

A Shape of Faith

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The title of this paper indicates an exploration; the indefinite article implies that it is (perhaps necessarily) expressed in personal terms. Putting and responding to questions like this one is very much a custom of our time; a time of questioning, when we are disinclined to accept the forms of tradition and the pronouncements of authority. We assume that it is normal and necessary, for Christians, to ask themselves what they mean when they use the traditional language of Christian doctrine: to ask themselves how these are related, on the one hand, to the experience to which they are intended to give intellectual shape and, on the other, to the intellectual processes which we use when we try to understand more manageable kinds of experience. Do we accept such language and in what sense? Do we want to reinterpret it? I suspect that most of us have asked ourselves the question that Bonhoeffer, in his prison-cell, came to see as the central one: 'What do we really believe, in the sense that we hang on to it with our lives?' Notice that he uses the word 'We'; he thought of faith as something shared, something corporate. But he had to do his own thinking. And if you feel that need you can't, in good faith, suppress it.

It is in this sense that my paper will be an individual and personal one. I haven't any distinctive experience to offer you; and what I have to say will, I think, be of general rather than of personal interest. Still, since it does come from an individual I ought to say something about the background of temperament, experience, orientation and interest which lie behind it, and which may help you to place what I have to say, and therefore to assess it for yourselves.

I am a relative late-comer to the Christian faith; it formed part of my upbringing, but I wasn't actually baptized till the age of 35. This happened, not as a result of any identifiable experience of conversion, but mainly from a conviction, arising from the Second World War, that the kind of humanistic liberalism which had sustained me up to then wasn't enough. It left too many depths unsounded; too much unexplored; too many questions unanswered. I realized, in particular, that in order to win the war we ourselves had had to do things for which there was a need to ask forgiveness – something that lies beyond the horizon of optimistic liberal humanism, or the agnosticism that has to live without a repentance that may seem merely vain. This did not take me into any existentialist anguish, nor did I accept Kierkegaard's invitation to

put aside reason in order to embrace faith. I have no first-hand experience of such agonies or such decisions. Conversion was so gradual a process that I can neither think of a decisive moment nor think of it as completed. (Wasn't it Kierkegaard who said that one isn't a Christian; one becomes one?) I couldn't describe myself, I think, as a born-again Christian, in the sense in which that term is normally used. Nor have I been through the kind of intense personal experience of suffering which tests the limits of faith. What I needed, above all, was to be able to make sense of things; and to understand what my encounter with Christ had to do with it. My baptism and what followed it didn't lead to any great decision as to my vocation. I went on being a civil servant and, whatever the gradual effect on the way I did my job, I am not conscious either of any radical change in the way I tried to do it, or of asking myself continually how I *should* do it as a Christian.

We all have our own sense of the deep emotional springs from which Christian faith comes, and our own memories of experiences which have touched them. Some are purely personal; others we can share. I think, for example, of hearing 'Once in royal David's city' in the King's College carol service; of Cymbeline saying 'Pardon's the word to all' at the end of that odd but enchanting play; of the Count (his opposite number, as it were) begging and receiving the forgiveness of his Countess in the great moment at the end of 'Figaro'; of experiencing over and over again with George Herbert that moment of surrender when he says at the end of the loveliest of his poems, 'So I did sit and eat'. But my approach has always been predominantly intellectual: too much so, I often tell myself. I have to wrestle with the questions. But, being an amateur theologian, educated in languages and literature, with an interest in philosophy and a career behind me which had nothing to do with any of these things, I define the questions as best I can from this rather varied background.

They group themselves, as I have indicated, round two themes: the two traditional concerns of Christian theology. Making sense of things lies at the root of natural theology; understanding what the encounter with Christ implies is at the root of christology. The two don't fit easily together. The first isn't distinctively Christian; those who are mainly concerned with it have to come to terms with the stubborn particularity of what happens in the gospels, and with Paul's decision to know nothing except Christ crucified. And, conversely, can you in fact do that? You still have, in some sense, to understand the world in order to live in it. And in order to do that you have to react in some way to the questions that our restless age may put to you.

I have never thought it adequate to concentrate on the one or

the other of my two themes; and I have never found a theologian to persuade me to do so. Barth is, of course, the great advocate of the second approach, with his insistence on the Word which comes from God to man and which is centred in Christ. To receive this entails a break with any kind of human understanding that precedes it. But the problem is precisely how you connect either with the rest of experience or with the problem of understanding the world in which you live. Either you speak the language of the group which understands the Christian revelation in these terms, which will be incomprehensible to those outside it; or you have to show how that language does connect with the language that is spoken outside; you have to come to grips with it and the problems expressed in it; to show what distinctive light the Christian faith can shed upon them. You have to show the cash value of your approach; if you wish to communicate there is no privileged language.

