

MACQUARRIE'S DOCTRINE OF GOD

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Summary

Macquarrie criticises the Hebraic monarchical view of God in favour of a panentheist interpretation; this means that he wishes to stress the inner relationship between the being of God and nature in a more emanationist model of creation, although he seeks to retain a measure of creative 'act' also. He works from an existential analysis of 'being', following Heidegger, to a recasting of dogmatic theology in terms of Being and beings. Revelation, personhood, God and Trinity are elaborated accordingly. Critical questions include those of sufficient distinction between God and the world, God as personal, and the viability of the method from Being to Christian theology.

I. Introduction

John Macquarrie, recently retired Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford, has for years been offering a reinterpretation of the doctrine of God which seeks to mediate the truth of Christian faith in modern conceptuality. He has sought to work out his reinterpretation in a spirit of charity towards the orthodoxy of the past and towards other more conservative schools of interpretation. It was interesting that he contributed an essay to *The Truth of God Incarnate*,¹ the collection of essays assembled in response to the *The Myth of God Incarnate*.² Macquarrie is not easy to pigeonhole as a theologian, and he can be likened in this to some of the leading continental theologians such as Rahner and Pannenberg, thinkers who show genuine independence of mind and freedom from the bonds of dogmatism, ancient or modern. He is probably the most accessible theologian advocating a clear shift of the doctrine of God towards panentheism, hence his importance.

Macquarrie's great range of erudition also marks him out as akin to such continental theologians. The extraordinary learning

¹E.M.B Green, (ed.) *The Truth of God Incarnate* (London, Hodder & Stoughton 1978) in which Macquarrie enters some important caveats against the dangers of reductionist tendencies in christology.

²J. Hick, (ed.) *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London, SCM 1977).

displayed in his *Twentieth Century Religious Thought*³ for example, is sobering. Like his continental counterparts too, his thought is heavily influenced by post-Kantian German philosophy, in particular by Heidegger but also by the absolute idealist tradition. As a translator of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, and as one of the world's leading expositors of the existentialist tradition, he brings to his theology a weight of philosophical expertise unusual in British circles.

Indeed, his refusal to be bound by the straitjacket of British empirical philosophy has been particularly significant. This is because one important aspect of his work has been apologetic. In his attempt to articulate theology he seems to share the concern of Schleiermacher to commend the faith to the cultured despisers of religion, by appealing to a range of human experience going beyond the purely rational. Macquarrie argues that his theistic interpretation of reality is credible,⁴ and his concern is pastoral as well as academic. He wants to enable as many as possible to find God in the world as the deepest reality behind human experience. He presents his commendation of theism on a wide canvas, claiming to draw in all the main religious traditions of the world.

Here we are dealing with a theologian who loves to stress the continuities rather than the discords of the realities he describes. An Anglican, Macquarrie can be seen as continuing a strong tradition within this denomination, that of liberal catholicism with its attachment to idealism. A broad reasonableness pervades his theological system, as he tries to integrate Christian doctrine into the whole world of human experience.

II. Macquarrie's Criticism of Classical Theism

Macquarrie has argued consistently that traditional doctrinal formulations of God and of the relationship of God with the world have drastically underplayed divine immanence. He finds the traditional 'monarchical' view of God unacceptable since, in its concern to stress divine transcendence over against creation, it exaggerates the distance between God and the world in the direction

³J. Macquarrie, *Twentieth Century Religious Thought* (rev. ed.) (London, SCM 1981). This impressive volume provides not only penetrating summaries of modern theological thinkers, but at the same time can serve as a guide to some important roots of Macquarrie's mentors.

⁴J. Macquarrie, *In Search of Deity* (London, SCM 1984).

of deism. Reversing this long held tradition, modifying it in the direction of divine participation in the universe, lies at the very heart of Macquarrie's enterprise; certainly it is a motif running through all his writings. Macquarrie feels that the traditional view unhelpfully distorts its subject, and thereby unnecessarily hinders secular society from understanding and acknowledging the divine reality.

Challenging and acute criticisms of the classical theistic position appear throughout his writings,⁵ but we can take the treatment given to the subject in his Gifford Lectures as a recent and powerfully argued statement of his case.

Taking Aquinas as representative of classical theism, Macquarrie initially states his general thesis: 'unfortunately, no matter how carefully classical theism is formulated, it still tends to present a distinctly "monarchical" view of God, that is to say, God as one-sidedly transcendent, separate from and over or above the world'.⁶ This classical theism lacks balance in its bias towards transcendence; it needs to complement this by a counter-stress on divine immanence. Macquarrie advocates what he calls a dialectical theism, in contrast to what he takes to be the asymmetrical structure of the classical doctrine. This is because 'the intellect demands a more dialectical concept of God',⁷ and because our religious sense demands a God more closely involved with our human experience. The traditionally defined deity resides outside the orbit of creaturely life, rests external to this world of time and change in majestic holiness and sovereignty.

Macquarrie's suspicions deepen as he tracks across the main doctrines of classical theology. The doctrine of creation out of nothing by a free act of this God 'places the world outside of God. The creation is external to the creator',⁸ and this leads to creation having an exaggerated autonomy.

Macquarrie criticises the classical doctrine of creation further on the ground that it renders creation dependent for existence

⁵A stimulating collection of various articles he has written on this subject can be found in his *Thinking About God* (London, SCM 1975).

⁶*In Search of Deity*, 31. Here Macquarrie also cites with approval Ward's remark opposing the view of God which sees him as "an inference, an absentee entity, an object apart from the universe".

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*, 35.

on the will of God alone. He finds this a problem not only with the classical Thomist account but also with the Old Testament and its 'Hebrew voluntarism', a tendency reaching its most extreme pitch in Calvinism.⁹

This doctrinal stance, he thinks, devalues creation and even lies behind Western cultural exploitation and despoliation of nature,¹⁰ since nature does not receive the fullness of value it deserves. This is because creation results from an act of God which does not flow from the very being of God; there was no need for this act of creation and even Aquinas is charged with conveying a sense of arbitrariness into the creative act.¹¹ But 'It was Brunner who gave one of the most extreme statements of that utter devaluation and profanation of the world which seems to follow from regarding it as a more or less arbitrary product of will. He put the statement in the form of two equations:

God minus the world = God; The world minus God = Zero.¹²

Macquarrie dubs this formula a kind of 'acosmism', which accords the creation a status 'always hovering between existence and non-existence',¹³ hanging on the will of God. 'The members of a relation', says O'Farrell, 'can exclude each other either totally (as contradictories) or partially (as contraries), by way of privation';¹⁴ Macquarrie certainly rejects the first option, and plainly wishes something more akin to the second.

As regards the classical idea of divine providence and action in the world, Macquarrie continues his lament. Secondary causes operate generally in the world to carry out divine government in the form of natural law, with occasional direct miraculous interventions. This constitutes perhaps the most serious problem with classical

⁹These tendencies reached their most extreme pitch in Calvinism. The sovereignty of God is the key-stone of the Calvinist system and the monarchical model of God receives uncompromising expression. Everything happens by the divine will'. *Thinking About God*, 148.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 147.

¹¹*In Search of Deity*, 36.

