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# A Critical Study of the Doctrine of Revelation as Held by Three Contemporary American Theologians -- Georgia Harkness, Nels F.S. Ferré, and Edwin Lewis -- In the Light of the Wesleyan View

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APPROVAL SHEET

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A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION  
AS HELD BY THREE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN THEOLOGIANS  
--GEORGIA HARKNESS, NELS F. S. FERRÉ, AND EDWIN LEWIS--  
IN THE LIGHT OF THE WESLEYAN VIEW

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Western School of Evangelical Religion

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by  
Paul Marvin Hayden

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### I. A STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Men are curious beings. They like to know. According to the Biblical account of the fall of man he was tempted and fell at this very point. The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was desired by Adam and Eve to make them wise. The Bible shows that they satisfied this desire to their own detriment. By a little observation, or even introspection, one can see that man still has this desire to know. A trip to the library, to inspect the multitudinous volumes on a myriad of subjects, should convince the most skeptical person of the human desire to know. Men not only want to know, they also want to know how and why they know.

The same library would contain many volumes treating the sources and nature of knowledge. Some of the greatest minds in history have dealt with this problem. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Roger Bacon, Francis Bacon, Locke, Hume, Leibnitz, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel and many other eminent men have seriously studied the problem of knowledge.

It has been possible to show that revelation is not just a historical problem, but that it also has current

interest in many circles. Robert Hutchins, one of America's leading educators, has expressed very cogently the need for revelation.

If we omit from theology faith and revelation, we are substantially in the position of the Greeks, who are thus, oddly enough, closer to us than are the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup>

Hutchins has come very close to the heart of the matter. The glory of the Greek civilization is undeniable. The Greeks, however, were still in search of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. They had progressed as far as the human mind, unaided by Supernatural Revelation, could travel. From much of the material available today, it seems that twentieth-century man is in the same position.

One of the world's well-known scientists, in dealing with the problem of life, has admitted the inadequacy of his own field of knowledge to provide a whole view of life, and therefore has sought integration with other sources of knowledge. Without forcing his admission of need for a proper philosophy into a need for revelation, the following quotation nevertheless has indicated the lack in his field. It is the needs in the various fields which point to the overall need which is troubling the minds of some of the great thinkers of today.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Maynard Hutchins, The Higher Learning in America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), p. 65.



. . . a problem not to be investigated completely by the analytic method of science, which deals with it in successive aspects, and, in each, tries to reduce it to its simplest terms; a problem which needs also the synoptic view of philosophy, by which we can "see life steadily and see it whole"; a problem the solution of which, could we reach it, would show us also the solution of subordinate problems, and give us a firm basis for ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics, the inner meaning of the Good, the Beautiful, and the True. <sup>2</sup>

These quotations were not intended to be extensive, or even representative, but they do illustrate the thinking of great men in the places of leadership in this day. If men in these areas of learning are concerned with this source of knowledge, it seems that theologians ought also to attempt a solution.

In moving from the fields of education and science to the field of theology, it has been found that one of the world's best-known living theologians has written much pertinent comment on this subject. Emil Brunner has said, "Christianity is either faith in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ or it is nothing." <sup>3</sup> Brunner has been a popular exponent of the Crisis Theology and is widely-read today. Due partly to this man and others in the same movement, there has been ever increasing interest in

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<sup>2</sup> Sir William Cecil Dampier, A History of Science (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 320.

<sup>3</sup> Emil Brunner, The Theology of Crisis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 2.

revelation. Regardless of the meaning of the word "revelation", as used by these writers in their various fields, it is evident that men are aware that neither science and reason together nor science and reason separately are able to answer the problems of life. Something beyond these is necessary. This demand is heightened by the complexity and speed of the age in which we live. Men are looking for an absolute. As Brunner has said, "An age which has lost its faith in an absolute has lost everything." <sup>4</sup> The search for values, the quest for goals, the longing for an absolute, the lack of motivation, the admission of the need of something else has been, to the writer of this thesis, an indication that men are in need of a revelation.

Some of the above quotations are very strong statements indeed, and the chronic problem of knowledge, especially that phase of knowledge which men have called revelation, is under more intensive consideration than ever before. In times past, a matter of indifference has been considered a safe position to take. Today this is not the case. Men's hearts are failing them for fear. The world has shrunk into one community. Ideologies seem irreconcilable, and nations are afraid of one another. Weapons of war are more devastating than ever before, and informed men are fearful as they

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

speculate on the possible horrors of another war.

Education is in possession of more facts than at any other time in history, but lacks integration and unity. The Harvard report, one of the latest and best known of educational works, dealt specifically with this problem of unity in education. In this analysis there was an admission that Christian colleges have,

. . . namely, the conviction that Christianity gives meaning and ultimate unity to all parts of the curriculum, indeed to the whole life of the college. Yet this solution is out of the question in publicly supported colleges and is practically, if not legally, impossible in most others.<sup>5</sup>

No reason was given for this hasty dismissal, but that has not been the concern of this study. The pertinent fact is that schools which respect revelation have a unifying force. This must have been the implication, because indifference in regard to revelation is the major distinction between Christian colleges and other types of colleges.

The problem of revelation is drawing the attention not only of individual men but also of movements. Revelation is one of the most important problems which can be entertained by the minds of men. In the light of the current emphasis upon this subject a consideration of the matter has been in

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<sup>5</sup> Harvard University. Committee on the Objectives of a General Education in a Free Society, General Education in a Free Society (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948), p. 39.

order. Recently, Carl F. H. Henry has said, ". . . the choice is between Nihilism and Revelationism." <sup>6</sup>

The whole area of epistemology or criteriology has been considered, some distinctions made, and some definitions clearly stated. Webster's Unabridged Dictionary has listed one definition of revelation as, "The act of revealing; the disclosing to others of what was before unknown to them; also, that which is revealed." <sup>7</sup> The theological definition is,

The act of revealing or communicating divine truth: specif., disclosure or manifestation of Himself or of His will by God to man, as through some wondrous act that awes and impresses, through oracular words, signs, laws, etc., or through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: as the revelation to the Jews assembled around Mt. Sinai." <sup>8</sup>

The word "revelation" has been used, in this paper, in the theological meaning. This has made revelation a special and separate source of knowledge. The writer has held that other sources of knowledge are reason and experience or empirical knowledge. Probably the authors compared would not all conform to this simple treatment of the subject, but clear definitions in approaching their position have been helpful in ascertaining their definitions. The word

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<sup>6</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, The Protestant Dilemma (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1948), p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language (Springfield, Mass.: G. C. Merriam Co., 1911), p. 1824.

<sup>8</sup> Loc. cit.

"doctrine" has had no special connotation but has meant simply "a teaching." The problem of revelation is a major problem and can not be exhaustively treated in one paper. The segment selected for this paper is but a minute part of the whole topic. Three contemporary theologians have been selected and their views of revelation compared and contrasted with the Wesleyan view.

## II. JUSTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM AND PROCEDURE

The statement of the problem, considering the importance of the doctrine of revelation, and the variety of views on the subject was in the writer's opinion, the strongest justification for this paper.

Voices from every quarter are crying for the solution of this problem which, in turn, answers many other queries concerning man's origin, purpose, and destiny. Either God has spoken or He has not. On a matter of such importance, there should be no room for ignorance, distortion, or speculation. The question of an absolute is in the balance. That the problem is critical has been evidenced by the host of writers it has attracted. Just as the number of cooks does not always improve the broth, so the number of writers does not necessarily assure light on any topic. On the contrary, awareness may be kindled by the number of writers, but the darkness only increased by the conflicting views in

their works. The lack of unanimity calls for further investigation.

This disagreement has been especially provocative of further study since it arises from those who call themselves Christians and who should be in agreement at this point. A more striking difference has been found when two of the same denomination differ at this point. Nothing more would be needed to warrant the study as a whole, but attention has been given to justifying the procedure and the persons and systems selected.

With the many voices that are raised today on the problem of revelation, it was necessary to be selective. The Wesleyan view has been chosen as the standard of measure, for several reasons. Wesley was a scholar and fellow at Oxford. This university, although prominent among the educational institutions of today, does not enjoy the dominance that it had in Wesley's day. This now world-famous man, from this great university, was the founder of what has become the world's largest Protestant denomination. The view of such a man should be respected.

Also, the writer of this paper has been trained in the Wesleyan tradition. This background and familiarity with the subject has been an asset. In addition, the writer is a member of the curious race of which he has written and was interested in examining the theological position in which he finds himself as well as retaining, discarding, or correcting

this position as the facts presented themselves. The Wesleyan view must not be considered the view of just John Wesley. It is also the view of the men with whom he laboured and those who followed him.

In one sense, it is hardly just to limit an appraisal of Methodism's theology to the writing of Wesley who was the evangelist and organizer of the movement but not its scholar. For a more leisurely and thorough exposition of Methodist doctrine the standard authorities are Fletcher, Clarke, and Watson.<sup>9</sup>

The three contemporary theologians, whose works have been considered in this paper, are very well-known and very influential. Their influence alone would seem to justify their selection yet more specific reasons were necessary for an inclusion in this study. Georgia Harkness is professor of applied theology at Garrett Biblical Institute, a Methodist school. Edwin Lewis is professor of systematic theology at Drew Theological Seminary, also a Methodist school. Although Nels F. S. Ferré is not, at present, teaching in a Methodist school he has been a lecturer at Garrett Biblical Institute and is to begin teaching at Vanderbilt University on approximately February 1, 1950. Vanderbilt University is a Methodist school. These various professors should present the Wesleyan view, to be consistent with the traditional

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<sup>9</sup> George Allen Turner, "Is Entire Sanctification Scriptural?" (unpublished Doctor's dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1946), p. 211.

Methodist doctrine.

### III. ORGANIZATION OF MATERIAL

The individual positions have been set forth one at a time. Biographical information has been given first. Then the philosophical approaches or presuppositions were considered. Next, the theological position was set forth as clearly as possible. Symmetry was striven for to facilitate comparison. The Wesleyan view was treated separately. After this was done, a chapter was devoted to comparing, contrasting, and evaluating the views of each of the three contemporary theologians with the Wesleyan view. Chapter VII is the conclusion of the subject.



## CHAPTER II

### THE POSITION OF GEORGIA HARKNESS

#### I. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Georgia Harkness was born in Harkness, New York in 1891. She was ordained in the Methodist ministry in 1926. The institutions at which she has studied and the degrees she has attained form an impressive list. Some of these schools and degrees are as follows: Cornell University ( A.B. 1912 ); Boston University ( M.A. 1920, M.R.E. 1920, Ph.D. 1923 ); Harvard University; Yale University; and Union Theological Seminary. Also, from Boston University, she now has the degree of Litt.D. The record of service of Georgia Harkness is one of notable achievements. She has been the teacher of English Bible at the Boston University School of Religious Education, 1919-1920; assistant professor of religious education, Elmira College, 1922, associate professor of philosophy 1923, professor of philosophy 1926-1937; associate professor, Mount Holyoke College, 1937-1939; and since 1939 she has been the professor of applied theology, Garrett Biblical Institute. According to one biographer, she is the first woman to hold a professorship in theology at a seminary, and is the only woman member of the American Theological Society. She is not only a

theologian but a poet. Her experience in ecumenical conferences is broad, having been a delegate to the Oxford and Madras Conferences, and a member of the Board of Strategy on the international crisis called by the World Council of Churches. As with most contemporary authors little biographical material has been made available. Nevertheless, the above information should aid in appreciating her work.

## II. PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS OF THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

Before the doctrine of revelation can be properly considered, the philosophical assumptions of the writer should be examined. If a person were a thorough and consistent naturalist, when anything in the Scriptures would appear as Supernatural he would be obligated to explain it according to his presuppositions. Consciously or unconsciously one judges all things by that which he has accepted as his authority. While there was nowhere an extensive treatise specifically on this subject, at least a fair idea of Harkness' philosophy may be gained by studying some of her many writings.

In treating of the subject of authority in the Christian church, and how that authority has shifted from time to time, she declares an attitude toward the Bible which may be helpful.

For centuries it was the authoritarian Church, with its priesthood and sacraments, that held Christianity and the social order together. Then came the Protestant Reformation, which substituted an authoritarian Book for an authoritative church. The Reformation theology, with its doctrine of sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide, was powerful but obdurate in the teeth of scientific fact, and it was bound to be challenged by the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Yet Christian faith could not die, and deism, with its defence of a spiritual universe "by the natural light of reason", became the refuge of many minds.<sup>1</sup>

There seem to be implications, in this phrase, that Harkness believes that the Bible is unscientific, unreasonable, and unessential for the Christian faith. The Bible was said to stubbornly withstand the scientific facts, which certainly would be unnecessary if it were in harmony with science. The Bible was inevitably to be challenged by reason, which could not be done if the Bible were logically consistent and also in harmony with other truth. In spite of these things the "Christian faith could not die." While this may not imply that the Bible is entirely unessential to the Christian faith, there appears no necessity for an infallible Bible. Certainly any such views as these are materially important in dealing with revelation as a whole or with any specific problems pertaining to revelation. In the same dissertation two warnings are given against using the Bible as authority for the Christian faith.

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<sup>1</sup> Georgia Harkness, The Faith By Which the Church Lives (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1946), p. 53.

As for the Bible, most people, at least most people sufficiently informed to be ministers of the gospel, recognize the dangers inherent in the proof text method. It is a truism that one can prove anything one likes from the Bible. . . . The revolt against Fundamentalism has centered upon the other great pitfall of reliance on the authority of the Bible, namely, the disregard of historical and scientific fact that ensues from belief in the literal inspiration.<sup>2</sup>

In both points it is plain that Harkness definitely does not believe in the literal inspiration of the Scripture. To briefly sum up these views, one might say that the Bible is inconsistent with itself and that it is inconsistent with scientific and historical facts. More reasons for rejecting the Bible as final authority are found in another section of the same book, The Faith By Which the Church Lives.

I have said that for our ultimate authority we must look to the mind of Christ, and that here we find the index to the proper use of every other kind of Christian authority. I have not claimed that here we find any meter-stick, any infallible rule or mechanically applicable guide to Christian belief or action. It is only as one finds within his own experience the meaning of the first Christian creed, "Jesus is Lord" that the mind of Christ has meaning for him.<sup>3</sup>

This is not the place for elaboration or criticism of Harkness' views, but since the intention is to set forth her views concerning revelation as clearly as possible, it will suffice to note that in the above paragraph she has

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

raised an "index" to every other kind of Christian authority. In speaking of the various kinds of Christian authority she refers to five main sources: The church, the Bible, the world of nature, the Holy Spirit, and the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup> It does seem as if the index, by which the other authorities are judged, has become a higher authority. Perhaps this should be borne in mind as she deals with the Bible in different areas and circumstances. The important fact, for immediate consideration, is that the Bible is not an unique authority. The Bible is but one of five authorities. These authorities, she warns, can be abused. However, for the fullness of the gospel, she suggests that all be used.

