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Louis Dupré

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# REFLECTIONS ON THE TRUTH OF RELIGION

Louis Dupré

Is it possible to reflect on religious truth from a position outside faith without seriously distorting what faith itself understands by its truth? As long as philosophy and theology remained united—until the end of the middle ages—such a reflection was neither needed nor attempted. The standpoint which an independent philosophy in the modern age has taken with respect to the problem of truth, where the knowing subject becomes the source of truth, would appear to render such an effort suspect. Nevertheless, this essay argues, we are justified in approaching the truth of religion through the models available in present philosophy: correspondence, coherence, disclosure. In all three cases, however, the *application* of the models needs to be qualified if it is to account for truth as faith itself understands it.

If one thing distinguishes traditional religious conceptions of truth from modern philosophical ones, it is the absence, or secondary role, of epistemological concerns. Despite their substantial differences, all religious traditions agree in stressing the ontological and moral qualities of truth over the purely cognitive ones. Truth refers to *being*, rather than to knowledge. In Sanskrit, the mother tongue of our Indo-European languages, *truth* is *satya* while *being* is *sat*. Gandhi based his life-long quest for what he called truth upon this identity. In 1932 he formulated as follows:

“Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why *Sat* or Truth is perhaps the more important name of God. In fact, it is more correct to say that ‘Truth is God’ than to say that ‘God is Truth’.”<sup>1</sup>

The proper attitude with respect to this ontological truth consists in the first place in devotion and fidelity: the path of truth is the path of devotion (*bhakti*)—the only path that leads to God.<sup>2</sup> In a religious vision of this nature lies, I believe, the origin of the so-called correspondence theory which later became so exclusively cognitive: the consistency between *what is* and one’s conduct. Not to be “true” to one’s self means, in fact, to descend to a lesser mode of being. Only when we are fully connected with Being shall we be able to *know*. The relation here is exactly the opposite of modern thought which starts from the primacy of consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

The nature of religious truth consists in the first place in an *ontological* state whereby the relation to God defines the definitive link with Being. That relation



also secures access to the source of ultimate meaning. All “true” *knowing* depends on a *being* in the truth. But the transcendent pole of the relation establishes man’s *awareness* of the relation as well as the relation itself. Truth in religion implies more than merely admitting that an ontological bond with God exists. The recognition of that bond must itself be given. Truth then consists in the right relation to the ultimately real and only that transcendent reality can enlighten us concerning the nature and even the existence of that relation. This principle summarizes the fundamental belief about truth not only in the Judaeo-Christian tradition but, if I am not mistaken, in all others as well. It marks the constant factor in religious truth. Our own tradition stands out by its increasing emphasis upon the second aspect—the need for a divine disclosure, a revelation.

#### *General Considerations*

If religion by its own account provides the basis of its own truth, can we move to a basis outside the domain of faith and yet hope fairly to evaluate that truth? Can faith accept any judgment critical of its truth that originates in an autonomous philosophy independently of the principles of faith itself? Can any statement be made about the truth *of* religion that does not coincide with the truth *in* religion itself without undoing or seriously distorting the latter? This much seems certain. A critical examination that on the basis of pure reason, independently of the religious experience proper, attempts to establish or disestablish “the truth of religion,” must indeed result in distortion. Since modern philosophical theories of truth were developed mainly for the purpose of securing a foundation for scientific practice, this may appear to render them unfit for evaluating the specific nature of religious truth. Yet such a conclusion would be premature and, we hope to show, in the end unjustified. The basic *models* of truth used in those theories predate the scientific concerns of the modern age. They may, in fact, have grown out of a religious soil. Such was, almost certainly, the case with the disclosure model. But truth as correspondence and coherence were also formulated well before their modern methodic investigation started. Clearly, philosophy has developed these ancient models of truth on the basis of careful (albeit often unduly limited) analyses of the cognitive act. To compare religious claims to those models by no means commits one to the antitheological assumptions which often accompany their appearance in modern philosophy. But neither do we propose to “justify” religious truth in the light of that philosophy. Unless one assumes the basic legitimacy of the religious act on its own merits, attempts toward an all-comprehensive justification inevitably fail. Truth, as Spinoza taught, must prove itself: one cannot prove it to be true by another “truth” which presumably stands outside it.

The following argument presupposes the existence of a truth proper to religion.