¹²*Thinking About God*, 148.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴F. O'Farrell, 'Relation', in *Sacramentum Mundi* (London, Burns & Oates 1970) vol. 5, 241.

theism for Macquarrie.¹⁵ Our world view now operates in terms of a closed system which science has described ever more fully, and the idea of a transcendent God occasionally intervening has become quite foreign to us;¹⁶ we need therefore to reconstruct our understanding of divine action in the world.

The classical view fails to allow for God to be affected by the world, in Macquarrie's critical appraisal. God would not be diminished by the disappearance of the world, nor is he enriched by its existence or process.¹⁷ Once more this exemplifies the imbalance of the traditionalist doctrine, its lack of dialectical poise. Macquarrie asks whether such a view leads to a picture of a capricious deity and a devaluation of creation.

Imbalance also flaws the classical discussion of divine attributes, which include impassibility, eternity, perfection, and immutability. Macquarrie wishes not to deny these but to insist also on their opposites. Love must be completed by suffering, transcendence by immanence, in what he calls dialectical theism.

This label signals a shift of emphasis or of presentation by Macquarrie. In his *Principles of Christian Theology*¹⁸ he was happy to call his theology of God a variety of panentheism; but dialectical theism becomes the preferred term in his Gifford Lectures, since it makes plain the association with theism, but theism in amended, balanced, form. Given this dialectical correction, the traditional monarchical model will be 'qualified by what may be called an "organic" model of the God-world relation'.¹⁹ A single entity, Being with beings, embodying differentiation of the unity, forms the model for Macquarrie's doctrine.

III. Being and God

Macquarrie reaches towards his alternative theological system by way of an existential analysis of being. He aims to conduct this philosophical analysis so as to construct, or rather uncover, the structure of being and in particular of human being. This exercise

¹⁵*In Search of Deity*, 38.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁸J. Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (rev. ed.) (London, SCM 1977) 120.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 121.

provides the conceptuality which will enable Macquarrie to purify Christian theism for the modern mind.

The method needs to be carefully defined. This is no rationalistic attempt to prove the existence of God; nor is it seeking to fit a concept of God onto a ground plan of human aspiration. Rather Macquarrie wishes to describe carefully the shape of human experience in all its aspects, then ask whether the religious traditions of the world, and in particular Christianity, can offer wisdom to mesh with the conceptual description and indeed be refined in this meshing.

We find a kind of method of correlation, akin to that of Tillich, at work in Macquarrie's system. 'Theism', he says, 'is defensible philosophically, but, more importantly, when an abstract theism is filled out in terms of the Christian revelation of God, we can understand it as an utterly adult and fulfilling faith for contemporary man'.²⁰ While not claiming, or aiming, to prove the existence or nature of God, Macquarrie thinks that the resources of modern philosophy can point the way and enable intelligent interpretation.

(a) Phenomenology of human being

In his *Principles*²¹ Macquarrie embarks on the 'inquiry into the fundamental ways in which we come to know anything, and try to elucidate the basic structures and patterns of experience that might seem to offer valid credentials for a religious conviction'. He seeks to go behind merely rational arguments for the existence of God and explore the structure of the faith which precedes the arguments and motivates them. This involves description rather than deduction, a careful phenomenological account of human experience. Such an account will provide concepts with which religious ideas, such as faith and revelation, can be explained.

Heidegger's philosophy provides the basis for the description of human existence. Humanity exists, stands out, from other beings in the world and it is aware of this. Human being therefore is aptly called existence and is characterised by polarities, notably freedom and limit, responsibility and impotence, and, peculiarly, anxiety in the face of inevitable death and hope. Imbalance of such poles leads to disorder, and humanity tends to fall

²⁰J. Macquarrie, *God and Secularity*, (London, Lutterworth Press 1968) 114.

²¹*Op. cit.*

back into non-existential being, into being as a mere object in the world, Heidegger's *das Man*.

Closely following Heidegger, Macquarrie stresses that the human self is wholly temporal, as is all being. Spiritual substances, such as souls, and trans-temporal Platonic entities have no place in this description of being. But the human experience of being, bracingly faced with the prospect of death, involves a choice of whether to make sense of life or to consider it absurd, to become truly responsible or to lapse into a kind of being which is no better than that of the herd.

Humanity can quest for meaning or relapse into futility, but the former brings the sense of continuity between our present in all its givenness, and our future, with all the openness of possibility lying ahead. Human being can be felt to be at one with its context as a wider being. This description of experience can appeal for validation only to the experience of others: the question is whether generally humans sense a supportive context of being in which they live and move and have their being. Is there a context of meaning and coherence for human life? This wider being seems to come to us as we advance into the future, as we quest ahead. To the religious person this is called grace.

(b) Revelation

Moving from the consideration of human experience to its wider context of being is the phenomenological equivalent of moving from faith to grace, moving from a consideration of being from the human aspect to the aspect of the beyond which comes to us, in its mystery. This movement corresponds to the turn Heidegger executed towards the mystery of Being from his analysis of our experience of Being in the world. The mood of anxiety generated by the onset of the question of being and nothingness 'may be said to constitute our capacity for receiving revelation'²² or the approach of wider being. Human quest for meaning finds itself meshed with that very meaning, and finds it 'holy' being. The universe suddenly appears sacramental of the depth of being to the recipient of revelation, in the accompanying mood of mystery and awe. Moses at the burning bush provides one Biblical instance, but all religions share this phenomenon.

²²*Ibid.*, 87.

Each religion has its foundational, classic or primordial revelation as its starting point, and individuals subsequently experience the depth of being according to the paradigm set up by that primordial revelation, in a kind of repetition or anamnesis. Revelation in its primary and secondary modes lights up the world, gives insight into the depth of meaning behind events.

Revealed being is holy in that it evokes a total commitment from the recipient and hence the worshipper of being which is found to be 'deep down things'. Wider being has both an otherness which inspires awe, and yet a commonality with human being, since it seeks and is known by humanity. This manner of appropriation is of key importance since Macquarrie insists that revelation is known only by participatory, empathetic thinking, something akin to Schleiermacher's feeling of absolute dependence. Macquarrie hastens to deny that this entails pure subjectivism; he acknowledges the significance of mood in the appropriation of revelation, but likens the process to intuition of realities other than ourselves, or to attunement to an environment.

'We are concerned here with something that is neither subjective nor objective' in all affective modes of knowing,²³ and Macquarrie stresses the continuity between human experience as described by contemporary existentialism and religiously described experience of revelation. The sense of anxiety highlighted by Heidegger resembles that of awe; as anxiety stimulates awareness of fear and the wonder of being, awe registers the presence of grace and *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.

