mine.

[60] Edgar Sheffield Brightman, "The Church, the Truth, and Society," *Theology and Modern Life: Essays in Honor of Harris Franklin Rall*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp (Chicago: Willett, Clark, & Co., 1940), 262.

This emphasis on a "growth toward harmony," grounded theologically in the Bownean doctrines of the "Fatherhood of God" and the "brotherhood of all humanity," was central to Brightman's views on ecumenism and religious pluralism. I will look at each in order.

Brightman spoke approvingly of the developing ecumenism of the inter-war period. He correctly recognized that the lines of division between denominations open to ecumenism and those that were closed were drawn over the question of the nature of the church and the nature of truth. As a metaphysician, he could not but define both in terms consistent with his radical empiricism. As such, he understood the church to be "a social institution, . . . consist[ing] of all experiences of individuals which arise in connection with what they acknowledge as a church, that is, as a body of Christian believers organized for purposes of Christian worship and other appropriate activity."[61]

This broadly defined ecclesiology allowed Brightman much greater latitude than even many liberals of the era were willing to concede in defining the limits of ecumenical relations. Whereas some Methodist ecumenists were willing to include all the recognized denominations in the

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[61] Ibid., 253.

ongoing dialogue,[62] Brightman himself did not see any need to stop at denominational lines. Thus, he insisted that "empirically, Quakers, Baptists, Christian Scientists, Witnesses of Jehovah, Latter-day Saints, angels of Father Divine, Anglo-Catholics, Methodists, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Presbyterians are all on an equality."[63]

By refusing to define the church in doctrinal terms, Brightman was at one with the moderns of his generation. The institution of the church is but one example of what Brightman called "Objective Spirit," whereas the spiritual church is a much more adequate symbol of the World Spirit that is personal, social, divine, free, eternally developing and increasing value in the cosmos.[64] For Brightman, of course, one's membership in the spiritual church is based on only one's spiritual development, and not on any adherence to particular ecclesiastical doctrines.

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[62] See Ivan Lee Holt, "Methodism and Ecumenical Christianity," in Anderson, ed., *Methodism*, 283-90, whose survey of Methodist attitudes toward ecumenism during the Interwar-period reveals a concern only for inter-denominational ecumenical advance. Holt does not mention ecumenical relations with sectarian groups on the fringes of Christianity.

[63] Brightman, "The Church, the Truth, and Society," 253. Brightman's catholicity is seen here to include groups that even up to the present time are labeled as cultic--such as the Christian Scientists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Father Divine--and therefore outside the historic Christian tradition.

[64] See Brightman, *The Spiritual Life*, passim; on the visible church as "Objective Spirit," see Ibid., 94-99. The influence of Hegel on this point is evident.

Brightman thus insisted that the basis of the authority of the Gospel was not creedal formula but human experience. As he said in an address delivered at the United Methodist Council Conference in February, 1938,

> The chief basis of faith is love; that is, the source of the authority of the gospel is the living experience of co-operation. Experience gives birth to all creeds and doctrines, and by it all creeds and doctrines must be tested experimentally. The experience of love verifies the creed of love.[65]

The related question regarding the nature of "truth" was approached in very much the same way. Truth, as Brightman emphatically stated, "is a social function, whatever else it may be."[66] This view of truth, along with his empirical approach to religion as a whole, moved Brightman finally toward accepting religious pluralism.

Whereas Bowne came to a greater appreciation of other religions after his world tour in 1905, he nevertheless was unable to conceive of them as

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[65] Edgar Sheffield Brightman, "The Gospel as Cooperation," *Vital Religion: A Crusading Church Faces Its Third Century*, ed. Otto Nall (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1938), 47. Brightman had earlier argued for religious experience as an "autonomous source of knowledge" ("The Dialectic of Religious Experience," *The Philosophical Review* 38 [1929]: 557-73). Later, however, he rescinded from this position and argued for a more comprehensive empirical approach requiring rational coherence. Experience could never be one's *only* source of religious knowledge; rather it it necessarily had to be interpreted by reason (see especially Brightman's summary thoughts on this subject in Part I of *Person and Reality* titled "Experience and Reason").