In comparing it with the existing models of truth we merely intend to investigate the aptitude of these models in clarifying that religious *fact* as well as the particular conditions required for successfully doing so. In a sense, then, it is philosophy, or at least its available apparatus, rather than religion, that is being examined here. To be sure, if the concept of religious truth proved to be radically incompatible with any of the existing models, the critical believer would have serious grounds for questioning the "truth of religion." For a comprehensive theory of truth, must, in principle, be able to adjudicate all legitimate claims of truth. If recent philosophy has often rejected the legitimacy of religious claims, the *application* of the basic models, rather than the models themselves may be at fault. If, however, the religious concept of truth were to prove intractably resistant to any *integration* with other concepts of truth (such as the scientific ones) within the existing models, this would create a serious problem in the religious truth claims themselves. All the more so since these models originated long before any positivist restrictions were attached to it. Even though religion unfolds its own truth, it is forced to do so within the available categories of general discourse. Revelation itself cannot be rendered intelligible unless it still proves capable of being assumed within the modern pattern of speaking and thinking. However sublime and unique, a message confronts the elementary fact that, in order to be expressed, it must adopt an *existing* language and thereby integrate itself within a *praxis* of discourse.

Western philosophy since its Greek origins has held truth to consist in an *ideal* presence, an objective quality that transcends the subjective experience of certainty. Only since the last century have philosophers begun to question this traditional position. Today certain psychological, sociological, or linguistic theories tend to reduce adherence to a particular epistemic position to unacknowledged factors in the individual or in the group to which the individual belongs. "Truth," in this view, would be attained by deconstructing the obvious surface structure and by gathering information about the building stones presumed to have been used in its construction. Obviously within such a perspective religion is *a priori* banned from presenting any truth claims at all. Since truth as demystification or deconstruction either begs the question of truth altogether or rests upon a more fundamental model to which it merely clears the access, we shall not consider it here.<sup>4</sup>

#### A. Correspondence

The correspondence between word and reality appears even in the earliest tradition, if not as the central core of religious truth, at least as one of its essential components. Truth, also religious truth, requires that our words or concepts conform to things as they are in themselves. Philosophy, after it took the critical epistemic turn, found nothing but insoluble problems in such a neat division

between a purely “mental” concept and a purely “real” object. Precisely the invincible difficulties inherent in the unproven assumption of a harmony between the mind and the world led to Kant’s radical reversal of the correspondence theory. After his “Copernican revolution” the line that distinguishes the correspondence from the coherence theory becomes hard to draw. Thus Edmund Husserl in his basically Kantian *Logical Investigations* asserts about the relation between ideas and things:

“The connection of things, to which the thought-experiences (*Denkerlebnisse*)—the real or the possible—are intentionally related, and, on the other hand, the connection of truths, in which the unity of things (*die sachliche Einheit*) comes to objective validity as that which it is—*both are given together and cannot be separated* from each other.”<sup>5</sup>

The famous “things themselves” (*die Sachen selbst*) to which Husserl intends to return philosophy, prove then to be as ideal as the relations of consciousness. They constitute the invariable element in the mind’s perspective variations. The very notion of intentionality—the relation between the mind and its object—is reinterpreted into one of immanent objectivity: the object *belongs* to the act of consciousness itself. It is constituted not independently of that act, but with and through it, yet with an *immanent* independence of the *experience* of the object. The intuition of truth in the end then is the outcome of a process in which we bring the object to givenness. A thing is given when it is *brought to* ideal presence. Clearly, in such an immanent interpretation the distinction between a theory of “correspondence” and one of coherence approaches the vanishing point.

Even without following the Kantian reinterpretation to its idealist extremes we cannot but regard the appeal to “the facts” which some contemporary critics of religion continue to make, as patently uncritical. No facts are perceivable without a screen of interpretation that converts data into objects or facts. To perceive a complex of data as a fact always includes seeing them through an interpretation. Now in the case of religion which deals with the ultimate structure of the real itself, interpretation plays a particularly significant and inevitably controversial part. It is quite common for two people confronted with the same state of affairs to see it *as* religious or as non-religious and to do so without in the least contradicting each other on the relevant observable data. Both may agree on the *basic* interpretation, but one may feel the need for a further interpretation which the other rejects or considers unnecessary. On a practical and on a limited theoretical level believers and unbelievers interpret the world in a manner so similar that they may intimately collaborate with one another on social or scientific projects without ever having to resolve major differences of interpretation. Basic, partial interpretations suffice for practical, scientific work, and even for a general cultural exchange. Nevertheless, the all-comprehensive, religious

interpretations shed a different light on all aspects of the real. To those who hold them they have the deepest impact upon emotional, ethical, and even motivational attitudes.