It is important to note Macquarrie's firm rejection of the interpretation of revelation as a personal type of encounter. The kind of knowing that takes place in revelation is not akin to the 'I Thou' model espoused by neo-orthodox dogmatic theology. He gives three reasons for this. Firstly, personal encounter as known to humanity involves some physical mediation clearly lacking in the case of knowledge of God. Secondly, the normal reciprocity of human encounter is missing. Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, a meeting of two persons involves two entities or beings who are

²³*Ibid*, 98.

separate from each other, whereas for Macquarrie revelation entails knowledge of being itself, not of a distinct being.²⁴

(c) Holy Being

Taking his cue from Heidegger's distinction between the ontic and the ontological, Macquarrie distinguishes Being from beings. Being lies behind all beings and cannot fall into any category, since Being gives rise to all beings and all categories. Being cannot be a being, or even a Being. Beings constitute items in the universe, items which are 'at hand', to use the Heideggerian terminology; but Being transcends itemisation or categorisation. Being transcends beings, Being is the very condition of the world. Macquarrie rejects the identification of Being with the absolute, since he feels that although it may be totally inclusive of all beings, nevertheless its being lies behind it and is more ultimate.²⁵

Being lets all beings be, and must be regarded as constantly creative, letting-be is a preferable term to the more static connotation of Being. Macquarrie is not intending to reinvent classical metaphysics here, which would mean treating Being/Letting-be as an entity which can be considered as separate from the world of beings. The subject-object division, essential to metaphysics, breaks down in the intuitive apprehension of Being which alone can yield true ontology. This apprehension *of* Being, (the ambiguous 'of' serves a useful purpose here), it cannot be metaphysical nor metatemporal, but has to be within the historical continuum or process.

'Being', therefore, 'is nothing apart from its appearances in and through and with particular beings'²⁶ while constantly transcending them and letting them be. Being is the incomparable that lets be and is present and manifest, this is Macquarrie's final definition.²⁷ He likens Being to the Aristotelian form to its substance, or to the meaning of a process.²⁸ But since Being evokes commitment, 'ultimate concern' and the feeling of absolute dependence perhaps, it is no neutral cosmological principle. Because of the existential shock and wonder attending awareness of Being, it

²⁴*Principles*, 93.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 110.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 114.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 115.

²⁸*Thinking about God*, 117.

attracts the description 'holy being' and can be equated with what religious people call God for that reason.

Being apprehends human beings as they experience the depth of meaning of temporal life in sharply focused moments, moments of being 'grazed'²⁹ by the question of Being. Macquarrie rebuts the criticism that talk of Being is merely talk of an abstraction from the world of actual beings, on the grounds that Being is simply being acknowledged, not posited by human reason in Hegelian fashion. The awareness of Being does not derive from rational extrapolation but just is a reality in which we find ourselves and find our ultimate concern. Being is apprehended as we thankfully receive its letting-be in a contemplative, mystical mode of awareness. Human beings discern the mystery of oneness with ultimate Being, with the very conditioning reality of all beings.

Macquarrie therefore firmly rejects the description of God as *a* Being: this would return him to metaphysics, to treating Being as a factor in the world rather than as its transcendental originative core. To regard Being as a Being entails putting a gap between the finite subjective being who thinks, and Being who is the object of this thought. Being cannot be in the order of objects, and beings are sustained by Being. The only relationship possible between Being and beings, therefore, is that akin to the relationship of life to the members of the body. Life transcends the members, but neither is conceivable without the other.

Macquarrie's refusal to characterise Being as personal, except in a remotely analogous way, also becomes more comprehensible in the light of this concept of Being. Can the members of the body be said to have a personal relationship with the life of the body which sustains the body and which is manifested by the members? Macquarrie seems to be consistent in his method and its harvest of holy Being or Letting-be, and the universe of beings who are struck occasionally by the utter supremacy and worth of Being.

Macquarrie is well aware of the criticism made by logicians against the use of 'being' by theologians such as Tillich and the philosophy of Heidegger, but he feels that such criticism, i.e. that the usage rests on a failure to understand that the verb to be has a purely

²⁹M. Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* Ralph Manheim (trans.) (New Haven and London, Yale University Press [1953] 1987) 1.

logical function and refers to nothing in itself, is shallow and misses the point.³⁰ When Tillich and Heidegger talk about being and nothing or non-being, these terms are not meant to be understood in their abstract logical signification. The terms are to be understood in relation to the significance which they bear in human existence; in the experiences of anxiety and finitude which bring the shock of possible non-being; and in the wonder for being which this shock awakens, the wonder that there is something and not nothing. This usage he says 'indicates the place of God on the ontological map—namely as a correlate of man's existential awareness of finitude, as being itself beyond any possible entity'.³¹ This gives us the structure of reality, a structure which receives its colour from the tones of the different religious and philosophical paths into being.

In keeping with his method of dialectic, the personal model of God must be balanced by the more mystical tradition which regards God as the absolute and so beyond the personal category. This seems to represent a change of expression rather than one of doctrine, since his motif of the *coincidentia oppositorum* running through the lectures seeks to revise the classical tradition in the direction of real relations between God and world. God is not external to the world but its depth; there is no transcendent moral governor of the universe, rather Macquarrie encourages to 'think of God as the immanent rationality which we know in our own being';³² holy Being is not transcendent in an external sense but rather as mystery behind everything.

Holy Being lets finite beings be in a way which accords at least as well with a model of emanation as with the traditional model of making. Macquarrie stresses that the existence of beings flows from the very nature of Being and its generous character of letting be, rather than from a decision of Being. He states, rather than explains, the combining of the model of making with that of emanating; but the latter really predominates.

³⁰*Twentieth Century Religious Thought*, 275, 354-5, 367-8 e.g.

³¹*Twentieth Century Religious Thought*, 370.

³²*In Search of Deity*, 213. This statement of immanentism fails to gain the dialectical counter-weight of an external moral governor, and fundamentally such an idea is foreign to Macquarrie's system.

The analogy of artistic creation is cited as the best available analogy for the relationship of beings to Being,³³ although this hardly accords with the whole tenor of emanationism and the rejection of the concepts of divine externality, of the divine as a Being, and of divine personhood. Any model of making results in an external relationship between God and the world, and even tends towards acosmism, since it renders the world dispensable. Making, even artistic creating, involves a clear distinction between maker and creation. However much the nature and personality of the artist flows into the art, there are two entities finally. Further, the work of art requires an act of will, however much this is conditioned by the nature and character of the artist. This model of creation usefully related nature and will, or being and will, but the latter seems to qualify the former and leave us with a more Hebraic view than an emanationist one.

Since the relationship of Being to beings is organic, creation must affect God in a real way, in his very Being and not simply externally. God remains sovereign in and through the world process, as does 'natural law which does not bind God but flows from within him'.³⁴

(d) The Language of Being

Macquarrie sets out his philosophical environment for theology in thoroughly immanentist fashion, and his understanding of the relation of language to Being emerges accordingly. Just as the realm of beings forms a continuum, from mere things to human existents, and from there beings become aware of Being sustaining all being, so it is with language: 'let me suggest that as one surveys the rising grades of being, the character of Being is itself more clearly manifested. For whereas the lowest or simplest beings are, the higher ones not only *are*, but *let-be*, and this becomes peculiarly true at the level of man's personal being, with its limited freedom and creativity. So again, the symbols that are drawn from the level of personal being have the highest adequacy, since they point to the letting-be of Being.'³⁵ He goes on to add that love has become the supreme symbol of divine Being for all religions.

³³*In Search of Deity*, 177-8.

³⁴*Thinking about God*, 151.

³⁵*Principles*, 144.