Any of these approaches may be perverted or it may be used with power. The full richness of the gospel message requires that all be employed, and used without the narrowness that has too often made them snares instead of guides.<sup>5</sup>

The problem of authority is so important that more time has been spent at this point. For her, the alternatives of Christian authority are threefold. She rejects the choosing of one of the authorities to the exclusion of the rest. She also rejects the possibility of finding a new basis of faith, because she feels it would be leaving the bounds of historic Christianity. The third alternative is to make a synthesis

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

of these approaches under some guiding and uniting principle. This is the attempt of evangelical liberalism, with which she classes herself. This synthesizing principle Harkness has designated as "the mind of Christ."<sup>6</sup> Earlier in this paper it was stated that Harkness held that the Bible was not essential to the Christian faith as the sole or final authority. She does believe that revelation is possible and that authority is in some way tied up with revelation. She recognizes that authority is essential, and therefore revelation as well. Natural theology is held to be inadequate. Some other revelation is needed. After speaking of the values of natural theology, while revealing the inadequacies, she treats of the need of further revelation:

But I do not find, save in the Bible, the assurance of a God who is Father and Redeemer - - of a living, loving, saving Deity who in grace and mercy condemns, yet forgives his sinning children and empowers them to new life... . If there is no revelation, or only such general revelation as is discernible through nature, there is only such salvation as man can discover for himself through a right use of nature. This is much, but not enough. Without a living God who takes the initiative in revealing himself in love and saving men from sin, there can be no religion -- good religion. But it is not the religion of Christian faith. It is primarily this lack of authority for the central assumptions of the Christian gospel of redemption that makes deficient any philosophy of religion that excludes the more-than-natural.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

The last phrase sounds like a very cautious departure from naturalism with no indication of how far the journey from that terminal has been. Webster's New International Dictionary gives us a theological definition of naturalism, "The doctrine that religious truth is derived from nature and not from revelation; the denial of the miraculous and supernatural in religion."<sup>8</sup> It should be observed that where any decision must be made concerning naturalism or supernaturalism she, in nearly every case, decides from the point of view of the naturalist. Such a crucial issue as this is of major importance when dealing with special revelation. Therefore some precise statements have been quoted that helped to determine her stand at this point. A rather interesting approach to the philosophical basis of revelation is found in her contrast of first and twentieth century thought. Stating that it is difficult to appreciate their point of view, she continues,

Yet it is not impossible to do so, and barring the fact that miracle was a concept far more congenial to that day than to ours, the impression which Jesus made upon his contemporaries and their immediate successors was not radically different from what happens in our day when men are confronted with Christ. . . . Jesus spoke mainly to the needs of individuals -- fearful, lonely, bewildered, possessed of the demons of psychic disorder, illness and sin: So does he now.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, p. 1439.

<sup>9</sup> The Faith By Which the Church Lives, p. 75.

Why was miracle a more congenial concept to that day than to ours? The answer lies in the fact that in Jesus' day supernaturalism was a socially acceptable philosophy, though not even then was it a universal belief. It must be admitted that the twentieth century has been largely dominated by the philosophy of naturalism. As no mention is made of Harkness' personal point of view, it can only be implied that she agrees with the twentieth century attitude in which she has been trained. An evidence that this is not an injustice to her is the last sentence which de-personalizes demons. The demons in the Bible are beings with names, who speak and hear, think and act. The right view is not the question here, but rather which view is the one accepted by Harkness. Another quotation has assisted in determining her philosophical approach to the Bible and in vindicating what appraisal has already been made by the writer. Treating the humanity of Jesus, Harkness has written,

. . . Insofar as he was a human figure - - and he must have been fully human, else he could not be the Word made flesh -- he stands in direct historical continuity with his past. When God chose to manifest himself in human flesh, he did not go outside of the stream of history to do it. Jesus is the revelation of God in history -- not as a mutation or sport, an aberration or an incident in discontinuity from enviroing circumstance--- but as the child of his past and the child of his times.

This I believe to be in keeping with all divine revelation. God cannot be reduced to a natural phenomenon or to a social process; yet God never speaks save through nature and society. The more-than-natural is to be discerned in the natural, not outside of it; the



more-than-human in the human, not in some isolated realm. All the problems of the revelation of the natural to the supernatural, of the historical to the trans-historical, of the immanence to the transcendence of God, are foreshadowed, and the answer to these problems given in its most convincing form, in the fact that the Son of God was the son of man, and a good Jew.<sup>10</sup>

Out of all the philosophical significance compressed into the above sentences there should be no doubt as to the matter presented. The concepts of, and even the vernacular of, the naturalists are evident. The writer of this thesis confesses amazement at such phrases as "the more-than-human in the human." However, the denial of discontinuity would surely keep Harkness out of the ranks of the supernaturalists. After speaking of the doctrine of man, noting the historical Augustinian and Pelagian controversy, she refers to the present controversy as only between the Barthian and liberal schools. No mention is made of the Wesleyan position, which indicates that, to her, it is represented by one of the above or is too insignificant to mention. Without becoming involved in her doctrine of man, there are other positions besides the one just mentioned which will have a bearing on any of her doctrines, including that of revelation. For instance, in dealing with the problem of the freedom and the finiteness of man Harkness tends toward paradox and makes a statement that will be far reaching in interpreting the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

Bible. "The judgements of Christian faith when it is virile are always paradoxical."<sup>11</sup>

In her newest book, The Gospel and Our World, Harkness speaks at length of Roman Catholicism, fundamental Protestantism and liberal Protestantism. It is an attempt at an appraisal of the liberal Protestant church with a view to listing its assets and liabilities. There is little in this book relative to the subject of revelation but whatever can be gleaned will be helpful. She classifies herself as a "middle-of-the-roader" theologian, between the right of neo-orthodoxy and the left of scientific humanism. "Saving faith" is suggested as a needed emphasis in liberal churches. The authoritarian groups seem to exceed the liberal groups in amount and concreteness of religious instruction. Her suggestion, as contained in the following paragraph, gives evidence that she believes the liberal group has a broader concept of revelation.

Is indoctrination wrong? It depends on what is indoctrinated. There can be no real education without the passing on to the next generation of the heritage of the past. If liberal Protestantism has a broader conception of revelation and hence a richer content of truth, it has accordingly the greater obligation to impart them to the people with concreteness and power.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>12</sup> Georgia Harkness, "The Gospel in the Churches," The Christian Advocate, 124:7, October 27, 1949.

Whatever revelation there is will be approached from the liberal point of view. With somewhat of a basis for understanding Harkness' approach to revelation it is time to examine her treatment of revelation in itself.

### III. THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

It is one thing to make an intelligent distinction between theory and practice and quite another to maintain this distinction consistently. Is not theory practical, and the practical merely an expression of theory? Even in the field of science, which is the field of controlled experiment, exact measurement, and scientific method, this distinction is not always apparent. Many current writers deal with the relationship of research science to practical science. Frank H. Hurley, professor of qualitative analysis at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, has remarked that theory is the most practical thing in the world. Now it seems that if, in the empirical sciences, such disability to clearly set forth this difference exists, perhaps it will be excusable in fields generally considered as abstract as philosophy and theology to admit of difficulty in this realm. A thorough or exhaustive examination is impossible in the light of Harkness' many writings. The endeavor of this study is to extract and set forth the heart of her writings as to the nature of revelation, with special reference to its existence,

its form, its authority, and content. Also some special mention will be made of her treatment of the Bible.

If one is to understand what is true about the Christian religion, he must read and understand the Bible. This is not to say there is no truth to be found elsewhere. God speaks through the marvelous orderliness and beauty of nature, and he speaks through great souls and the highest thoughts of men wherever they are found. Nevertheless, there is no substitute for this central source of our knowledge of God. This makes it imperative that we not only read the Bible, but read it with understanding.<sup>13</sup>

The theological definition of the word "revelation" which has been referred to in the introduction of this paper will be used here. God does communicate with men. There is revelation. Revelation exists, but this means little unless we consider its form, authority, and content.

One should not base all comment or appraisal on one paragraph, but a more comprehensive statement would be difficult to find. The Bible is the central source of our knowledge of God according to Harkness. In the Bible revelation is written. Besides the Bible there is revelation through nature, through the souls of men, and through the thoughts of men. Harkness follows a broad definition of revelation, i.e., God speaking to men. It is necessary to note that in the souls and thoughts of men, it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish what is of men and what

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<sup>13</sup> Georgia Harkness, Understanding the Christian Faith (New York: The Abingdon Press, [n.d.]), p. 24.

is of God, if there is a distinction. In all these forms of revelation few distinctions of any kind were made, other than the fact that the Bible is central. One other form of revelation was mentioned and it is important enough to quote a reference to it.

God knew this, and in his wisdom and love he sent His Son, that men might know what God is like. Because there once lived in a simple peasant society a godlike Christ, we today in a very different world find assurance of the living reality of God the Redeemer -- the Christlike God. In the fact that there was once in human flesh a man who lived like God, who prayed to God, who triumphed over sin and pain and death, who gave himself in love and suffering for men -- there we have our surest revelation of the nature and reality of God.<sup>14</sup>

It is far easier to merely list the forms of revelation, as has been done, than to search out their authority and content. An attempt must be made at this point because these are important aspects of any revelation.

As to authority, because of the lack of distinction between revelation and any other sources of knowledge, there is no distinction possible here. If God speaks through Nature, and the minds of men, and through His son Jesus, with equal importance and clarity, none is prior. Authority is difficult to isolate. In dealing with this problem, Harkness herself writes, "It is the most deepseated and most difficult problem

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<sup>14</sup> The Faith By Which the Church Lives, p. 157.

of Christian leadership."<sup>15</sup> She places all of religious authority in two realms: personality and epistemology. The former is irrelevant to this study and she wrote nearly an entire book explaining the latter, and this book has been freely used in this study. After this much material has been written by Harkness about this very problem, the answer still is not easy to ascertain. In Christ and His death on the cross we have the "surest revelation" of the nature and reality of God. Experience can carry us to the God of redemption when intellectual approaches cannot. Perhaps as close to the answer as one can come is to say that the real seat of authority, to Harkness, is mysticism. Between knowledge, revelation, and authority little distinction can be made from the writings of this theologian.

It would be futile to spend much time considering the content of revelation when the sources of revelation are so many. All reality has become revealed: nature, the lives of men, and the work of men. Jesus most clearly reveals God, with nature also throwing light upon Him. The Church, the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus all reveal God's will. The content of any or all of these revelations is determined by the "mind of Christ." Perhaps it even varies with individuals

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

and individual experiences. "At any rate there is no absolute objective revelation for 'there is no single closed system of beliefs that a religious person must accept.'"<sup>16</sup>

The Bible deserves special consideration because of the place of sole authority given it by so many religious leaders and because of the bitter attacks upon it by others who are also religious leaders. In an endeavor to help people understand the Bible, and this she thinks is essential to understanding the Christian faith, Harkness has given four principles of Biblical interpretation. First, the Bible is a mixture of truth and error. In it we find "heavenly treasure in earthen vessels." Because the men who wrote knew not they were penning holy scripture they mixed their own erroneous ideas into the truths they had received from God. "The Bible contains human error as well as divine truth."<sup>17</sup> Second, the historical setting must be considered. This is not for the laity to do first-hand, but they must refer to the experts for their findings. Third, the type of literature found in each book is important. Fourth, try to understand its timeless message. This, of course, assumes that some of the Bible was dated and is not relevant today. To be more specific on her interpretations of the Bible we

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<sup>16</sup> Georgia Harkness, Religious Living (New York: Association Press, 1940), p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> Understanding the Christian Faith, p. 46.

could fill the paper with quotations. As this is impractical, brief references will be made to some passages. The gospels are held to be unreliable and therefore Jesus' opinion of his own messiahship and to what extent he prophesied is nearly unanswerable.<sup>18</sup> The story of the resurrection is poetry and mythology,<sup>19</sup> and the story of the flood is ridiculed.<sup>20</sup> To believe in the literal inspiration of the Scriptures leads to disregard of scientific and historical fact.<sup>21</sup>

#### IV. IMPLICATIONS

Our religious concepts come from our sources of religious knowledge. What we think of God depends on where we receive our knowledge of God. One point may suffice to illustrate this. The Bible tells of a personal God who created the earth by special creation. Harkness believes rather, what science purports to tell us about God. She believes in theistic evolution. When science or reason appears to contradict the Bible, it is the Bible which suffers. Needless to say, this approach affects many of Harkness' religious concepts.

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<sup>18</sup> The Faith By Which the Church Lives, p. 100.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 57.



God is liable to be the Creator, if only of orderliness -- God is judge, but this does not mean that he is a God of wrath who visits vengeance upon sinners. God is also a saviour. Jesus is the unique son of God, but only in degree, not in kind. She is Sabellian rather than Trinitarian in her view of God. The virgin birth is held to be an addition to the gospels by believers trying to make others realize the deity of Jesus, of which they had become convinced on other grounds.<sup>22</sup> Because of her fame as a poet it is fitting to include her expression of this doctrine in verse.

#### GOD IS TO ME

God is to me like radiant sunset glow,  
White filmy tracery against the blue,  
And bluer hills in yonder distance, low  
Against a sky that cradles many a hue.

God is to me like freshness of green fields,  
New-clad in verdure after weeks of drought;  
His loving kindness is as rain that yields  
Its coolness to the desert of my doubt.

God is to me like trees that bud and bloom  
And yield their increase after many days;  
In trust of fruitage I can bide the gloom  
And wait for Him to move in His own ways.

God is to me like hush of evening time  
That speaks, and makes my littleness sublime.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>23</sup> Georgia Harkness, The Glory of God (New York: Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1943), p. 40.

In viewing man, it is basic to realize his kinship with God. Harkness treats of man's greatness and also of his finitude. She states that the Christian view of man comes from the Old and New Testaments.<sup>24</sup> As to man's destiny, she believes in universalism. There are some things that we should believe about man to be religious. One thing is that man is a spiritual personality. This doesn't mean that you must believe in a body and soul dicotomy. This belief is useful to keep man above materialism and to make ideals and worship possible.<sup>25</sup> A second essential belief is to acknowledge man's inadequacy. Man is great, but he cannot save himself. To be truly great he must look to God.<sup>26</sup>

Sin is said to be an act or attitude that is sinful and runs counter to the nature and righteous will of God. Original sin, as hereditary corruption passed on from Adam, is not taught by Harkness, but rather that there is a biological tendency to self-centeredness.<sup>27</sup> In itself this is not sinful, but unless curbed and mastered it can become willful selfishness and the root of all sins. The

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<sup>24</sup> The Faith By Which the Church Lives, p. 94.

<sup>25</sup> Religious Living, p. 20.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>27</sup> Georgia Harkness, The Recovery of Ideals (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 33.

most saintly soul cannot be wholly free from sin.<sup>28</sup>

Redemption is centered around love. Hell becomes unnecessary and impossible. Nearly all of the historical terms of redemption are used, but nearly all have a private or personal definition. More attention will be given this point in the comparison of this view with the Wesleyan view.

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<sup>28</sup> The Faith By Which the Church Lives, p. 102.

## CHAPTER III

### THE POSITION OF NELS F. S. FERRÉ

#### I. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Nels F. S. Ferré was born in Luleá, Sweden, in 1908. At the age of thirteen he came to this country alone to work for an education. He was educated in Boston University ( A.B., 1931 ); Andover Newton Theological Seminary ( B.D., 1934 ); and Harvard University ( A.M. 1936; Ph.D., 1938 ). From the first two institutions he was graduated with high honors. From Harvard University, as a Sheldon Travelling Fellow, he studied in Upsala and Lund Universities in 1936-1937. In the Fall of 1937 Ferré joined the Faculty of the Andover Newton Seminary and served as an instructor of philosophy during the year 1937-1938. He served as associate professor of philosophy of religion, 1938-1940. Since 1940 he has been Abbott Professor of Christian Theology, one of the most historic and distinguished chairs in American seminaries. In the decade that he has served in this capacity he has steadily added to his stature as a leading American theologian. He is viewed as a very outstanding and promising young theologian. John C. Bennett says Ferré is "one of the most original and religiously sensitive among American theologians." Henry P. Van Dusen describes him as

"one of the most promising younger leaders of Christian though in the United States."