A philosophical evaluation of the "truth of religion" on the basis of a correspondence theory of truth, then, requires taking into account not only the legitimacy of separate levels of interpretation but, in addition, the possible conflict of an interpretation made on a basic level with those made on other levels. Nevertheless, there are solid reasons for continuing to speak of correspondence with respect to religious truth even in philosophical discourse. For truth in religion always presents itself as a *relatedness* to what ultimately *is*: a conversion, both moral and ontological, toward Being as it is in its very roots and origins, contrary to appearance and deception. The possible discrepancy between one and the other, as well as the process required to reach the state of total correspondence, suggest the existence of a separation between the mind and that ultimate reality which religious truth claims to bridge. Moreover, the "truth" thus attained is presented as *revealed*, that is, *given* to the mind from a principle or level of being that surpasses the mind's own reality. Here again the *process* of truth overcomes an initial duality between the mind and the "inner word" of revelation. It is worth noting that *both* these elements belong to the *ideal* realm (the only *locus* of truth since Kant) and hence that the correspondence theory thus applied to religious truth is not the naive-realistic one, but the modern critical one.

### B. Coherence

Today most truth theories, implicitly or explicitly, refer to coherence. This is particularly the case with religious truth. Many who had become disheartened about the prospect of religious truth filling the demands for empirical verification advanced by positivists and empiricists, saw in the new forms of the coherence theory an escape from their troubles. Linguistic theories such as that found in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* would legitimate any discourse in its own right, independently of others, provided it *consistently* apply the rules it set itself. Undoubtedly the coherence theory has protected the realm of religious meaning against undue intrusions of other realms. Each particular system, each "significant whole" as Harold Joachim defined it in his classical *The Nature of Truth*, obeys laws of its own that differ from those of other significant wholes.<sup>6</sup> An internal articulation organically integrates the separate elements into a unity of meaning. In the case of religion such a recognition of a relative autonomy becomes particularly important since it dispenses us from applying criteria derived from those epistemic conditions that determine purely objective knowledge.

Yet the theory as developed in modern epistemology requires several qualifications if it is to relate to what we have traditionally understood as *religious*

truth, or even to accomplish the more modest goal of justifying the meaningfulness of religious discourse. Coherence easily turns into closedness. To make genuine truth claims a system must be coherent not only within itself, but also with other systems. This requires at the very least that principles inherent in what we have called “basic” interpretations of experience do not contradict those implicit in a “higher” or more remote system of interpretation where religious truth places its stake. Recent debates on religious truth tend to neglect this point. To prove that the discourses of religion and of physics substantially differ is not sufficient to exclude *a priori* any possible conflict. That religion has staked out its own realm of discourse does not dispense it from having to enter into dialogue with other realms and to render its claims compatible with the “basic” interpretations of common sense and the physical sciences. Even the principles of falsifiability and verifiability that rule these interpretations should not be immediately dismissed as not applying to this “higher” realm. In withdrawing religious truth from universal criteria of meaning we rescue it from outside criticism only to drown it in total meaninglessness.

If truth in religion did not share some basic assumptions with other areas of truth, the term “truth” as we understand it today would cease to preserve any meaning at all. Religious truth, while being distinct, nevertheless relates to all aspects of life. Philosophical reflection tolerates neither unmediated pluralism nor epistemic relativism, as if one system of truth could remain totally unrelated to another.<sup>7</sup> Closing religious doctrines off from other realms of thought may in the end create worse problems than open conflicts with them. Precisely the failure to harmonize those doctrines with the scientific world view has rendered religion so improbable to many of our educated contemporaries as not to deserve any serious consideration. C. D. Broad while agreeing with the claim that nothing in modern science “refutes” the belief in miracles and in an afterlife, nevertheless dismissed it for being totally out of tune with the world picture of science: “. . . there is literally nothing but a few pinches of philosophical fluff to be put in the opposite scale to this vast coherent mass of ascertained facts.”<sup>8</sup> A preposterous conclusion, but one made possible by the increasing “hermetisation” of religious discourse. To avoid the problems of modern culture believers tend to compartmentalize their world view. Facing social, psychological, and scientific developments which they feel incapable of integrating with their faith they disconnect their unexamined religious beliefs from the rest of their convictions, as an island of truth isolated from the mainland of modern culture. Yet the believer should know that these convictions on a basic level draw a line of probability beyond which even the most hallowed “revelation” becomes rationally inadmissible. Rather than outright rejecting the validity of the principle of falsifiability in religious truth believers should question the one-sided manner in which the positivist usually applies it. They may rightly refuse to accept criteria that fail