Given the strong ontological participation of beings, supremely human existences, with Being, this hierarchy of symbolic language is at the same time a revelation of Being as well as a finite mediation. Macquarrie argues that his ontological doctrine of the inseparability of Being and beings provides an *analogia entis* which preserves the distinctness of God while grounding a common context of meaning.³⁶

Symbols or analogues speak not of Being as it is in itself but of Being in relation to beings, or, better, in relation to human existents since the very power of symbols and analogues lies in their existential disclosive impact. Light can be cast on the relation of Being to beings, and this fundamentally is an absolute dependence, arising from Being as 'prior enabling condition'.³⁷

Ontologically Being and beings enjoy a closer general relationship than in classical theism; but epistemologically it seems that we can know virtually nothing of Being *in se*; whatever we know stems from the feeling of absolute dependence upon (the) prior enabling condition. Strictly speaking, to say that God exists strays beyond the bounds of accurate language, since Being is beyond existence and properties. But here Macquarrie operates his dialectic to enable some human terms to become useful in talking of God.

Although Being exceeds existence, the term can be applied dialectically in that non-being is even less appropriate as a term, so that on balance existence, the more positive term, finds qualified favour. Macquarrie does not discuss the aptness of calling God non-Being, and this might be just as logical a term for him to choose. The existence of beings becomes non-being at their dissolution, and thereafter we know not of them nor of their non-being. But there is a connection between non-being and beings, before and after their disappearance they were not; hence the mystery of Being might be

³⁶Summarising his position, Macquarrie writes: 'Being has been called an incomparable and a *transcendens*, and there could be no beings without the Being that lets them be; but Being is present and manifest in the beings, and apart from the beings, Being would become indistinguishable from nothing. Hence Being and the beings, though neither can be assimilated to the other, cannot be separated from each other. This ontological doctrine corresponds to the religious experience of the holy as at once *tremendum* and *fascinosum*, as characterised by otherness and closeness'. *Ibid.*, 138.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 141.

termed non-Being, in that things which have been let be, subsequently are let not to be. Macquarrie pursues his *via eminentiae*, rather than this equally logical *via negativa*, into positive rather than negative attributes for letting-be. 'We have no understanding what the word "good" might literally mean when applied to God, for it must transcend any notions of goodness that we may have',³⁸ but nevertheless we are permitted to use the term since it is more appropriate than 'not good', since God is the prior condition of all goodness.

The *via negativa* may again, however, be logically possible and spiritually credible. Macquarrie assumes that goodness applied to God and to humanity has no literal commonality of meaning, and one here is reminded of the dialectics of the early Barth in terms of the *ordo cognoscendi*. In speaking of God we have no common ground, no shared field of meaning, to work from. 'Good' may be used, but it is not a term which has any necessary application to God, who defines his own meaning for it: a kind of nominalist position. In fact 'not good' would, on the reasoning presented, do as well; God is beyond goodness. God is beyond the terms good and evil, 'beyond good and evil' being a phrase with fine existentialist pedigree! Being, which is organically immanent, transcends our knowing and perceiving, our categories. Being as present and manifest ought to balance with absent and hidden, if we take Macquarrie's logic consistently.

Any knowledge of God can only be analogical, and only that in a dialectical fashion. We know that God is unknowable, yet we have flashes of insight through the revelational symbolism handed down to us. What we do know is that Being is present and manifest in beings, as he who speaks is to language being spoken.³⁹ This proposition, which *prima facie* indicates an ontological relation unlike that of the early Barth, appears to be literal rather than analogical. If the verb 'is' can apply to the unknowable Being who lets be, who is the prior condition, conditioning beyond good and evil, then Being actually is this Being which is present and manifest in the world. That Being is present and manifest in beings is a more definite statement than Being is. What Being is cannot be asked. Where Being is may

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹*Ibid.*, 142.

be a better question to ask, Being is present and manifest in this temporal world, and is not existent without it. But is this, too, an analogical statement? Do we not have to take 'present and manifest' as analogical and symbolic terms? Macquarrie regards the personal categories as inappropriate to describing revelation on grounds, among others, that persons are physically present but that the divine is not, hence the category can be used only in a remote analogical way. But the divine Being is said to be really, not simply analogically, present and manifest in beings, and the terms 'present and manifest' are not merely figurative.

This leads us back to the original characterisation or identification of Being through the description of Being, the human experience of the shock of being in the face of non being. Being is selected as a term as the reverse of the term non being, a fear bringing the human existent to a choice of commitment to ultimate being or non being. 'To be or not to be'? poses a literal, rather than analogical or metaphorical question, and 'being' as a substitute word for 'to be' likewise seems to be literal rather than analogical. The move from beings to Being, however, takes us into another dimension of reality, a dimension on which finite beings have no cognitive hold. The term Being is suggested, with a freighting of lets-be, prior enabling condition of being. Being is so different in being to beings that it cannot truly be said to exist. It only exists after a fashion, not literally.

Perhaps therefore it should be taken as an analogical term: although what it can be analogous *to* presents a major problem. Being is beyond analogy. Returning to the existential starting point of the shock of being in the face of non-being, is there any difference between Being and non-being, in the final result of this theologising? As regards what we know, they could well be the same. Being was without form and void, a kind of non-being? Being, from the existential origins, is a commitment of the existent, hence it is holy Being: the human existent has chosen Being. Being in the context of the ontological comparison with beings, a comparison which cannot truly occur because of the dimensional difference, is not merely human commitment but the ineffable letting be of beings. Being in itself cannot be described since it is the prior enabling condition; it is

wholly beyond our reach, it is the very condition of our reach.

The question remains whether we can, using Macquarrie's method, characterise Being at all in view of the competing and conflicting experiences of life in human consciousness across the great variety of ideologies, religions agnosticisms and protest atheisms. Being receives the designation 'holy' from religious claims. This can be contradicted by other claims. More seriously, if we bring in the dialectical coincidence of opposites here, Being has to be simultaneously unholy. The blunt issue arising here is that of the coherence of this theological method.

(e) Transcendence

The link between the existential ground of the description of Being and the ontological description of Being as the letting be of beings seems to be human self-transcendence. We reach beyond ourselves and so can be said to transcend ourselves. As finite beings we have a kind of transcendental impetus or drive beyond ourselves; this is taken by Macquarrie as towards Being, and as evoked by Being the source of all beings. But the impetus into the beyond, or upwards, is analogical: 'upwards' (the metaphor of height) signifies our commitment to Being which justifies the term holy as applicable to Being. It is difficult to move from this phenomenon of self-transcendence to speak of that which inspires that to which the human consciousness aspires.

Bounded, defined beings aspire to transcend themselves, and the beyond to which they feel and by which they feel transcended gains the definition 'Being' or *transcendens*. This language, however, is that of height again, and therefore we are returned to the original explanation of it as commitment, an explanation in terms of human existential shock. The theory of description does not seem able to get itself 'off the ground', outside itself in order to provide speech of Being.

This failure to 'get off the ground' does not mean failure to prove or establish Being beyond ourselves, but to describe that Being in any way beyond giving it the title or definition 'Being', a word which functions as a cypher for something impossible to describe. We describe a certain affective transcendental state in which the subject/object division falls away to give insight into the true pattern

of the universe as it is absolutely dependent upon the wholly ineffable. What we do know with great certainty is that this ineffable is immanent in our world, and is organically related to it, and has no existence apart from or outside of it.