[66] Brightman, "The Church, the Truth, and Society," 263.

anything other than "lesser lights" in comparison with Christianity.[67] This religious inclusivism also characterized the views of President Warren, well known among Methodists as their "mentor in world religions."[68] Brightman's modernistic theism, however, did not allow him to resist the religious pluralism demanded by his underlying philosophical method.

While early in his career Brightman was able to speak rhetorically of religious ideals in pluralistic terms,[69] he was not completely free to accept religious pluralism until he had, with his doctrine of the finite God, escaped from the clutches of authoritarian Christianity. It is in the chapter on "The Way of Revelation" in *The Finding of God* that Brightman first reveals his thoughts on religious pluralism. In commenting on biblical passages which have been traditionally secured as proof texts for the exclusivistic position, Brightman says

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[67] Bowne wrote in 1908 that since "we have come to believe that the great non-Christian systems also had their place in God's providential plan for men. . ., Christianity does not envy any of these lesser lights" (*Personalism*, 290-1).

[68] See Donald K. Bishop, "William Fairfield Warren (1833-1929), Mentor of World Religions," *Methodist History* 6:4 (July 1968): 36-43.

[69] Thus, he comments that "not Jesus of Nazareth only, but Confucius, Buddha, Plato, Aristotle, and Spinoza, with many others, have seen in love . . . the consummation of personality and the source of infinite growth" (*A Philosophy of Ideals*, 130).

> either these passages mean that human knowledge of Christ and conscious acceptance of him are absolutely essential to finding God, or else they mean that the actual God revealed in Christ is the only God there is and that he alone saves everyone who is saved--whether they are "of this fold" or not, and whether they say, "Lord, Lord" or not. This latter view is so much more in harmony with the character of Jesus himself and of the Heavenly Father of whom he taught that I take it to represent the true intent of the "exclusivist" passages.[70]

Brightman's religious pluralism is forcefully stated in his prognosis for Christianity written in 1937. There, he unequivocally asserted that "the Christian Church will come to recognize in Buddhism and Hinduism, Confucianism and Mohammedanism, other roads to God. The Christian will treat representatives of these religions as brothers, not as heathen enemies of the faith."[71] Later, in 1947, Brightman went so far as to acknowledge the Indian mystic-philosopher, Sri Ramakrishna (1834-86), as an avatar, and to compare him to Jesus, who "acquired the name of Christ, the Messiah."[72] Although "avatar" is not defined in this context, Brightman does not appear

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[70] Brightman, *The Finding of God*, 41; Brightman is commenting on John 10:7-18, the "fold" referring to the Christian church, and Matthew 7:21-23, the "Lord, Lord" referring to those who appeal to the divine judge for entry into the Kingdom of Heaven.

[71] Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *The Future of Christianity* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1937), 80.

[72] Originally a tribute on the occasion of Ramakrishna's birthday anniversary given by Brightman in Boston and later published as "Sri Ramakrishna," *Prabuddha Bharata, or Awakened India* 52 (November 1947): 452.

to be deviating from the standard definition of the term which describes a Hindu incarnation of deity. Most importantly, however, he seems to clearly suggest that the Christian doctrine of the incarnation is by no means unique.[73]

Brightman's own life was an exemplary demonstration of non-partisan religion. He was, for example, very sympathetic toward Hindu mysticism, as seen in his frequent citations of the Bhavagad Gita, and in his relationships with the Indian philosophers, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), and Swami Akhilananda (1894-962).[74] The fact that some of his

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[73] Brightman's sympathies for the avatar doctrine of Hinduism are evident in an essay written at the end of his life. There, he writes approvingly of the Hindu view of the incarnation as "a principle exemplified in many instances. Buddha, Christ, and Sri Ramakrishna, for example, are all avatars, all incarnations of God in man in a supremely lofty sense" ("Goals of Philosophy and Religion, East and West," *Philosophy East and West* 2 [1952]: 16).

