

The God of Faith and the God of the Philosophers: A Contribution to the Problem of the *Theologia Naturalis**

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Preface to the 1960 Edition

The remarks that I hereby present to the public consist in the reproduction of the inaugural lecture I gave on June 24, 1959, on the occasion of my appointment to the Chair of Fundamental Theology of the Catholic Faculty of Theology at the University of Bonn. Several notes have been added to the unchanged text of the lecture to provide scholarly justification for what has been said. The aim of my remarks was to illuminate the problematic background of a word that is unfortunately all too worn out and to get to the bottom of a question that is of great importance both for the inner orientation of Catholic theology and for the dialogue between the denominations.

I dedicate these lines to the memory of my father, who accompanied all my work with his caring sympathy until last August, when he was unexpectedly called from this world. As with my book on Bonaventure, I have to thank Schnell and Steiner publishing house for their cooperation that made it possible to print in this form.

Bad Godesberg, Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas, 1960.

* Originally in German: Joseph Ratzinger, “Der Gott des Glaubens, der Gott der Philosophen,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3/2 (Freiburg: Herder, 2020), 189–210 (© Dicastero per la Comunicazione-Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004). The translator thanks Jared Wicks, S.J., and Richard DeClue for their invaluable suggestions.

New Preface to the New Edition in 2004

Almost half a century has passed since I gave the Bonn inaugural lecture in June of 1959. During this time, history has moved faster than ever before. To the dramatic upheavals in society, politics, science, and culture correspond also profound breakthroughs in philosophy and theology. Can a text from back then still be current even today? When I reread this lecture, which in the meantime had been published once again by my circle of students in a volume with texts written over the course of four decades,¹ only then did I become fully aware of how much the questions posed back then have remained until today guidelines for my thinking. These questions recur in my *Introduction to Christianity* (1968), but especially in the lecture I gave at the Sorbonne in Paris entitled “Christianity—the True Religion?”² Naturally, the lecture was modified and reshaped by each of the new contexts.

What remains today, and what will be tomorrow a central task of theological thinking, is in any case the twofold question around which the considerations of the Bonn lecture revolved. There is first the general question of the relationship between faith and reason: what kind of rationality is appropriate for the Christian faith? How does faith fit into the whole of our existence? Is faith reconcilable with the fundamental insights that modern reason has acquired? Does the faith respond to reasonable questions and is its “reason” communicable? This fundamental problem inside our faith and theology becomes concrete as a question: Was the consummate connection in the nascent Church between Greek thought and biblical faith lawful, so that this relation belongs to “the essence of Christianity,” or was it a “disastrous misunderstanding” from which we must finally liberate ourselves? Today, where Christianity in the West resolutely wishes to assimilate into other cultural spheres, stepping out of the Western world, this question has become an extremely urgent problem; this is also a fundamental problem in the conversation between Catholic and Orthodox Christianity on the one hand, and between the Protestant theological thought, on the other hand, which from the beginning critiqued the merger of metaphysics and faith, of Greek thought and biblical tradition. So, it appears to me that the attempt then to rewrite the foundational problems of fundamental theology, which

¹ See *Vom Wiederauffinden der Mitte* [The retrieval of the middle]: *Grundorientierungen*, ed. Stephan Otto Horn, Vinzenz Pfnür, and Vincent Twomey (Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 1997), 40–59.

² See Ratzinger, “Das Christentum—die wahre Religion?,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3/1, *Der Gott des Glaubens und der Gott der Philosophen*, 439–56 [English in *Truth and Tolerance* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 162–82].

I dared at the beginning of my theological work, can also today provide an impetus to theological thought, in order—in our own context—to satisfy our obligation to give an answer to those who ask about the *Logos*—the reason—for our hope (1 Pet 3:15).

I give my heartfelt thanks to the publishing house for the initiative to reprint this small text, and likewise to my third successor as chair of Fundamental Theology in Bonn, Prof. Dr. Heino Sonnemans, for his friendly cooperation in this project.

Rome, Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, 2004
Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

Introduction

The Prehistory of the Question

The theme of these reflections—the God of faith and the God of the philosophers—is in substance as old as the coexistence of faith and philosophy. Its explicit history starts however with a small parchment sheet which was found a few days after the death of Blaise Pascal, hanging in the skirt lining of the deceased. This sheet, called *Memorial*, offers timid and at the same time shattering news of the experience of transformation that had happened to this man the night of the 23rd to the 24th of November, 1654. It starts, after a very careful indication of the day and time, with the words: “Fire, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers, not of the scholars.”³ The mathematician and philosopher Pascal had experienced the living God, the God of faith, in such a lively encounter with the “You” of God, evidently captured in shocked and joyful astonishment; how different is the in-breaking of the reality of God in comparison to what a philosophy like that of Descartes knew to say about God. Pascal’s *Pensées* are to be understood from this fundamental experience: in contrast to the metaphysical doctrine of God of his time, with its purely theoretical God, his thoughts work to lead directly from the reality of concrete human existence, with its insoluble intertwining of greatness and mercy, into the encounter with God who is the living response to the open question of the human being, and who is no other than the gracious God in Jesus Christ, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

³ Romano Guardini, *Pascal for Our Time*, trans. Brian Thompson (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966).