The notion of human existence, self transcendence, provides the key for Macquarrie's interpretation of divine omniscience, for Being transcends and occupies every perspective or horizon of meaning at once, a stretching of our more limited condition.⁴⁰ Likewise the immutability of Being mirrors the consistent overarching human 'commitment that pulls together the manifold concerns of life'.⁴¹ Perhaps most significantly of all, the experience of human self-transcendence yields the clue for the temporality of Being: unlike the cow in the field which moves from clump to clump of grass, we are very aware that we move from past to future via this present. Being itself macrocosmically mirrors this experience, and this reinforces the analogy of selfhood as our most adequate symbol of Being.⁴²

Macquarrie cites Berdyaev saying that Kant abolished old style metaphysics which was rationalistic, deriving from the objective world, and that he reveals the possibility of a metaphysics based on the subject, a metaphysics of freedom. This statement gains approval, given the rewording of 'metaphysics of the subject' to 'existential ontology'.⁴³

Plainly Macquarrie opposes any idea of a dualism between the phenomenal and the noumenal since Being, the noumenal, lets be the phenomenal, beings. But the absolute lack of knowledge about Being in itself, save for our dialectically reasoned proposals, has affinities with the Kantian position. Macquarrie seeks to go beyond the noumenal as a limiting *concept*, but Being functions as such, although the concept, the enabling prior condition, exists as the background of all being and consciousness. This understanding of Being forms the conceptuality onto which religious language from all religions must be painted, and of which it is symbolic. We must now turn to examine the trinitarianism structured according to the

⁴⁰*Principles*, 206.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 207.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 208.

⁴³*God and Secularity*, 33.

determinative conceptuality of Being, since 'the basic structure of religious faith has been outlined'.⁴⁴

Here we may note the great redefinition of the term transcendence in much modern theology. Rahner and Tillich provide other clear examples. Now transcendence is defined in terms of openness to beyond, in terms of aspiration and inspiration, the distinguishing feature of human existence. Reversing the revolution wrought by Barth at the start of the century, theology is now perhaps under suspicion of a new form of the secret identification of God with human experience: this question at least needs to be marked. Macquarrie operates something of an elastic method in this redefinition; maybe a yo-yo could be a picture of his movement from existential consciousness out towards the beyond, and back to our condition and our religious traditions. Being releases beings, but can it also be said that we create Being after our own fears and anxieties, our own rather middle class and aesthetic anxieties perhaps?

IV. Trinitarian Being

(a) The Structure of Being

The Christian theology of Being moves from the stark monotheism which Macquarrie finds in the Old Testament to the differentiated understanding of God he perceives in the New Testament. The incarnation necessitates a revision of our understanding of God in a radically more immanentist direction, and this runs parallel to the conceptual framework of Being already developed and to the dialectical tradition which does not seek to dismiss divine transcendence but 'simply asks that the properties ascribed to him should be understood dialectically, that is to say, each property is qualified by its opposite, and God himself, in accordance with the logic of the infinite, is understood as *coincidentia oppositorum*'.⁴⁵ The move from the stark monotheism of the Old Testament to the Christian doctrine is a development to a dialectical conception of God.

The trinitarian doctrine resulting from its application to the framework of Being has a distinctly 'Western' character. Rejecting

⁴⁴*Principles*, 187.

⁴⁵*In Search of Deity*, 228.

the social analogy of three persons, and preferring Barth's attribution of personality to the one single essence of patristic discourse,⁴⁶ Macquarrie speaks of the depth of mysterious 'primordial' Being pouring itself forth as 'expressive' Being, to return in 'unitive' Being, which gathers all alienated beings back to their source. Persons are interpreted as dynamic movements or modes (although not temporary modes) of Being, what used to be called 'substance', a point which Macquarrie uses to reinforce his rejection of the notion of God as a Being.⁴⁷ The persons or modes exist only in and as common Being, participate mutually in Being, and their movement can only work in harmony. The terms 'movements' and 'modes', as well as 'persons' must also be regarded as symbolic, but again 'we are pointed to the analysis of Being for an interpretation'.⁴⁸

Macquarrie dislikes the tritheistic implications of the social analogy of the persons, and settles for an unfashionably Western position surprisingly like that of Barth. The persons are modes of divine Being, which itself is ineffable. Primordial Being expresses, or reveals, itself as the second person, in the tradition of the Logos theology of the Platonistic Fathers. Primordial Being is mysterious, expressive Being mediates Being outwards into the realm of creation. The third person unites Being with beings so as to re-integrate them existentially, just as for Barth the Holy Spirit imparts revelation and elicits reconciling response of faith.⁴⁹ Interestingly Macquarrie draws upon Barth for support not only for his interpretation of persons as modes or movements, but also for the structural concept of self-communication as the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity; this 'teaching is derived from an analysis of the pure concept of revelation, not from the content of the Christian revelation'.⁵⁰ Macquarrie takes this as evidence to support his thesis that the doctrine of the triune God can emerge from natural theology in the form of a dialectical analysis of Being.

⁴⁶*Principles*, 194 but *cf. In Search of Deity*, 245 when he distances himself from Barth's wish to call God person.

⁴⁷*Principles*, 192.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 193.

⁴⁹I am indebted to my colleague, Dr Paul Fiddes, for the idea that Macquarrie may have embodied some of Barth's theology in his system.

⁵⁰*In Search of Deity*, 232.

Whereas Barth, however, develops his pure concept of revelation from the concrete fact of divine self disclosure in Christ rather than from a general notion or experience, Macquarrie develops his structure of Being from the phenomenon of self-transcendence in time, gained from description of human experience in general. Humanity stands at the topmost level of being and is a microcosm of the structure of Being.⁵¹ Triune Being sums up and originates the ontology of all beings, a dialectical union and differentiation.

(b) Expressive Being

Being lets-be all life and beings as primordial Being pours itself forth through expressive Being out of pure generosity or love.⁵² This provides the ontological answer to Heidegger's question as to the wonder of being in a way which begins to resemble the notion of the *logos spermatikos*. Being does not lie outside time, 'rather the expansion and expression of Being creates time and history':⁵³ this supplementation of Heidegger has as much in common with Hegel's *Geist* as with Neoplatonic Logos. Denying that Being is compelled so to 'act', Macquarrie affirms that 'God in the fullness of his being goes out from himself to posit another who is nevertheless derived from himself and so of infinite value and concern to him'.⁵⁴

Creation exists, stands out from nothing, by virtue of this self-positing of Being through expressive Being, in which we all 'live and move and have our being'. Creation emerges through the Logos as the Logos itself flows from primordial Being, in the same kind of emanationist fashion. Macquarrie seems to realise that he is very close to identifying the second person of the Trinity with creation when he insists that 'The Logos is expressive Being, that is to say, it is not to be identified with the beings through which it gains expression. . .we assign the Logos to the side of Being, rather than to the beings'.⁵⁵ The Logos was eternally generated from primordial Being, and serves as the mediating principle of the diversity of beings.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 218, e.g.

⁵²'The Energy of primordial Being is poured out through expressive Being and gives rise to the world of particular beings, having an intelligible structure and disposed in space and time'. *Principles*, 199.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 208.

⁵⁴*In Search of Deity*, 179.

⁵⁵*Principles*, 199.

As Origen posited a Logos, from which derived the finite world, so expressive Being gives rise to beings and expresses Being through them.

Here we reach a key point in Macquarrie's doctrine of God and the world. What is the nature of the distinction between them? In particular, how is the world of beings differentiated from expressive Being? Both emerge from primordial Being, expressive Being falling on the divine side, and yet expressing Being in beings. The second person of the Trinity participates in Being, which flows from the first person, but the world of beings also participates in Being.