[74] On Radhakrishnan, see Brightman's article, "Radhakrishnan and Mysticism," *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1952), 393-415, reprinted in *Studies in Personalism: Selected Writings of Edgar Sheffield Brightman*, 142-58, wherein he displays both a breadth and depth of insight into Hindu mysticism.

Regarding Akhilananda, a third generation devotee of Ramakrishna and leader of The Vedanta Society at Providence, Rhode Island, Joanne C. Brown has described him as Brightman's "good friend" from whom Brightman learned much about Hinduism ("Brightman, Edgar Sheffield (1884-1953)," *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, eds., Daniel G. Reid, et. al. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990], 189). In pursuing the details of this friendship, I have discovered that over the last ten years of his life, Brightman maintained a voluminous correspondence with the Swami, of which more than 300 letters survive under the Akhilananda File and the Brightman Papers at the Mugar Memorial Library of Boston University (Telephone Interview with C. Niles, Mugar Library, Boston University, 13 January 1995). He also contributed an affectionate

books were translated into other languages (Chinese, Japanese, Spanish and Portuguese) is further testimony to his global appeal and his religious pluralism.

SUMMARY OF BRIGHTMAN'S CONTRIBUTION TO MODERNISM AND PLURALISM IN METHODIST THEOLOGY

Brightman's life work was devoted to applying thoroughly the personalistic method toward the formulation of a philosophy of life. This included a more radical and empirical approach to the problems of religion. It should not be surprising that the problem of evil was an especially acute one for Brightman, who himself had endured through two world wars and the Great economic depression of the 1930s. His theistic modernism was therefore an impressive apologetic effort to meet both the religious and intellectual demands of the times.

Foreword to the Swami's *Hindu Psychology*, concurring with the latter's acknowledgment "of divine reality in every religion" (Brightman, "Foreword" to *Hindu Psychology: Its Meaning for the West*, by Swami Akhilananda [New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1946], xii). Further testimony of the pluralistic spirit that Brightman imparted to his students can be found in the warm memories which third generation personalists like Peter A. Bertocci, L. Harold DeWolf, John H. Lavely, Walter G. Muelder, Janette Newhall, and S. Paul Schilling recorded of the Swami in his posthumously published *Spiritual Practices: Memorial Edition with Reminiscences by His Friends*, eds. Alice May and Claude Alan Stark (Cape Cod, MA: Claude Stark Co., 1974); see especially the contributions by DeWolf and Lavely in this volume which describe Brightman's deep respect and appreciation for the Swami's spiritual leadership

As expected, his criterion of empirical coherence eventuated in a categorical rejection of the Bible as an exclusive source of revelatory truth. As one theologian puts it, Boston personalism, "basing its understanding of God upon rational probabilities, has no place for this kind of supernaturalism."[75] Further, his insistent appeal to experience inevitably led him to shed most of the evangelical pietism of Bowne and evangelical liberalism of Knudson in favor of a religious pluralism. The journey from the pietism of late nineteenth century evangelicalism to the pluralism of mid-twentieth century Protestantism is seen to culminate, for American Methodism, in the work of Professor Brightman.

What remains to be considered is the specifics of how the philosophical method of personalism shaped the direction of theology at Boston University and demanded the conclusions reached by Brightman. This will be the task of the concluding chapter.

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[75] John B. Cobb, Jr., *Living Options in Protestant Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 74.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

My thesis throughout this study has been that the overall movement of American Methodism from pietism to liberalism and to pluralism was enacted in the transition from the evangelical pietism of Borden P. Bowne to the religious pluralism of Edgar S. Brightman. In Chapter III, I showed that while Bowne was one of the first to articulate an evangelical liberal Methodist theology based on his personalistic philosophy, the influence of his pietistic heritage was one that he never completely rejected. As the third generation personalist Walter G. Muelder, tells us, this has led some to accuse Bowne of "substituting faith for reason, and theology for philosophy."[1]