No small part of the prestige and influence of Ferré is due to his literary accomplishments. Among Ferré's books are Swedish Contributions to Modern Theology (1939), The Christian Fellowship (1940), The Christian Faith (1942), Return to Christianity (1943), Faith and Reason (1946), Evil and the Christian Faith (1947), and Pillars of Faith (1948). A significant contribution of Ferré has come both through his own books and his translation of Swedish writings which has opened up new vistas regarding the meaning of God as agape.

## II. PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS OF THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

Although the philosophical basis or the approach to the doctrine of revelation, or any other doctrine, is the most logical place to begin, it sometimes is the most difficult. Whether clearly stated or not, the philosophical approach bears fruit which enables one to discern the type of tree. Ferré has given evidence in his writings that this very problem is his own greatest problem. There are also enough clear statements and particulars of interpretation to fairly well ascertain his own approach to the doctrine of revelation.

The problem of epistemology has persistently reappeared in the writings of Ferré. He calls himself neither a trad-

itionalist nor a modernist and is free to point out their faults. In each case their failure has been in some way connected with a faulty epistemology. In speaking of traditional Christians he has written,

Modern man cannot force his spirit into the straight jacket of such a repulsive religion. Only those who have never opened their eyes to the light of the fuller truth can live with deep conviction within the inconsistencies of traditional theology. . . . They are true to the whole dogma because they possess no adequate principle of discrimination by which to discard the false and release the true.<sup>1</sup>

The failure lay in their inability to know the truth. This failure of traditional theology in the realm of faith also carried over into the realm of practice.<sup>2</sup> Traditions have value as well as danger. They preserve and nourish the truth which gave them birth, while at the same time they may pervert and obscure it. While traditional theology was rather severely criticized by Ferré, modernism fared little better, and was also held to be inadequate in theory and practice. Again Ferré has named, as the trouble, a faulty epistemology.

Here, then, was the basic inconsistency within modernism: While science and reason deal competently only within the created realm, the center of Christian faith is always beyond what is here and now actual, and can therefore never be proved in its terms . . .

If the ideal which is far greater and more real than

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<sup>1</sup> Nels F. S. Ferré, Return to Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1943), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

the actual can be proved in its terms . . . it is precisely by this very fact not the ideal of high faith. Religion.<sup>3</sup>

In his progress on this subject Ferré has stated his own view,

Modernism failed because it failed to understand that religion has its own standards, its own perspectives, its own sources of assurance. God's spirit can never be reduced or wholly proved in terms of His created works, especially as obscured by the demonic elements of historic process. God can be known concretely only to a faith that sees and feels beyond present attainment. . . . The standard of Christian faith, however, is its highest revelation, a transcendent God of Love who is both the Most High and the Most Real.<sup>4</sup>

Not only did Ferré allow the possibility of revelation, but he constructed a standard of discernment for the revelation he thought existed. In this arrangement faith was the door to knowledge. The concept of God was the standard of faith. By "faith", Ferré did not mean just an aesthetic realization or appreciation. He took pains to point out that that aesthetic level was satisfactory only to partial solutions of isolated problems and did not give a whole picture.<sup>5</sup> As history dealt only with facts it too was insufficient to provide adequate content or criterion for the full truth.<sup>6</sup> Faith seemed to be nearly equivalent to the "personal-

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Nels F. S. Ferré, Evil and the Christian Faith (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947), p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

spiritual level." This "level" was elaborately expounded and was given many areas of interpretation.<sup>7</sup> The problem of knowing in one area was similar to this same problem in another area, and in some way Ferré tied knowledge to obedience or action.

One of these trials is surely the relation between the explanatory and the existential perspective on the problem of evil. Both are essential. Without knowing we cannot do; without doing we cannot know in any adequate sense in either case.<sup>8</sup>

Reason was considered valid and with experience it was to give direction to the motivation provided by faith.

Another failure of the liberals was their failure, in their sole dependence on reason, to recognize that man is a sinner, "and that with regard to religion his reason is darkened by sin."<sup>9</sup> Faith and grace free our reason, and reason should be used to its fullest possible extent.

Neo-orthodoxy also received its share of criticism from Ferré.

Neo-orthodoxy came close to being a wounded wing of faith, representing mostly a general mood of irrationalism, despair, and existentialist revolt against an inadequate liberalism. . . . I came to see that it was demonic rather than divine, that the creative and

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>9</sup> Nels F. S. Ferré, "Beyond Liberalism and Neo-Orthodoxy," Christian Century, 66:362, March 23, 1949.



Christian truth it contained was mixed with cancerous doubts and error.<sup>10</sup>

All of these three groups criticized needed a proper sieve through which to strain reality and by it to obtain the truth, pure and whole, while separating the error. The problem was that of epistemology. This seemed to be the problem with which Ferré was wrestling and grappling most of the time.<sup>11</sup> As a theologian his emphasis was on religious knowledge, and the relation of religion to other fields of knowledge. Yet, care was necessary, at this point, because there seemed to be some antithesis between faith and knowledge.

Truth is all that we now know. . . . Truth can have no legitimate meaning other than knowledge. "We have faith: we cannot know; for knowledge is of things we see." And faith is faith and not knowledge. It cannot convincingly be called truth.<sup>12</sup>

This view was only partially approved by Ferré. Positively it was good, negatively it was "fatal negligence." Life demands decisions, interpretation possible. "And saving truth can be found."<sup>13</sup> Pure empiricism was rejected and the validity of reason was maintained. This agreed with the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 363.

<sup>11</sup> Nels F. S. Ferré, Faith and Reason (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946), pp. 1, 217.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

sources of knowledge included by the writer in the introduction of this paper. To see how Ferré handled the third, or that of revelation, was the object of this chapter. So far Ferré has implied that science is valid, but limited.

Philosophy was said to deal with rational truth, presupposing scientific knowledge, but going beyond it. Before entering into the doctrine of revelation, a comparison of the fields of theology and philosophy will be helpful.

Philosophy is inclusive, coherent, objective; religious interpretation is inclusive, coherent, and subjective. . . . The fact is, however, that philosophy and theology are different not only in function but also in actual standards of truth. Subjectivity is not the only difference. Philosophy and theology have different standards of coherence and inclusiveness as well. Philosophy is the sum and substance of rational knowledge while theology is the synthesis of faith and knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

Ferré has already warned of equating knowledge and truth and the import of his reason is, "But if truth is to be equated with rational knowledge, and nothing more, religion is simply not true."<sup>15</sup> This is because philosophy deals with the totality of temporal existence only, while religion goes far beyond.

Religious thought is coherent, not with what is here and now actual, but with the highest selective actual within the process, pointing beyond itself to what is more real than itself as an aggregate whole . . . <sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>16</sup> Lec. cit.

Religion is anticipatory and seeks a fuller revelation. This is the heart of Ferré's work and extremely important. He contends that there is no problem between experience and reason and faith, but truth remains basically a faith judgment because the ultimate cannot be proved. "Truth, in the last analysis, is an existential ultimate. It is a religious judgment involving integrally both faith and reason."<sup>17</sup> To determine this ultimate is a major problem. According to Ferré, "Religion claims that the most high . . . forms the content of experience, the selective actual, which best constitutes the criterion for our existential ultimate."<sup>18</sup> Theology then, while using objective information, is never objective. It must be existential. Theology, to Ferré, cannot be objectively systematic. If it becomes impersonal it is philosophy. Saving truth cannot neglect either "the full interpretation of fact or the full interpretation of faith."<sup>19</sup> This makes both philosophy and theology essential to saving truth. Together they should give "dynamic truth" which should properly analyze what is and guide toward what ought to be. The largest question remaining seems to be to determine the most high and the most real and their relation-

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

ship to one another. This plunges us into the need for revelation. Certainly Ferré's epistemology made room for revelation and after considering briefly whether he held that it is essential or necessary his actual treatment of revelation as a fact was considered.

This writer believes that Ferré did hold that revelation is necessary. In the writings of Ferré, the need of man called for revelation. "What is most high is what meets our deepest needs."<sup>20</sup> This involves religious knowledge. The most high and the most real are inseparably tied up together. Man's needs, to be met, must be met by revelation. "One of the basic existential grounds for the most high's being the most real is our need for an adequate authority and motivation."<sup>21</sup> The nature of revelation is discussed later, so for the present, Ferré's word is used and must be understood in his sense. There is no attempt to force his concepts into other words or his words around other concepts. He has expressed his own view of "revelational antirationalism" as the kind known as Augustinian-Anselmian. There is the "eternal necessity of faith as existential decision," and "our existential situation by the reality of evil, demands a seeing beyond present realization of historic process."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

Whatever his view of revelation, it is necessitated and demanded. With this in mind, attention may properly be turned to the theological basis of revelation.

### III. THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

Revelation is an accepted fact with Ferré. Revelation does exist. He speaks of both special and general revelation. But to use the word "revelation" today is to invite questions as to what is meant by the word. It would be unfair to Ferré, and unscholarly as well, to try to understand his writings using the definition of revelation as stated in the introduction of this paper. These views have been compared and contrasted in Chapter Six, but it is needful here to present his own view of revelation.

But this incomparable majesty and immeasurable priority of God, the Creator and Redeemer, above man, the creature and sinner, must not be made an excuse for the teaching that God is inscrutable and that His revelation is a supra-rational act in history. Weak and piecemeal, to be sure, is that God through His prophets and supremely through His Son has made Himself known unto us.<sup>23</sup>

This statement shows that Ferré believes that God is specially revealed in Jesus. To him, Christianity is a religion of revelation.

It [Christianity] is a God-centered, God-given freedom and faithfulness in fellowship based on the kind of love

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<sup>23</sup> Nels F. S. Ferré, The Christian Faith (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1942), p. 33.

first fully revealed and made effective as light and life in Jesus Christ.<sup>24</sup>

This was the predominant emphasis in the writings of Ferré. God is revealed in Jesus as agape.

To discuss the form and content and authority will explain more fully the nature of the revelation for which Ferré claims an existence. The Bible is, in a special way, God's own Word. God was truly in Jesus, yet Jesus was truly human. In both of these instances the reader is warned to clearly distinguish between form and content or between "the gift" and "the wrappings." The person of Christ and the Bible are placed together in this section because Ferré showed their likeness and even treated them together.

The doctrine of the Virgin Birth has too long been subject to this conflict so that a believer had to be either a literalist or a denier. The situation was similar to that of belief in the Bible, albeit on a smaller scale. One side rejects the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. . . . The other side makes of the literal acceptance of the doctrine a touchstone of a believer having any saving faith in Christ. And so it is with the Bible as a whole.<sup>25</sup>

Ferré resolved this difficulty by his distinction between form and content. To fail here, is to fail to distinguish between general and special revelation. The Bible and Jesus are forms of special revelation and both are unique in degree and not in kind. Ferré used his attitude toward the Bible to

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

illustrate his attitude concerning the Virgin Birth. In both cases he gave preference to the literalists and said it was better to have the content with its erroneous form than to discard both.

It is unfortunate, indeed, not to be able to distinguish the form from the content, the letter from the spirit, the wrapping from the gift; but, we repeat, it is better by far to take the form, the letter, and the wrapping along with the content than to fail to understand the preciousness and reality of the gift.<sup>26</sup>

The church is also an important factor in revelation. He claimed that in the deepest sense the Bible can only be read and understood in the fellowship of the church.

The Church is thus not only a principle for interpreting the Bible. It is also itself an organ of revelation. . . . The Holy Spirit, the Spirit which makes one of all who are in Christ, inspired its conclusive truth. In this sense the Church must always test the Bible.<sup>27</sup>

Even with as much stress as revelation received at Ferré's hands, it seemed to be continuous; not yet completed.

The open heart is always glad that there is much to learn. No book is closed to him. . . . We live in a world where our best judgment is at most a pale approximation. . . . The Bible must most certainly be open in the same sense that we use the best scholarship available to find out the truth about it and within it. Beyond that we must relate that truth to all, the truth which the Holy Spirit reveals, has revealed, and will reveal.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>27</sup> Nels F. S. Ferré, Pillars of Faith (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948), p. 86.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

Also affecting the form of revelation is the subjective element in the Christian faith. In his latest book he appealed for at "least five pillars of faith." Yet "the foundation itself is always God Himself present within our hearts."<sup>29</sup> It is already apparent that the form, content, and authority of revelation are interactive. This is essential by their very nature. But for the sake of comparison with the Wesleyan view some clear distinctions were sought for at these points. Two problems presented themselves: the danger of mutilating the context for the sake of the part, and the danger of repetition. With caution at these points it is time to discuss the authority of revelation.

One of the things which called for revelation was the need of authority. Ferré admitted that authority must come from beyond what we know and control.

Yet there is little steadying authority in our own creations. Our golden calves may give pleasure, but from the height above comes the order of the moral law.<sup>30</sup>

Ferré found this authority in revelation. He said,

It [Christianity] must, first of all, be resolutely and primarily a faith (though a faith organically related to reason and experience). Its special revelation must be its primary authority. The revelation is special

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>30</sup> Nels F. S. Ferré, "The Meaning of Human Dignity From a Theological Perspective," Science, Philosophy, and Religion: a Symposium (New York: Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion in Their Relation to the Democratic Way of Life, Inc., 1943), p. 278.



because it is the selective rather than the general disclosure in history of what God in Himself really is. The best, the least common, actual life, the special life, reveals God the most.<sup>31</sup>

Although faith has its own validity, it must be checked by reason and experience. Reasoned experience thus keeps faith from artificial dogma and arbitrary creed, but is yet, as authority, only a secondary standard. It remains that the ultimate reality and authority of faith's object cannot be proved in terms of general experience. Therefore, Christianity must guard against surrendering to non-religious standards. Religion has its own epistemology.<sup>32</sup> Personal religion is essential in understanding truth, almost to the point of making the final authority subjective.<sup>33</sup> Also,

Conservatives who cannot or will not, cope with the problems of modern thought, and emotionally unstable individuals who need to depend upon some inerrant authority of external nature beyond the vexations of mind, have welcomed the modern undermining of philosophy.<sup>34</sup>

It would seem that all external authority is ridiculed in this sentence. To make authority other than subjective, at any rate, is to have a closed mind, or to be emotionally unstable. Full knowledge, to Ferré, was subjective.<sup>35</sup> The very separation of religion into a separate compartment of

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<sup>31</sup> Return to Christianity, p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>33</sup> Pillars of Faith, p. 92.

<sup>34</sup> Faith and Reason, p. 104.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

knowledge and making it accessible only by faith is to make its authority something less than absolute, or even objective. Christianity is held to be the ultimate religion but it does not have ultimate or absolute truth. Truth itself is process, it is dynamic.<sup>36</sup> Truth is an existential ultimate. "It is a religious judgment involving integrally both faith and reason."<sup>37</sup> This certainly has not exhausted the subject of the "authority of revelation" but it is indicative of Ferre's attitude and this has been drawn from not just one or several articles but is representative of his overall approach, which seems to the writer of this paper to be fairly consistent. This has a direct relationship to the "content" of revelation.

If one were to choose the most distinctive or unifying theme in the works of Ferre it would undoubtedly be his concept of "God as agape." He seems to agree substantially with the position of two well-known Swedish theologians, Aulén and Nygren, in their concept of God.