The philosophy of this time, particularly that of Descartes, is a philosophy of the *esprit de géométrie*. Instead, Pascal's *Pensées* attempts to be a philosophy of the *esprit de finesse*, of the real apprehension of the whole of reality that penetrates deeper than mathematical abstraction.⁴ Meanwhile, the rationalistic philosophy of the day, whose inadequacy Pascal revealed, was still so very certain of itself at the time that it could not be shaken by the "deviating" and fragmented comments of the self-taught philosopher, Pascal. First, the rubble of speculative metaphysics left behind by Kant and the relocation of religiosity to the extra-rational—and thus also extra-metaphysical—realm of feelings by Schleiermacher finally brought the thoughts of Pascal to a breakthrough, then only leading to a radical worsening of the problem. For the first time, the gap between metaphysics and religion could not be bridged: metaphysics, i.e., theoretical reason—has no access to God; religion has no place in the sphere of *ratio*: it is experience, which cannot be verified by scientific measurability; to attempt this anyway means to draw out of it a fictitious schema the "God of the philosophers."⁵ This has a further consequence: a religion that cannot be rationalized cannot, in principle, be dogmatic, if indeed dogma ought to be a rational statement about religious content. So, the concretely experienced opposition between the God of faith and the God of the philosophers is ultimately generalized into the opposition between the God of religion and the God of philosophers. Religion is experience, while philosophy is theory. Correspondingly, the God of religion

⁴ In his translation of the *Pensées*, Matthias Laros draws particular attention to the underlying argument with Descartes, which is based on the distinction between *esprit de géométrie* and *esprit de finesse*; see *Pascal's Pensées*, trans. and ed. Matthias Laros (München: Kempten-Kösel, 1913), 1. Cf. Romano Guardini, "Über Pascals Vorstellung vom Weg der religiösen Erkenntnis [On Faith and Reason in Blaise Pascal's *Memorial*]," in *Pascal for Our Time*, 33–44, and the summary presentation by Hans Meyer, *Geschichte der abendländischen Weltanschauung*, vol. 4, *Die Weltanschauung des Mittelalters* (Paderborn and Würzburg: F. Schöningh, 1948). See more bibliography there.

⁵ Compare with this development, Gottlieb Söhngen, "Die Neubegründung der Metaphysik und die Gotteserkenntnis," in *Probleme der Gotteserkenntnis*, ed. Adolf Dyroff, Albertus-Magnus-Akademie zu Köln, vol. 2/3 (Münster in Westfalen: Aschendorffschen, 1928), 1–55; Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Gott, V: Theologiegeschichtlich," *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 2, 1729ff. [English: *Religion Past and Present*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz, Don Browning, Bernd Janowski, and Eberhard Jüngel, vol. 10 (Boston: Brill, 2011)]. Pannenberg, points to the significant influence that A. Ritschl and A. Cremer have exerted on this matter; see Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Die Aufnahme des philosophischen Gottesbegriffs als dogmatisches Problem der frühchristlichen Theologie," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 70, no. 1/2 (1959): 1–45.

is living and personal, in stark contrast to the God of the philosophers, who is portrayed as being empty and rigid.⁶

Today this distinction has almost become a catchphrase and definitely a commonplace belief behind which probably very different ideas—and often enough also a lack of real knowledge of the problems—are hiding. That makes it all the more important to create clarity in this matter—especially because of the distinction just indicated—and to connect the basic questions of fundamental theology, like the relationship between religion and philosophy, between faith and knowledge, between common sense and religious experience, and thus finally the question of the possibility of a dogmatic religion at all.

It will prove expedient in this regard to tackle the narrower and more comprehensible contrast, “the God of faith and the God of the philosophers,” given the fact that the wider contrast between the “the God of religion and the God of the philosophers” will, without the former, necessarily be misunderstood anyway. I will try next to present two grandiose and radically opposed answers to our question, whose critical revision should then help to find a solution.

The Problem

The Thesis of Thomas Aquinas

First there is the answer of St. Thomas Aquinas, which can be summarized in a few words. We must state beforehand that Thomas naturally does not know the modern formulation of the question but knows about the matter and addresses it. His opinion could be presented as follows: the God of religion and the God of the philosophers are fully integrated, while the God of faith and the God of philosophy can be partially distinguished, given that the God of faith is superior and adds something to the God of the philosophers. The *religio naturalis*, which means every religion outside of Christianity, does not have any higher content and cannot have any higher content than what the philosophical doctrine of God offers to it. In contrast, the religions that go beyond or in contradiction to this doctrine are rubbish and aberrations. For Thomas, outside of the Christian faith, philosophy is the highest possibility of the human spirit in general.⁷ Here Scheler does

⁶ This is how Scheler determines the mutual relationship; see *On the Eternal in Man* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 239. Cf. Heinrich Freis, *Die katholische Religionsphilosophie der Gegenwart: Der Einfluss Max Schelers auf ihre Formen und Gestalten; eine problemgeschichtliche Studie* (Heidelberg: F. H. Kerle, 1949), 32.