The other approach raises different problems, subtler and more complex; they have to do with the difficulty of finding a basis for natural theology. Natural theology depends on the possibility of offering some kind of general picture of the world in which the whole of our knowledge finds its place and fits together – a metaphysic in fact. I share the scepticism of most philosophers as to the possibility of doing this. I have not encountered any theologian who has persuaded me to put aside this scepticism. Those who try, such as Lonergan and Pannenberg, seem to me to offer, in their very different ways, suggestions about method rather than any metaphysic which the method might produce: and suggestions which imply that the subject-matter of theology is more manageable than I think it is.

II

I am left, therefore, with two challenges. One is to speak of the encounter with Christ, in Bonhoeffer's words, not as an object of religion, but as Lord of the world. The other is to find clues which enable me to make sense of the world though I cannot demonstrate their validity, since I cannot know that sense. In trying to meet them I have found help in more places and from more people than I can remember; but of the four who have helped me most only one, Bonhoeffer, was a professional theologian, and he did the theology that has helped me most when he was in prison, in peril of his life. Of the others one, Sartre, was an atheist; another, Wittgenstein, could be described as an agnostic with a religious concern; the third, Simone Weil, was devoted to Christ but never baptized. They are all, one might say, on or beyond the frontiers of religious experience. Nor do I find this surprising. It isn't for

theologians to establish the agenda of their subject. I didn't choose these people deliberately; I was attracted to them because they had the most penetrating things to say, positively or negatively, on the questions with which I have been concerned.

I clearly cannot attempt to discuss any of them in detail, let alone all four. What I want to do is to identify, however briefly and sketchily, the kind of clues that I have picked up from them. I want then to turn to the themes that have preoccupied me and to indicate how clues like these have helped me to make something of those themes.

What they all have in common is their common rejection of the possibility of any kind of *explanation* of the world that we experience. They express this in different ways, since their concerns are so different; but they all share the assumption that it is no longer possible to justify, in explicit terms, any claim to offer a picture of the order of the universe. We do not possess the knowledge that would enable us to justify such a claim, nor is it possible to envisage human beings doing so. They are all conscious of inhabiting the intellectual world of contemporary Western man, in which we become more and more conscious of the expansion of knowledge, of the limits of what is discoverable, and of the seeming impossibility of putting it all together, and of relating our knowledge to our decisions about how we are to live.

Of these four it is Wittgenstein who investigates most penetratingly what we can know and say. He addressed himself to the situation in two different but related ways. He first tried, in the *Tractatus*, to establish a logically clear language in which we can say everything that can be said. 'What can be said can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent'. But although he thought that he had succeeded he confessed 'how little is achieved when these problems are solved'. This little turns out to be the propositions of natural science. But the point of the *Tractatus*, he confessed, was an ethical one and the second part, which he did not write, the important one. Ethics and aesthetics (and even the logic of our speech) are transcendental, but for that reason we cannot speak of them. Our efforts to speak of ethics or religion involve 'running against the walls of our cage', which he found 'perfectly, absolutely hopeless', though he thought it 'a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply'. In his second phase of philosophical activity the focus of his interest had changed: he was concerned not with what we can say but with what we do say. People obviously do speak of such matters as aesthetics, ethics and religion, because their 'form of life' makes it seem justifiable to do so. Religious forms of life exist side by side with others and are justified as such. (Wittgenstein

rejects what he regarded as Frazer's shallow rationalistic criticism of the practices he describes in *The Golden Bough*.) But the task of philosophy is to elucidate what people say; there is no 'second-order philosophy' which can compare and evaluate the different forms of life. The language of belief is not about evidence, but about what governs the life of the believer. So his first position was that you cannot speak of religion; his second that you cannot criticize the forms of life of others who may do so.

Wittgenstein leaves me – as he must leave anyone who responds to his approach – with a cohort of penetrating questions, all of which have to do with the nature of religious concern, as it is expressed through the language that we use. Which of the language games of religion has to do with questions of fact, and how important is such reference? How are the different uses related to each other and what gives them, as a group, their collective significance? How do I justify the attitudes that I express in such language? How is this related to what is said in the Bible and in the traditional language of doctrine? These questions are inspired by a man who was preoccupied all his life with religious questions, and who lived by what his friend Engelmann called 'wordless faith'.