We now come to the very center of Lundensian thought that God is definitely known through Christ. What then is meant by this definiteness which by its very nature cannot be theoretical definiteness? The sum and substance of this revelation is that God is spontaneous, unmotivated, value-indifferent love creative of fellowship. God is agape.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>38</sup> Nels F. S. Ferré, "God as Agape," Contemporary Thinking About Jesus, compiled by Thomas Kepler (Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1944), p. 293.

This concept was consistently maintained and is determinative of the content of the Christian religion.

This claim that God as agape, or unlimited, objective, self-giving love, is central for both faith and life, constitutes the fulfilling and revolutionary uniqueness of Christian faith, which should dominate its very last and least doctrine.<sup>39</sup>

This concept was called the "criterion" or "standard" of Christian truth and conduct.<sup>40</sup> That he faithfully applied this standard may be seen by two principles given in another volume; the principle of inclusion, and the principle of exclusion.

This principle of inclusion is as follows: All things cultural, intellectual, moral, and spiritual which are consistent with a God-centered, sacrificial, creative good will as first fully revealed and made effective in Jesus Christ may be freely admitted into the Christian religion. . . . The principle of exclusion may be stated as follows: All that is inconsistent in profession and practise with the nature of Christianity as sacrificial, creative good will centered in God and first fully revealed and made effective as light and life in Jesus Christ must be done away.<sup>41</sup>

These lengthy quotations have been included to show the stress Ferré placed upon this concept, how it is the "absolute standard of Christian faith"<sup>42</sup> and how rigidly he adhered to it. It should be observed that in many of the critical points of the Christian faith Ferré, by the use of "form and content"

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<sup>39</sup> Return to Christianity, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>41</sup> The Christian Faith, p. 51.

<sup>42</sup> Return to Christianity, p. 56.

and "gift and wrapping" devices, avoids a definite statement. The doctrines of the Bible, the fall of man, the Virgin Birth, and the resurrection of Christ were said to contain real truth while not being wholly true. Regardless of any uncertainty in the content of the Christian faith, "One thing is certain: all things must be judged in terms of God's eternal agape."<sup>43</sup>

The application of this principle was further demonstrated in Ferré's treatment of the Bible. To him, both the Old and New Testaments contain things unworthy of the Christian faith. In speaking of the heritages of different religions, he asserted,

Each religion has its Old Testament. . . . The better acquainted we are with other religions, the more we realize that the study of them is extremely profitable to our fuller and richer knowledge of God. Nor is it necessary to begin by weeding out what is sub-Christian in such historical heritages. Suppose we did that with our Old Testament, and even with the New!"<sup>44</sup>

The Old Testament is only one medium of revelation, other religions can be approached from within. He held the Bible to err whenever God was presented as anything other than his own conception of agape. Traditional theology (literalists, or Bible-believers) was not a pretty picture to the modern man, as drawn by Ferré.

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<sup>43</sup> The Christian Faith, p. 177.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

He finds not only that it is inconsistent in theory, but also that it actually denies its central affirmation at crucial points of both faith and life. He finds in fact a dogmatic system which talks about a personal devil who will actually possess most men in an eternal hell which itself depends for its very existence upon the being and activity of God. He finds a little Ptolemaic God of human history and, even worse, a little scheme which does not usually bother to justify God's relation with all people, all lives, and all conditions of men at all times and in all places in terms of a strict but compassionate Father's love. He finds a spirit that has fought for every obscurantism and literalism, against the best men of science who dared to suffer for the truth, a spirit which even to this day fights against rather than for the facts when they challenge the miniature dimensions of its Lilliputian theology. Altogether too often he finds revolting ideas which in their utter crudeness rival the immoral myths of primitive religions.<sup>45</sup>

In places, the Bible is sub-Christian, contradictory, inadequate, narrow, revolting and even immoral. With these things in mind it is difficult to see how he placed the high value upon it that he sometimes did. He held that in the Bible alone we have the full and primary record of God's redemptive revelation in Jesus Christ.

The Bible as God's word is the source book of the Christian religion and it is on a different plane from all other books. In a special way it is God's own Word. This naturally does not mean that it is throughout God's words, equally and infallibly true.<sup>46</sup>

Regardless of the high esteem in which he held the Bible, it was to him a fallible record.

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<sup>45</sup> Return to Christianity, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> The Christian Faith, p. 104.

## IV. IMPLICATIONS

The object of writing this section entitled "Implications" is not to further discuss "revelation" but to demonstrate what effect a man's doctrine of revelation has on other areas of theology. Important, crucial doctrines have been selected. God, man, sin, and redemption are vital points in any theology. If the doctrine of revelation is as important as is maintained by the writer of this paper, then it is tremendous implications in every area and this should be demonstrable by comparing or contrasting views of revelation and the topics under "implications." Ferré's idea of God has been somewhat discussed already because it is impossible to understand Ferré apart from his concept of God as agape.

God's love which gives itself freely, unconditionally, sovereignly to the unworthy sinner -- a love high as the heavens above thought or law -- this is God's definite disclosure in the Christ-deed. Around this thought is centered all else . . .

. . . Agape is unmotivated love . . . The uniqueness of Christianity lies in its basic motif, in its new picture of God as Agape.<sup>47</sup>

This approach was consistent in Ferré. Belief in God, he held, was pragmatically beneficial. Men need not merely a view of sovereignty, but of the right kind of sovereignty.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Contemporary Thinking About Jesus, p. 293.

<sup>48</sup> Evil and the Christian Faith, p. 16.

This truth, linked with God's nature as agape, made hell impossible. Not only was the idea of hell rejected but the idea that hell is within God's dynasty was considered unthinkable. "We suspect, however, that both such theologians and their God need missionaries to tell them of Christ's compassion."<sup>49</sup> Ferré's God was not the God of the Bible, or rather, the Bible does not always picture God as agape. Whenever this happened the Old Testament was criticized and the concept of God as agape was maintained.

"Do we know that He will not have a tantrum worse than the most horrid picture of Him in the Old Testament, demanding vengeance on women, innocent children, and even cattle?"<sup>50</sup>

Ferré was anti-Trinitarian in his view of God. He believed that this belief is tritheism. Therefore the person of Jesus was not pre-existent, but the word "agape" was. The "form and content" device was worked here again and "form" was personality and the "content" was agape.

In Jesus, God's agape which is His very nature visited man in matchless fullness. . . . It was this agape which pre-existed from all eternity . . .

This must not be taken to mean that the eternal personality which is God walked on earth.<sup>51</sup>

Whether Jesus was sinless or not was held to be debatable.

Exactly what he went through, whether he actually rebelled sinfully, we do not know. We cannot explain the Bible at

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> Faith and Reason, p. 187.

this point because we cannot find clear light. . . . Whether or not he ever defied or hid God's full will we cannot know.<sup>52</sup>

It also seemed that Ferré regarded Jesus as more of a teacher than a saviour,<sup>53</sup> and he did not believe that He was a mediator.<sup>54</sup>

Man was made in the image of God. His freedom allows him the potential of becoming a real son. But, according to Ferré, sin is essential to freedom.

To become really free we must act in rebellion against others; we must act distinctly as separate individuals; we must sometime or other go contrary to their decisions. . . . To eat of the tree of knowledge is necessarily to want to become like God. We must assume God's place; we must be fully free in our decision if we are to become real individuals.<sup>55</sup>

This has made freedom dependent upon sin. Man played an important part in Ferré's theology. The need for revelation was based partly in the nature of man. He even went so far as to declare that "man" was a "pivotal" doctrine.<sup>56</sup> Ferré accepted the theory of evolution. He denied the traditional "fall" and even that man is born sinful. "Man's characteristic

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52 Evil and The Christian Faith, p. 35.

53 Return to Christianity, p. 43.

54 The Christian Faith, p. 109.

55 Evil and The Christian Faith, p. 33.

56 Science, Philosophy, and Religion: a Symposium, p. 278.



attitude is selfish. This is his state of sin. This does not mean that man is born sinful."<sup>57</sup>

Evil is the biggest problem of religion. The only solution to evil is victory over it, and this is the meaning of religion. Man's freedom explains the world's evil. Sin is essential, and it makes man's freedom real. Evil was held to be beneficial in several volumes of Ferré, at least in the sense of a means, if not an end. Evil is instrumental. Sin is twofold in nature; an act, and a state.<sup>58</sup> The location of sin is not in the body but in the heart.<sup>59</sup> This rather brief but concise paragraph on sin is supplemented by the paragraphs on man and redemption.

Redemption is a large concept. Revelation is redemptive. Redemption is a work distinct from creation. Redemption is a goal for creation. All redemptive agencies are to direct the historic process to God's purpose or this redemptive goal. Redemption is discontinuity for the sake of continuity.<sup>60</sup> Redemption has meaning to the individual and to society. As for conversion, it is in intention rather than fact. It really is a lifetime process. The true saints are those who realize that they are the greatest

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<sup>57</sup> The Christian Faith, p. 188.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>59</sup> Evil and The Christian Faith, p. 105.

<sup>60</sup> The Christian Faith, p. 81.

sinners.<sup>61</sup> The crisis of repentance is not desirable. As to the means of redemption, there are many redemptive factors. The church, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, pacifism -- all these are redemptive in character, but Jesus remains central. Jesus evidently is not the only means of salvation, but the "clearest way", or the "central means."

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE POSITION OF EDWIN LEWIS

#### I, BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Edwin Lewis is noted as a preacher, author, lecturer, and traveler. He was born in Newbury, England. In early manhood he went to Newfoundland, where for several years he engaged in mission work. A portion of this time he covered the same coastline as Sir Wilfred Grenfell. It has been interesting to note that Sir Wilfred Grenfell was his housemate at St. Anthony. He did his undergraduate work at New York State College and Drew Theological Seminary. Following this he spent four years of graduate study in theology. Since 1918 he has been professor of systematic theology in Drew Theological Seminary. This is the chair made famous by Randolph S. Foster, John Miley, and Olin A. Curtis.

Lewis has lectured extensively at annual conferences, pastors' institutes, summer schools of ministerial training, and theological seminaries. During a sabbatical year in 1936-1937, he lectured at various mission schools and colleges in the Far East.

Among his many publications are Jesus Christ and the Human Quest, A Manual of Christian Beliefs, Great Christian Teachings, God and Ourselves, A Christian Manifesto, The

Faith We Declare, A Philosophy of the Christian Revelation, and The Creator and The Adversary. Lewis was also one of the editors of The Abingdon Bible Commentary. Along with this list, it should be remembered that he has been for many years a regular contributor to church publications and other periodicals.

To prepare a view of any writer these days is somewhat of a problem, for the vogue seems to be to change views as the main current changes. However, with Edwin Lewis, the problem is increased because he is purported to have changed not only some intellectual opinions and beliefs but also to have had a transforming spiritual experience. He has been accused, by some, of going Barthian, Fundamentalist, or even becoming senile. A definite testimony was unavailable, but the following quotation from the foreword of A Christian Manifesto is enlightening:

Just as I was finishing the book, one day, after a class in which I had been saying some of the things here written, a student came to me and said, "Professor, I think that something has happened lately deep down inside of you." I did not deny it. The real question is as to the meaning of what "happened."<sup>1</sup>

In the light of this, an endeavor was made by this writer to show the development or change of ideas in Lewis' teaching. In other instances, the attempt was to present his

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<sup>1</sup> Edwin Lewis, A Christian Manifesto (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1934), p. 10.

ideas as clearly as possible, as found in the material available.

## II. PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS OF THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

The illusive line between the speculative and the practical is difficult, if not impossible, to fix and then examine. Nor does a change of subject matter, or a change of authors, radically change the situation. As was the case with Georgia Harkness, so it is with Edwin Lewis (and nearly everyone else as well); his assumptions were quite generously mingled with his own practical conclusions. The assumptions lead on to the conclusions and the conclusions point back to the assumptions in such a smooth blend that they were to the writer at least, difficult to crystallize. An attempt was made to approach the matter through the mind or thought-processes of Lewis. We are confronted with a dependent world. No one part, animate or inanimate, of the whole may be said to be necessary. A dependent universe calls for a Creator who would be the universal Sovereign. God's universe has become infected with sin, a moral shadow, which is really a denial of God's right to rule. This may seem unnecessary but from it Lewis leads directly to the subject at hand.

There properly goes with God's work as Creator a work as Saviour. God necessarily serves what he makes, and this applies to each least part as well as to the whole. . . . The blacker the circumstance the more it calls for God, if we are to find any hope of it. . . . For by his

suffering and his serving God purposes to save. His greatness is proved not by his remoteness from our human life but by his very nearness to it. He works in all and for all because he would save all. He pays the price of his own creation, and if he calls us to share in this price, it is only that we may share in the blessedness.<sup>2</sup>

To view God as Creator is good, but not enough. God is the free Sovereign of His universe. Lewis holds that He must be a Saviour as well as a Creator. By the fact of creation, God has obligated Himself to His creation. The greater the problem, the greater the need for revelation, or God's aid in solving the problem. Revelation is not only a possibility to Lewis, but a necessity. To continue, Lewis deals with the concept of mind. Mind is not self-explanatory. He argues for a super-mind. The philosophical groundwork is thus laid for the possibility of revelation by the "commerce of mind" idea. This "commerce" is possible between the Creator and His thinking creation, man. For, according to his own definition, "Mind consists in the power to convey and apprehend meaning."<sup>3</sup> To strengthen this, Lewis also argues from the "evaluating impulse."

The logic of the evaluating impulse is religion, the logic of religion is God; the logic of a religion that lays hold upon God is the discovery of richer and richer

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<sup>2</sup> Edwin Lewis, God and Ourselves (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1931), p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

values. So that again we say of value, religion, God, that they belong together -- that either one involves or justifies the other two.<sup>4</sup>

Life necessitates evaluation because of the claims of the higher and the lower which keep reappearing and demand a choice. Freedom means that the claims of the higher may be ignored but this does not destroy the higher. Actually, evaluation testifies to an Eternal Moral Order.

The order in its turn involves God. Moral evaluation is metaphysical revelation. Religion seeks that God whose nature and will are revealed in the moral order. It is his will that we are to find our peace.<sup>5</sup>

This argument follows that of Kant, and his "categorical imperative" is brought to mind as Lewis talks of the "evaluating influence" and the sense of "oughtness." Lewis went further and called it a kind of revelation. This claim has been examined further in another section.

As the philosophical possibility and the necessity of revelation are spoken of, one is involved with not only the philosophy of the Christian religion but also the whole realm of philosophy. Does the philosophy of the theologian admit of a revelation such as is claimed by some Christians? This approach was quite thoroughly handled by Lewis in his book, God and Ourselves, which he calls a plea for the reality, adequacy and availability of God. Actually this approach is

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

concerned with whether or not a man's philosophy will admit of a God. Lewis strongly states his view, that reason and faith working together may establish the certainty of God as a real Being. Lewis does speak for both the possibility and the necessity of revelation, or of God speaking to men. With this groundwork firmly laid, it is safe to venture into the other writings that deal more specifically with the approach to the Christian revelation. Even to speak of such things as the Christian religion and the Christian revelation, is it not necessary to have some basic notions or assumptions as to what the word "Christian" mean? Religion is that which distinguishes man from the rest of existence. "Only persons can be religious, because only persons can think about themselves in relation to a Higher and a Beyond."<sup>6</sup> To Lewis, man and religion were inseparable. When the adjective "Christian" is used, a particular type of religion is specified. The quest of Lewis, in his book concerning the philosophy of revelation, was precisely the relation between God's revelation to man and the Christian religion. As has been mentioned, no discussion of faith, or beliefs, or principles, or ethics, or hope can proceed without having some answer to this relationship. The clarity and conviction with which Lewis handles this matter is commendable and

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<sup>6</sup> Edwin Lewis, A Philosophy of the Christian Revelation (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940), p. 18.



refreshing in this day of ambiguity and listlessness.