⁷ Short and classic is the related point of view of St. Thomas summarized in *Summa*

not speak mistakenly of a partial-identity system in Aquinas where the truth content of the non-Christian religions is identified with philosophy, keeping only the Christian faith outside of this total identity;⁸ the faith mediates a new and higher concept of God than what philosophical reason could ever devise or conceive. Moreover, faith does not contradict the philosophical doctrine of God to shed light on faith's relationship with such doctrine, so that the formula "gratia non destruit, sed elevat et perfecit naturam" can well apply.⁹ The Christian belief in God absorbs the philosophical doctrine of God and completes it. To be more precise, the God of Aristotle and the God of Jesus Christ are one and the same. Aristotle had recognized the true God whom we in faith are allowed to capture more deeply and purely, just as in the future vision of God we will again grasp God's essence more intimately and more closely. One could maybe say, without violating the facts, that the Christian faith relates to the philosophical knowledge of God in the same way that the eschatological sight of God relates to faith. These are the three gradations of a unified path.

The Counter-Thesis of Emil Brunner

The radical contradiction to this harmonious solution characterizes the doctrine of God of the Reformed theologian Emil Brunner. Admittedly, he brings up in a very pointed manner an essential concern of Reformation theology.¹⁰ Brunner ties his doctrine of God to the obvious fact that God has

theologiae [ST] I, q. 1, a. 1, where the philosophical theology as *lumen naturalis rationis* is contrasted with the *doctrina per revelationem*. While the former is a theology of *pauci* and remains mixed up with errors, the latter is accessible to all, corrects errors, and adds new knowledge. The fundamental right of the philosophical theology remains untouched. Cf. the text mentioned in note 9.

⁸ Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, 323ff.; Fries, *Die katholische Religionsphilosophie der*, 61–62.

⁹ ST I, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1: "The existence of God and other like truths about God, which can be known by natural reason, are not articles of faith, but are preambles to the articles; for faith presupposes natural knowledge, even as grace presupposes nature, and perfection supposes something that can be perfected. Nevertheless, there is nothing to prevent a man, who cannot grasp a proof, accepting, as a matter of faith, something which in itself is capable of being scientifically known and demonstrated" (obj. 1: "It seems that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated. For it is an article of faith that God exists"). Compare with *Summa contra gentiles* I, ch. 7.

¹⁰ Emil Brunner, *Dogmatik*, vol. 1, *Die christliche Lehre von Gott* (Zürich: Zwingli, 1953), 121–40 [Citations will be made to the English edition *Dogmatics*, vol. 1. *The Christian Doctrine of God*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950), 117–37]. Related literature can be found in Pannenberg, "Die Aufnahme." See also Johann Peter Steffen, *Glaubensbegründung*, vol. 1 (Mainz: L. Deibel, 1958), 32. This presentation

names in the Bible. That is undoubtedly a fact that is contrary to the basic tendency of the philosophical doctrine of God. Indeed, philosophy intends precisely to advance beyond the individual and many things which bear names to the universal, to the concept. What has a name is an individual, next to which there is an equal. But philosophy looks for the concept that, as a description of the general, is the opposite of the name. So, the philosophical doctrine of God consequently tends away from the names of God in preference to the concept of God. This doctrine is all the purer the more it has moved away from names to the mere concept. But the biblical God has names and is an individual, a specific one, instead of being "the absolute." And this naming of God is not just an imperfection of the still possibly semi-polytheistic early stages of the Old Testament which faded away with the increasing clarification of the concept of God. No: a double development can be observed in the Bible such that the individual names of God indeed recede more and more, while at the same time the awareness that God has a name further intensifies. Yes, the theologically most developed Scripture of the New Testament, the Gospel of John, virtually sums up Jesus's function in the fact that he revealed the name of God to human beings—"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me" (John 17:6; cf. 17:26 ["I made your name known to them, and I will make it known"] and 12:28 ["Father, glorify your name"]) as Jesus's goal in life; cf. the Our Father's prayer "hallowed be your name" in Matt. 6:9) and Christ stands as the new Moses whose work, the proclamation of God's name and simultaneously the foundation of a relationship between man and God, is fulfilled on a higher level.

What does this fact of the name of God mean? A name does not express knowledge of an essence, but it allows a being to be appealed to and addressed, and the name provides for the social integration of the one named. Because one with a name can be invoked, a relation of coexistence results with a being so named. When God gives himself a name among human beings, he does not actually express his essence, but rather he lets himself be invoked and he becomes accessible to human beings and enters into the relation of coexistence with them, thus allows people to coexist with himself. It is true that God, as absolutely superior to human beings, cannot be named by them, and we cannot force God to be named: God can be called upon only when he lets himself be called, and his name can only be known only when he himself announces it. The relation of coexistence cannot be established here by human beings, but only by God. In this way,

will be limited to the position especially characteristic of Brunner, which here and there will be further clarified with our own thoughts.

however, the name of God expresses the fact that God gives himself a name, as one who reveals himself. He is not someone who is invented *via causalitatis*. In this, an important contrast to the Greek philosophical relationship to God becomes clear: in philosophy, it is the human being who goes out of himself seeking God, while in biblical faith it is God himself, and God alone, who establishes the human–God relationship in creative freedom. So now, the contrast between the name of God and the concept of God, between the God of faith and the God of philosophers, becomes clearer and more definite.