Nevertheless, Bowne's theological writings served to secure the place

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[1] Walter Muelder, along with Peter Bertocci, et. al., "The Renaissance of Bowne: A Symposium . . . .", *Bostonia* 34 (Fall 1960): 25; so also the judgment of G. Watts Cunningham, *The Idealistic Argument in Recent British and American Philosophy* (New York: The Century Co., 1933), 315. For this and other reasons, Bowne has never received the kind of recognition of which his thought is deserving from the philosophical world.

of liberalism in the Methodist Episcopal Church. In fact, two American philosophers of religion during the 1930s, Henry Wieman and Bernard Meland, implied such when they admitted that, "When one reads the works of Borden Parker Bowne today, one is amazed to see how fully they express the generally accepted liberal view among Christians of our time."[2]

It is, however, only in the systematic application of personalistic principles to the entire field of Christian theology that Albert C. Knudson was able to construct a theology freed from the grip of pietistic prescriptions. These efforts I have recounted in Chapter IV. The personal testimony of Muelder (who studied under both Knudson and Brightman) is therefore characteristic of many a Boston University student of the 1920s, when he recalls experiencing the liberating influence of Boston personalism and the Social Gospel from the "individualistic evangelical pietism" which pervaded the ecclesiastical atmosphere of his boyhood.[3] The scope of Knudson's work undoubtedly led both Wieman and Meland to see "the philosophy of

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[2] Henry Nelson Wieman and Bernard Eugene Meland, *American Philosophies of Religion* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1936), 139.

[3] Walter G. Muelder, "An Autobiographical Introduction: Forty Years of Communitarian Personalism," *The Ethical Edge of Christian Theology*, Toronto Studies in Theology, vol. 13 (New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), 1.

personalism as most true to the Christian tradition"[4] in comparison with other prevalent philosophies of religion during the Interwar period.

This conclusion, however, is premature, especially when one takes the work of Brightman into consideration. Only by skewing the definition of "the Christian tradition" can one say that Brightman's theistic finitism and religious pluralism are within the boundaries of historic Christianity. It is to his credit, however, to have pushed the postulates of personalism to their logical theistic (finitistic) and religious (pluralistic) conclusions.

It is true that Bowne the theologian can hardly be faulted for failing to see the predisposition of personalism toward pluralism. In defense of his theological exclusivism, it should be reiterated that Bowne's philosophical and theological energies were directed elsewhere; further, the question of religious pluralism was not one that had really been formulated at the turn of the century. Knudson also, writing as first and foremost a theologian, was interested primarily in Christian ecumenism, and was never led to address the inter-faith subject in his writings.[5]

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[4] Wieman and Meland, *American Philosophies of Religion*, 133.

[5] Knudson does briefly compare Christian ethics with those of other religions in *The Doctrine of Redemption*, 423-28; he does not, however, discuss soteriological issues in that context. That he was an inclusivist who believed in Christianity as superior to all other religions can be seen from the following: "Christianity does not stand apart from all other

With regard to Brightman's creative theodicy, Knudson the theologian was never quite satisfied with the religious value of his colleague's theistic finitism. It is not so certain, however, whether Bowne the philosopher, who always insisted on clarity of thought, can rightly be said to have been thoroughly consistent with his personalism in choosing to retain classical absolutism against some form of theistic finitism.

On this point, Professor Rufus Burrow, Jr. has shown that Bowne, the absolutist, was "either not willing or unable to press the questions and the facts of experience far enough to conclude against the classical view of the omnipotent-omnibenevolent God."[6] Here, although Bowne briefly entertained the idea of God as internally limited,[7] his pietistic inclinations may have caused him to revolt against the notion. As Professor Burrow concludes, Bowne the philosopher, was "at least a closet finitist, i.e., one

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religions as alone divine. It is not an island separated from the great human mainland. It is, rather, a mountainpeak rising up out of the broad plane of human need and human aspiration. It is the climax of the natural, not its antithesis. And is so far as it is such, in so far as it expresses and satisfies the deepest and highest needs of the human spirit, it may without hesitancy be accepted as valid" (*The Validity of Religion Experience*, 196).