to account for the specific quality of religious beliefs. But they should at least admit the fact, supported by daily apostasies, that faith is in principle falsifiable and that the limits of probability, however different from one person to another, cannot be stretched indefinitely.

Taken by itself the theory of coherence proves equally insufficient to account for the most characteristic quality of religious truth, namely, that it originates *outside* the system. A brief glance at the theory's most popular current representative should illustrate this. Reexamining the relation between the objective world and the discourse which signifies that world, structuralism concludes that a system of discourse filters each new perception through a pre-established, self-sufficient network allowing to emerge only so much as the system is able to handle. Decisive for the appearance of objects at any given time is, in the words of Michel Foucault, "the interplay of the rules."<sup>9</sup> Such a self-sufficient, self-referential structure excludes the world of objects or, for that matter, any other system. All assertions refer to the established communal meaning. This is not the place to enter into the different varieties of structuralist theories. But their general tendency to have social, mostly linguistic, structures, determine thought, restricts truth to a social, linguistic problem. A consistent structuralist system, if I understand it correctly, tolerates no intrusion from beyond, indeed, no genuine novelty. Since the context alone must account for any possible appearance, the form of new phenomena was already *apriori* implied in the structure itself. Not to admit genuine difference is, of course, fatal to any idea of religious truth which implies a transcendent revelation. Precisely because he perceived the inability of a closed structuralism to admit genuine novelty, Derrida developed a theory of language that would allow him to move beyond the intrinsic socio-linguistic limitations. His philosophy of the creative *word* breaking through the given, whereby the signifier transcends the signified, appears, paradoxically, to reopen the way to a religious transcendence.<sup>10</sup>

Having expressed these objections against the potential of the coherence theory to serve as exclusive model for a philosophical evaluation of religious truth, we must nevertheless admit its unique appropriateness for legitimating the *relative* autonomy and distinct identity of religious discourse. Our objections bear only on the sufficiency of a closed theory of coherence for the purpose of justifying the characteristic truth of such a discourse.

### C. *Disclosure*

The correspondence and coherence models remain indispensable for understanding the truth of religion. But the more they came to reflect the subjective turn of modern thought, the more they became removed from what religion itself has traditionally understood to be the essence of its truth. We saw how hard it



becomes to accommodate the idea of revelation in theories for which the sole source of equation or of coherence is the human subject. The disclosure theory appears less tainted by modern subjectivism and therefore better suited to recognize the specific nature of *religious* truth. In recent discussions that theory has moved once again to the front stage of the philosophical scene. But its origins lie hidden in the beginnings of Western thought. We find it in Plato and Plotinus, of course, but, before them, already in Parmenides's famous poem and, even earlier, in the dark recesses of Greek myth. In its modern form it reasserts the priority of *ontological* over epistemic truth. "Truth," Heidegger states, does not possess its original seat in the proposition but in a disclosure "through which an openness essentially unfolds." Allowing things to be, to disclose themselves in the open, is the very essence of freedom. Though the essence of truth lies in freedom, its focus is not on the subject, but to the openness within which Being itself appears.<sup>11</sup>