Christianity has to do with a knowledge of God and of his activities and purposes which it claims has been given by God Himself in a special way. This claim is essential to the integrity of the entire Christian message. God has spoken, and because he has spoken we know what he is, and what he seeks, and by what means he seeks it. The process by which this has been accomplished, and still is being accomplished, we call revelation.<sup>7</sup>

This is the Christian revelation of which Lewis has spoken. Prior to this he placed a tremendous argument for Christian revelation upon the religious nature of man. Men are religious, and it is this very religiousness which argues for the existence of God and for God's revelation to man to enable man to attain to self-realization. The theory of Strauss that to get rid of mystery in religion, men must first rid of the priests, is held to be erroneous. Priests exist because the mystery of religion exists. Religiousness is indubitably factual and as much a part of existence as any scientific fact which is measurable or ponderable. A paragraph clearly showing that Lewis believed a man is incomplete without God is the following quotation.

Let the "larger whole" that man's very nature implies be called God, in the only true sense of the word as the Giver and Ruler and Lover of life, but let it also be admitted that men may seek the fulfillment of their incompleteness by relationship with a "larger whole" which is yet other than this God and less than this God, and as we have the explanation of the fact that men

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

may still live "the good life", may be very unselfish, devoted to a Cause, deeply moved by humanitarian impulses, and yet still fail of "fulness of life." If there be in man that of which the correlate is God, and only God, then ever is man a broken arc if he does not find himself in God.<sup>8</sup>

All that can be said of the physical man, the economic man, the psychological man, the social man or the political man may be true if not represented as the total or final truth. Man's potential, as regarding completeness in God, by the means of a revelation from God as to man's nature and purpose, is consistently maintained.

One dares go farther, and to say that if man's religiousness does not in fact bespeak an "over-natural" reference and suffuse him with a light that never was on sea or land, then ever "revelation" in the abrupt and apocalyptic fashion delineated by Kierkegaard, and Karl Barth, becomes likewise utterly meaningless because impossible. If God speaks to me it is because he has already made me with power to hear him. If God discloses himself in a human life, so that of that human life men in awed wonder exclaim, God Incarnate! it can only be because the power to become the vehicle of the divine disclosure is a fundamental human mark.<sup>9</sup>

The search for communion with God is the history both of man and of religion and this history is integrated with the history of God's work. More information is given elsewhere on Lewis' view of man, but it should be recognized what great weight in the argument for a Christian revelation he has drawn from his concept of the nature of man. This idea

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

was not relinquished in any of his material that was read by this writer.

. . . there is in God that which answers to every need of his purpose and to every need of men. His purpose calls for his revealing himself to men in a human life; men need such a revelation; in Jesus Christ that twofold need is met.<sup>10</sup>

Although this came from an earlier writing, the same need for revelation is stated and another is given. If God's purpose is to be known, God must speak. If man is to realize his potential, God must speak. Perhaps this is saying the same thing in two different ways, or looking at the same thing from two different points of view. The nature of man demands a revelation. Would it be an oversimplification to say that the Creator is responsible to meet the needs of His creature, and that the creature must have his needs met? One look is from heaven earthward, the other is from earth heavenward. It is well to remember that Lewis had no obstacles either in heaven or earth, in Creator or creature, in the mind of God or the mind of man, in the nature of God or the nature of man, that would render revelation an impossibility.

In another book addressed primarily to specific articles of faith, especially to what is essential to the Christian faith, there was a statement that presented some-

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<sup>10</sup> Edwin Lewis, A Manual of Christian Beliefs (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), p. 23.

what of a problem.

The Christian faith therefore grounds itself in the nature, the purpose, and the activity of God. Irrespective of what one may think of the truth of the claim, this is the claim which is made. No man discovered the characteristic truths of Christianity; they were made known to men in such ways as God Himself chose to use. They are either as they are presented to be or they are not. Revelation is not demonstrable, if by that is meant that there is no possible alternative. Unbelief is always possible as the alternative to belief. The authority of the Christian faith is the authority of experience also. But the experience cannot be known until the revelation is accepted.<sup>11</sup>

The statement that was difficult to harmonize with most of Lewis' writings was the one which allowed for a "possible alternative." "Necessity" was argued for and elaborated upon, but this statement was a repudiation of such thoughts. There is no necessity when alternatives exist. Necessity means that only one course of action is possible. The whole paragraph was difficult. It was difficult not only in this section in this paper but it was difficult in its original context. Faith has been declared prior to action, thinking prior to living. From this Lewis proceeded to plead for an experience based on a belief. Actually, this paragraph has made belief and revelation synonymous. This certainly was not in keeping with the greater part of his writings. Where is necessity? Who is obligated to believe? What happens to man's free choice? Does not revelation exist,

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<sup>11</sup>Edwin Lewis, The Faith We Declare (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1939), p. 14.

independent of man's acceptance of it? Is not unbelief, or a rejection of revelation, just as much proof of revelation as an acceptance of it would be? In Lewis' strongest argument for revelation; the nature of man, he repeatedly claimed irreligion as an ally. No man is non-religious, but he may be irreligious. His rejection proves his need and capacity. So would unbelief prove that revelation exists as much as belief would prove the same thing. This section is not to be an evaluation of the doctrines of Lewis, but any seeming inconsistencies that can be noted will be helpful in understanding his position. It would be fair to Lewis to state that this idea of revelation, as belief, would make revelation strictly a personal affair, and then the word "revelation" would more properly be used in the plural form. Apart from this type of reference, found only occasionally in his writings, Lewis taught that revelation was both possible and necessary.

### III. THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

It is one thing to philosophize about problems and another to remain faithful to one's philosophy in the treatment of the facts. After all has been said, concerning the possibility and necessity of revelation that seems pertinent, the question suggests itself, has God spoken? The existence of revelation is a most basic and practical question.

What is important, in the present state of thought, is the general truth itself. There is really one fundamental question, and that is whether God actually has spoken in suchwise as is claimed in Christianity, and whether in what he has said there is "enough light for us in the dark to rise by." Failing this, no other question about revelation, especially critical questions in connection with the documents and their history, profoundly matters. If the central claim is admitted, then these questions become vital for their bearing on interpretation; but not otherwise.<sup>12</sup>

After acknowledging the crucial nature of this question, Lewis answered in many places and in a variety of ways. There were a great number of indirect references to the fact of revelation. These are referred to in the following paragraphs. To speak of form, authority, or content of revelation certainly presupposes the existence of a revelation. Some direct references are noted before further elaboration.

. . . that Christ and all the great truths associated with him are so integrated with the very nature and will of God that they confront men as specific divine self-disclosure; that the certainty that this is so is attested both by the historic Church which faith created, and by the type of individual experience which follows upon the acceptance of the faith.<sup>13</sup>

Again, Christianity is referred to as a revealed religion. God's self-disclosure is held as essential to the Christian religion. In answer to the above claims Lewis declared that God has spoken.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The Philosophy of the Christian Revelation, p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> The Faith We Declare, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> The Philosophy of the Christian Revelation, p. 30.

The form of the revelation was more difficult to trace. Perhaps there has been a change in Lewis' concept of the form of revelation. At any rate, he rather disregarded form, as if it were unimportant. In places, God's revelation seemed to reside solely in Christ. In other movements of thought, emphasis was placed upon the Bible or experience as God's method of speaking to men. The writer felt that whatever changes had been made had been progressively in the direction of the Bible as the main form of revelation. Any reference to Lewis' claimed conversion experience may be dated around 1932. His views are sometimes referred to as before or after this experience. In a "pre-conversion" book Jesus Christ was held to be the revelation of God in human life.<sup>15</sup> This particular view seems to present the typical liberal view. Whatever increase of emphasis the Bible has received, the emphasis of the revelation in Christ has apparently not been decreased. A "post-conversion" book still gave Jesus a central place.<sup>16</sup> An even later book stated, "In the nature of the case, there can only be one final revelation of God, and the Christian claim is that that comes to us through the Bible."<sup>17</sup> In the same book Christ is referred to in the following manner:

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<sup>15</sup> A Manual of Christian Beliefs, p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> The Faith We Declare, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> The Philosophy of the Christian Revelation, p. 32.

We may talk all we like about the Jesus of history, but if in the Jesus of history we do not see at the same time a specific revelation of the nature and purposes of the Creator himself, and by consequence that absolute by which all history is to be judged, then no amount of sentiment poured out in honor of the historical Figure will avail to conserve and to perpetuate our heritage.<sup>18</sup>

Besides the Bible and Christ, experience was sometimes referred to as revelation. It was usually kept in a secondary place but was important enough to be mentioned.<sup>19</sup>

In dealing with skepticism and the spirit of the anti-Christ, Lewis insisted that the Christian revelation is a unique revelation and as such is absolute and final.<sup>20</sup> Some who are favorable to the idea of revelation in general are hostile to the idea of special revelation and ask,

Nature is a word of God. History is a word of God. Conscience is a word of God. Reason is a word of God. . . . Then why ask for more? . . . Why confuse the issue by the attempt to introduce some "special" word over and above what is so obvious and so normal.<sup>21</sup>

Christians answer that this is true but that it is insufficient. Lewis stated the need succinctly in the thought that if we are to properly know reality,

. . . it can only be on the condition that the veil of temporality be removed sufficiently to give us, for however brief a moment, a direct vision of the eternally Real. And Christianity claims that this is precisely what has been done, and offers as evidence of the claim,

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18 Ibid., p. 92.

19 Ibid., p. 30.

20 Ibid., p. 132.

21 Loc. cit.



Christ himself, with that by which he was adumbrated and that which the unreserved acceptance of him has brought to pass.<sup>22</sup>

This comprehensive statement of the fact of special revelation makes room for nearly every form of revelation about which Lewis deals in other places. God has spoken in miracles, or through nature, in the Bible, in the person of Christ, and in personal experience, which covers nearly every revelatory possibility. In summarizing of Lewis' position on the form of special revelation, the writer feels that it is fair to say that his primary emphasis was on Jesus, not exactly as He is presented in the Bible, but very nearly.

The authority of the revelation is a vital question. Has God spoken? Then, what are the obligations of those addressed? Lewis held that Christianity is first a faith, not a system of "irrefragible logic," even though it is reasonable. It is a faith which makes absolute claims upon men.

The moment Christianity is made secondary to anything else it has ceased to be Christianity in any proper sense, and has become simply one more of a competing number of possible views of existence. Its absoluteness is its essence. Inscribed on its banner is "No Other Name."<sup>23</sup>

Even though this idea of a final and absolute revelation was

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

contended for in other places as well, the authority of the revelation seemed to depend upon faith or experience. In other words, the revelation is only authoritative if you accept it as such. For instance, after a very clear analysis of the need of an objective standard of values, the weight of the argument is left untouched, but his own solution is negated by the need of human consent.

Both are alike in having no absolute objective standard by which to determine the alleged values. One man says he intends to think only of himself. Another says he intends to think of others first. Who shall judge between them? Who shall say that it matters profoundly who is right? Then into the confusion there comes a Word of God which settles the question for whoever accepts it.

Whether it is a Word of God is, of course, the ultimate issue, never to be settled by any purely logical or scientific considerations. Its acceptance is necessarily an act of faith . . .<sup>24</sup>

What this does to an "absolute" standard is apparent. If it is dependent it is not absolute, and if not absolute for all it is not absolute for any. Again, this is no attempt at evaluation but a sincere desire to properly understand and interpret the words which Lewis uses as he means them. To corroborate the view of the authority of revelation, as just expressed, an excerpt from another book was helpful.

The authority of the Christian faith is primarily the authority of revelation, although it is secondarily the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

authority of experience also. But the experience cannot be known until the revelation is accepted.

The Christian certitudes are faith-certitudes, not logical certitudes. This does not mean that we may not rest in them with complete security. It does mean, however, that our certitudes are something less than absolute. But they can be less than absolute, and still be sufficient, and that is the situation.<sup>25</sup>

It is without dispute that Lewis held that the authority of the Christian revelation is not absolute.

As the Bible is instrumental and not final, content of special revelation is difficult to ascertain.<sup>26</sup> Little emphasis is given to form, much to "vital content." This is problematic because illusive, or perhaps even variable. The supernatural cannot be removed from the Synoptics, but individuals have the right of private judgment as to details of the miracles.<sup>27</sup>

Every informed Christian knows that the Fourth Gospel is a "problem," as to its authorship, as to its historicity, and as to its interpretation. . . . It seems unquestionable, even as the critics say, that the Fourth Gospel was never written as sober, scientific, objective history.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps no more elaboration is possible, or necessary, on the content of revelation, but definite concepts were considered in the concluding section of this chapter.

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<sup>25</sup> The Faith We Declare, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> The Philosophy of the Christian Revelation, p. 31.

<sup>27</sup> The Faith We Declare, p. 79.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

The Bible was treated separately for the sake of easy comparison and because it plays such an important role in the whole subject of revelation. This subject is inseparably bound up with the four matters just discussed. The Bible cannot be considered apart from those problems but it is larger than them all. The general approach, or principle of interpretation, of the Bible can be determinative in many of the particular or lesser problems. Lewis believed that we should approach the Bible with an open mind. The reader is free to interpret, as to the details. A basic principle that was helpful in understanding Lewis' estimate of the Bible was found in the following.

The supposition, still too often made, that these studies (lower and higher criticism) are necessarily a liability to faith, in no sense an asset, is entirely false, provided always that we see in the New Testament not the historical basis of the faith but, rather, the witness to that basis, which is quite another thing. Any damage that has been done by criticism has resulted from the fact that already a false view of the New Testament was being entertained. . . . It is well that that view has been destroyed, destroyed by its own devastating effects -- the view, I mean, that every statement of the New Testament must be in complete agreement with every other statement since the production of the entire book was in all respects a divine achievement.<sup>29</sup>

Some views of sickness in the Synoptics cannot be accepted today. Some of Paul's writings are indefensible. Many discrepancies exist between the Gospels, and between the Epistles and Acts. False analogies, traditions, world views, disagreements, false views of evil spirits,

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<sup>29</sup> The Christian Manifesto, p. 52.

wild imaginative apocalyptic visions -- these can all be found in the Bible.<sup>30</sup>

In a recent theological journal Lewis' view of the importance of authorship and authenticity is explained.

Literary authenticity is one thing; evangelical authenticity is another. The Fourth Gospel, like the Epistle to the Hebrews, is what it is, whoever wrote it. Revelation is communally and historically conditioned, even if in a given case its immediate vehicle is an individual. Faith in "the cosmic Christ" is not reduced to puerile incredulity by reason of merely literary questions connected with its representation.<sup>31</sup>

A most significant article is "The Emancipation of the Word of God." It was from this article that the following quotation was taken.

Christ is the "sole Word of God." In consequence, "a new understanding of the Bible." This fairly describes the new biblicism, but the difference from the old biblicism is nothing less than radical, the new biblicism was concerned to take the Bible "as is." The new biblicism yielded a static authoritarianism. The new biblicism promises to issue in the creation of a dynamic spiritual freedom.<sup>32</sup>

A definite dislike for "plenary inspiration," "documentary inerrancy," "verbal infallibility," and like theories is plainly evident. The basic question is acknowledged to be authority, and it is held erroneous to place the authority

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 53,54.

