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The Anonymity of God

Thomas J. J. Altizer

Simply to speak of theology today is to raise a question, and that question is the question of the possibility of theology itself. Is theological speech possible in our world? Is it actually possible for us to speak of God? Can we speak of God and truly say anything at all? These questions and others are driving us to the realization that we can only speak of God by realizing a new identity of theology. One route to such an identity is the realization that what we once knew as theology has become a soliloquy, a narcissistic soliloquy in which the speaker speaks only to itself. Thereby, too, the God which is evoked is the absolutely solitary God, the God which is only insofar as it is solely and only itself. We can name that God only by way of total obedience, an obedience to the wholly other, and that other can be spoken only in the language of pure otherness. But a language of pure otherness can be spoken only in solitude, a solitude in which the speaker is only itself, for actually to speak of the God which is only itself is to speak in a solitary and isolated speech. Finally, that speech becomes isolated even from itself, and thereby ceases to speak. Yet the silence of that cessation is not a simple ending of speech, it is rather a blockage of speech, an impotence of speech wherein a primal identity becomes unmanifest because unsaid.

Even poets and philosophers have ceased speaking of God, and while their silence has been heard by many theologians as grace, it is now more clearly evident that it has brought with it a wounding which perhaps only the theologian can address. For the theologian is a theologian only by way of his or her speech about God, and the ending of that speech would quite simply be the end of theology. Many fervently hope that this end has already occurred, and they hope with good reason, for if it has ended therewith has ended the speakability of the deepest ground of a purely solitary speech. And if that which cannot be spoken is not real, or is not real for us, then our inability to speak about God might well portend the advent of a new and fuller humanity. Nevertheless, it is manifest that an anonymous speech and identity abounds among us, and perhaps never more so than today. Is there a necessary and integral relationship between our new anonymity and what we once spoke of as God? Is our anonymity related to our previous speech about God? Or is our failure or impotence of theological speech a decisive sign of a new anonymity among and within us? One might begin to address these questions by first questioning whether it is really true that we can no longer speak either of or about God. Perhaps we are speaking about God in ways which are hidden even to ourselves. Perhaps it is theology itself which is truly anonymous among us, and perhaps most anonymous to those who identify themselves as theologians. For it to be a theologian is to be bound to what was once manifest as theology this very vocation may obscure and darken whatever actual theology exists and speaks today.

Theology, as we know it, came into existence as a consequence of the movement of Christianity from its original historical ground in Jewish apocalypticism into the "catholic" world of Hellenistic culture and society. Now theology is being called to rebirth in the context of the movement of faith from Christendom to a far more "catholic" world than was ever envisioned in the Christian

tradition. Rebirth occurs only through death, and if a genuine rebirth is to occur here, we must presume that it will occur only through the death of the original form and identity of our theology. Indeed, this may already have occurred, or be occurring, and if so, it is to be expected that theology itself will now appear to be in crisis. What many have hailed as the death of theology could then be interpreted as its rebirth. In this situation, theology is seeking its foundations, and not simply its historical foundations, but its foundations in the very activity and identity of theology.

The real question of the identity of theology can only be raised in the context of the impossibility of theology. So long as theological forms are given and real there can be no real question of their identity if only because their life and activity will preclude a questioning of their existence. Theology, like anything else, cannot deeply question itself when it cannot deeply doubt itself. Such doubt is thrust upon it if it becomes thwarted or impotent, or does so if it remains alive. Then God will truly appear as a mystery, and as a theological mystery, a mystery reflecting the groundlessness, or the apparent groundlessness, of theology itself. Now the mystery of God in this sense must be distinguished from what is commonly known as the mystery of God. Commonly, we think of the mystery of God as the unknowability of God. This can and has gone hand in hand with a confident faith in God, and many theologians have affirmed that true faith in God can be noted by its realization of the pure or total unknowability of God. Unknowability, in this sense, is the primary attribute of God, and the primary attribute for faith. Hence Kierkegaard could insist that it is precisely the unknowability or mystery of God which most fundamentally distinguishes faith from paganism, and this Kierkegaardian thesis has been widely echoed in our own century. Here, mystery or unknowability is the primary identity of God for us, and that mystery is the deepest source of meaning and identity for us.

