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## Realistic Theism and the Foundation of Spiritual Life

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### Introduction

It is very difficult to find any material in the past fifty years dealing with the metaphysical foundations of spiritual life. There is much more about the nature of the metaphysical foundations of Christian thought. There is even more concerned with constructing a Christian metaphysic. But only a few authors, almost in passing, discuss the metaphysical foundations for spiritual life. Fewer still have related this to any form of realistic theism.

Some Roman Catholic authors have done this, most notably Collins in *The Emergence of Philosophy of Religion* (1967; cf. Clinton, 1969), Rahner in the early part of *Foundations of Christian Faith* (1978) and in *Spirit in the World* (1968; cf. Sheehan, 1985), and Fiorenza in *Foundational Theology* (1984). Of these, only Fiorenza deals with contemporary philosophical discussions or philosophy of religion.

The only Protestants who have dealt with this at length are Carnell in *Christian Commitment* (1957; cf. Sims, 1979) and MacGregor in *Philosophical Issues in Religious Thought* (1973); but again, both deal with the metaphysical or philosophical basis of thought, not with spiritual reality. Pannenberg (1985) touches on this but does not develop the philosophical side of spiritual life (cf. Farrelly, 1986).

In this paper I will introduce a background in Realistic Theism, then try to show how Realistic Theism relates to the spiritual foundations question and how this might effect a discussion of the origin and foundation of spiritual life.

### Roots of Realistic Theism

The roots of the contemporary movement known as realistic theism are found in responses to the writings of Hume, Kant and Hegel. As they deal with the nature and source of human knowledge pertaining to religious issues, their methodology is more important than their conclusions. Collins, after a 300 page study of these authors, summarizes:

The realistic philosophy of religion is part of the broad revision of the positions of Hume and Kant on the nature and limits of human knowledge. Realism agrees with these thinkers in being dissatisfied with rationalistic metaphysics and the jumble of principles invoked in popular natural theology. However, it suggests that metaphysics can be developed through an analysis of the general factors present in human experience, and through an inferential study of the implications which these factors bear concerning the reality of God. (1967, pp. 448-449)

Collins thinks that Hume and Kant properly critiqued the foundations of scholastic and reformation rationalism. But their responses are not satisfying, either rationally or in experience.

Collins also discussed the need for a systematic approach to dealing with philosophical, cultural and theological issues from the viewpoint of theistic realism. He drew out six problems faced by Hume, Kant and Hegel (1967, p. 350).

### Chart I - Collins' Problems

1. The manner in which religion falls within the scope of philosophy;
2. the impact of philosophy of religion upon natural theology;
3. the relationship between morality and religion;
4. the philosophical approach to religious faith;
5. the persistent mystery of the revealing God;
6. the inter-relationship between religious belief, worship and service to mankind.

Collins integrated these six problems into the philosophical and social climate of the 1960's and concluded that there were three main tasks for theistic realists.

First, there is the cultural task of clarifying the role of religion in contemporary thought and society. These roles continue to shift since they depend on other features in the society such as the strength of the church, the public acceptability of religious faith, the openness of the philosophical climate, etc. Collins felt that a prerequisite to proper definition was an understanding of the secularization process as it 'demythologized' law, philosophy and society at large.

Second is the methodological task of integrative analysis in which we should identify the broad implications of religious studies for other disciplines and for life. Collins believed that a four-fold procedure would generate a useful methodology. We need to examine the findings of the social and psychological sciences regarding the meaning of human life and the contribution of religion to this meaning. Then, we can analyze the personal and social contributions of formal theologies drawing upon the analytic procedures of contemporary philosophies. Third, we can use historical studies, such as Collins' own study of Hume, Kant, Kierkegaard, Hegel and others, to elicit the contributions of great thinkers and activists of the past. Finally, there must be a personal interaction in religious faith and life on the part of the theologian. Any contributor to the dialog must examine "the active relationship between man and the living spiritual reality wherein he seeks fulfillment" (1967, p. 443). Only when all four aspects are present can meaningful integration take place.