“The ‘God of the philosophers’ is the God to whom one does not pray, with whom, it is true, one can be united—but this unity is one thought only, one in which one thinks the deepest truth’ by one’s own efforts—but here there is no communion—no communion established by God himself. This is the point of the assertion that all this talk about revelation of the name of God is ‘primitive anthropomorphism.’ This argument is simply the despairing defense of the self which wants to be left alone in its isolation which does not want to open up, which does not want to be forced out of its position as the center of existence, which wants to assert itself against God who created it. . . . This is what is meant by the idea of the name of God, which is so repellent to those who defend the philosophical idea of God, and one which is so decisive for the biblical testimony: the disclosure of the mystery of the nature of the true personal God through revelation, which can be known only in this revelation as the nature of the God who imparts himself. The God of revelation is the God who can be known only through revelation. God, as he is conceived outside this revelation is quite different: he is something that has been thought, hence he is not personal; He is not the one whose nature it is to communicate himself.”¹¹

The opposition between the God of faith and the God of the philosophers, as it appears in the fact of the divine name, attains its culmination most clearly in the principal divine name of the Bible: Yahweh. The Hebrew Bible paraphrases and explains this name with the words *aeħjaeh ašaer aeħjae*, “I am who I am.” In place of the repeated active form, the Septuagint introduces the participle for the second instance; . . . the “I-am” thus becomes “the Being.” This was a decision of incalculable importance, for this translation

¹¹ *Dogmatics*, 1:126–27.

provided a decisive approach for the synthesis of the Greek and biblical images of God. The effect of this translation on Patristic and Scholastic theology is well known. Theology was well aware that God calls himself “the Being,” and thus reveals his metaphysical essence, which consists in the fact that he is *ens a se* in whom essence and existence coincide to form a unity. That means that what is the highest concept of ontology and the key concept of the philosophical doctrine of God appears here as the central self-statement of the biblical God. This word vouches for the unity of Scripture and philosophy and becomes one of the most important links that unites them. The name Yahweh is thus understood as a statement regarding his essence, in which God reveals the metaphysical basis of his being, so that we are no longer dealing in truth with a name, but a concept. At this point, Brunner’s criticism comes in, which in short consists in the assertion that the meaning of the biblical statement is turned upside down and is inwardly perverted.

The Greek Fathers made a great mistake (and this error bore disastrous fruits) in turning the name of Yahweh (especially the Name as described by the Elohist writer in the narrative of the revelation of the Divine name of Horeb) into an ontological definition. The words “I Am That I Am” ought not be translated in the language of speculative thought, as a definition: I Am He Who Is. To do this not only misses the meaning of this statement but it turns the biblical idea of revelation into its opposite. The “name” which cannot be defined is turned into a definition. The meaning of the Sacred Name is precisely this: I am the Mysterious One, and I will to remain so; I Am That I Am, I Am the Incomparable, therefore it cannot be defined nor named.¹²

Elsewhere, Brunner speaks of a misunderstanding¹³ that is downright tragic in its effects and condemns the link established by Augustine between neo-Platonic ontology and biblical knowledge of God.¹⁴ According to Brunner, this is not just a single exegetical misunderstanding, as is always possible, but it is the central falsification of the biblical message, because these extreme opposites collide in the name of God. On the one hand there is God, who reveals himself to be You by naming his name and who opens up to man and offers himself to him for fellowship. On the other hand,

¹² *Dogmatics*, 1:120

¹³ Cf. *Dogmatics*, 1:128.

¹⁴ Cf. *Dogmatics*, 1:129.

philosophical thinking sees an anthropomorphism in the revelation of the name so that it ultimately rejects revelation itself.

Self-sufficient reason will not admit anything that comes from a sphere beyond its own possibilities.”¹⁵

They will [only receive—and this is the same thing in the end—monological and not dialogical truth,] only truth which is preceded by the words: “I think,” but not that which is prefaced by the words: “Here it is!”¹⁶

The error of the Fathers and of the Scholastics would consist in the fact that—with their synthesis of the God of faith and the God of the philosophers—they read into the passage exactly what is radically opposite, and thus stray from and falsify the essence of Christian revelation.

The problem that underlines the opposition between the God of faith and the God of philosophers has vast ramifications. Here it becomes a question of the essence of Christianity in general, the question of the legitimacy of the synthesis of Greek and biblical thought that shapes concrete Christianity. Thus, it is a question regarding the legitimacy of the coexistence of faith and philosophy. It is also regards the validity of the *analogia entis* as a positive relation between the knowledge gained through reason and the knowledge acquired through faith, between the natural being and the reality of grace. Finally, what is at stake is our decision in favor of the Catholic or the Protestant understanding of Christianity.¹⁷ In a word, the problem of the God of faith and the God of the philosophers, understood as a focal

¹⁵ *Dogmatics*, 1:125.

¹⁶ *Dogmatics*, 1:125. See also Brunner's *Wahrheit als Begegnung: Sechs Vorlesungen über das christliche Wahrheitsverständnis* (Zurich: Zwingli, 1938). The new thesis in this work, whose fundamental point of departure also determines the doctrine of God in his *Dogmatik*, is understood in connection with Ferdinand Ebner. Cf. Brunner's warning to this respect in *Für Ferdinand Ebner: Stimmen der Freunde*, ed. H. Jone (Regensburg: Pustet, 1935), 12–15.