When the mystery of God appears in this form it can be a living ground of theology, and a ground reflecting the knowledge of God in faith. Such a mystery of God is wholly different from a mystery of God reflecting the disintegration or transformation of theological thinking. For then it is the very identity of God which is most deeply in question. If a classical faith could know the mystery or unknowability of God as its deepest foundation, it is that unknowability which was our source for the identity of God, and that identity is most firm or secure just in this pure unknowability. But this is just the identity which we have lost, and most deeply lost, so that one could almost say that God is literally a mystery to us. We could say it, that is, if it were possible to speak literally of mystery, and perhaps in this one instance we can. God is a mystery to us if only because God is anonymous to us, and most clearly so in contemporary theology. Here, too, we find a contrast between classical and contemporary theology. Classical theology could know God's name in His namelessness, in His transcendence. Contemporary theology knows God's namelessness as a literal namelessness, a literal anonymity, an anonymity wherein all concrete and actual identity is absent. It is just when God's name and identity is absent that theology can now speak most naturally and spontaneously of God.

If we know ourselves only by knowing God, and this has been affirmed by Christians as diverse as Augustine and Descartes, to say nothing of Tertullian and Beckett or Paul and Blake, then to know the anonymity of God is to know the

anonymity of selfhood, and the deeper our knowledge of God the deeper our own anonymity will be. Surely this is one reason, and an "existential" reason, why Buddhism has recently become so real to so many Christians. From this perspective that *anomie* so forcefully described by Durkheim and his followers could theologically be interpreted as a sign of the Christian identity of the modern world, assuming that is that it is faith which now knows the anonymity of God. Theologically, can we make that assumption? This is to ask if contemporary theology is a reflection of faith, and of a contemporary and genuine faith. Is a statement that could be a theological statement for us a statement that could be a reflection or embodiment of faith? And not of bad faith or false faith, but of genuine faith. Can we know the anonymity of God as the true identity of God for us?

First, we must inquire as to just what a theological understanding of anonymity might be. Recognizing that anonymity is not to be confused with unknowability, we might begin by employing a classical theological distinction and speak of anonymity as a positive rather than a negative attribute or symbol of God. It is so for us if only because anonymity is virtually a living presence among us, and not only among us but deeply within us, a presence beyond which neither our artists nor our thinkers can penetrate. So pervasive is this presence, indeed, that we can no longer either imagine or conceive a region beyond such anonymity. All too naturally many theologians have returned to a classical mystical language and used such images as eclipse, the cloud of unknowing, and the dark night of the soul, to speak of our world and situation. But these will no longer do if only because, in terms of their own language worlds, each of these images presupposes and posits the presence or the actuality of its own contrary or opposite. Eclipse, cloud, and night are only meaningful in terms of the potential and finally actual presence of their others or opposites, and were employed by the mystics to speak of the preludes or preparations for union or coinherence. So likewise some of us are being forced to recognize that even 'death' carries with it a positive symbolic meaning which now lies behind us. Hence the attraction today of a radical iconoclasm which denies all images of either God or the divine presence.

Yet even iconoclasm presupposes the actuality of its opposite as clearly can be seen in Buddhism, Yahwism, and Islam. Iconoclasm is a consequence of either faith or enlightenment, and is meaningless apart from such a ground. A truly new iconoclasm may well be a possibility for us, but it is not so apart from a new enlightenment or a new faith. In any case, we cannot by this means avoid our present dilemma. We might rather note that the anonymity which we know is a total presence, a presence pervading all our modes of both speech and silence. Let us speak of it then as a totality. Images of totality pervade the history of religions and mythology, and these have again and again been resurrected by the modern imagination. Romanticism might be said to have begun with the image of the marriage of heaven and hell, and many would say that it has ended with their divorce and the consequent oblivion of heaven. In any case, if hell or nothingness now dominates the contemporary imagination, it does so by way of its presence as a total image. Once this situation excited our Barthian theological mood, for such a nothingness seemed to present itself as the actual opposite of faith. Now we should realize that it cannot be so construed

if only because ours is a total nothingness which is open to no possibility of an actual opposite which is other than itself. Most recently, this challenge has been taken up by attempting to identify our nothingness as a form of the Buddhist Sunyata or pure emptiness. But this tactic can only succeed by developing a theology of pure or total anonymity.