<sup>31</sup> Edwin Lewis, "Paul and the Perverters of Christianity," Interpretation, 2:145, April, 1948.

<sup>32</sup> Edwin Lewis, "The Emancipation of the Word of God," Religion in Life, 18:542, Autumn, 1949.

"wholly outside the individual." Somehow the Bible remains at the disposal of human discernment and acceptance.<sup>33</sup>

Scripture can be rightly understood only by a

. . . proper appreciation of Christian experience, of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and of the function of the Church. . . . Scripture is a means to an end. It is instrumental, not final.<sup>34</sup>

To summarize, it is clear that Lewis thought the Bible to be not the historic basis of faith but a witness to it. He further stated that the Bible contradicts itself and contradicts science. The Holy Spirit was not considered in any appreciable degree in the formation of the Bible. The Bible seemed to Lewis more human than divine, and was definitely fallible and full of errors.

#### IV. IMPLICATIONS

The assumption of this paper was that revelation is an extremely important doctrine. If this is so it will have important implications for all doctrines. To compare the results of different views of revelation, certain key doctrines were examined. The views of God, man, sin, and redemption were studied in each author's works.

For sometime, Lewis has been very much concerned about the idea of God. Even a year before his conversion, he wrote

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<sup>34</sup> The Philosophy of the Christian Revelation, p. 31.

a book favoring the traditional God in reaction to the current trends. He saw what happened to a Christianity without Christ, and he said that current topics were about "Religion Without God." He felt that many people were not aware of the necessity of God to religion. If God is retained, what is he like? He championed the traditional God, holding that this position is not made untenable by the writings of the contemporaries. "It costs a lot to have God, but the cost of a little one is the same as the cost of a great one." A God in every way adequate makes less demands on faith and reason than the gods being newly introduced.

He claimed that we have a right to be certain concerning God. If experience anywhere yields certainty, it yields it in relation to God as well. Experiences differ because reality differs. The experience of God is real, but unique because God is unique. A God who is a "probability" to philosophy becomes a "certainty" to religious faith. The "moral shadow," which this writer understood to mean conscience, exists only where God exists. God's representative in every man is that man's moral ideal. The burden of the world's sin is both God's and man's because God knew sin, although not every sin, was inevitable.

As Creator, God is called on also to be a Saviour, or a universal servant, involved in all of the suffering in the world. God purposes to save through suffering. His nearness

is his greatness. "The transcendent God reveals himself to faith as the immanent God reveals himself to rational processes."<sup>35</sup> The Christian God is like Christ, even to the detriment of the Old Testament. "Much that is said about God in the Old Testament cannot be accepted by the Christian because it cannot be brought into agreement with the God who is revealed in Christ."<sup>36</sup>

In a later book, A Christian Manifesto, supernaturalism was deemed essential to Christianity, yet there seemed to be some reservation. "We use the term 'supernatural' simply because there is a type of fact and a type of experience that we cannot properly chart under the term 'natural.'"<sup>37</sup>

As to the incarnation it was more difficult to get Lewis' true meaning. Earlier he thought it enough to think that Christ was a perfect manifestation of the character of God. "We do not have to agree as to the process before we can accept the fact."<sup>38</sup> Later he spoke much of the Incarnate God. The incarnation is essential to the Christian faith, even the absolute center. Christianity is based on this miracle or it submits to a naturalistic view of God and the

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<sup>35</sup> A Manual of Christian Beliefs, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>37</sup> A Christian Manifesto, p. 121.

<sup>38</sup> A Manual of Christian Beliefs, p. 24.



world.<sup>39</sup> Christ was truly human but possessed the "meta-physical status" that belonged only to God. Little was said of the virgin birth. He seemed sympathetic and could understand why people have believed this but made no personal commitments.

The Trinity is the reasonable explanation of the incarnation. This is agreeable to Lewis, as it comprehends in the idea of one God what is meant by Eternal Fatherhood, Eternal Sonship, and Eternal Spirit. Only the idea of the Trinity makes completely intelligible the claim concerning Jesus Christ. His earlier view was that the Trinity meant just an inexhaustible capacity in God.

His latest and most comprehensive view of God was perhaps the most difficult to expound. He wrote an entire volume to do it, so a few words in this paper cannot be adequate. It is so important however, that mention must be made of it. Lewis actually has gone to a dualistic or trinitarian view of the universe. "The Given" which Edgar Sheffield Brightman placed in the life of God and against which God must struggle and which leaves God good but finite, Lewis rejected. He acknowledged its reality but changed its location. Lewis grounded evil in the Adversary, or the Demonic Discreative. God is thus finite, and from the

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<sup>39</sup> A Christian Manifesto, p. 185.

beginning was faced with a neutral constant and a demonic Adversary. Neither God nor the Adversary can destroy each other. Occasional victories show God's adequacy in the human situation but do not provide sufficient ground for the optimism of Lewis. In fact, his ultimate optimism was not really a compatible partner for his basic pessimistic metaphysics. Lewis freely acknowledged his departure from monism,<sup>40</sup> and a reviewer of the book agreed that the other positions are as stated here.<sup>41</sup> This latest book has certainly made clear Lewis' present view of God.

One's view of man is always important. For Lewis this seemed to scarcely change from one book to another. To him Genesis one and two are held to be two different accounts. The investigations of science leave "little doubt" that the antecedents of man run back into remote ages. The first man did not appear suddenly, a perfect being. This view of origin is prior to his conversion but nothing to the contrary was found elsewhere.

Personality is a body-mind unit. One is not just a function of the other. Man is also moral.

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<sup>40</sup> Edwin Lewis, The Creator and the Adversary (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, [n. d.]), p. 20.

<sup>41</sup> Kenneth J. Foreman, "Unorthodox Credo," Interpretation, 3:107, January, 1949.

The possibility of moral evil necessarily goes with human life: sin is the responsible actualizing of this possibility. There can be no freedom only as there may be slavery; right judgments only as there may be wrong judgments; holiness only as there may be sinfulness.<sup>42</sup>

As to destiny, one is almost forced to believe that Lewis was driven to universalism. Man is of a perishable order and may or may not be delivered. But, he continues,

Banish God and you may banish hell. Bring God back and you bring hell back. But in bringing God back, you also bring back the possibility that hell, like the salt, unplumb'd, estranging sea, will be "no more" . . . there can be no guarantee that the process of securing a holy and redeemed humanity will be without wastage. There can never be complete bliss for any, either for God or for man, while there is not complete bliss for all.<sup>43</sup>

This is a post-conversion view. Evil is the cause of sin in man, and man could never have been perfect. The story of Adam is a myth and Adam was the same as we are.<sup>44</sup>

The possibility of sin was admitted in his view of the nature of man. "Complete success, however, is impossible. That is to say, sin is an inevitability in the human life, although not all sins are inevitable."<sup>45</sup> God becomes involved in the above view. Evil is held as relative to the good. One can appreciate Lewis' clear distinction between

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<sup>42</sup> God and Ourselves, p. 106.

<sup>43</sup> A Christian Manifesto, p. 210.

<sup>44</sup> The Creator and the Adversary, p. 220.

<sup>45</sup> God and Ourselves, loc. cit.

natural and moral evil throughout. There must be avoidable evil to have responsibility. He shies away from all determinism. Christianity speaks definitely that "especially is sin to be included among the avoidable evils." All punishment is suffering, but not all suffering is punishment.

Punishment can be both remedial and retributive. A consistent view extends the connection of God with evil to include even sin, because he maintains the conditions which make sin possible. Even so God may judge, but he must also seek to save. God plants both tribulation and kingdom. God's opposition to sin takes the form of personal and social loss. Man is created for fellowship. Selfishness carries its own penalty. Man was meant for God and leaving Him out makes hell possible. This realization makes hell an actuality. This hell, however, seems to be nothing more than a suffering soul -- alone.

Nowhere was Lewis' idea of a suffering God more apparent than in his treatment of evil. The idea is rooted in the Old Testament, and supremely expressed in Jesus Christ. Because God is a Father, he suffers with his children. Penal means, alone, cannot bring men to the relationship God desires. We should understand Christ as an expression of the Father's will to destroy the spirit that is the root of wrong doing. Sin remains not only essential to animate existence, but is

the very nature of all created existence.<sup>46</sup>

The purpose of revelation must be understood as for the purpose of redeeming men.

To repeat what has already been said, atonement depends on incarnation, incarnation is in order to atonement, and incarnation can only mean that God himself is involved in the atoning deed.<sup>47</sup>

Man is "foredoomed." His redemption means, "You are condemned," "Ye must be born again," it is "the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." "Christianity is a religion of atonement . . . The inescapable implication of atonement is supernaturalism . . ."48 Man has a "nature inherently defective," although Lewis did not contend for the terms "original sin" or "depravity." Christianity means regeneration. "His sins had been 'imputed' to him. He is 'in Christ' and God sees him so."<sup>49</sup> To omit the atonement is fatal. "Christ tasted death for everyone," but it is necessary to the soul's redemption that a transaction take place within. This message is exclusive and is a "provision for the salvation of the whole world." We must be missionaries if we are to see the "universal exaltation." It was helpful to read

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<sup>46</sup> The Creator and the Adversary, p. 131.

<sup>47</sup> A Christian Manifesto, p. 185.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

Lewis' own brief appraisal of his theological progress and the writer of this paper felt it was in substantial agreement with the views stated here.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> The Creator and the Adversary, p. 7.

## CHAPTER V

### THE WESLEYAN POSITION

#### I. HISTORICAL SKETCH

The Wesleyan view of revelation can be treated as a single view although it is the view of a group or movement. The reason that it can be so treated is that it has been propagated by a group. This has given a well-defined doctrine and much literature has been produced stating the doctrine. This has tended to crystallize the doctrines now known as Wesleyan and they are available in many works. A history of the movement would parallel the biographical section of the other chapters. John Wesley, after whom the movement was named, was the most important man. His brother Charles and George Whitefield complete the trio which was so influential in the origin of the movement. The Wesleyan revival may be said to have begun about 1729 in the organization called the "Holy Club." This was a group of Oxford men who met for Bible study and worship. For their strict religious habits they were nicknamed "Methodists." Soon the members were working in London to carry religion and morality to the submerged classes. In 1739 several events occurred which marked the beginning of organized Methodism. A class meeting was held and the Methodists were organized as a special body. Also this was the beginning of

open-air and lay preaching. In the same year the first Methodist congregations were formed in Bristol and London. By 1740, Methodism had become distinctly separated from Calvinism and Moravianism. In 1744, the first Conference fixed the doctrine and polity which formed the basis of the movement subsequent to this time. The phenomenal growth of this group was shown by the fact that in 1790 there were about one hundred and twenty thousand members in the Wesleyan societies, of whom more than a third were in the United States. Today, the Methodist Church is the largest single Protestant denomination in America and is the mother of many of the smaller denominations. It would not be surprising if many of this great number had departed from the traditional Wesleyan doctrines, including the doctrine of revelation. The purpose of this chapter was to state the true, traditional Methodist doctrine of revelation. Some of the early scholars and authorities of the Wesleyan view were John Fletcher, Adam Clarke, and Richard Watson. Some later theologians who were in substantial agreement with these men were W. B. Pope, Amos Binney, Daniel Steele, Benjamin Field, R. S. Foster, Thomas N. Ralston, John Miley, H. Orton Wiley, and others.

## II. THE PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS OF THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

Revelation is necessarily related to other sources



of knowledge, therefore it was proper to begin this section by a consideration of epistemology. The writer has already stated his own view which allows for three sources: reason, experience, and revelation. This statement was necessary even to begin this study. However, now that it has been stated, it seems to be not far from the Wesleyan view. Wesley himself was a man educated in the greatest university of his day. He was familiar with the current secular books as well as the religious books. He tended to increase his Bible study throughout his life, and called himself a man of one book. The Bible which he considered God's special revelation, was interpreted according to the light of reason. This was not only so, but the findings of such interpretations were checked by experience. He has been criticised and commended for sometimes changing his views, but for this paper it has indicated that he checked his religious knowledge by these other sources of knowledge which have been mentioned. Turner has given an excellent summary of Wesley's theory of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Those who followed Wesley have maintained essentially this same view.

Reason is an original faculty given by God to individual man, and no supra-natural revelation can be given which is not addressed to him (a) As a rational being, and through the channel of his reason; and (b) As consistent with the

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<sup>1</sup> Turner, op. cit., pp. 212-216.

unbiased deductions of reason, acting legitimately within its own sphere. . . . By reason is meant that faculty of the human mind by which man arrives at truth without any super-sensuous aid: This implies his understanding, conscience, and experience, all acting under natural circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

This admits the validity of sensory data and the validity of the mind to properly handle this data.

We believe that both empirical and rational experiences are valid. Such knowledge is valid in as far as it reaches in man's world. Man's knowledge is limited. There will always be finite knowledge to finite man.<sup>3</sup>

After acknowledging that reason was valid in its sphere, the task of the Wesleyan theologians was to clearly define its sphere. This has been admirably done in all of the standard works. A summary view, or the essence of the place of reason is given not as a direct quotation, but in the words of the writer of this paper. There was general agreement that any revelation must be addressed to the reason. Revelation presupposes reason. It was sometimes stated that the highest use of reason is to recognize its limitations. Actually, each man's reason decides what it will do with a purported revelation. Revelation is not irrationalism. Reason is not violated by God's revelation. Rather, revelation builds upon and transcends reason. In the light of

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<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Field, Handbook of Christian Theology (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, [n. d.]), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Delbert R. Rose, Lectures delivered at Western School of Evangelical Religion, Jennings Lodge, Oregon.

this, the function of the faculty of reason in the matters of religion is: To examine and decide upon the evidences of Divine revelation; to ascertain what truths are revealed; after being convinced that a revelation has been made, to accept it as the authority of God and where it may transcend reason, to accept that on faith. This last duty is qualified generally by statements to the effect that while the revelation is to be accepted even though mysterious or inexplicable, that nothing shall be obligatory which is absurd, contradictory, or absolutely irrational. The Wesleyan theologians readily admitted the possibility of revelation in the nature and capacity of man. Also they readily admitted the possibility of revelation in the nature of God. The following quotation may be considered as representative.

The first two postulates of all theology are the Personality of the Infinite Being and the personality of man His creature. Neither of these is a matter of demonstration in the holy oracles; both are assumed or taken for granted everywhere. To renounce either is to annihilate theological knowledge properly so called. . . . God is a Person who condescends to man; and man is a person who is capable of God.<sup>4</sup>

Revelation is not only considered possible, but also probable and necessary. Revelation is necessary because of the moral nature of man. Reason alone is inadequate to meet the demands of a moral and spiritual being. Watson agreed

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<sup>4</sup> William Burt Pope, A Compendium of Christian Theology (New York: Phillips and Hunt, [n. d.]), I, 7.

that there are two important presumptions which can be objectively, historically proved. First, there are some actions which have almost universally among men been called good. Second, that they were originally in some mode or other prescribed and enjoined as the law of the Creator, and their contraries prohibited.<sup>5</sup> This is strong presumptive evidence in favor of a general revelation and expressive of a need of clearer and special revelation. "Christianity, or the perfect Divine Revelation, presents itself as the answer to a universal demand."<sup>6</sup> Because of the agreement of the many authors at this point, this paragraph is closed by referring to the work of Binney, which differed only in being more concise than the work of the other theologians. He maintained that the necessity of this revelation was manifested by five considerations. (1) Human opinions are not a sufficient guide of life and rule of conduct, because they are various and contradictory. (2) Human reason is insufficient, for those professing to be guided by it and having the same book of nature worship different things and some have been sunken in moral character. (3) The law of God can be perfectly known only through revelation. (4) The moral character of God cannot be fully disclosed through the

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Watson, Theological Institutes (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1880), I, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Pope, op. cit., p. 49.

material world. (5) The moral condition of the ancient heathens proves the necessity of special revelation. Their own writers verify that the greatest crimes were countenanced by the arguments and examples of their moralists.<sup>7</sup> The next consideration was the fact of revelation.