Sartre is a thinker of a very different kind – one who stands in the tradition of Pascal, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche; one of those who expound certain convictions, rather than devote themselves to the detailed work of philosophical investigation as the English tradition understands it; who see the world in a certain way and want to make us see it in that way too. He confronts enormous questions with unargued pronouncements. Significantly, he is equally at home as a dramatist and novelist. The insights that he offers are a dramatic challenge. It is this that has made him probably the most influential man of letters of his time. How do I define that challenge?

He is concerned with man in the world. He insists (and Wittgenstein would agree) that we cannot get outside that world, see it as a whole, and therefore understand it. Nor can we refer back to the necessary being whose will provides a reason for everything. To believe in such a being, indeed, negates the notion of human freedom. There is, therefore, nothing on which we can ground a belief that the universe makes sense, or that its existence is necessary. We can only see it as contingent. And in this world man himself is, of course, contingent and therefore *de trop*. And, being *de trop*, he is absurd. Nevertheless he must assert his freedom, for it is 'the foundation of values while itself without foundation'. He must not, therefore, surrender to the contingent world of fact which surrounds him and seeks to condition him; he must put it aside, at whatever cost, and take his decisions. Only so can he live

in good faith, as Sartre puts it.

The difficulties are clear: in particular, how do you attribute meaning to freedom in a meaningless universe; and how do you reconcile your freedom with that of others? Negatively, one can ask what kind of life this vision of the world makes possible; Sartre's view of human relationships is deeply pessimistic, and his novels and plays, without exception, leave us with that question. But the questions remain. How do I face the challenge of radical contingency – face it in good faith in a metaphysical vacuum? Must I do so? How do I face the assertion that man's freedom cannot be reconciled with Divine omnipotence? Or the assertion that the fulfilment towards which human desire strives (the 'project to be God') can never be fulfilled, and that man 'is a useless passion'? Sartre's own option for his own peculiar kind of Marxism solves none of these problems, for they are ultimate questions; and political theory can deal only with proximate questions, referring to changing human situations.

Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison* are the product of experience which made a professional theologian think radical thoughts about how theology ought to be done: thoughts which he has left with us. They started from the conviction that the needs which traditional religion has met no longer existed, since men have ceased to ask the questions about meaning and purpose which it claimed to answer, or to feel that they were sinners who needed God's forgiveness. How, then, can Christ be 'not an object of religion but Lord of the world' – a world in which the God who lets us live without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand?

Bonhoeffer has to do here not with explicit atheism or with questioning about human possibilities, but with the *absence* of such questioning; not with what can be said but with what people want to say. And he accepts that we should not ask questions which cannot be answered: 'At the limits it seems to me better to be silent and to leave the insoluble unsolved'. The problem is to show the significance of Christian faith without the support of the postulates of traditional religion, and without pretending to more knowledge than we possess. This, he thought, would involve a reinterpretation of the traditional concepts of Biblical theology – Creation, Fall and the rest. We do not know how he would have tackled it: he leaves us only with clues which are not easily reconcilable with each other: for example, the notion of faith as a *cantus firmus* round which the counterpoint of life weaves itself; the notion of Christ as 'the man for others', and the Christian vocation as 'participation in the suffering of God in worldly life'. And, above all, there is the elusive concept of the transcendent. He rejects it as

something which completes our knowledge – ‘the transcendence of God is not the transcendence of epistemology’ – but Jesus is for him, both ‘the man for others’ and ‘the man who lives from the transcendent’. And must there not be, in his ‘man come of age’, a need to which this Jesus can speak? So he confronts me with surprises and he leaves me with puzzles, but with a kind of fragmentary vitality that is worth more than most other men’s completed thoughts. He leaves me, above all, with the question ‘What language can theology speak?’ It is the kind of question that Wittgenstein would have understood. He would have answered, I think (and Bonhoeffer would have understood) that it can only be shown.