Such a theory definitely moves closer to the essence of religious truth. Indeed, its origin is clearly religious. But here, the problem presents itself rather from the opposite angle. How will a theory so obviously dependent upon the traditional idea of illumination meet the modern critical demand that truth *justify* itself. Until it does, *disclosure* may be the concept in which religion views its own truth, but philosophy will resist accepting it as the truth *of* religion. Since the days of Heidegger and Marcel, however, hermeneutic philosophy has gone a long way in attempting to justify the disclosure theory, not, to be sure, by means of the critical method (which would soon reduce disclosure to a subjective source), but by a careful analysis of modes of cognition which illuminate Being without being restricted by the epistemic criteria of the positive sciences. Thus, the aesthetic and the historical consciousness attain truth in a manner which surpasses the subordinate moments of historical accuracy and of the aesthetic "imitation of nature." Obviously, to apply here the critical norms used in establishing the foundations of the positive sciences constitutes an ineffective attempt to transfer the truth proper to one domain into a different one. Gadamer clearly defined the issue: "Our task demands that we recognize in it an experience of truth which must not only be critically justified, but which itself is a mode of philosophizing."<sup>12</sup> "Critical" justification (the term itself is misleading in this context!) here consists in a particular "mode of philosophizing," a retracing in *actu reflecto* of what we are actually doing in *actu exercito*, rather than in establishing the kind of critical foundation which philosophy provides for the sciences. The purpose of this immanent reflection is to uncover the light it sheds on Being and on human existence within Being. The real test of the disclosure consists in establishing its ontological significance. This, according to Gadamer (in the third part of *Truth and Method*), occurs in a fundamental reflection on language.

In his discussion of the image Gadamer refers to the ontological quality of the iconic symbol by the term *Seinszuwachs*—augmentation of Being. However one may judge this usage, the term eminently applies to the truth disclosed in religious symbols and, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, that means in the first place, religious language. Precisely in this ontological nature of the religious disclosure resides its characteristic truth. This, I believe, is ultimately what Hegel had in mind when he declared the Christian religion to be essentially “true”—that is, expressing the deepest dimension of Being. “[Christian doctrine is not merely something subjective but is also an absolute, objective content that is in and for itself, and has the characteristic of truth.”<sup>13</sup> Rather than submitting this disclosure to antecedent philosophical criteria, Hegel subordinates this critical awareness itself to what he considers the prior, religious disclosure. “[The standpoint of religion] is the affirmation that the truth with which consciousness is actively related *embraces all content within itself*. Hence this relation of consciousness to this truth is itself the highest level of consciousness, its absolute standpoint.”<sup>14</sup> The absoluteness of religious truth lies in the fact that its disclosure includes all reality without having to refer to any reality outside itself, and that it implies its own necessity.<sup>15</sup>

But then Hegel adds that the truth of religion is fully disclosed only when religion itself loses its representational form and becomes philosophy. The justification of religious truth—which formerly had mostly consisted in the critical *reflection upon* an already established truth—now constitutes itself as truth. Hence the disclosure of religious truth is no longer completed *within faith* itself. At this point we may wonder whether Hegel is not withdrawing with one hand what he had given with the other. Nevertheless, in reclaiming ontological ultimacy for religious disclosure Hegel supports the position of the mystics who, almost unanimously, assert that religious disclosure contains an ontological richness unparalleled by any other mode of truth.

Theologians and many philosophers were quick in appropriating the disclosure theory for their explanation of religious truth. Understandably so, since they felt they were merely returning an indigenous idea to its original habitat. Religious symbols undoubtedly disclose a unique fullness of Being. Of course, philosophers still found themselves stranded with the arduous task of *justifying* this ontological manifestation without appealing directly to a supernatural revelation. Many chose to ignore this difficult issue and were satisfied with *describing* the unique disclosure that takes place in the religious act. One need not decide on the natural or supernatural origin, they felt, in order to see in the religious act an illumination within which all previous contents and relations come to stand in a new light. Even as we suddenly perceive a picture that, without any change in the configuration, totally transforms a mere complex of lines and colors, so a religious disclosure conveys to ordinary reality a symbolic and metaphorical quality. But

does such a description philosophically legitimate the religious act? How does the ontological disclosure justify the specific beliefs and rules that provided the occasion for it? I have already indicated how the traditional requirements of verification and falsification in a general way also apply to religion. For the religious believer, the ontological disclosure occurs entirely *within* the language of revelation. In the Christian revelation God's living Word provides, with its own disclosure, the conditions for the internal *justification* of its truth. The Spirit given with, and in, the Word testifies to the veracity of the message and enables the believer to see its evidence. But a justification of this nature is neither available nor sufficient to modern philosophy. The idea of a divine revelation, far from providing the justifying evidence which disclosure requires, has itself come to stand in dire need of support. Nor should we assume, as Gadamer does (in analogy with the way revelation justifies itself to the believing mind), that language *justifies* its own disclosure. Because the disclosure of language by itself provides no adequate criteria for distinguishing truth from falsehood—an essential task in the traditional justification of truth.