¹⁷ Regarding the problematic of the *analogia entis* that has so profoundly concerned Karl Barth as well as Emil Brunner, lately we have to take into account Gottlieb Söhngen, *Die Einheit in der Theologie: Gesammelte Abhandlungen, Aufsätze, Vorträge* (Munich: Karl Zink, 1952), 235–64; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie* (Cologne: Jakob Hegner, 1951) [English: *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992)]; Erich Przywara, “Analogia entis, analogia fidei,” in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (1959), 470–76.

point, summarizes the whole problem of theological foundations, which, in the cosmos of theological disciplines, is the difficult and at the same time beautiful task of the fundamental theologian.

An Attempt at a Solution

The Philosophical Concept of God and the Pre-Christian Religion

The problem is difficult and serious. One can approach it only if one looks carefully and thoroughly at both concepts of God, to recognize what is essential. Only a few hints in this direction can be attempted here. Let us start with the philosophical concept of God, which, in contrast to the God of faith, is presented to us in a more pointed way as the concept of God in Greek philosophy.¹⁸ In order to understand, it is not enough to know and adopt a certain form of definition. It is much more necessary to see the relationship of this concept of God to the spiritual and religious world in which it was found and in which it was classified in one way or another. For, in some way, the pre-Christian philosophical concept of God also stood in relation to religion, which was also something different from philosophy. And only when this relation is considered is the philosophical concept of God of the Greeks as such going to be seen correctly and completely. In principle, the same applies to any philosophical concept of God. This relationship becomes tangible in the Stoic distinction of theologies as threefold, which at the same time leads us to the root of the concept of *theologia naturalis*, which is constantly in the background here. The Stoics distinction of theologies as threefold is between theologies which are mythical, political or civil, and physical or natural: *theologia mythica-politike-physike*; *theologia mythica-civilis-naturalis*.¹⁹ The philosophical *theologia naturalis* of the Greeks belongs to this precise context. To try to understand it independently of this context leads to a wrong understanding. With this Stoic division, as it is developed above all in the forty-one books of the *Antiquitatis rerum humanarum et divinarum* of M. Terentius Varro (116–17 BC), one

¹⁸ For the concrete comprehension of the Greek concept of God in comparison to the Christian one, Pannenberg's *Aufnahme* is fundamental. Here should also be emphasized, above all, the relationship between the Greeks' philosophical concept of God and their religious world.

¹⁹ See Jakob Bilz, "Theologie," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2nd ed., vol. 10 (1938), 65–77. About the term "theology," see Pierre Batiffol, "Theologie, Theologici," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 5 (1918): 205–20; Joseph Stiglmayr, "Mannigfache Bedeutungen von 'Theologie' und 'Theologen,'" *Theologie und Glaube* 11 (1919): 296–309.

encounters the problem of the philosophical monotheism of the Greeks, i.e., their philosophical doctrine of God.²⁰

What is meant by this division? First of all, it should be noted that there are by no means three equal members. The separation of *theologia civilis* and *mythica* probably has primarily an apologetic and reforming character: the *theologia civilis* should be exonerated and separated from the discredited mythical theology as much as possible, but its factually close-knit connection with mythical theology is undeniable.

Perhaps, more precisely, the opposition should simply be between the so called *theologia mythica*, *theologia civilis*, and *theologia naturalis*. Let us now ask ourselves what this distinction means. Varro undertakes this very carefully, according to the individual factors of the respective theologies. The *theologia mythica* is the concern of the poet, while the *theologia civilis* is the about the work of the people, and the *theologia naturalis* arises from philosophers or physicists; he does not forget to note that many people have affiliated themselves with the poets. A second difference concerns the respective place in reality to which the individual theologies are assigned. According to this, the theater corresponds to mystical theology, the *polis* to political theology, and the cosmos to “natural” theology. Here, one sees already the deep inner contrast that separates political and mythical theology, on the one hand, and natural theology on the other hand. For, the specifications of place are completely disparate according to the subject matter: the place of political and mythological theology is determined by the human cult practices, whereas the place of philosophical theology is determined by the reality of the divine that confronts man.²¹ The contrast becomes more radical in the third distinction made by Varro, which relates to the content of the three theologies. Mythical theology has as its content the various fables of God, precisely the “myths,” which together are “the” myth. Political theology has as its content the cult of the state. Finally, natural theology treats questions about who or what the gods are, “whether they are made of fire, as Heraclitus believes, or of numbers, as Pythagoras thinks, or of atoms, as Epicurus says. And there are other things which the ears can more easily endure inside the walls of a school than outside in the forum.”²² One is also tempted to say here, God of faith and God of philosophers; and here,

²⁰ Tertullian deals with Varro in detail in *Ad nationes* 2.1–8, as well as Augustine in *De civitate Dei* 6.5ff. In what follows, see Joseph Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche* (Munich: Zink, 1954), 265–76.

²¹ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 6.5.47; 4.32.

²² Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 6.5 [trans. Marcus Dods in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ser. 1, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009)].

too, faith has to do with living people and encounters, and philosophy with the impersonal formula . . . This²³ distinction in the divine counterpart of theology leads to a final contrast that ultimately exposes the real core of the problem: “The *theologia naturalis* has to do with the *natura deorum*, but the other two *theologiae* have to do with the *divina instituta hominum*. But this ultimately reduces the whole difference to that of theological metaphysics on the one hand and cultic religion on the other. Ultimately, civil theology has no God, but only ‘religion,’ while ‘natural theology’ has no religion but only a deity.”²⁴ The contrast between religion and the God of the philosophers arrives at a stage of ultimate seriousness in the spiritual and religious situation of antiquity described by Varro: philosophy, as yet undivided from physics, uncovers the truth of the real, and thus also the truth of the divine being, while religion takes its path independently of this; it is not about venerating what science discovers as the true God. Religion is much more; it places itself outside of the question of truth and seeks shelter solely to its own legality.

With this separation of philosophical truth and religious realization, Varro, or rather the Stoic thinking he represents, perceptively discovers the real problematic nature of ancient polytheism, or, one may say, the basic problem of any polytheistic religiosity. For what actually is the essence of polytheism? The essence of polytheism cannot be grasped with the assertion that polytheism adores many gods, while monotheism knows only one God. Such an affirmation remains superficial. Almost always, the polytheisms, even if they cannot be reduced to the same measure, in one way or another, recognize that ultimately the Absolute can only be one. This knowledge can have a variety of forms: it can express itself in the idea of the *deus otiosus* of the primitive religions, in the idea of the all-pervasive *μοῖρα* as the power ruling gods and men, or as the high form of the philosophical concept of the God of Plato or Aristotle. (Here we should note that the Aristotelian first mover represents, from a history of religions perspective, a classic modification of the motif of *deus otiosus*.) The forms are diverse, but nowhere is there a complete lack of knowledge of the unity of the absolute. The decisive and defining component of polytheism is not the lack of the idea of unity, but the idea that humans cannot address the Absolute in itself as such.²⁵

²³ [Trans. note: The ellipses here are original to the German and do not indicate any elision of material by the translator or by editors for *Nova et Vetera*. However, the exact reason for them in the original is not entirely clear.]

²⁴ Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes*, 354.

²⁵ This particular contrast between “monotheism” and “polytheism” is worked out above all by Jacques-Albert Cuttat, *Begegnung der Religionen* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1956), 20ff. Instead of the easily misinterpreted juxtaposition of Cuttat’s “personal” and

Therefore human beings have to decide to call out the finite reflections of the absolute, the gods who are not “God”—not even for them.²⁶ For, “God,” that is, the absolute itself, is, to say it again, not addressable.²⁷ And the essence of monotheism, as is now shown, consists precisely in the fact that it dares to address the absolute itself as the absolute, as God, who is at the same time the absolute in itself *and* the God of human beings. In other words: monotheism undertakes the risk of addressing *the* absolute—the “God of philosophers”—as the God of men—“of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob”! And of course, human beings can dare to do this only because they know themselves to be first addressed by this God. But the fact remains that nothing else constitutes monotheism than precisely the hyphen that connects the Absolute—the “God of the philosophers”—and the God-man—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—with one another. Augustine establishes a link “between Neoplatonic ontology and biblical knowledge of God,”²⁸ which is therefore legitimate from the point of view of monotheism. It is the concrete way in which, for us, the link between the God of philosophers and the God of faith, the God of man, had to be represented. Yes, with the statement that the mute and inexpressible God of the philosophers has become in Jesus Christ the God who talks and hears, he has simply enforced the entire inherent claim of biblical faith.

“impersonal” concept of God, I prefer to speak of the responsiveness of God or the lack thereof, because only the responsiveness of God constitutes his personality from a religious-philosophical perspective. The first mover of Aristotle carries essential characteristics of the metaphysical concept of the person (self-consciousness) but cannot be referred to as a person in philosophy of religion precisely because God is unable to listen to people and so is lacking in responsiveness. On the background idea of unity, which also remains in polytheism, see August Brunner, *Die Religion: Eine philosophische Untersuchung auf geschichtlicher Grundlage* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1956), 177–78, 186.

²⁶ This is particularly evident in original Buddhism and in the most important forms of Hinduism, see Helmuth von Glasenapp, “Die nichtchristlichen Religionen,” in *Das Fischer Lexikon*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1957), 76, 176. This is no less clear in the Neoplatonism of late antiquity’s philosophical apology of polytheism. Compare the presentation by Edward Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, vol. 3, 4th ed. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1903).

²⁷ Now the peculiar facts become understandable. For example, Plato and Aristotle remain religious polytheists despite their philosophical monotheism. See Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 47. See also Pannenberg’s *Aufnahme*, 7.

²⁸ Brunner, *Die Religion*, 136.

The Philosophical Concept of God and Biblical Revelation of God

The extraordinary scope of such a statement is obvious. If it is true, then it means that the synthesis—carried out by the Church Fathers—of biblical faith with the Hellenistic spirit as the representative of the philosophical spirit in general at the time was not only legitimate but necessary in order to bring to expression the full claim and the complete seriousness of biblical faith. This full claim rests precisely on the fact that there is the link with the pre-religious, philosophical concept of God. But this means that, in a certain sense, philosophical truth belongs constitutively to Christian faith, and this in turn means that *analogia entis* is a necessary dimension of Christian reality, which if written off would at the same time be the abolition of the actual claim that Christianity has to make.