Simone Weil is, like the later Wittgenstein and the Bonhoeffer of the *Letters and Papers*, another fragmentary thinker, surprising, penetrating, often arbitrary – someone whom (as a reviewer once said) we read with a gasp of astonishment. She, like Sartre, feels bound to assert a position in a world with which the understanding cannot deal. She speaks of the ‘three mysteries here below’, ‘three incomprehensible things, beauty, justice and truth’. She has penetrating things to say on all three. They are rooted in her belief in God, whom we do not know in any intelligible sense, whose existence we cannot deny without belying our own instincts, and yet who ‘is absent from the world except in the existence of those in whom his love lives’. And his presence is shown in the grace that can descend upon them in the acceptance of suffering – the suffering that, if it is not accepted, can destroy the individual. It is grace that she opposes to the gravity which determines how the world goes. Gravity is what you might call the force of circumstance and instinct; something like Sartre’s notion of the *en-soi* – the situation that the individual has to put aside in order to take his decisions. Creation is justified only through the renunciation that we see in Christ and which we have to emulate should the occasion arise, though we are not to force it. Yet she had a keen sense of the beauty of the world: a true sense of it ‘would sweep all secular life in a body to the feet of God’. She is full of paradoxes, like the Christian faith itself. All this was said by a woman who confessed that ‘Christ came down and took possession of me’, but who was never baptized, and who continued to wait on God.

One can take issue with Simone Weil on all sorts of points: on the questions that she raises with her breath-taking assertions and her cavalier view of history. One can point out the limitations of her view of Christ; she sees, as has been said, the Passion but not the Resurrection. But I find irresistible the sheer power of her vision of the Christ of faith (linked, for her, only uncertainly with the Jesus of history). She raises with force and penetration of genius

the question 'Who was this Jesus?' (Bonhoeffer does so no less insistently). She brings me up against the demands of the Christian vocation, in the extreme case, and the light that this throws on the whole of the rest of life; between the created world and its renunciation; between wholeness of life and the one thing needful.

III

What I have learned from these four is part of my life – an unfinished part, of course. But their importance has not been solely as individuals. They have formulated in their own very different ways certain questions and concerns which seem to me to arise when, in our contemporary Western culture, we ask ourselves what we believe, whether we are Christians or not. They have all been shaped, in different ways, by a cultural environment which they, in turn, have helped to shape. I need hardly emphasize how different they are, though there are links and affinities between them. Some I have suggested; the rest I leave to you to work out, if you should have a mind to do so. But we have, I insist, to live in the same world as all of them; how could we ignore any of them? They have been important to me, as you will have gathered, more because of the challenges they have offered and the questions they have asked than in any positive guidance that they have provided. Nor should this, surely, be surprising. Sartre was an atheist; Wittgenstein was no theologian; Simone Weil had her own highly idiosyncratic view of the world; and Bonhoeffer ended with questions, without even the opportunity of suggesting how we might look for answers. And it is, of course, to the positives that I must turn: to what I have to offer in response to the challenge of living in the same world with all of them; the world of which they are all, in their different ways, so characteristic of the world which they have helped to shape. What does it lead me to say on the two questions I mentioned at the outset?

The encounter with all the different contemporary challenges to the possibility of making sense of the world leaves me with the conviction that we have to insist, at least, that the attempt to do so is not vain, even though it cannot succeed. The challenges range themselves, one after another; their collective force is hardly weakened by the fact that some of them cannot be reconciled with each other. There is the sheer scope of what there is to know – whether we think of the physical extent of the universe or the diversities of knowledge: a scope which continually increases. There is the criticism starting from Kant: that we can only know in terms of the categories of our understanding; the thing in itself is unknowable. There is the argument, of which we hear more and more, that we can only understand within the context of our own culture; other cultures can only be understood in their own terms,

which are alien to us. There is the Marxist criticism that the whole of the intellectual superstructure of a society is determined by the economic forces which create it. And, lastly and inescapably, there is the world of paradoxes within which human beings live, paradoxes which derive from the impossibility of reconciling ourselves to our human limitations. We want to understand our world, but there is always something beyond what we know; we can think of the universe neither as finite nor as infinite. Our moral aspirations transcend any pattern of human conduct – our own or that of others – that we can conceive as possible. Our experience of beauty can seem to take us beyond the limits of our everyday life, but we do not understand what this experience implies. We may think of a God in whom being and becoming are one, and in whom the contingency of the universe is overcome; but such a notion cannot be coherently formulated within the limits of our world, and we cannot get outside it.