One particular characteristic of the disclosure of faith appears to exclude the kind of objective, impartial justification on which philosophy insists for the legitimation of truth. This disclosure does not consist in a detached intellectual insight but requires an involved participation which philosophy cannot, and should not, reproduce. Phenomenologists experienced this when they attempted to apply to the religious disclosure Husserl's *epoche*—the bracketing of all existential elements needed to bring the phenomenon to its pure "essential" appearance. Is a method devised for grasping the object as it appears in the immanence of the experience qualified to bring out the *transcendence* of that object? How can phenomenology preserve the unique transcendence of what the religious act intends? The doxic modality of faith affects not only the *real* (empirical) experience of the act but also the *ideal* (*i.e.*, independently of the psychological conditions of the experience) status of its object. The religious act intends its object as lying essentially *beyond* the immanence of the experience. One may well wonder, then, whether the phenomenological method, restricted as it is to the ideal immanence of that object suffices for *justifying the truth* of the disclosure. Unlike other acts of consciousness faith never brings its intentional object to full immanence. Its object is experienced as lying *beyond attainment*, and its only immanence in the experience consists in the very awareness of a lasting transcendence.

Two prominent students of the phenomenology of religion, Gerardus Van der Leeuw and Max Scheler, therefrom concluded that the religious act and its intentional object cannot be understood unless one shares the faith that conditions them, that is, unless one accepts the transcendence of its object.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, if this implied the need to convert philosophy into faith, philosophy would *eo ipso* cease to justify

the religious disclosure altogether. Yet according to another, milder interpretation, an adequate philosophical evaluation of religious disclosure would require only that the critic be *in some way* directly acquainted with its experience. This acquaintance need not consist in a full participation in the faith on which one reflects: it may be no more than the memory of an actual faith, or even no specific faith at all, but only a personal acquaintance with the religious experience in general. Even so, the restriction prevents philosophical reflection on the religious disclosure from being universally available. But can a reflection not generally accessible be called philosophical? Does "a truth" that cannot justify itself on a universal basis still be considered philosophically justified at all? Before answering these questions negatively, we should realize that the aesthetic experience falls under the same restrictions. Only a person actually acquainted with such an experience qualifies for passing philosophical judgment on it. Rather than to claim that there is no truth in the disclosure of art and religion one should conclude that the truth of disclosure, aesthetic or religious, intrinsically differs from scientific or historical truth, even though they may share *some* rules. But this much remains certain: religion introduces its *own truth* without allowing itself to be measured *definitively* by any extrinsic or universal norm.

Other, perhaps equally fundamental difficulties have emerged from the attempts to apply to religion the disclosure theory of truth as formulated by Heidegger. Theologians sympathetic to his distinction between Being (*Sein*) and beings (*Seiende*) have not succeeded in defining the place of God in his structure. Is God Being itself, or a being? I doubt whether the issue can be resolved on Heidegger's terms. Whether a particular theory of disclosure fits the religious case, depends very much on the mode in which it is conceived. Heidegger's disclosure clearly differs from, and is possibly incompatible with, the Judaeo-Christian religious disclosure. The problem exceeds the linguistic aptitude of Greek concepts for articulating ideas mainly expressed in Hebrew concepts. When Rudolf Bultmann interpreted religious truth as existential disclosure, his superior knowledge of the Jewish background of Christianity succeeded in neutralizing, at least in part, the Hellenic orientation of Heidegger's theory. No, the more fundamental problem lies in the very assumption that the Gospel *can be* exhaustively translated into existential terms. Kierkegaard with his own intense interest in an existential realization of the Gospel remained acutely aware of the ultimate incongruity between transcendent meaning and immanent existence and therefore considered all genuinely religious truth to remain permanently hidden from *direct communication*. Religious truth is, indeed, interiorly disclosed, but never directly. It remains, as Kierkegaard put it, a "pathetic-dialectical" message that is, one which after having been passively received, must still be dialectically interiorized. This translation into existence, essential to the religious disclosure, consists in a never-ending process of mediation.