In view of such serious and far-reaching consequences, the question must be asked again and again whether and to what extent the link established by the Church Fathers between the God of faith and the God of philosophers, whose justification and necessity have hitherto been revealed in the context of the general problem of monotheism, was justified, especially with regard to the biblical concept of God. This can first be answered as follows: the link was justified, inasmuch as and to the extent that the biblical belief in God intends to be, and should be monotheism. For, monotheism stands and falls with the identification of the Absolute itself, who has turned to human beings. Now, however, not only is the monotheistic intention of the biblical belief in God fundamentally certain, but one can also notice that, in postexilic biblical writing, the attempt is made with increasing clarity to make intelligible to the outside world the essence of the monotheistic belief we have just described.²⁹ The theme of creation imposes itself more and more and plays perhaps a dominant role in Deutero-Isaiah, for example. Like no other notion, it is suitable to interpreting the distinctiveness of the biblical belief in God for the nations of the world, into which Israel was now placed in a completely new way. Precisely from the idea of creation the prophet was able to express the fact that Israel worshiped none of the usual popular deities and none of the inner-worldly fertility powers, but rather the world's absolute foundation itself. One thinks of the great verses of chapter 40 of Isaiah:

Who has measured with his palm the waters, marked off the heavens
with a span, held in his fingers the dust of the earth, weighed the

²⁹ For what follows, compare with Ernst Würthwein's article "Gott," in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 2, 1705–13. See also Alfons Deissler, "Gott," in *Bibel-theologisches Wörterbuch*, ed. J. B. Bauer (Graz: Styria, 1959), 352–68.

mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who has directed the spirit of the Lord, or instructed him as his counselor? Whom did he consult to gain knowledge? Who taught him the path of judgment, or showed him the way of understanding? See, the nations count as a drop in the bucket, as a wisp of cloud on the scales; the coastlands weigh no more than a speck. Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor its animals be enough for burnt offerings. Before him all the nations are as naught, as nothing and void he counts them. To whom can you liken God? With what likeness can you confront him?" (Isa 40:12–18)

In view of the powerful and proud empires of the world, this is a truly bold language, which impressively expresses the special features of the God of Israel: his uniqueness, which is based on the fact that he is the absolute itself, which has turned to human beings as the absolute.³⁰

The characterization of God as "God of Heaven," which predominates in the books of Ezra and Daniel, moves in the same direction as does the concept of creation. There can be no doubt that this is a kind of missionary term, whose function is to make the nature of the God of Israel comprehensible to the people. In the history of religion, "God of heaven" is everywhere designating the high God, who often as *deus otiosus* practically assumes the function of a God of the philosophers.³¹ When Israel refers to its God as the God of heaven when addressing the Gentiles, it wants to say that it does not know any god of the people in the usual sense, but that the one Lord of the world—"the absolute"—is its God, for Israel knows that he has addressed them and to him in truth all peoples are subordinate.³²

Finally, the study of the divine qualities that we can extract from the Bible points in the same direction. In it, the biblical image of God comes closest to the philosophers' doctrine of God, and therefore it has contributed the most to establishing the relationship between them. Concepts like God's eternity, omnipotence, unity, truth, goodness, and holiness do not simply mean the same in the Bible and philosophy, but considerable approximations are unmistakable. The intention to refer beyond all inner-worldly powers to

³⁰ Deissler, "Gott," 356ff.

³¹ See A. Brunner, *Die Religion*, 67ff., 155. Henri de Lubac, "Ursprung der Religion," in *Gott, Mensch, Universum: Die Stellung des Christen in Zeit und Welt*, ed. Jacques de Bivort de la Saudée and Johannes Hüttenbügel (Graz: Styria, 1956), 330. See also Gerardus Van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1956), 182ff.

³² Walther Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1939), 113.

the primordial power itself, which moves the world, is common to both.³³ At the same time, with such considerations, another point becomes clear: the philosophical element has been joined to the Bible's concept of God to the extent that it found itself compelled to address its own particular features in relation to the peoples' world in general, beyond its own internal space. That is, it had to use a language understandable to all of the world. It became necessary to the extent that the apologetic need, seen negatively, and the missionary need, seen positively, arose. In this respect, the philosophical dimension actually denotes the missionary dimension of the concept of God, that moment with which it makes itself comprehensible to the outside world. But it also becomes clear that the appropriation of philosophical elements was comprehensively carried out at the moment when the less expansive Judaism was replaced by a missionary religion, Christianity. The appropriation of philosophy, as it was accomplished by the apologist, was nothing more than the necessary internal complementary function to the external process of the missionary proclamation of the Gospel to the people of the world. If it is essential to the Christian message not to be an esoteric secret doctrine for a narrowly limited circle of the initiated, but rather to be God's message to all, then it will be essential that the message be translated to those outside, into the common language of human reason. The true claim of the Christian faith can be made visible again and again in its greatness and in its seriousness only through this link to what man has already understood in some form as the Absolute.³⁴

The Relational Unity of Philosophy and Faith

In this respect, the "partial-identity system" of Thomas Aquinas undoubtedly makes a valid claim: the "link" between the God of faith and the God of philosophers is fundamental, and as such, legitimate.³⁵ Nevertheless,

³³ See Pannenberg, *Aufnahme*, for careful consideration of the mutual differences and relationships.