Is such a theology possible, and possible for us? Can we even imagine what it might mean? Can we speak of God as anonymous, and so anonymous that to speak the name of God is to evoke a pure and total anonymity? At the very least this might be one way by which theology could preserve its role of speaking of ultimate depth and primal ground. It might also be thought of as a goal by which the breakdown of the theology could be understood as the necessary and inevitable way to theology's own realization and resolution. Then that breakdown could be construed as a response to the divine presence, and to the divine presence within and among us. If it is true that the divine presence is for us an anonymous presence, then a language speaking for that presence must inevitably speak against all of our given ideas and images of God. And it would speak against them precisely by way of speaking of the divine presence, a presence not only embodying but evoking anonymity. When anonymity can be understood as an attribute or symbol of God, and as the primal or primary symbol for us, then anonymity itself will realize a new meaning and identity for us. Melville's *Moby Dick* has already initiated us into such a possibility, for the whiteness of the whale can readily be construed as an overwhelmingly powerful image of the anonymity of God, and thereby we can also see that whiteness or anonymity can be realized as a polar power which is equally positive and negative at once. For too long the theologian has echoed Pascal by shuddering in the presence of the vast empty spaces opened by such an anonymity. Let us not forget that it was Newton himself who identified an all too modern space as the body of God.

One barrier to such a theological goal is the realization that we can realize it only by deepening our own anonymity. But we might more properly speak here of understanding our anonymity. We have long since come to understand that historically considered images of God are inseparable from both images and identities of selfhood. The Augustine who was most responsible for the creation of our dominant theological idea of God succeeded in this endeavor only by creating the literary genre of autobiography and thereby realizing a truly new and personal identity of selfhood. So likewise the new faith of the late Middle Ages and the Reformation was at least in part a consequence of a new and autonomous form of selfhood, a form culminating in the unique and solitary ego of the modern world, thereby giving birth to images of the absolute solitude of God. If this form of selfhood is collapsing in our midst, this collapse is surely not unrelated to the disintegration of our given ideas and images of God. And if a new and anonymous form of selfhood is succeeding our earlier forms of selfhood then it would appear to be simply inevitable that this would be accompanied by a new and anonymous image of God. Indeed, such images already lie before us, as witness such writers as Kafka and Beckett, and one might go on to speak of Proust, Rilke, Joyce, and Stevens.

Further perspective for such an endeavor could be provided by casting a glance at painting. Far Eastern landscape painting initially startles us because

we cannot readily identify the human presences which might be present within it. Soon we realize that these presences are enriched by their apparent disappearance and that our inability here to see a singularly human form is precisely what makes possible our ability to see the fullness of a human identity which is otherwise invisible to us. So likewise the disappearance or radical transformation of the human face in abstract painting is not simply the consequence of a negative vision of the end of humanity but rather a truly new and positive vision of an integral selfhood which is organically united with time and space. Both God and man seem to be wholly absent from Monet's landscapes, but upon reflection one begins to suspect that the immense power of his later painting, and most particularly so his late water lilies, derives from his success in actually seeing a total presence, a presence comprehending both the human and the divine. If God is present here then that presence is anonymous, but the same could be said of the human. And we are present here, and present by seeing the water lilies, even if that presence forecloses what we once saw ourselves to be. After all if modern Western painting began with the union of sanctity and humanity in Giotto it might well realize itself in an identity wherein everything which we have known as God and man has disappeared.

Our understanding of iconoclasm itself would be deepened if we could conceive the possibility that the vision of God in our world is a vision of a total anonymity or nothingness, a plenitude of nothingness wherein the apparent absence of God is at bottom the fullness of God's presence. Then the Mahayana Buddhist symbol of Sunyata would be a decisive clue for the identity of God for us, and the purely negative movement of iconoclasm could once again be understood as a way to the positivity or actuality of the divine identity and presence. Iconoclasm is clearly present in the higher and purer expressions of the modern imagination, and yet these negative movements of the imagination are manifestly expressions of religious or sacred or total vision. For example, Proust's vision of time recaptured is a vision of the presence of eternity in a real, concrete, and actual moment of time. But, here, time can be recaptured as eternity only when a concrete moment of time has passed through a process of oblivion, therein it is isolated from the vicissitudes of consciousness and preserved in a pure state by being forgotten, and thence can be resurrected as eternity when a contingent and accidental event occurs whereby there is a coincidence between a present and actual moment and the now forgotten and pure but once actual moment. Yet this deeply modern presence of eternity can occur only as a consequence of the loss or disappearance of all the assurances and certainties of consciousness. Hence we find the paradox that Proust's novel is at once the deepest orchestration of selfhood in modern fiction even while that very orchestration is itself the very arena and avenue whereby and wherein our deepest selfhood passes into oblivion and itself as selfhood becomes wholly anonymous.