We must remember that creation, for Macquarrie, means not an entity with a temporal beginning so much as an existential sense of creaturely dependence, a sense that deep down things Being sustains beings. Creation therefore means the continual giving forth of being to beings by Being, Being which itself is temporal and not above the continuum in which beings are. Macquarrie himself has queried whether it is right to speak of two realities when distinguishing God and the world,⁵⁶ and the distinction needs to be sought with some care and indeed determination.

The difficulty in defining Macquarrie's exact position arises not simply from the inherent difficulty of God-talk, but is magnified by his use of dialectics. He rejects the monarchical model of God in favour of an organic one, God as 'an active *Gestalt*, informing the body and expressing itself in and through the body';⁵⁷ but then qualifies this by wishing to hold onto some of the transcendent character of the old monarchical model, 'The fullness of God seems to demand both poles—the pole of transcendence and the pole of immanent participation'.⁵⁸

At the heart of the system lies this dialectic of reaching beyond, the structure of anticipation, revealed in the consciousness of humanity as defining transcendence. Transcendence means not ontological difference, the infinite qualitative distinction of Kierkegaard for example, but the self-transcendence of enlightened reflective experience. We reach out and find that we gain a perspective on ourselves. Just as mankind is doing this and finds his

⁵⁶*Thinking About God*, ch. 10.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 117.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 114.

existence organically rooted in the conditioning support of Being, so with God whose being reaches out in pure generosity towards the diverse reality of beings. We can ascend up the dialectical ladder towards the dialectical trinity of being-logos-reunion, and we can descend the ladder of beings from Being, via the route of ever-increasing differentiation into lower orders of being, each less conscious, less and less *logikos*. The Logos, expressive Being, accords decreasing reflective capacity to levels of being as it pours forth Being in its sustaining supporting and conditioning existence.

The hard question is the simple one of the line between Being and beings: is there such a line, or does the dialectical process prevent any real division between God and the world? All beings share in Being, but at different levels of consciousness. The key point of the divine lies at expressive Being. As Being pours forth through expressive Being, does this *ipso facto* mean the existence of diverse beings, the realm of creation? Is creation the epiphenomenon of the mediating logos of primal being, in classical neoplatonic manner?⁵⁹ Macquarrie teaches that creation is free, not a necessary imposition on God, but at the same time this is, as D.M. Baillie might have said, a pelagian question, since it is inconceivable that Being would not pour forth in generosity to share Being with beings. Pouring forth comes from the essence of Being rather than an act of Being which would mean an externality between God and the world rejected by Macquarrie. Despite a qualified acceptance of the model as a created work of art in his Gifford Lectures, in an earlier piece he definitely comes down in favour of the organic body model against the artefact model.⁶⁰

The Logos emerges continually from the primordial Being, but continually bringing forth beings and always in or with time. Being exists temporally, as do beings. Spatially beings form the means of expression or appearance of Being, as form to matter in Aristotelian hylomorphism, or as the life to the body. The Logos

⁵⁹Compare the panoramic view of reality supplied by Plotinus: 'a vision of the sensible world as an image of the divine mind, which is itself a reflection of the one; of the whole universe as a vast organism, an immense living being, held together by the power and logos of God, so that all existence, men and things, is drawn by a sort of centripetal attraction towards God'. Described by F.C. Happold in *Mysticism* (Harmondsworth, Penguin 1956) 184.

⁶⁰*Thinking about God*, 118.

continually expresses Being in beings, continually participates in beings, and *vice versa*. The Logos is revealed in Jesus, where the two movements, from Being to beings and from beings to Being, cohere in perfect poise and mutual self-giving. The line between the Logos and human beings seems to be that of level and ultimacy; both share in Being but the Logos endures through time, while we fade and die, just as the life of our body lives on while our physical cells die off and are replaced.

(c) Unitive Being and alienation

Both the Logos and the world emerge through the same kind of dialectical process, that of differentiation from prior Being, the former at one level higher than the other, or one might say, the former at a more universal or abstract level of self-transcendence than the other. The fact of human capacity for thought as well as, or as part of, its being, must also relate to the organic immanence of Being. Beings at the necessary level think and experience, and therefore supporting this aspect of being also is the conditioning Being. What prevents a monistic consciousness immediately opening up before our very eyes seems to be the differentiation principle once again: being as thought has to be grounded in Being, Logos, but has its being differently - yet in organic relation. The totality of the history of human thought must also be seen in integrated organic relation with Being, or perhaps *Geist*. Can it be that the realm of conscious beings emerged, or emerges, through and in the Logos, and is collectively returning thence, so that Being will have shared in the whole historical consciousness of beings? It is not clear how this conclusion is to be avoided, and here simply to appeal to the dialectical principle will not suffice.

Why does the realm of human beings need the immanence of Being in a different, but related, form, Unitive Being? Expressive Being emerges from Primal Being in with and under the diversification of beings. But why are these beings in need of reunification with Being, since they share in Being and since Being participates in them? The doctrine of creation means that conscious beings, humans, are aware of their dependence on Being. This doctrine is not speaking of the start of time or of the realm of beings as a different order of being in covenant with Being. Theology must leave issues of cosmic beginning to science and concentrate on its own sphere of testimony, the existential. The sense of dependence is

the basic meaning of creatureliness, and it is by reduction or abstraction from our first-hand experience of creatureliness that we understand nature as a creation.⁶¹ The true beginning of creation is God, not some past event constituting creation as somehow completed in relative independence vis-à-vis God; in fact time is in Being constantly, and the realm of beings streams in the trinitarian temporal life. We are already participants in the flow of Being.

Why then do we not realise this, and why do we fear nothingness, which is where Macquarrie began his analysis of human consciousness? And why is Being not more obviously evident in countering this *Angst*? The fact of this universal ignorance of Being and the need on the part of beings to turn towards Being in a determined act of will indicates, perhaps, that creation has a good deal more independence vis-à-vis Being than we have been led to believe, in fact that there may be two realities rather than one after all. Or else Being itself may be subject to the threat of nothingness or to this fear, however groundless this may be, and therefore Being may, like Hegel's *Geist*, become its opposite in order to bear the pain of the negative inside itself, through finite consciousness. Macquarrie, however, does not speculate in this vein.

Creation is alienated from Being not ontologically but cognitively and morally, and needs to be reunified with Being through Unitive Being, and this always must have been so, since creation has no initial starting point and there was no golden age of unfallen consciousness. Creation and fall in a sense therefore coincide in the diversification⁶² of the universe through the outpouring of Being. Being lets-be at risk of disorder and alienation, and indeed of a split in Being itself as a result,⁶³ which is quite logical given the organic unity of being with Being: the dipolarity could conceivably become dualism, each side containing an aspect of Being itself. But the

⁶¹*Principles*, 213.

⁶²Hence some kind of "cosmic fall" seems to be inherent in the very notion of creation, and some kind of natural evil seems to be necessary. Yet since the creation is "very good", in the sense that it must utterly transcend in worth and interest any undifferentiated being, the risk has to be taken, and there could be no "God" (holy Being) without it'. *Ibid.*, 257.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 217.

Unitive Spirit constantly draws the alienated being back to Being and away from the threat of nothing. At one end of the continuum lies pure primordial Being, at the other end lies nothingness, the extreme pitch of fragmentation and diversity without the countervailing unity, pure individualism and egoism.