³⁴ In fact, this is also stated by Pannenberg, *Aufnahme*, 45, who points out that the abandonment of the metaphysical element in the concept of God would also mean the presentation of the universal claim of Christian God (13).

³⁵ Scheler's criticism of the partial-identity system of St. Thomas remains justified insofar as the essential relationship between belief and philosophy is not to be exaggerated in the sense of an identity of *religio naturalis* and *theologia naturalis*, but merely understood as a relational unity. In this respect, the concept of the conformity-system can be accepted; however, it is closer to the true intention of Aquinas than what Scheler himself assumes. See Albert Lang, *Wesen und Wahrheit der Religion. Einführung in die Religionsphilosophie* (Munich: Hueber, 1957), 88ff.

there remains a thorn that forces us to make room for Emil Brunner's legitimate concern despite everything. For, it is clear: if the faith apprehends the philosophical concept of God and says, "the Absolute—of which you knew something somehow—is the Absolute who speaks in Christ (who is the Word) and to whom you can speak," still this does not simply cancel out the difference between faith and philosophy, and by no means is what philosophy has now transformed into faith. Rather, philosophy continues to be something else with its own identity and the faith refers to this to express through philosophy this other thing in order to become comprehensible. And furthermore, the concept of the Absolute, if it is detached from its own independent philosophical existence, or more precisely, from its previous togetherness with polytheism, and is inserted into faith's sphere of relationships, the Absolute will necessarily have to undergo a deep purification and transformation.

Let us look again at the decisive process of laying the foundations of Christian faith's appropriation of Greek philosophy! We determined that, in the Greek spiritual world, natural theology, which raises the philosophical concept of God, was by no means the only theology that existed then, for it coexisted with mythical and political theologies in such a way that their god remained essentially unreligious and could thus form the metaphysical background to the religious polytheism that became publicly dominant. It is clear that the fundamental religious neutrality of the concept of God also had to have a decisive influence on this concept and on the idea of the Absolute itself. The transition from negative coexistence with polytheism to positive coexistence with monotheistic belief could not occur without leaving its mark on the basic concept of God. And here it can and must be said that the appropriation of the philosophical concept of God by the Apologists and later Fathers was simply a necessary interior process that was without a doubt legitimate, but it is undeniable that this appropriation has not always taken place critically enough.

Philosophical statements were often blindly accepted and not subjected to the necessary critical clarification and metamorphosis.³⁶ The realization that God is a God related to the world and to people, who has an impact on history—said more profoundly, the realization that God is person, an *I* that

³⁶ See a detailed treatment in Pannenberg's *Aufnahme*. There he also presents significant approaches to a new critical acquisition of the philosophical concept of God. I made a modest attempt in the same direction in my article, "Ewigkeit II," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (1959), 1268ff, repr. in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10, *Auferstehung und ewiges Leben: Beiträge zur Eschatologie und zur Theologie der Hoffnung*, 323–25.

meets a *you*—this realization, doubtlessly across the board, demands a new examination and thinking through of the philosophical affirmations, which has not yet been done adequately. In this task of a new and deeper appropriation of the concept of God, Protestant and Catholic theology, coming from different viewpoints, can meet in a new way. In any case, in the work on such a task, *theo-logy* will be an execution in an eminently meaningful sense of what Richard of St. Victor recognized from Augustine and from the Psalms as the real task of theology, *Quaerite faciem eius semper*—“constantly seek his face.” (Ps 105:4).³⁷ Of course, whatever knowledge is gained—it will not and should not invalidate the words that Augustine offered on this psalm verse: “Doubtlessly, to seek his face always is not about solving the questions raised by love and putting an end to it. But as love grows, so does the seeking of the beloved.”³⁸ The task of theology in this world necessarily remains unfinished. Theology is precisely posing that ever new quest for God’s face “until he comes” and he himself is the answer to all questions.

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³⁷ Richard of St. Victor, *De Trinitate* 3.1: “Quid si non detur pervenire, quo tendo? Quid si currendo deficio? Gaudebo tandem inquirendo faciem domini mei semper pro viribus cucurrisse, laborasse, desudasse” [“What if it is not given to me to reach the goal that I strive for? What if I falter in running the course? Well, I will rejoice that I totally ran, labored and sweated to the extent of my powers in seeking the face of my Lord”; see Richard of St. Victor, *The Twelve Patriarchs, The Mystical Ark, Book Three of the Trinity*, trans. Grover A. Zinn (New York: Paulist, 1979), 374; another English trans. can be found in *On the Trinity*, trans. and ed. Rubin Angelici (Eugene OR: Cascade, 2011)]. See Martin Grabmann, *Die Geschichte der scholastischen Methode: Nach den gedruckten und ungedruckten Quellen*, new ed. (Graz: Akademie Verlag, 1956), 3133ff.

³⁸ Cf. Augustine, *Ennaratio in Ps 104* (*Corpus Christianorum*, 40:1537; German trans.: *Augustinus, Das Antlitz der Kirche: Auswahl und übertragen von Hans Urs von Balthasar* [Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1942], text no. 292 [p. 352]).