### III. THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

John Miley has written some material which the writer of this paper felt was very clear and which could be quoted with profit.

On the broadest division there are two sources of theology -- nature and revelation. They are very far from any equality; in fullness, clearness, and authority fairly comparable only by contrast. Some great truths of Christian theology are peculiar to revelation. Yet the first question of all religion, the existence of God, must be taken first to nature. The best Christian thinkers agree in these two sources.<sup>8</sup>

Pope declared that the term revelation was at once the most elementary and comprehensive word of our theological systems. In its broadest sense, it includes every manifestation of God to the consciousness of man, or the whole of Divine disclosures.

Revelation in this higher meaning of the term, is general and special. As GENERAL it is undoubtedly common to the

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<sup>7</sup> Amos Binney and Daniel Steele, Binney's Theological Compendium Improved (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1902), p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> John Miley, Systematic Theology (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1892), I, 88.

human race as such: The foundation of what may be called natural religion. Although, as we have seen, the highest word is not used of this universal unveiling of God in the creature, it may be called natural as distinguished from supernatural revelation. This latter is special; as being imparted not so much in man as to man, through the medium both of Divine works and Divine words, as will be hereafter seen.<sup>9</sup>

Revelation does exist. In speaking of its existence even this briefly, it was necessary to speak of the form in which it existed. The form of revelation needed further elaboration, however, to assist in determining the authority and content of revelation. Revelation was held to be both general and special, or natural and supernatural, by all those expressing the Wesleyan view, with the possible exception of Watson.<sup>10</sup> The English deists had been exalting the light of nature and Watson tended to the other extreme in his refutation of this, by taking a position which would logically exclude the grounds of a natural theology. A clear distinction was made between nature and revelation by the difference in the modes of knowledge. In nature knowledge is acquired by the use of human faculties. In revelation there is immediate communication by the divine agency though this involves the use of human faculties as well.<sup>11</sup> Miley further held

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<sup>9</sup> Pope, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> Watson, op. cit., pp. 5-236.

<sup>11</sup> Miley, op. cit., p. 9.

that so-called confessional, traditional, and mystical sources of theology are erroneous. The Bible is the one supreme pre-eminent source of theology. It is revelation in a written form. This form of special revelation tells of another important form of special revelation, the Person of Christ. It would be more accurate and proper to put Christ prior to the written Word. The importance of the Bible comes from the fact that it reveals the Living Word. A quotation from the most recent theological work of the Wesleyan tradition, published in 1940, will clarify this point. Wiley states,

By Special Revelation we refer to the redemptive purpose of God manifested in Christ Jesus, as over against the more general revelation of His power as manifested in His creative works.

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 In thus limiting the idea of a special revelation to the unfolding of the eternal counsel of God as it concerns the redemption of men through Christ, we bring before us three salient points. First, the redemptive purpose of God as revealed in Christ; second, the perfected Scriptures as the final testimony of Jesus to sinful men; and third, the coincidence of these with the Christian Faith.<sup>12</sup>

Wiley stressed this point over and over, that the Bible was the Word of God because it was the perfected testimony of Christ. God has revealed Himself through nature by His creation, and in a special way in the Person of Christ and

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<sup>12</sup> H. Orton Wiley, Christian Theology (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1946), I, 136.

in the Bible.

With this approach, one must be nearly able to predict what authority will be given this special revelation. It is special revelation with which this paper, and Christian theology as well, is primarily concerned. If there be a God, who is the Creator of man, and if He has revealed Himself and His will for man in an accurate record, then surely this record would be man's final authority on whatever matters it touches. After showing the grounds for believing the Bible to be inspired of God, Pope stated,

Its plenary inspiration makes Holy Scripture the absolute and final authority, all-sufficient as the supreme Standard of Faith, Directory of Morals, and Charter of Privileges to the Church of God.<sup>13</sup>

This is the Wesleyan view. One of the earlier writers, in his Rational Demonstration of Man's Corruption and Lost Estate, took considerable pains to assert the authority of the Scriptures. Actually he inserted between his Thirtieth and Thirty-First Argument, a short apology for the Bible.

. . . I here premise, by way of digression, a few rational arguments to evince, as far as my contracted plan will allow, the Divine authority of the scriptures.<sup>14</sup>

Wesley, in his sermons and writings, used Scriptural terms and phrases so freely that it was difficult to ascertain

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<sup>13</sup> Pope, op. cit., p. 174.

<sup>14</sup> John Fletcher, An Appeal to Matter of Fact and Common Sense (Nashville, Tennessee: Barbee and Smith, 1891), p. 128.



what is Bible, and what is Wesley. This stemmed from his belief in the Bible as his authority. He claimed that pure doctrine comes, "By keeping to the Bible, and setting it just as high as the Scripture does."<sup>15</sup> The Methodist Discipline, a large part of which remains in the language of Wesley, reflected his view of the authority of the Bible.

The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.<sup>16</sup>

Even to become a member in The Methodist Church one must answer affirmatively the question, "Do you believe in the Bible as God's Holy Word?"<sup>17</sup> Bishop R. S. Foster wrote,

Anything else than a supernatural or superhuman Christ the Son of God, and anything else than a Bible delivered of God to men, takes all virtue out of Christianity, and convicts it of imposture.<sup>18</sup>

And again,

The claim set up by all evangelical Christians, of whatever phase of faith, is that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament either directly or indirectly contain his teachings; and that, in substance, they are

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<sup>15</sup> John Wesley, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection (Louisville, Ky.: Pentecostal Publishing Co., [n. d.]), p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> The Methodist Church, Discipline ([n. p.]: The Methodist Publishing House, 1944), p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 461.

<sup>18</sup> Randolph S. Foster, The Supernatural Book (Studies in Theology. New York: Eaton and Mains, 1889), p. xii.

of divine authority and are to be received as such; in other word, that the Bible is a divinely inspired book, and that he was a divinely sent teacher, and that the substance of what is found in the Bible, is a revelation from God, and as such is to be accepted as final authority on all matters of which it makes deliverances.<sup>19</sup>

Wiley regarded the Bible, ". . . not only as the Christian rule of faith and practice, but also as the ultimate critical standard of religious thought."<sup>20</sup>

The content of revelation is dependent upon the authority of the revelation. The plenary inspiration view of the Scriptures would certainly include all of the Bible. "Plenary" means full or complete. This view was held by all of the authors cited in this chapter except Foster. He denied plenary inspiration, but did believe that the Bible was entirely veracious.<sup>21</sup> In this denial he departed from the Wesleyan view and may be considered as the exception which proves the rule rather than as representative of this view. Although the theologians warned against placing the Bible above the Christ whom the Bible reveals,<sup>22</sup> yet it remains that the question of the Bible is the most basic and that the knowledge of the Person and work of Christ is a part of

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Wiley, op. cit., p. 185.

<sup>21</sup> Randolph S. Foster, Prolegomena (Studies in Theology. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, [n. d.]), p. 282.

<sup>22</sup> Wiley, op. cit., p. 140.

the contents of the Bible. A rather lengthy, but comprehensive and pertinent quotation, from Pope will conclude this section on the contents of revelation as it shows the coincidence of God's redemptive purpose in Christ and the written Word and the Christian faith.

. . . our Lord's sanction makes the complete Scriptures the finished revelation, never to be superceded. Nothing can be more plain than that the entire fulness of what the Revealer had to say to the world was to be communicated to the Apostles by the Holy Ghost; and that, not as a further disclosure on the part of the Spirit, but as the consolidation of the Saviour's teaching into its perfect unity, and its expansion into its perfect meaning. No future streams of revelation were to rise higher than the fountain-head of truth opened in Himself. Hence we must repeat concerning the Book what has been said concerning the Lord's teaching; the Bible means all revelation and all revelation means the Bible.

We are justified, therefore, in holding that the Scriptures of revelation and Christianity, as the Christian Faith, cover the same ground and strictly coincide. As yet, we have nothing to do with the question of inspiration, nor with inquiries into the genuineness and integrity of individual books and individual passages; but only with the general fact that in all sound theology, the Bible and Christ are inseparably connected. Not that they are in the nature of things identical: We can suppose the possibility of an Incarnate Revealer present in the world without the mediation of the Written Word. Indeed we are bound to assume, as has been already seen, that there is a wider revelation of the Word in the world than the Scriptures cover. Moreover, we may assent that His revelation of Himself is still, and even in connection with the Scriptures, more or less independent of the Word. But as the basis of the science of theology, the Bible is Christianity. It has pleased God from the beginning to conduct the development of the great mystery by documents containing the attested facts, the authenticated doctrines, and the sealed predictions of revelation. The process of the Divine Counsel has been bound up with the enlargement of the Volume of the Book. That Book is the foundation of Christianity: the Lord of the Bible and the Bible are indissolubly the Rock on which it is based. We

have its documents and records; we have no documents and records which do not directly or indirectly pay their tribute to the Christian Religion; and there is no revelation in any department of truth of which the same may be said. All revelation is identical with Christianity and summed up in it. Hence, generally speaking, and as yet regarding the Scriptures only as a whole, we may say that the character of Christianity is the character of the Bible; the claims and credentials of the one are the claims and credentials of the other.<sup>23</sup>

At this point the writer of this paper would like to pay tribute to the Wesleyan writers and to state the satisfaction that came from perusing their work. That many of the writings were intended to be systematic treatises did not lessen the admiration for their clarity and unity. The logical approach and procedure would be commendable in any work. As the thought progressed smoothly from one point to another, one point nearly anticipated another. In nearly every section this has been so. For instance, in discussing the nature of revelation, the form in which it exists, its authority, and its contents, it has been impossible to do so without clearly stating the attitude of this movement toward the Bible. Only a brief section was given to the treatment of the Bible, therefore, to avoid repetition. It was without question the view of this movement that the Bible is the infallible Word of God. As such, it is the final authority of faith and practice. In the light of the previous material on the subject, one quotation is

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<sup>23</sup> Pope, op. cit., pp. 40-41.

sufficient to conclude this paragraph. In speaking of inspiration, Wiley also stated his view of the Bible:

By plenary inspiration, we mean that the whole and every part is divinely inspired. This does not necessarily presuppose the mechanical theory of inspiration, as some contend, or any particular method, only that the results of that inspiration gave us the Holy Scriptures as the final and authoritative rule of faith in the Church.<sup>24</sup>

#### IV. IMPLICATIONS

This section could be omitted in a study of revelation alone. However, the purpose of this paper was to compare different views of revelation, and a comparison of crucial points in general theology have made the differences more apparent. Not only have they made clear the differences in the doctrines but they have manifested the extreme importance of a correct doctrine of revelation. The doctrines selected for brief examination were those of God, man, sin, and redemption. Brevity was a virtue in this division of each chapter as it aided in comparison and was ample for its purpose. To begin, the doctrine of God was well-stated in the Methodist Discipline and there was no voice among the many Wesleyan theologians consulted to even suggest any other view.

There is one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness;

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<sup>24</sup> Wiley, op. cit., p. 184.

the maker and preserver of all things, visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity -- the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.<sup>25</sup>

This is definitely trinitarian in view and so naturally Christ and the Holy Spirit are prominent in Wesleyan theology. This paragraph will close with a brief quotation, from the same source as above, concerning Christ and the Holy Ghost.

The Son, who was the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin; so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Christ, very God and very Man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for the actual sins of men.<sup>26</sup>

Of the third Person of the Trinity it is stated, "The Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one substance, majesty, and glory, with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God."<sup>27</sup>

Man did not evolve, but is a special creation of God. "In him the physical and spiritual met. He is at once a creature and a son. . . the crowning act of the creative process."<sup>28</sup> The soul of man is immortal. Even death of the body is generally held to have entered solely because of sin.

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<sup>25</sup> The Methodist Church, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>26</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>27</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>28</sup> H. Orton Wiley, Christian Theology (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1946), II, 110.

It was maintained that it was possible for man not to sin and therefore not to fall from original holiness. "Ability for obedience is a rational requirement under a testing law of Duty."<sup>29</sup> But primitive man did fall with a consequent fall of the race. Original sin is the corruption of every offspring of Adam which inclines his nature toward evil rather than righteousness. Fletcher's work, An Appeal to Matter of Fact and Common Sense, is a classic on this doctrine. He stated that original sin is the principle truth of Christianity and that genuine Christianity stands or falls with it.<sup>30</sup>

A correct view of sin is important because it bears upon the fields of anthropology and soteriology. The possibility of sin demands the freedom of man. The Mosaic account of the fall of man was the view accepted and explained the origin of sin in human history. Sin has a twofold nature. It was described as both an act and a state or condition. There was some difference between the earlier and later theologians as to the question guilt attaching to inbred or original sin. The earlier group said that although no personal demerit is attached to original sin, that every man is amenable to punishment

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<sup>29</sup> Miley, op. cit., p. 424.

<sup>30</sup> Fletcher, op. cit., p. 7.

because corrupted by original sin. Some of the later theologians denied any sense of guilt involved in depravity until personally responsible for it. However, this difference was resolved as to practical results. In either case no man will be condemned for what Adam did, because the unconditional benefits of the atonement of Christ are as extensive as the guilt of all through Adam, if this is held.<sup>31</sup> All sin, whether in act or disposition, is a corruption of God's plan for man.

Redemption depends somewhat upon the concepts of God, man, and sin. The Wesleyans have been generally credited with two specific doctrines which seem to be the outstanding contribution of their movement to Protestantism. Both of these doctrines lie in this area. The doctrines are: the witness of the Holy Spirit, and sanctification by faith. However, the doctrine of justification by faith was protected from antinomianism by insistence on a second justification by works.<sup>32</sup> Salvation is not a redemption "in" sin but a redemption "from" sin. Wesley, when speaking on the witness of the Spirit, made it identical in both justification and sanctification.

But how do you know you are sanctified -- saved from your inbred corruption?

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<sup>31</sup> Wiley, op. cit., II, 1121.

<sup>32</sup> John Fletcher, Checks to Antinomianism (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1948), p. 76.



I can know it no otherwise than I know that I am justified. "Hereby know ye that we are of God (in either sense), by the Spirit that he hath given us."<sup>33</sup>

Sanctification is an instantaneous experience for Christians which is:

That renewal of our fallen nature by the Holy Ghost, received through faith in Jesus Christ, whose blood of atonement cleanseth from all sin; whereby we are not only delivered from the guilt of sin, but are washed from its pollution, saved from its power, and are enabled, through grace, to love God with all our hearts and to walk in his holy commandments blameless.<sup>34</sup>

Redemption was to Wesleyan theologians, the salvation from all sin, provided by the shed blood of Christ, and appropriated through faith in Him. Redemption also meant the future glorification of the mortal body and deliverance from even the presence of sin in a holy heaven provided by God for those who love Him. This eternal bliss was contrasted with the eternal punishment of the wicked.