[6] Rufus Burrow, Jr., "Borden P. Bowne's Contribution to Theistic Finitism," unpublished manuscript made available to the author, 2.

[7] Bowne hastily dismissed the thought of God as "able to do the doable but as limited by some necessities, probably self-existent and eternal, which cannot be transcended" (*Theism*, 190; I owe this reference to Professor Burrow).

who had more sympathy for theistic finitism than he was willing to confess publicly."[8] He further points out that while Bowne's "personalistic method breaks down" at primary points, Brightman the metaphysician was bold enough to recognize that "what is at stake is not the kind of God one would like to believe in, but whether or not one has the courage and character to accept the kind of God supported by the facts."[9]

Students of Bowne, Knudson and Brightman have continued in the paths charted by these founding personalists. Whether it be the social ethics of McConnell and Muelder; the philosophical gains of Ralph T. Fwelleling (who founded and edited *The Personalist* while at the University of Southern California), Peter Bertocci and John Lavely (the latter two also taught at Boston University); the theological contributions of Georgia Harkness, Harold DeWolf, and S. Paul Schilling (all of whom have been recognized theological leaders in the Methodist church since its Unification); or the social personalism of Martin Luther King Jr. (who received his Ph.D. under Brightman, DeWolf, Muelder and Schilling, and acknowledged his indebtedness to the Boston tradition); the worth of the person and the

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[8] Burrow, "Borden P. Bowne's Contribution to Theistic Finitism," 3.

[9] Ibid., 2.

centrality of personality have continued to be emphasized as axiomatic in the personalist tradition. By all accounts, the work of the early Boston personalists can be seen to have readily influenced the mid-twentieth century middle of the road to liberal theological opinions dominant across the spectrum of American Methodism.[10]

The influence of Brightman's modernism and pluralism has also continued to the present. His theistic finitism has been held by a small but significant minority group including Harkness, Lavely, Bertocci, and Muelder. It is today being re-articulated with vigor in the writings of Professor Rufus Burrow. Further, Brightman's religious pluralism has also been evidenced in the work of some of his students. The Swedish theologian, Nels F. S. Ferre, one of Brightman's prized students, is an example. In *The Finality of Faith and Christianity among the World Religions*, Ferre categorically rejects the belief that only Christianity is true and that all other religions are pagan and therefore false. While he insists that his is not a religious "pluralism," he is hard pressed to distinguish between what he calls his own "inclusivism" from the clear cut pluralism of

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[10] So S. Paul Schilling, *Methodism and Society in Theological Perspective* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1960), 153.

his teacher.[11]

By all accounts, this religious pluralism can be seen as analogous to the mid-twentieth century theological situation in American Methodism. Of this, William McCutcheon has correctly observed that "there is no single Methodist theology."[12] To be sure, the early Boston personalists have played an important role in the development of Methodist theology in this century. Whatever the future of the Boston personalist tradition in this scenario, however, from its own sources, it can be said to be full of promise in spite of any mitigating circumstances. As Brightman wrote during the midst of World War II,

> The sum of the whole matter is that the spiritual life is indeed a life of struggle, but is also a life of well-grounded hope. Hope is grounded in freedom, and freedom is grounded in all the high purposes and powers of spirit, human and divine. The last word of the spirit is Victory.[13]

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[11] Nels F. S. Ferre, *The Finality of Faith and Christianity among the World Religions* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), 87 ff.

[12] William J. McCutcheon, "American Methodism and the Theological Challenges of the Twentieth Century," *Forever Beginning, 1766-1966: Methodist Bicentennial Historical Papers* (Lake Junalaska, NC: Association of Methodist Historical Society, 1968), 163. As examples of the theological pluralism in Methodist circles at mid-century, McCutcheon points to neo-Reformationism, neo-liberalism, personalism, existentialism, naturalism, ecumenism, Death of God, Church renewal, linguistic, and process theologies, Wesley studies, and theological ethics. "You mention the frontier," he concludes, "and a Methodist writer has been there."

[13] Brightman, *The Spiritual Life*, 213.

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