Iconoclasm cannot be genuine iconoclasm if it does not assault both the exterior and interior forms of our given identities. And one way by which this assault occurs is through the interior realization of anonymity. This, too, is judgment, and not only judgment but also self-judgment, perhaps the most terrible form of judgment. Few theologians have taken note of the biblical ground and source of that awesome guilt and self-judgment which has so occu-

pied the modern mind and sensibility. Nowhere else is there such a clear link between the biblical and the modern apocalyptic imagination. We might also note that if it was Augustine who created the literary genre of autobiography it was Blake who created the literary genre of apocalypse. Now just as the *Confessions* made possible a voyage into the depths of selfhood which made manifest the genesis of selfhood as the epiphany of the personal presence and identity of God then so likewise do *Milton* and *Jerusalem* make manifest a cosmic and total self-judgment as the epiphany of the self-annihilation of God. Here, an ultimate self-judgment is finally the self-negation of God, wherein an apocalyptic night of judgment passes into an apocalyptic day of forgiveness and joy. If a fully personal or self-conscious identity was first spoken by Augustine, then it is in Blake that we may observe the first modern expression of the self-negation of that identity. Self-judgment lies at the very center of each of these realizations of the identity of selfhood, and each shatters and transforms a given and established identity of selfhood.

Historically, the genesis of what we know as self-consciousness occurs in Paul's meditations upon guilt, wherein the actualization of self-judgment realizes the birth of a fully personal self-consciousness. That consciousness knows itself as fallen, hence self-consciousness is a guilty consciousness, or quite simply a bad conscience. That bad conscience realizes its own interior identity in the Augustinian transformation of consciousness, and as a result of that transformation, or self-transformation, previous forms of selfhood come to an end. Then these forms of selfhood appear as anonymous, and anonymous because only then is self-conscious actually absent. Apart from the realization of self-consciousness, self-consciousness itself is neither actually present nor actually absent. But once it is present it is irresistibly present, or is so until it fully realizes itself. Not until Shakespeare will the depths and breadths of this self-consciousness be fully celebrated or explored, but as that exploration and self-exploration of consciousness evolved each earlier form and expression of consciousness receded into a night of anonymity. From this perspective, anonymity is a consequence of judgment, and of self-judgment, a self-judgment which is a self-negation. Not surprisingly it is the language of guilt which is the primary language of self-consciousness, and this is true not only of Augustine, Luther, and Kierkegaard, but also of Shakespeare, Nietzsche, and Beckett. At no other point has our modern imaginative language so fully returned to its biblical source.

If we could picture a line running from Paul to Beckett, and could understand this line as representing the movement of self-consciousness, then we might be able to imagine this line as recording the autobiography of self-consciousness, beginning with its birth and culminating in its death. Both before and after this line there is only anonymity, at least from the point of view of self-consciousness. We might also observe that after innumerable evolving cycles and gyrations the line finally returns to its initial form or configuration. For the pure nihilism which most Christians find in Beckett is found by most non-Christians who respond to Paul. Certainly both are apocalyptic visionaries, and both are obsessed by chaos, judgment, and guilt. Indeed, for both, the very form of self-consciousness is identical with self-judgment. Yet in Paul self-consciousness initially comes into existence and in Beckett it seemingly comes

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to an end. True, Beckett's contemporaries, or the great bulk of us, proceed as though nothing has happened, but so likewise did Paul's. Paul knew that the end of a world was at hand, and so, too, does Beckett, and not only Beckett but a host of modern visionaries. Indeed, Paul knew that the end was at hand, and we might say the same for Beckett and his peers. If only for this reason we understand such modern vision as apocalyptic, but if truly apocalyptic it cannot fail to record a vision of God.

Most theologians would like to believe that this is just what is absent from modern apocalyptic vision. But this vision begins with Blake, and in no other visionary, not even Dante, do we find a fuller or more comprehensive vision of God. And in that vision we discover not only the self-annihilation of God, but also the disappearance of God, as God passes first into Satan, and then into that universal energy and life which the seer names as Jerusalem. Then God is truly anonymous, for no longer can God be named as God, and therewith also perishes all possibility of either a speech or a naming which is either a witness to or an expression of self-consciousness. Beckett might be interpreted as the climax of that speechlessness. If so, we could then interpret the absence of God in Beckett's language as a witness to the identity and presence of the anonymity of God. Therewith we could also entertain the possibility that the God appearing after and beyond self-consciousness will have wholly transcended self-consciousness, and it is just for this reason that God can no longer be named as God. Then idolatry would become the naming of God as God, a naming which itself forecloses an opening to the divine presence, and does so because it names God as that which God has ceased to be.