The third task Collins identified is doctrinal. We need to reformulate doctrinal theories in light of cultural and methodological studies. This should come as a result of the integrative studies. This does not mean that we change our doctrines but that we reformulate how they are expressed and especially how we ask for application in academic disciplines and in life. Metaphysics, Collins thought, can be initially developed from an analysis of the phenomenal field of composite human experience. Collins derived his method from non-reductionistic phenomenology, more or less from Heidegger and from existentialism. Collins saw that man is driven beyond this world in search of the absolute. This does not deprive man of knowledge of the absolute, but it does imply that this knowledge will be limited to what is observable through human senses. If Collins stopped here this would be nothing more than an empirical theology. But Collins adds the category of revelation--God speaking to us within our perceptual field, i.e., human history.

Collins sees a principle distinction between God and any kind of absolute. What must be sought is not proof that God exists, for to gain this man would have to have comprehensive knowledge of God's being (not just some indicator of an absolute). Rather, Collins would search for proof supporting his statement that God exists (1962, p. 42). This discovery of truth about God must be grounded in the reality of man's experience and reflection. "The philosophy of religion . . . is only achieved through a fresh interrogation of our experience and a judgment which responds to the religious acts involved in that experience." (1967, p. 424) Any further development is limited, by the nature of philosophy, to movement from man toward God (1962, p. 43; 1967, p. 423). Of course, a different procedure is found in philosophical theology, which begins with God. Collins believes the way to begin the search for God within human experience is to demonstrate the context within which religious talk can have meaning. Linguistic analysis gives both the context and the meaning to talk about religion, but offers no proof (1967, p. 458). The beneficial point Collins gained from language analysis is support for the intentionality of all human discourse. Based in man's bond with natural being (Collins, 1962, pp. 539f), this intentionality drives man past the bounds of this empirical world. However, this does not allow us to import theology. "The essential maxim for the philosopher of religion to respect is that religion is to be investigated by means of the same general methods and guiding principles which govern his philosophy as a whole." (1967, p. 430) Intentionality, in itself, is a definite pointer to the transcendence of God. But because man seeks philosophical knowledge, he is limited to an immanent approach to the problem. Intentionality is only explained as man accepts the pointers to God as proof of the belief that He exists.

There is an experiential base of reference for all propositions on religion which gain our philosophical assent. As far as their philosophical acceptance is concerned, it depends upon showing that their referents have a determinate presence in our experience of man, as related to the world through operations of feeling and acting, knowing and willing, personal and social effort. (1967, p. 447)

Thus, personal belief in God is an issue of volitional commitment based on the available evidence, which is non-conclusive but real.

However, for Collins a realistic theism attains its metaphysical character directly from its methodic analysis of human experience and from the inferences it makes concerning the implications found in the existent beings of our experience (1967, p. 457).

Realistic theism carries with it an openness to the free, personal God, present in the universe and distinct from it through His creative presence. ... It is precisely in the philosophy of religion that this relationship is examined in itself, thus calling attention to a religious context for philosophical anthropology as well as for natural theology. (Collins, 1967, p. 485)

There are powerful grounds in human nature, in the general purposiveness of being, and in the ethical search for human good, which orient men toward God. Viewed in terms of a realistic theism, what these grounds dispose men toward is a life of searching after God through the acts of believing, loving, and serving Him. Such acts draw men into an interpersonal religious community in which God's initiative is disclosed and man's response is freely given (Collins, 1967, p. 473; cf. Martin, 1986 and Tracy, 1981).

Thus, Collin's starting point is historical human experience.

The need for defining a starting point in a philosophical system is indicative, and probably axiomatic, for defining a starting point for any systematic conceptual development. This means that metaphysical, epistemological and axiological work must precede any formative systematic development.

Rahner begins at a different place. For him, the starting point is not in any particular human experience or even in the totality of human experience. He begins with what he calls transcendental experience, which is the necessary structure for the possibility of any human experience. This is a phenomenological analysis of trans-cendental religious experience.