V. Appraisal

(a) The Scope of Being-talk

This cosmology represents real structures of Being derived from the analysis of the experience of *Dasein*, of being in the world, and in this way is superior to the picture language of 'I and Thou' talk and Biblical metaphors. This is the framework of interpretation for the religious understandings of Christianity and all religions. The language of Being claims to interpret doctrines by providing the inside story as to the pattern of the relation of Being and beings.

This goes beyond analogy; analogies can be understood in the light of this structure. Such analogies include such characteristics of God as personhood, creativity, holiness, faithfulness. The Biblical stories and expressions can be seen as naive reachings for what the structure of Being shows. The conceptual structure of Being results from no mere calculative consideration, rather from essential, participatory sketching and reflecting, describing, of the pattern of experience of being-in-the-world. There is a sense in which this is indirect self-revelation on the part of Being through thematisation in the consciousness of beings, if the organic model of God and the world is taken with due seriousness. The purpose of the enterprise is to escape from old style metaphysics and substance ontologies of orthodox theology, and yet to escape the reductionism of contemporary thought, itself equally unhistorical. The theology taking up from Heidegger, the later Heidegger anyway, wishes to do justice to participation and concrete experience of being as it is in the really experienced world, rather than in a world dessicated of its true colour and feeling by abstract rationalism. This seems to be a truly worthwhile aim. The great question is whether the analysis or description of being in the world does reflect human experience and whether this can serve as the structure for interpreting Christianity. We also need to ask whether Macquarrie has failed to break out of classical metaphysics and has simply transmuted it into a different

form by supplementing *Dasein* with *Sein*, about which he claims to deduce or uncover a great deal, and articulating a dipolar system thereby.

(b) The character of Being?

As human beings with the transcendental reflective consciousness we reach forward and find that this reaching forward correlates with being reached towards and supported. We find our roots of experience and consciousness are already sunk in the grace of Being, before we even began to reflect upon the question. Being itself is the ground of existence, there can be no ground of Being therefore. Being simply is, and to argue that the verb 'to be' is a logical and grammatical term without content of its own misses the point entirely: the logical function of the verb already signals its ontological significance by pointing to the fact that beings just are, or that being is characteristic of beings. Being has to be taken as already given, it is not an abstraction from the particular beings, these particulars are and they manifest the fact that they are, and their existence repudiates non-being. They give rise to awareness of Being through our reflection on the wonder existence, hence indirectly.

Being as trinitarian replicates the transcendental structure of our experience, and so must be regarded as a kind of Hegelian *Aufhebung*, the finite consciousness becoming aware of *Geist*, Mind, or perhaps Being, in this very process of becoming aware. The term Being has the advantage of seeming to hold together all aspects of reality, and in particular avoids abstract concepts, indeed this is its very *raison d'être*. It remains a depth concept, its image remains earthbound and not ethereal, ruling out supernature.

The character of this Being is primarily worked out or realised in terms of the wonder of being, Being lets-be, and this is what Christian faith calls love. Being is therefore act, perpetual act is the essence of Being. We answer the question as to the identity of God in terms of the answer given to Moses at the burning bush, 'I am who I am' or 'I let be'. The character of Being is to let be, the very Being of Being to let be. Moreover the Being of Being lets be itself, Being itself pours forth, differentiated from itself as diversified beings.

Here Macquarrie applies his dialectical method to develop qualities for Being. The coincidence of opposites unfolds to define the nature of Being. Being and nothing, one and many, knowable and

incomprehensible, transcendent and immanent, passible and impassible, eternal and temporal, personal and impersonal.⁶⁴ His discussion of the way these pairs should be understood includes qualifications not gained wholly from his existential starting point, for example he argues that the reaction to monarchical theism should not swing so far as to make God puny, a hapless victim of the world; God cannot be overwhelmed by suffering as we can. Likewise while 'eternity can hardly mean sheer timelessness' as has been made clear, yet 'God, to be worthy of the name of God, must be eternal. Part of his otherness and transcendence is his immunity from the ravages of time'.⁶⁵ It is not at all clear why this should be so given that Being is truly temporal: what can temporality mean if the ravages of time are removed from it? Is temporality defined for Being in terms solely of the order of knowing and not of being, and if so has not the heart of the new revised system been betrayed at a stroke? Being will have become defined by knowing in a way which abstracts from the continuum of real life experience. If this is allowed, then Mind, rather than Being, forces itself to centre stage as the true model of deity.

An equally pressing use of the dialectical method upon Being is its withdrawal at the moral categories. 'Good' is not a pole to be qualified by its opposite. Why not? Our human experience of being in the world undoubtedly encompasses vile within our own hearts; some religions would assert an evil and a good principle in human motivation. A recent work of pastoral theology, claiming to be using Christian theology, can speak of 'the dark side of God'.⁶⁶ Macquarrie himself has indicated above that fall and creation coincide. He refuses to follow his dialectical logic by insisting that evil is not co-ordinated with good, but is its privation. This itself would seem to be a dialectical relation, and of precisely the same kind as being with nothing.

Evil must also be regarded as a conditioning factor of beings, judging by the phenomena of human experience, and Macquarrie's system of dialectical theism logically needs to place it as the opposite of Being, equivalent to nothing, and fast approaching

⁶⁴*In Search of Deity*, 172ff. and 241-2.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 181-2.

⁶⁶R. Twycross (ed.), *Mud and Stars* (Oxford, Sobell 1991) 233.

the notion of evil as unreal. This too would accord with some Eastern theological tradition, and hence the structure of Being would find its most natural religious clothing in an Eastern rather than a Western wardrobe. Macquarrie might have developed the dialectic of good and evil in Being in terms of the Hegelian 'sweet and sour sauce' doctrine, both together providing the tastiest food. The basic point to be made here is that a dialectical unfolding of Being can lead a theology in all kinds of directions and readers need to watch to see that traditional premisses are not smuggled back into this system at key points.

The idea of the 'holy', for example, is derived from its existential impact of awe and fear, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. This might well indicate a terrifying, quasi-demonic, aspect to Being. A Nietzschean ego might be part of the dialectical structure of Being, counterpointed by a more gentle aspect. It is only the classical presupposition that God's holiness is perfect goodness and perfect love, counterpointed not at all by their opposites, that can prevent such possibilities for theology. The character of Being cannot, I submit, be derived solely from this dialectical process worked out from the concept of Being. Macquarrie has to go back to the picture language of goodness and love, pictures and images he felt he had to go beyond in favour of conceptual framework of Being, in order to give content to the dialectic, and the Christian content.

(c) Personal Being?

Macquarrie sets his face against personal models of Being, save for the concept of self-transcendence in and over time. Otherwise the notions of encounter with God, of self-revelation in terms of 'I and Thou', are criticised and interpreted as second order religious pictures which find meaning on the structure of Being and beings. God is not a Being but Being. God is not a person, but can usefully be articulated in trinitarian terms as Being in three movements or modes. God is not even best described as personal Being, although in good dialectical fashion Being is both personal and impersonal or supra personal.