Nevertheless, we remain far removed from a theological understanding of the anonymity of God. Just as that vast region of consciousness lying on the hither side of Abraham has become unreal to us, and unreal because of the historical realization of the naming of God, so likewise we might imagine that a world is aborning wherein our world will become ever more fully unreal, and most unreal at just those points wherein we have released and embodied self-consciousness. If so, we should be able to arrive at some sense of what a truly new anonymity might be. If it is a new anonymity, and not simply a regression or return to an archaic and pre-historic state of consciousness, then it will not be identical with anything which we can imagine or conceive as an archaic world. For that world, at least as we understand it, is not a purely anonymous world, and not an anonymous world because it named itself in what we know as myth and rite. Distant as the naming of the gods may well be from what is present to us as the activity of consciousness, it is a naming nonetheless, and the very act of naming reverses anonymity. We know this all too well because we have evolved a form of language which annuls or dissolves previous ways of naming, and this is true not only of our scientific, technological, and bureaucratic language, but of our poetic and conceptual language as well. Nevertheless, ours is not a simply or literally anonymous world. Indeed, it is not possible to imagine, not even in fantasy, a literal anonymity. And we know all too well that identity of some kind, and of multiple kinds, is firmly established in our world. Our problem is that the deepest and most powerful identity in our world is incompatible with and alien to what we once knew and realized as identity.

Thus the theologian cannot say that God is literally anonymous, for this

would be to say nothing at all. At most it would simply be a rhetorical trick to speak of the unknowability of God in contemporary language. Certainly the Christian theologian can no longer in good faith speak of the unknowability of God. For we have known God in knowing ourselves, and it is only through our naming of God that we have been able to speak and name ourselves. At this point our theological problem derives from the brute historical fact that we have named God. That act is irreversible, and irreversible because we bear its imprint within ourselves, and so much so that even our anonymous language continues despite itself to bear witness to God. So far from being a literally anonymous language, our new language, just as our new consciousness, is inescapably and undeniably a consequence of our history, and it is just for this reason that we know our new identity to be truly our own. But in knowing ourselves as a consequence of our history, we know ourselves to be a consequence of our naming of God, for what we have known and realized as our self-conscious identity is inescapably a consequence of what we have named and therefore known as God. To speak of the unknowability of God is to speak as though such a self-conscious identity had never been real. But we know it to be real, and know it because we have now lost or are losing it. To speak of the unknowability of God is to speak as though nothing had ever ultimately happened in history, or nothing which we can name. And it is also to speak as though we were not now undergoing a catastrophic loss.

As Kafka has so profoundly taught us, we have irretrievably lost that innocence which makes possible the non-naming of God. So likewise we cannot pretend that our anonymity says nothing about either ourselves or our world. We have not stumbled into the Garden of Eden, for we are not innocent, and therefore are not simply anonymous. Accordingly, God is not and cannot be anonymous in this sense. The theologian is most tempted to speak of God as though God were not present in either our world or ourselves, and thus not present in our desert and abyss. This is why it is now so tempting to speak of the unknowability of God, and thereby to dissociate God from the actuality of our identity and condition. No, our anonymity does speak of God, and it speaks of God because it speaks of a loss of that which was once present only through the presence of God. That loss has created our anonymous language, and our anonymous consciousness as well, a consciousness which is anonymous because it is no longer what it once was. In losing a consciousness which once was ours, and was ours because it was ourselves, we have not simply lost a source of our identity. We are losing our identity itself, and that identity is not simply absent or missing, it is coming to an end. And it is actually coming to an end, an actuality which we know to be real because we speak it, and speak it and live it when we are most actually ourselves. That is the mystery of our situation, that we actually speak our anonymity, and therein anonymity itself is realized not only in silence but also in language and voice.