We shall call transcendental experience the subjective, unthematic, necessary and unfailing consciousness of the knowing subject that is co-present in every spiritual act of knowledge, and the subject's openness to the unlimited expanse of all possible reality. (1978, p. 20)

For Rahner, this transcendental experience is not merely an experience of pure knowledge, but also of the will and of freedom. (p. 20) It is the very fact that man can ask questions about himself and about his place in the world which reveal his link with transcendental foundations.

In the fact that man raises analytical questions about himself and opens himself to the unlimited horizons of such questioning, he has already transcended himself and every conceivable element of such an analysis or of an empirical reconstruction of himself. In doing this he is affirming himself as more than the sum of such analyzable components of his reality. (1978, p.29)

Thus, Rahner thinks the transcendental movement is a pre-condition of any self-reflective consciousness.

But even this transcendental movement, as actualized, is a part of human experience and thus is a part of history. "Even the most basic, self-grounded and most transcendental philosophy of human existence is always achieved only within historical experience." (1978, p. 25) This links the transcendental aspect of human experience to the actuality of human history. Rahner applies this to the individual:

In the fact that he experiences his finiteness radically, he reaches beyond this finiteness and experiences himself as a transcendent being, as spirit. He is the spirit who experiences himself as spirit in that he does not experience himself as pure spirit. Man is not the unquestioning and unquestioned infinity of reality. He is the question which rises up before him, empty, but really and inescapably, and which can never be settled and never adequately answered by him. (1978, p. 32)

Thus, for Rahner, the starting point is in one sense transcendental and in the other historical. However, in neither sense is man in contact, either experientially or rationally, with a trans-historical or non-historical deity. Therefore, Rahner is bound within mankind's historical experience and the logical transcendental movement within that history. This is very helpful for a historical metaphysics, but does not help us directly toward a starting point for realistic theism (Cf. Dennehy, 1986).

To understand this better we must put the whole discussion in the context of a system of realistic theism. Contrary to Holmes (1977) and Wolters (1985), I shall use the term "world view" to refer to the set of philosophical conclusions which underlie any theoretical representation of content regarding human life or the state of affairs usually called "the world" or "all that is." A set of metaphysical, epistemological and axiological conclusions constitutes a world view. The point at issue is to define the nature of a starting point for elaborating a world view.

This issue of finding a starting point within the philosophic arena is difficult. Because all philosophical processes are a posteriori to experience, it will be helpful to see that a world view can be observed as a set of actual philosophic conclusions, which, taken together, form a coherent pattern. In an actual consistent set of conclusions, the individual conclusions are often so interdependent that where one begins the discussion of a position is more sociological than logical.

John Smith (1970) examined systems which use the self or the world as starting points, concluding that both must be wrong because they systematically bifurcate the whole of human experience. For example, if I am a semi-naive metaphysical realist, in Dummett's terms (1982), then I have commitments not only to certain ontological realities such as the status of externals or a definite theory of meaning, but also to epistemological elements such as a theory of linguistic reference and a position in regard to valuing semantics (cf. Lonergan, 1977; Keefe, 1986; and background in Kohlberg, 1981 and Krathwohl, 1964).

In addition to an ontology and an epistemology, we must also develop an axiology. Putnam has argued that commitments to values underlie ontological convictions and hence take precedence in determining one's world view (1981, p. 215). Whether we agree with Putnam's prioritization, or his internal realist arguments, or even if we think his prioritization is system-bound, he makes a good case for the inter-relatedness of the concepts and the need to include values in the philosophical discussion.

This emphasis on the priority of values fits closely with Polanyi (1958). A hierarchy of value types has been developed by Kohlberg (1981) and an elaboration of the actual value developmental process has been developed by Krathwold (1964).

I propose that the theistic realist should begin on philosophic grounds, present his world view (basic conceptual grid) as a whole, then discuss and defend the system and the parts. Thus, the inter-related conceptual system is itself the logical starting point. This approach is reminiscent of, but a significant development beyond, Carnell's starting point with hypotheses (1948). This approach forces each thinker to a realization that one's person, via his values, is revealed in his writing, if any constructive work is to be done (cf. Cooke, 1986).