The self-manifestation of the transcendent is, in the end, neither self-understanding nor understanding of Being. Though contributing to both, it also surpasses them in referring to the inexpressible. Mystical writers have fully accepted this paradox. John of the Cross introduces his chapter on “naked truths” with the disconcerting preface: “You should know, beloved reader, that what they in themselves are for the soul is beyond words.”<sup>17</sup> He then proceeds by declaring the knowledge of God a subject on which “in no way anything can be said.”<sup>18</sup> Nor is this inexpressible knowledge “manifest and clear,” but “sublime” because “transcending what is naturally attainable.”<sup>19</sup> These paradoxes of mystical knowledge affect religious truth *as such*: it discloses what can never be fully disclosed. Without accounting for this unique mode of religious disclosing a philosophical theory of truth as disclosure, far from “justifying” religious truth, remains incapable of understanding it.

Religious disclosure conveys a truth that, in its essentials, refuses to submit to external criteria. To confirm this conclusion we only have to reflect on the notion of *experience* as religion uses it. Any disclosure takes place in some mode of what we vaguely refer to as experience. Now, if experience means no more than the various mental processes by which a person, actively and passively, responds to the stimuli of his or her life world, the term contains no brief for truth. Yet if, as Aristotle taught,<sup>20</sup> experience yields a unique form of insight that, though not scientific, nevertheless attains a kind of cumulative and never completed universality, then it is at least on the way to truth. Experience defines its own meaning: the person who experiences learns in the process itself *what* he or she is experiencing. This insight cannot claim the title of truth, however, until, beyond a mere empirical awareness, it attains some form of ideal necessity and thereby discloses a permanent feature of the real as such. Yet the truth of experience does not lie exclusively in its possible *result*, the knowledge, for which it establishes the precondition, but also, and primarily as Gadamer points out, in the process itself.<sup>21</sup> Precisely in following the very course of consciousness in time experience acquires its unique purchase on truth, namely, that it is and becomes increasingly *my own* experience. It hereby endows truth, on whichever level acquired, with some kind of *practical indubitability* which, though not warranting freedom from error, nevertheless secures unsubstitutional evidence.

Now religious disclosure occurs *within* a highly personal or intensely communal experience and, even when raised to the level of full and universal truth, retains this personal or communal quality in being a *truth-for-me* or a *truth-for-us*. Revelation discloses as much about the believer as it reveals of God: in it a transcendent message interacts with an immanent experience. This tight link between the message and the experience does not render religious disclosure a purely subjective affair. The *reality* which we experience, in this case the transcendent reality as communicated in revelation, defines the nature of the experience and endows it with its own authority—not the other way round.<sup>22</sup>

This, however, by no means implies that in the immanence of his experience the believer gains *direct access* to the transcendent object received by it. The experience of faith does not convey the kind of meaning fulfillment whereby other modes of thought render their object “personally” present. God never *appears* in the manner in which a sense object bodily presents itself, or in which the solution to a mathematical problem suddenly forces its incontrovertible evidence upon the mind.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless faith carries an evidence of its own which, without the manifest presence of its object, illuminates the believer’s relation to it as vital to the understanding of itself and of all reality. The experience of revelation draws the *decisive* arguments for verifying its content not from external sources, but from itself. Believers assume that what they know of the divine object they know through that object itself. Christians have traditionally expressed this in the doctrine of the indwelling Spirit who teaches them “the entire faith.” Eckhart echoed it in his word that the eye with which we see God is the eye with which He sees Himself. Clearly this kind of evidence provides no scientific support for its truth, nor does it lend greater coherence to our empirical observation of the world. Neither does it provide metaphysical insight. But it opens up a different perspective on metaphysical insight as well as on empirical investigation, and brings with it a unique yet highly personal evidence of its own truth.<sup>24</sup>

Yale University

## NOTES

1. Mahatma K. Gandhi: *Yeravda Mandir* in *Gandhi Selected Writings* (N.Y.: Harper, 1972), p. 41.
  2. He himself coined a new word based on truth-being to articulate his life project: *satyagraha* since *agraha* means firmness, determination, we could translate it as “remaining firmly faithful to the truth of being.” For Gandhi truth implies a single-minded devotion to authenticity in speaking, thinking, acting, as well as a willingness to suffer persecution for it. Only after having pursued it morally may we hope that it will reveal itself cognitively. Cf., D. M. Datta: *The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi* (Madison: U. Wisconsin Press, 1953), p. 128.
  3. “We are so steeped in an epistemological method that we feel compelled to begin with judgment and then introduce ‘truth’ as a relation to fact to distinguish knowledge from mere belief. But from Gandhi’s metaphysical perspective we can within the more general view take account of individual facts as well as individual beliefs and then introduce correspondence as one of the several meanings of truth of judgment.”
- Paul Grimly Kuntz: “Gandhi’s Truth” in *International Philosophical Quarterly* 22, 3 (Sept. 1982), p. 150.
4. The pragmatist model has been omitted from this discussion as being more appropriate for