Perhaps this is the most appropriate point at which the theologian can now speak of the mystery of God. We can only truly speak of the mystery of God in speaking of that which is most deeply a mystery to ourselves. What could be more mysterious to us than the presence of speech and voice amongst us? Nor does such speech occur simply in response to our loss of speech and identity, our speech is a primary way by which we lose that identity, and this is true in

all of our modes and modalities of speech. True that is when our speech is most active and real, for only then is it most fully anonymous, and then anonymity is everywhere, and nowhere more so than in the actual voice of speech. Then voice is another, but it is not simply another, for then all centers of identity cease to stand out and apart. Or, rather, they cease to stand in themselves, losing all integral or interior identity, they cease to be what they once were or were named as being. Centers of identity flow into one another, and the voice of speech speaks both for all and for none. Now the source of speech is everywhere, and in being everywhere it is nowhere, nowhere that is where it is singular or distinct. Voice itself then becomes unnameable, or unnameable in its singularity, unnameable as a voice which is itself and no other. Then voice is itself by being another, and is another by being itself. Only then is voice purely anonymous, and it is most fully anonymous when it is most fully present as itself.

In the presence of that voice we cannot hear the voice which once was named as the voice of God. Nor can we hear the voice of conscience, or any voice whatsoever which speaks only itself. Does this mean that the voice of God is not silent? Surely it is if we are forced to identify the voice of God with voice which we once heard. But God's voice need not be silent if it can be present in the voice of anonymity, even if while present therein it can no longer be named as the voice of God. Voices cease to be nameable when they are anonymous, or cease to be nameable as voices which are individual and unique. This need not mean that naming ceases, only that a naming vanishes which can name anything whatsoever which is itself and no other. The paradox of our situation is that naming so fully occurs among us even if that naming names nothing which is uniquely and only itself. This could well mean that God is named in and by our speech even if our speech says nothing of God. After all, we know that we name ourselves in our speech, and are named by our speech, even if that speech says nothing which is only our own. For our speech is our own, is our most intimate identity, and is so even when we say and hear nothing which we imagine to be our own. Certainly an anonymous speech names that which we are in the process of becoming, and we know all too well that it is we ourselves who both speak and are realized in that speech. If in some sense we are what we have lost or are losing, or are in continuity with that which we are ceasing to be, then it is not impossible that God is now present in an anonymous form and identity, and therein is present as God.

But what could it mean to say this or something like it? Could this be genuine speech about God, or the only genuine speech about God which we can speak? If our anonymity truly speaks a loss of that which once was present only through the presence of God, then we speak of God in speaking that loss of ourselves, and therein voice that voice of God which once we heard and spoke. Now that voice is a negative voice, and a truly and actually negative voice, a voice dissolving or reversing what was once present as voice. Thus it is not an absent voice, or an echo of an earlier and now distant voice, but a voice which is present in a new form and identity. Even if we cannot speak or name that voice as once we did, we name it or speak it in speaking the loss of our identity, for that identity is inseparable from that voice or identity, for that identity is inseparable from that voice or identity which we once named as God. That naming occurred in us, and irreversibly occurred in us, so irreversibly that it continues its occurrence

even when we do not and cannot speak that name which once was given us as the name of God. Once we spoke that name, and that naming cannot be undone, or cannot be undone so long as voice continues to speak in continuity with that which voice once said. If we recognize our deepest and most actual identity in that speech, then therein we must inescapably recognize the identity of God, for that which once was most deeply and integrally our own was so only through our naming of God.

Theologically, what is now most difficult for us is to name a total and anonymous voice as the name and identify it as a voice of judgment, and not simply of judgment but of total judgment. Perhaps self-judgment has never been so fully present as it is in our world, certainly it has never been so comprehensively present, and it is difficult if not impossible to avoid or evade the theological conclusion that such judgment can only be the judgment of God. For it is the totality of that judgment which impels the theologian to speak of God, and even if self-judgment is now most fully realized through an anonymous consciousness and voice, it is self-judgment nonetheless, an assault upon what once was present to us as self-consciousness. If that self-consciousness is now in process of being negated, then the theologian must be open to the possibility that such negation is a transcending negation, and this because the theologian as theologian cannot dissociate judgment from grace. But if it is both an actual and a transcending negation, a forwarding moving actuality of negation, then the theologian can speak of the contemporary actuality of grace, and thus of the presence of God for us. Yet this can be done only by speaking and naming the anonymity of God, for it is precisely in anonymity that judgment and self-judgment is now most actual and real. To continue to speak of God as once we named Him would be to evade and refuse that anonymity, and thus to refuse that one identity in which the fullness of voice might now be speaking of God. For a full and actual voice is now only an anonymous voice, and if the theologian cannot speak of God in response to that voice, then surely theology can no longer speak.

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