Nevertheless, in the face of all these reminders of our human limitations, we have to hold on to the notion of intellectual coherence if we are ourselves to function coherently. Questions of truth and falsity *matter* – questions of value also – if we are to be able to converse with each other as human beings within our own society, or in others which exist elsewhere in time and space, but with whom we share a common humanity. The fact that we do have access to other cultures, however imperfect, does show that we are not confined in the prison of our own culture – even if we could define that culture in such a way as to isolate it from others. The Marxist can be seen as either destroying, logically, the basis of his own argument; or as claiming a privileged status for it which, in religion, would be described as fundamentalist obscurantism.

But it is not merely the Marxist and the relativist who implicitly reject the implications of their own attitudes. Those who deny order and coherence on any grounds do the same; they must, if they are not to admit that they are merely playing a game according to arbitrary rules devised within human conventions, or relapse into meaninglessness. In practice they do not do this. Each argues for his own position with undiminished conviction; the nihilist as ardently as any other. The artist (Beckett, for example) who sets out to portray chaos imposes the order of art upon it, otherwise he would fail to communicate at all. To do these things is to imply that they are worth doing: that we are arguing, within a world of human discourse, about issues of substance, even though we may never agree on them; that values, moral and aesthetic, matter and that the ways in which men have tried to express them are not alien to each other, however much they may differ.

This conviction can only be expressed in modest terms. It seems natural, in our time, to approach the very notions of truth and value – which is what we are discussing – by way of the less resounding notion of intellectual coherence. It is a conviction to be held to, even though I do not question the impossibility of formulating an all-embracing metaphysic. Karl Popper's saying is more appropriate: 'All we can do is to grope for truth even though it be beyond our reach'. The whole of his thought is an expression of such a search. And these references remind us that we are not talking here about Christian theology, but about human reason and the human community. The religious person makes a further move by arguing that to speak of the notions of truth and value as indispensable to human life, implies a universe that transcends human life and expresses a reality that transcends human personality. It cannot express *less* than the reality of human experience; it cannot be simply the product of accident. Such a conviction has to be maintained in the face of the bewildering diversity of our knowledge and experience; in face, also of the heart-breaking challenges of human perversity, natural disaster, the suffering that comes of both and the limited life of the planet on which we live. It has to be maintained, not because of a need for comfort, but because it is, in the end, the most coherent attitude open to us and the one that does the fullest justice to our nature as human beings.

The second of my questions is the distinctively Christian one: the relevance to all this of my encounter with Christ: something much more specific, an individual happening, a scandal of particularity. Here the question of truth arises in a particularly sharp form, when I have to consider the validity of the extraordinary claims that are made for him – that he makes upon me. There are, I suggest, three different approaches to this problem. One is to try to establish what actually happened: the quest of the historical Jesus. The second is to claim a privileged status for the Bible, as communicating a special kind of truth; this can be Biblical fundamentalism or some other form of what is called Biblical theology. The third is to ask, as Bonhoeffer did in his lectures on Christology, 'Who is Christ for me?' To see how these different approaches compare and come together I find it necessary to ask myself what, in the light of Biblical research, we are actually confronted with. What kind of material is this?

We are confronted with a collection of documents of witness, compiled at different times, from earlier (but perhaps not original) material now lost to us. They are compiled at different times and in different places, by different people with differing views of Christ, who had encountered him in differing ways. They are documents of witness in two senses. Those who recorded the original

material were witnesses of matters of fact, in the legal sense. Both they and those who passed on and edited their material were witnesses in the second sense: witnesses to a truth that they felt had been revealed to them, whose relationship to the matters of fact that they reported was much more complex than in the first sense. Since the evangelists make it clear that the disciples did not understand Jesus during his life their ability to record it must obviously have been limited. Conversely, when they came to record it, in the light of what Jesus had come to mean to them, they did so in the light of that understanding, and as putting in perspective the whole of their religious experience and of the Jewish religious tradition, so that they would tend to bring in references to figures of the past and to earlier prophecies. They were, moreover, no more concerned with literal factual truth than other historians of their day: it was permissible, for example to attach a name to a Gospel which would give it status; to report (especially in John's Gospel) what the evangelist thought it appropriate for Jesus to say rather than what he said. And, of course, as Bultmann has pointed out, they accepted the language of myth and of miracle literally as we do not – though this seems to me less important, because it is generally accepted. In bearing their witness they play, in Wittgenstein's term, a whole variety of language games: straightforward narrative; miracle; myth; teaching; exhortation; parable; prayer; theological disputation. Many of these language games are themselves the subject of keen theological dispute (think, for example, of myth and parable). And the motives which led them to put their gospels together as they did have called for investigation. All this makes it clear that there is no prospect of finality in the results of critical study: any more than in literary or historical studies. A large part of the critical debate (perhaps the most important part) has to do with interpretation. So the pursuit of factual truth won't provide an answer, though this doesn't mean that it won't provide an enlightenment, or that some interpretations are not more illuminating than others. Once you have recognised this it becomes impossible to claim for it a privileged kind of truth, independently of how it came to be recorded, though this doesn't mean that it does not possess unique significance. In any case the question 'Who is Christ for me?' is surely primary, since if it didn't arise we would not concern ourselves much with the first, or concern ourselves at all with the second. But it isn't the *only* question: I can't agree with Kierkegaard and Simone Weil that it is only the notion of the Incarnation that matters – however it came to us. We have to do, somehow, with events in history.