This fits with the fact that we know Being indirectly. Being is the conditioning context of life, we do not so much meet Being face to face as glimpse it from the corner of our eye in the background, being there. Given this down playing of the personal face to face relationship as significant for religion or for theology, Macquarrie's

trinitarian Being not surprisingly appears to be thoroughly modalist. The now fashionable Cappadocian trinitarianism of the communion of the persons each participating in divine being holds little attraction for Macquarrie, who fears tritheism here. The triune Being, if one is allowed to use the definite article for Being in three dynamic modes, comprises some analogy of *a* person, paradoxically, because the analogy is of the transcendental consciousness rather than relational 'being as communion'. Having started with the Heideggerian determination to avoid Cartesian subjectivity as the atomic basic unit of reality, Macquarrie seems to end up coming strangely close to a trinitarianism whose personal definition rests on self-consciousness in time.

The problem may relate back to Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, so much relied upon by Macquarrie. 'It is of spiritual significance' says Levinas, 'that this relation to being underlying all of our objective knowledge does not involve an impersonal, neutral unity—the Sein des Seiendes of Heidegger—but a Seiendes which is the being of the other, and hence implies a social communion considered as the primary act of being'.⁶⁷ Levinas, while much indebted to Heidegger, finds his ontology subordinates the other person to being. We may bring this point to Macquarrie: for a Christian theology of God, is the personal and the relations between persons in the world, sufficiently highlighted? Even the now much-criticised Western tradition of trinitarian theology insists on subsistent relations in God, but Macquarrie's triune Being consists of the movement of Being outwards, through expressive Being and back in Unitive Being, the 'Odyssey' and 'Iliad', reaching an enriched unification of Being through beings. Relationality in a personal sense, as opposed to a kind of Hegelian self-differentiation, gains little prominence.

The theological car of the Eastern Orthodox, rolling along so smoothly now, would have more still to say in favour of person. This tradition stresses that 'there is no true being without communion' and that 'communion is an ontological category'.⁶⁸ Divine Being

⁶⁷E. Levinas, 'Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge', in *The Levinas Reader* S. Hand (ed.) (Oxford, Blackwell 1989) 65.

⁶⁸J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (New York, St. Vladimir's Press 1985) 18.

does not exist in modes or movements: ‘What is important about trinitarian theology is that God “exists” on account of a person, the Father, and not on account of a substance’,⁶⁹ nor a structure of relationality or reciprocity.

The question of the nature of divine being and its relationship to creaturely being raises some interesting issues of analysis of Macquarrie’s ontology in the light of Eastern thought. Being, for Macquarrie, is not simply substance or essence, but is the *es gibt*, letting-be, and this is equivalent to the traditional notion of divine love. Zizioulas elucidates his tradition as holding that ‘the substratum of existence is love’ rather than some structure of a rational kind.⁷⁰ But can Macquarrie’s Being equate with divine love as it is after all letting-be in pure generosity? Does this save Macquarrie’s system from falling under the same judgment as that accorded to the Logos theologies of Clement and Origen, that of fundamental monism?

Here we reach the crux of an appraisal of this system. Creation, for Maximus, is by the loving will of God, no doubt reflecting his nature or being, but an act of will and by the persons of the trinity; ‘Being depends on love’.⁷¹ Creaturely being cannot be regarded as a form of divine Being, or as if it were the ‘matter’ which is ‘informed’ by the divine Being to use Macquarrie’s own analogy. Love confers itself on ‘the other’ and does not relate itself to itself in another form. This is very similar to the point made by Levinas above. It must also be asked whether love is adequately defined in terms of the transcendental consciousness going beyond itself, even as an ontological positing of another from its own Being.

Does this transcendental structure describe the quality of the love of God? Further to this, can creation be said to be sufficiently independent so as to be ‘face to face’ with God? And when creation responds to God, is it creation or Being responding to Being through

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 42; see also the long footnote (40) on p. 45 detailing the difficulties of integrating Heidegger’s thought into trinitarian doctrine.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 97.

⁷¹*Ibid.*

beings? Is the perfection of creation its re-conversion to pure Being,⁷² rather than the fulfilment of the created order of being? 'Fusion', said P.T. Forsyth, 'however organic and concrete, is one thing, communion is another thing'.⁷³

(d) Distinct orders of being?

Being, however, is letting-be, not an essence, hence any fusion between Being and beings must be regarded as a relation between active origin and effect. Since Being is not an essence, beings cannot be regarded as instances of this essence, rather they are let-be as what they are, particular beings. Macquarrie becomes slippery at this point, and perhaps his ambiguity has a positive quality: God is indeed beyond our classification, maybe Macquarrie is stretching our language so as to merge being and act in God? If Being is letting-be, then there must be that which has been brought into being, therefore there might, after all, be communion between two orders of being? The difficulty here lies in determining the manner or mode of letting-be in relation to Being.

Being is letting-be, therefore *is* a process: Macquarrie has ruled out the notion of Being as the *subject of* this letting-be, since this would return him to positing a divine entity behind the activity of letting-be. Dom Illtydd Trethowan has queried Macquarrie's deduction that 'the alternative to regarding God as a thing' is 'to introduce time and becoming into him',⁷⁴ and Macquarrie finally envisages God as sustaining letting-be, everlasting and temporal rather than eternal. God is process rather than person, and can be called personal only from analogy with the consciousness of passage of time by humans. God is process, rather than being the ground of process, and in the finite temporal reality which we know is included in this process, but in differentiated degrees of temporal transcendence. Our finitude is stretched into an understanding of letting-be, one entity with varieties of grades of awareness and capacities of going beyond the present into future potentialities.

The unificatory, centripetal, role of the Spirit means that finally the process will gain a common consciousness and harmony,

⁷²The Orthodox doctrine of deification, theosis, according to Zizioulas, 'means participation not in the nature or substance of God, but in his personal existence'. *Ibid.*, 50.

⁷³P.T. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ* 1965 (Fontana 1910) 78.

⁷⁴I. Trethowan, *Absolute Value* (London, Allen & Unwin 1970) 176.

and at this point it will be hard to maintain a distinction between Being and beings, since unification will have taken place. In fact, one needs to ask whether fall is necessary to this ontology in order to gain sufficient distinction and autonomy for the realm of beings: when the alienation of fall is dissolved, what ontologically differentiates beings from Being, in particular from expressive Being? Here the classical tradition can point to the distinction between the generation of the Son and the creation of the world, but Macquarrie has replaced this strict difference in the orders of being with a purely existential distinction.

VI. Conclusion

Macquarrie provides a fascinating alternative model of God's relationship with the created order. His method, seeking to tap into the human experience of modernity, has much to teach in its critique of abstract rationalism, however light he seems to sit to biblical theological concepts and understandings. His attempt to synthesise Heideggerian ontology, opposing metaphysics, is academically attractive and influential. He loses the bite of early Heidegger and the existentialist tradition, however, by closing the circuit between us as beings and the mysterious Being which has become accessible through our consciousness and stretched experience: Being reveals itself through our self-awareness. From an existential start we reach what is quite a Hegelian system at the end.

Such systems are in vogue at present. The more rugged covenant model of God and the world, a two entity model fundamentally, linked by the goodwill of God the perfect artist rather than by a commonality of Being emanating and returning, this Hebraic view finds few defenders in modern theology. But can the panentheistic fashion offer sufficient identity and freedom to the world? And ultimately can Christian worship remain such if directed by one grade of a single process to another of which it is part?