Carnell (1957) and others (Goldman, 1986) have pointed to the legitimacy of such subjective experience within a philosophic theory. But MacGregor (1973), Rahner (1978) and Pannenberg (1985) illustrate that such a subjectivity is a necessity.

### Conceptual Foundation

In light of the above discussion regarding a starting point and a world view, I suggest the following agenda for conceptual development of realistic theism.

### Chart II - Agenda for Development of Realistic Theism

1. Develop a form of theistic realism which is compatible with both scripture and historical experience (a set of preliminary value choices regarding metaphysical issues).
2. Develop an epistemology which defines the nature of truth and reflects the knowing process to which our metaphysics has committed us.
3. Based on the metaphysical and epistemological grounding, develop a structure, perhaps even a hierarchy, of values, which will serve as a base for axiological decisions in politics, law, ethics, etc.
4. Reassess our theological position using theistic realism as the philosophic part of the world view grid. This is parallel to Collin's religious task.
5. Develop a systematic process for integrating the theology and values into other disciplines.
6. Develop a strategy for influencing our culture in each area of importance. This should lead to effective penetration and eventual transformation of culture and society.

The values in #3 could come from ethics, biblical theology and doctrine of the Christian Life (cf. Clinton, 1987). Note that a hierarchy must be developed in order for effective decision making to take place (cf. Scholes, 1986; Clinton, 1988). Models of #5 are often based on Niebuhr's five approaches (1951). But his approach is system dependent and ultimately fails to provide a philosophically fruitful way to develop a model for integration and a new approach is needed (Clinton, 1990).

For this enterprise, the foundation lies in explicating a theistic realism as an adequate foundation for a world view. As Christians, we are committed to the existence of God and the truthfulness of His Word as revealed in the Bible. Thus, efforts by evangelicals like Corduan (1981) to critique and learn from positions of Rahner and Aquinas, or of Grunler (1983) to reinterpret the best of process thought, are to be applauded.

We need to expand these critiques to include Putnam (1981) and Dummett (1982) on realism, Rahner (1978) and Lonergan (1972) on the value of a modified phenomenology (cf. Clinton, 1984 A), and many others. Along the way, there will be much pure creative work as we fill in such a system. I presented a theoretical representation of such a system (1984 B). A summary chart is presented here for reference.

### Chart III APPLYING REALISTIC THEISM

Coordinated efforts to implement the strategy for penetrating and transforming key areas of culture and society: family life, political leadership, social ethics, media, business leadership and ethics, etc.

VALUES: Ethics, Medicine, Law, Worship, Science, etc.

WORLD VIEW: Axiology Metaphysics Epistemology

As evangelicals we can see fundamental directions being set from two sources: human experience and propositional revelation. Of course, with two sources of information, we are open to the possibility of conflict between the two. However, as believers in the consistency of God's work, we do not anticipate any real conflict of truth between the two fields.

## Origin of Spiritual Life

All people have an orientation toward relating to God which is worked out in their lives in their value commitments and religious practices (Rahner, 1978). The fact of this subjective reflective experience and personal and social objective experience is common to all men, although the specific content is different for each person. The analysis of this spiritual experience usually focuses on the biblical data or on objective religious experience. I would like to shift to a philosophical analysis of the spiritual area. There are three interrelated aspects to the spiritual area of a person's life: Each person has a spirit; each person can receive spiritual impressions from other spirits; each person can be indwelt by another spirit.

The reality of one's own spirit includes, functionally, the ability to receive and comprehend (recognize intuitively) spiritual reality. This comprehension has the possibility of being brought to the level of conscious reflection. But such reflection is not necessary, since spiritual reality is comprehensible through the innate categories of the mind (there is a 'fit' with our rational apparatus) and can be responded to at the levels of values apart from conscious reflective experience. Of course the integration of spiritual values and realities into a person's life will be much quicker and more efficient if there is help with the process via preaching, teaching and discipleship.