evaluating methods of solving practical and scientific problems than for evaluating the theoretical truth of religion. The pragmatist tends to sidestep the issue of truth in favor of that of practical (moral, aesthetic, psychological) value. William James himself, that most perceptive interpreter of religion, defends "the will to believe" on the basis of its beneficial effects rather than its intrinsic truth. He treats faith as a good rather than as a truth.

"We see first that religion offers itself as a *momentous* option. We are supposed to gain, even now, by our belief, and to lose by our non-belief, a certain vital good. Secondly, religion is a *forced* option, so far as that good goes. We cannot escape the issue by remaining skeptical and waiting for more light, because although we avoid error in that way *if religion be untrue*, we lose the good, *if it be true*, just as certainly as we positively choose to disbelieve . . . ."

William James: "The Will to Believe" in *Essays on Faith and Morals* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1972), p. 57. Absent in this passage is any appreciation of the intrinsic truth of faith and of the attraction, indeed necessity, of that alleged truth with respect to the believer. Even regarding faith as the result of a decision misapprehends the believer's situation, since the believer considers his or her assent to be a *response* to a transcendent attraction.

5. *Logische Untersuchungen* (Halle, 1913) I, p. 228.

6. Oxford: The Clarendon Press (1906), 1969, p. 68. The importance of Joachim's expression lies in its distinguishing "the determining characteristic of the 'significant whole'" from a logical nexus which secures a certain cohesion of various elements without intrinsically relating them.

7. In the words of William Christian:

"If there are domains of truth then philosophers taken collectively, would have the following complex project, among others, on their hands. They would be responsible for (1) formulating principles of judgment in various domains of discourse, (2) formulating general conditions of truth and showing how truth conditions in various domains specify the general conditions, and (3) exploring patterns of relatedness among different domains."

William A. Christian: "Domains of Truth" in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 12 (1975) 1, p. 62.

8. C. D. Broad: *Philosophy and Psychical Research* (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 235.

9. Michel Foucault: *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 32.

10. How little this effect is intended, however, appears in the fact that the creative power is restricted to man—the sole maker of words. Derrida himself supports his position by a quote which could have been written by an Italian humanist: "Consciously or not, the idea that man has of his aesthetic power corresponds to the idea he has about the creation of the world and to the solution he gives to the radical origin of things." *Writing and Difference* (The University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 10.

11. "On the Essence of Truth" ts. John Sallis, in *Basic Writings* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), pp. 129-33.

12. *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr (1957) 1965, p. XXVII.

13. *Vorlesungen uber die Philosophie der Religion*. Part I *Der Begriff der Religion*, ed. Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg, 1981), p. 25. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Part I *The Concept of Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1984), p. 106.

14. *Vorlesungen*, p. 219; *Lectures* I, p. 315.

15. *Vorlesungen*, p. 223; *Lectures* I, p. 319.

16. Gerardus Van der Leeuw: *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (New York: Harper, 1960),

- p. 61. Compare my own evaluation in *A Dubious Heritage* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), pp. 76-79.
17. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, trans. Allison Peers (New York: Doubleday-Image, 1958), II, 26, 1, p. 312.
18. *Ibid.*, II, 26, 5.
19. *Ibid.*, II, 26, 8.
20. *Analytica Posteriora* B 19.
21. *Wahrheit und Methode*, pp. 333-37.
22. Edward Schillebeeckx: *Christ. The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads, 1981), p. 37.
23. We leave the complex case of the mystical vision out of consideration. Besides being highly exceptional, the precise nature of visions and locutions remains obscure even by the mystics' own accounts. They could hardly be more than expressions of a more intense but *still mysterious* experience of presence.
24. Sincere thanks to my friend and colleague, William Christian, who kindly read and judiciously criticized an earlier draft of this essay.