For me the answers start from the doctrine of the Kingdom that Jesus came to preach (Mk. 1:15): the paradoxical notion which

baffles my understanding by showing me a quality of truth that my understanding cannot comprehend: hints about the true end of man, though I cannot imagine how that end may be fulfilled. None of us can claim to live by it; but it draws me as nothing else. No exposition could be comprehensible; it can only be shown. It is to be accepted, if need be, at the cost of all else; it involves strange reversals of the order of the world: a challenge that brings defeat, followed, in a way that we cannot explain (but which we associate with what we call the Resurrection) by victory. What has been done is justified by God in the sight of those who have eyes to see: the love that has been offered; the pain that has been borne.

IV

All that I have offered is two simple assertions; perhaps simple to the point of crudity. One is that we cannot, in practice, live without the notions of truth and value; and that these imply that it makes sense to pursue truth and to cherish what seems to us to have value, seeking it in fresh experience. And this implies that we live in a world that is not simply the product of cosmic accident. The other is to point to a particular manifestation of a way of life, embodied in a particular individual at a particular time, in a particular place, which seems to me of unique value. I have referred very little to the traditional subject-matter of Christian doctrine; I haven't tried to show how one would work out these assertions in the terms of Christian theology. One of these assertions is about the general order of things – the field of natural theology; the other is about the Christian revelation. I haven't tried to relate the one to the other. I have left the stubborn particularity of that revelation to speak for itself in the context of whatever else we know about values.

I couldn't, of course, have done all these things within the confines of a single paper; but I wouldn't in any case have wanted to try. I have been concerned with the kind of basic convictions which we try to formulate in theology in order to understand them better; not with the secondary language in which we try to give intellectual form to what the intellect cannot comprehend. This is not to undervalue the secondary language of theology. The effort has to be made, and the great concepts that theology uses – Creation, Fall, Incarnation, Atonement – are rooted in experience, derive their meaning from it, and continue to serve as focal points for it. The question is rather how they work and how we can use them. (Even if there were convincing evidence on which we could predict a Judgment Day, said Wittgenstein, 'belief in this happening wouldn't be at all a religious belief'.) We need a keener sense of what it is of which we speak; what we say, and what it means.

What it means, the sceptic will argue, is that we are practising

wishful thinking; seeking a comforting account of the world. There is no conclusive answer to this. Of course it expresses a hope for mankind; a hope that is based on faith and therefore, by definition, not on a certainty that we cannot have. And such a hope must embrace the person who expresses it; he utters it as a member of the human race. But it is based on what is positive in our experience. Our evidence of how the world goes and what kind of people we are must remain ambiguous at best; but my argument has been that we ought not to reject as meaningless the best that we see and we ought to accept its implications; and that we need the notion of truth and coherence if we are to function as human beings; and the notion of shared values if we are to think in terms of a common human nature.

We need to pursue this theme of hope, and to relate it to the notion of wholeness. Both seem to me to come up very often in contemporary theology and in religious and other writing. Wholeness is a paradoxical notion in an age when so much of our experience makes against it; it is the opposite of fragmentation; disunity; the lack of relationship; alienation; meaninglessness. And yet it is an indispensable notion if our lives are to make sense. To speak of it seems to me to imply, inescapably, a religious dimension, since to have a religious attitude to life implies belief in a wholeness that lies beyond your own experience, though you can't hope to describe it; and this is the only way we *can* speak of wholeness. But if you can't describe it what cash value can you give to your conviction? And how can we express Christian hope except as becoming conformed to the will of God in love? What else can we hope for, though we have neither the vision to see where the hope might lead nor the words to express it, other than the metaphors on which we lean when we try to speak?