We also have the ability to make decisions regarding all of life in dynamic harmony between the spiritual, innate and reflective areas. However, there must be more to the spiritual area than a functional ability and an internal interactive capability. Ontologically, the spiritual area consists of an immaterial element of a person's being which is the source of his or her ability to make spiritual decisions and to interact with spiritual realities such as God, other people's spirits, etc.

A second aspect of the spiritual area includes the possibility of receiving spiritual input from other spirits and people. This is not the same as being internally responsive or reflective concerning my own spirit, as described above. We are in touch with motivations and values held by other spirits with whom we are interacting. I have called this area spiritual impressions. When functioning in this area, we often say that a person is distinguishing another person's spirit or is responding to another's spirit. While this includes a rational element, it is not essentially a reflective function.

The third area of spiritual reality is the capacity to have my personal spirit directed (i.e., led or strongly influenced initially, only later can there be absolute control) by another spirit. In common literature this is known as being possessed by another spirit. In a philosophical sense it is the reality that another spirit can so influence my spirit that I can be led to obey the other spirit as though it were my own. In this case, I am not the source of the spiritual direction. Nor am I merely responding to an external influence over which I have significant control. This is a middle ground where great influence is exerted on my spirit to lead me to act a certain way or to believe a certain way, which, if I do not resist it, will eventuate in my acting in keeping with the direction of the indwelling spirit.

If the indwelling (or, prior to a spiritual or reflective commitment on my part to allow the indwelling, influencing) spirit is God's, then we have arrived at the biblical case of being led by the Spirit of God. If the indwelling spirit is an evil spirit, then we have a case of demonic influence or possession.

Once a situation of full indwelling (surrender of voluntary control) has occurred, the source of spiritual direction and decision will be the secondary spirit, until this direction is actively resisted. Thus, the person who is filled with the Spirit is one who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and continues to be influenced by the Spirit at the valuational level, the reflective level and at an emotional level. In a case of demonic possession, the person is indwelt by and receives direction in of value and reflection from an evil spirit.

In the case of God's Spirit, we are told that while the filling --that is the active influence-- can be resisted, the indwelling itself is permanent. In the case of an evil spirit, the influence can be resisted but the indwelling/possession is not reversible by the person. It is reversible by the Holy Spirit.

These considerations lead us to the questions of how the human spirit originates, how it is influenced and how it can be indwelt by another spirit.

## Creation

The origin of the human spirit is described two ways in scripture. First, the spirit of a person is said to return at death to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7). In Zechariah 12:1 we are told that God creates the spirit of man within him (cf. Job 34:14; Luke 23:46; Num. 16:22 and 27:16; Isa 57:16). But there is also indication in scripture that the spirit is part of the man which is given in a Traducian way, that is, by generation from the parents (cf. Romans 5 and others). Numbers 16:22 says that the Lord is "the God of the spirits of all flesh." This universal statement is in keeping with other scripture, although no other passage asserts it this clearly.

Theologically, the human spirit is described as fallen since the historic fall of Adam and Eve. Ontologically, I understand this to mean that a person's spirit is rebellious toward God and will lead him to choose to reject God or to pervert the knowledge of God, unless the Spirit precedes the revelation with a sovereign drawing of his spirit. The fallen spirit will result in a perversion of the innate values as well as of the consequent behavior, at least in the religious behavior and probably in moral and general behavior as well.

#### Re-creation in Christ

With this foundational philosophical discussion and relevant biblical study I would like to draw a synthesis in the form of a chart.

#### Chart IV - Categories of Experience

Self: My Spirit

Subjective Experience Objective Experience

Spiritual Innate Reflective Personal Social

Experience Experience Experience Experience Experience

Impressions Voices Dreams Visions Miracles People Circumstances Community Bible

God: The Holy Spirit

Using the terms of Chart IV presented above, we can see that most of the past conceptual work has been done in the area of reflective experience, sometimes in combination with social objective experience. I have not found any philosophical material focusing on metaphysics of the spiritual area from a Christian perspective.

Further development of the metaphysics of the spiritual realm and the relation of this to the metaphysics of the objective (experiential/historical) realm and to the formal structure of knowledge and to value structures, and discussion of the the implications of this for theology and life will have to come in other papers.

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