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<sup>33</sup> Wesley, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>34</sup> The Methodist Church, op. cit., p. 33.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE THREE CONTEMPORARY VIEWS COMPARED AND CONTRASTED WITH THE WESLEYAN VIEW

#### I. THE POSITION OF GEORGIA HARKNESS AND THE WESLEYAN POSITION COMPARED AND CONTRASTED

This chapter has very little new material because it has concerned itself largely with the material presented in the first four chapters. Evaluations or appraisals have been referred to the concluding chapter. This chapter has pointed out the agreement or disagreement of the views compared.

The philosophical bases. The question of knowledge is the first point of comparison. Harkness has called herself an empiricist and a theistic realist.<sup>1</sup> Her work had a general empirical foundation, and the reason was considered able to handle this sensory data. In this much her approach was quite similiar to the Wesleyan approach. Also she admitted the need of revelation. Authority is necessary for religion, and revelation is necessary for authority. There was a difference when she spoke of several authorities. She saw no reason for the five sources of authority of the Christian faith which she mentioned to be mutually exclusive.

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<sup>1</sup> Harkness, The Recovery of Ideals, p. viii.

The Wesleyan view said that there can be but one absolute authority. "No authority can be judged by any other authority. It must stand alone and be self-validating and self-confirming."<sup>2</sup> The Wesleyans adopted the Bible as the final authority, while Harkness rejected adopting any one of her five authorities as final. She also rejected finding a new basis of faith, and so attempted a synthesis of her five authorities. In so doing she created an index, the "mind-of-Christ," which actually was her final authority and thus she ended either in mysticism or rationalism,<sup>3</sup> This was a major departure from the Wesleyan Biblicism. She admitted the possibility and necessity of revelation as did the Wesleyans, but the difference lies in what each actually accepted as revelation. This is in part due to philosophical presuppositions. Harkness denied that the supernatural is a separate realm of being and claimed that it is merely an aspect of the natural.<sup>4</sup> This is contradictory to the most basic presupposition of the Wesleyan view. The Wesleyans were theistic. They admitted that the fact of a God that is a Personal Being essential to all of

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<sup>2</sup> Delbert R. Rose, lectures.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. ante, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Harkness, The Recovery of Ideals, p. 92.

their theological knowledge.<sup>5</sup> This is a serious difference in approaches.

The theological bases. Both views said that revelation exists. The difference was as to form, the authority, and the content of revelation. The Wesleyan theologians allowed for revelation in both general and special forms while this distinction was difficult to find in the writings of Harkness, if it was there at all. To her, the Bible was central in revelation, but is different in degree and not in kind from other forms of revelation.

The Bible is the infallible Word of God and the absolute and final authority of Christian faith to the Wesleyans.<sup>6</sup> In Harkness' writings, revelation and knowledge were scarcely discernible and therefore all knowledge has nearly the same authority.<sup>7</sup>

The entire contents of the Bible were special revelation to the true Methodist theologians while Harkness' broad concept of revelation included all of reality.

The literary or plenary inspiration of the Scriptures as held by the Wesleyans was considered erroneous and even

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. ante, p. 85.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. ante, p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. ante, p. 24.

harmful.<sup>8</sup>

In this one section alone there are enough differences to definitely say that Harkness is not in the Wesleyan tradition. Revelation was the doctrine considered in this paper so this difference is the one of most importance. But there is another section to be compared, and it should be enlightening and helpful and substantiate the writer's claim of the importance of the doctrine of revelation to all theology.

Implications. Harkness believed that God is judge, but this does not mean a God of wrath who visits vengeance upon sinners.<sup>9</sup> This was a departure from the Wesleyan view which accepted the God of the Old Testament and believed in the eternal punishment of the wicked. The virgin birth and many miracles and the resurrection were doubted by Harkness. The Wesleyans affirmed that the Bible is true at these points. Harkness was Sabellian in her view of God and not Trinitarian as were the true Wesleyans. Harkness believed that Jesus was unique in degree only, while the Methodist theologians have insisted on uniqueness in kind. People that do not worship the same God can hardly be said to have the same religion. This difference was apparently due to her doctrine of

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. ante, p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. ante, p. 27.

revelation because those in the Wesleyan tradition who accepted the same authority, had an identical view of God, which is the one taught by the whole Bible.

Man to the Wesleyans, is a product of special creation by God, but to Harkness he is a product of evolution. In both views, man's purpose, roughly, is to do the will of God. As to destiny, Harkness believes in universal salvation while the traditional Methodists believe in heaven and hell. With different origins and destinies, and very different Gods, man's purpose is quite different. Basically, there can be no greater difference than this.

Sin was defined very much the same in both views. However, the hereditary corruption passed on from Adam as taught by orthodox Methodism was denied by Harkness. To her it is a biological ego-centricity not intrinsically sinful.

In redemption, both of Methodism's outstanding contributions were denied. No soul can be free from sin, and as full salvation is thus unattainable and as men are always striving after it, it would be great presumption to testify to it.<sup>10</sup>

Harkness admitted that she was not an orthodox

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<sup>10</sup> Georgia Harkness, Resources of Religion (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1936), p. 24.

Christian theologian and this comparison of some of the most important of all doctrines would seem to prove her correct in this claim.<sup>11</sup>

## II. THE POSITION OF NELS F. S. FERRÉ AND THE WESLEYAN POSITION COMPARED AND CONTRASTED

The philosophical bases. Both traditional and liberal theology were criticized by Ferré for having a faulty epistemology. His is a two-level epistemology with science and reason competent to deal with the here and now, but faith is the sole source of religion. In Wesleyan theology, faith is rational; God appeals to reason. In Ferré's system, faith is irrational, and faith is prior to religious knowledge. This difference is evident throughout the writings of each and is a basic disagreement.<sup>12</sup> Both agree as to the possibility and necessity of revelation but the criteria for establishing it is their point of disagreement. Even faith does not yield real knowledge for Ferré, because faith and knowledge are antithetical in some sense. He denied that theology can be objectively systematic, which would certainly disturb those Methodist theologians who have written systematic theologies, if they could but know it.

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<sup>11</sup> Harkness, The Recovery of Ideals, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. ante, pp. 4, 84.

The theological bases. Ferré believed that revelation exists. Christianity is a religion of revelation. In this much he was Methodistic, but in the other phases of revelation he soon departed from this theological lineage. The fullest and most effective revelation was made in Jesus, who revealed God as agape. On the surface this seems agreeable with Wesleyan teaching but actually it is very different. Ferré interpreted everything in revelation from his presupposition of God as agape. The Wesleyans accepted everything God has revealed about Himself in the Bible as true. In one case it is knowing God from what He reveals of Himself, in the other it is only accepting as revealed what agrees with a previous concept of God. These approaches are miles apart.

Both the authority and content of revelation were determined by this index which Ferré erected, agape. The Bible and Jesus were both considered to be unique in degree and not in kind, which is a contradiction of the Wesleyan view. The Wesleyans' view of the Bible as an objective revelation, that it is authoritative for all men, would be undercut by Ferré's "revelational irrationalism," or the Augustinian-Anselmic approach.<sup>13</sup> This is another instance of total disagreement. The content of revelation is indefinite because revelation is continuous, and its authority is not

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. ante, p. 38.



final because revelation is incomplete. The Wesleyan view is exactly the opposite; revelation is both closed and final for this era of gospel privilege.<sup>14</sup> Ferré's content in revelation was determined by his selective principle agape, while the Wesleyans insisted on plenary inspiration. The only agreement found was that revelation exists, and this is no agreement at all unless revelation has comparable definitions in both views. This has been further illustrated by comparing their treatment of the Bible.

Both the Old and New Testaments contain things unworthy of the Christian faith, according to Ferré, which is a repudiation of the plenary inspiration as held by the Wesleyans. Fallibility and infallibility are the conflicting doctrines of the Bible held by these two views.<sup>15</sup>

Implications. Ferré claimed that the uniqueness of Christianity lies in its concept of God as agape.<sup>16</sup> The Wesleyans claimed that Christianity is unique because it is the one true religion based on the historical revelation of the one true God. The Wesleyan God is the God of the Bible,

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. ante, p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. ante, p. 47.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. ante, p. 48.

whom Ferré rejected as not always acting in love. Ferré rejected the Trinitarian God of the Methodists, and therefore Christ's personal pre-existence is denied. Christ's sinlessness was insisted on in the Methodist doctrine, along with His office of Saviour and Mediator. Ferré was uncertain about the first and regarded Jesus more as a teacher than as a Saviour.<sup>17</sup> The doctrine of God is certainly important to religion, yet there is little agreement at this point. The differences can be directly traced to their approach to revelation and their handling of it. It is far from being merely a matter of interpretation of what is revealed, but a question as to what is revealed.

The doctrines of man demonstrated the same divergence of view. Ferré believed in evolution, historic Methodism in special creation. Wesleyanism believed in inherited depravity, Ferré denied this as well as the "fall." Ferré believed that sin is essential to man's freedom,<sup>18</sup> but the Wesleyans said that it is possible not to sin, but that sin is possible because man is free.<sup>19</sup>

There was some agreement as to sin. Both admitted its two-fold nature and both maintained that it was not

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. ante, p. 50.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. ante, p. 50

<sup>19</sup> Cf. ante, pp. 51, 97.

located in the body but in the heart. Agreement was found also when all evil was held as springing from moral evil. The cleavage appeared here when evil was considered by Ferré as essential, or even beneficial.<sup>20</sup>

Redemption was the goal of creation to Ferré, and God's remedy for sin to the Wesleyans. It is personal and social in effect to both views, but "redemption" is not properly applied to society by the Wesleyans. That repentance is undesirable, that conversion is unattainable, that saints are sinners -- these views of Ferré are diametrically opposed to Methodist doctrines.<sup>21</sup>

The differences apparent in this last paragraph, along with the other contrasting doctrines, would almost cause one to think that different religions were compared. It is sure that enough difference existed that to say that Ferré is in the Wesleyan tradition would be a grave error.

### III. THE POSITION OF EDWIN LEWIS AND THE WESLEYAN POSITION COMPARED AND CONTRASTED

The philosophical bases. Lewis admitted the possibility of revelation through the super-mind and the "commerce of mind" idea. The necessity of revelation is grounded in God's

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. ante, p. 51.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. ante, p. 52.

obligation to His creation and man's need. Though there was considerable difference of approach, he agreed with the Wesleyans at these points.

The theological bases. Lewis stated that the most basic question about revelation is whether it exists or not.<sup>22</sup> And Lewis also contended that revelation does exist, and that this is essential to Christianity.<sup>23</sup> This agrees with the Wesleyan view.

There was also considerable harmony concerning the form of revelation. Lewis held that the Bible and Christ are forms of revelation. Lewis also believed in general revelation, which seems to parallel fairly closely the traditional Methodist view of general or natural revelation.<sup>24</sup> He sometimes spoke of experience as a form of revelation. In Wesleyan theology this is most often called the witness of the Holy Spirit in epochal experiences of grace or the leadership of the Holy Spirit in other direct Divine communication. Even in Methodism it is sometimes called personal revelation, but this is not used for subjective experience. There has been very nearly perfect agreement in this section up to this point.

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. ante, p. 59.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. ante, pp. 66, 88.

The authority of revelation was difficult to compare because of the ill-defined concept of revelation in the work of Lewis. The Christian faith is essentially absolute and authoritative to Lewis, although this authority may be determined subjectively.<sup>25</sup> In Chapter IV it was stated that however high Lewis wanted to raise the authority of the Christian revelation he left it somewhere below the absolute. Therefore, there was a major disagreement at this point because the Wesleyans held that the Bible is infallible and therefore absolute.

The content of revelation is determined privately according to Lewis,<sup>26</sup> while for the Wesleyans it is defined and constant. Herein was another serious disagreement.

While the Wesleyans respected the Bible as entirely inspired and therefore infallible, Lewis regarded it as fallible and brought other serious charges against it.<sup>27</sup> This was a clear departure from those claiming that the Bible and the Christian faith coincide, and from the Wesleyan point of view, a lethal departure.

Implications. God, to Lewis, is more nearly the God of the Wesleyans than the God of either Harkness or Ferré.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. ante, p. 68.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. ante, p. 68.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. ante, p. 71.

Lewis believed that God is a personal being who is both transcendent and immanent. He also believed that God is a Trinity, which is denied by Harkness and Ferré, but which is Wesleyan.<sup>28</sup> He left the Wesleyan view when he denied some things in the Old Testament attributed to God and this difference was because of the varying concepts of authority. By far the most serious differences, in the views of God, appeared in Lewis' latest book, in which he adopted a pluralistic view of reality. This leaves God finite, which is a direct contradiction to the infinite God of the Wesleyans.<sup>29</sup>

Lewis believed that man evolved, which, as has been stated, is a contradiction of the Wesleyan view of special creation. This difference also may be traced to their different views of the Bible. Both views agree that freedom is essential to manhood. This makes sin possible but not essential. Lewis contradicted both the Wesleyan view and his own earlier positions when he said that evil is the cause of sin in man, and that man could never have been perfect.<sup>30</sup> Lewis' universalism is also far different from the heaven and hell of the Methodists.

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. ante, p. 75.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. ante, p. 76.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. ante, p. 77.

The writer of this paper felt that the Wesleyans would approve of Lewis' clear distinction between natural and moral evil. All natural evil is the result of moral evil according to both views.

Redemption is the purpose of revelation in both views.<sup>31</sup> Here Lewis used many traditional words and phrases such as "born again" and "converted." These did not seem to mean quite the same as in Methodism. Lewis talked of "imputed righteousness," whereas the Wesleyans stressed "imparted righteousness." For both views personal experience is necessary.

More harmony was found between the view of Lewis and the Wesleyan view than was found between the latter and the views of the two other contemporary theologians. There was sufficient disagreement, however, to keep him from being included in the orthodox Methodist tradition.

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. ante, p. 79.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

The Wesleyan view has been used as a standard of measurement in the preceding chapter. This procedure has been followed because the Wesleyan view is the one accepted. This paper has not attempted to evaluate the Wesleyan position but to correctly state it and compare the contemporary views with it. In the process there was a rethinking of the position which is the writer's, and no apparent reasons were found for changing views. On the contrary, this view has been made to appear in a brighter light than before and it certainly has not suffered by the comparisons. The conclusion was drawn with this same view as the standard.

The contemporary views which have been examined can hardly be called Wesleyan. It would be difficult to affix a line which would clearly indicate when a particular theologian would be considered to have gone astray from his regular school of thought. It is unlikely that two men have ever agreed perfectly on everything. Theologians are no exception in this respect. What per cent of agreement or disagreement is essential between theologians before they can be considered in the same school of thought? This paper does not try to determine this or even the percentage of agreement involved in the comparison. What has been done has



shown that there was basic disagreement at this central doctrine of revelation. It has been demonstrated by the number of varying opinions about dependent doctrines. The importance of the doctrine has also been manifest by this method. The single factor seeming to bear the most weight in the comparison was the authority of revelation, and the Bible in particular. The Bible is fallible or it is not. If it is fallible it is not authoritative. Nearly all doctrines hinge on this. In the cases of disagreements in the comparisons the basic disagreement was as to the authority of the Word. A great number of nice things may be said about the doctrine of revelation but its teeth are pulled if it is not authoritative. This is what this writer has used as the determining line. Harkness, Ferré, and Lewis all denied the infallibility of the Bible. It was on this basis that they were said to be non-Wesleyan.

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