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DOING RADICAL THEOLOGY

Apparently we are now entering an era in which radical theology is simply impossible. It is surely not being taught in any of our theological centers, just as it is unknown to the general public, and seemingly unknown to our professional theologians. A genuine radical theology is not to be confused with our various liberation theologies, all of which are conservative theologically, nor is it to be confused with radical fundamentalism of any kind. For a genuinely radical theology is a theological thinking that truly rethinks the deepest ground of theology, a rethinking that is initially an unthinking of every established theological ground; only through such an unthinking can a clearing be established for theological thinking, and that is the very clearing that is the first goal of radical theology. Nor can this be accomplished by a simple dissolution of our given theological grounds, for those are the very grounds that must here be ultimately challenged, and challenged in terms of their most intrinsic claims. Indeed, this has already decisively occurred, as most clearly manifest in our world by the impossibility of all established theologies to be biblical theologies, or to be biblical theologies incorporating a truly critical understanding of the Bible. This has always been true in all of our neo-orthodoxies, which by necessity phenomenologically suspend all scholarly understanding of the Bible, a bracketing or *epochē* impelled by a uniquely modern situation, a condition in which there is no possibility of integrating anything that we can know as faith with anything that we can critically understand. Nothing has more challenged our theologies than biblical

scholarship, and this is true in all our theological worlds, and while once biblical scholars could be genuinely theological, now theology has virtually disappeared from our biblical criticism and scholarship.

Unfortunately this is a situation that seemingly makes a critical or even a genuine theology impossible, and for the first time we are bereft of fully systematic theologies that are critical theologies, and this is above all true of our fundamental thinking of God, which is now our most silent or most forbidden theological topic. But is this a clearing that the radical theologian can not only accept but affirm? Is it possible that such a clearing is now essential to genuine theological thinking? If so, that is not a clearing that can simply be taken for granted, but far rather one that must be theologically thought through, and thought through by theological thinking itself. All too fortunately this has already occurred, and occurred in our greatest modern philosophical theologies, and not the philosophical theologies of modern theologians, but rather those of our most radical modern philosophers, including not only Spinoza and Hegel but also Nietzsche and Heidegger. Simply to mention these philosophers is to evoke a uniquely modern radical theological thinking, one that has not only profoundly rethought the ground or grounds of theology, but has done so only by deeply unthinking every established theological ground. Ironically, it was Spinoza who initiated a truly modern understanding of the Bible, just as it was Hegel who more fully incorporated a biblical ground into his thinking than has any other philosopher, and Nietzsche and Heidegger who fully embodied an apocalyptic horizon in their thinking, one absent from all of our established theologies, and this despite the modern historical discovery of the apocalyptic ground of an original Christianity.

We must be prepared to accept the paradox that modern philosophy has been more deeply theological than modern theology, which is perhaps not so paradoxical if our greatest modern imaginative vision has been more fully theological than has our theological thinking. This is already true of Dante, and in our world it is true of Joyce. But this is a deeply heterodox vision, and one becoming ever more fully heterodox as it evolves, which is exactly the movement that can be discovered in the evolution of modern philosophy, which is why most modern theologians have deeply resisted modern philosophy, a resistance that is a pure opposition in the greatest of all modern religious thinkers, Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard could know modern philosophy as a truly

pagan thinking, hence it is not theologically neutral but rather the very opposite of genuine faith. While Kierkegaard absorbed Hegel's dialectical thinking, he inverted it just as did Marx, and it is this inversion that made possible his thinking of the pure subjectivity or deep interiority of faith. Yet this is possible only by way of a profoundly solitary thinking, a solitary thinking only fully paralleled in Nietzsche, which is why Nietzsche can be understood as the polar opposite or dialectical twin of Kierkegaard. Indeed, Nietzsche opposed modern philosophy even more profoundly than did Kierkegaard, although following Heidegger it is possible to understand Nietzsche as the consummation of Western philosophy, and above all so in his ultimate and final realization of the death of God.

That is indeed an apocalyptic realization, one bringing our history to an end, an ending most purely realized in the depths of the late modern imagination, and even as Nietzsche is the philosopher who is most open to those depths, it is Nietzsche who had the greatest philosophical impact upon late modern artists and poets. So it is that Nietzsche can genuinely be known as a poetic philosopher, even as Kierkegaard can be known as a poetic religious thinker, and if here thinking and the imagination are truly united, this is a union that has been impervious to all of our theology. Is a genuinely imaginative theology simply inconceivable, a truly ironic situation in a world that has been given such profoundly theological poetry, music, and art, art truly alien to the world of theology, and above all alien to every theology that is commonly known or manifest. Could this be a genuine way for the contemporary radical theologian? It would surely be a solitary way, but is not solitude essential for the genuinely radical theologian? Certainly no home is now at hand for the radical theologian in our theological or academic worlds, and while radical thinkers seemingly abound among us, radical theologians are virtually invisible, and most others would no doubt respond to radical theology as an oxymoron. Yet it is manifest that great philosophers can be radical theological thinkers, perhaps all of them have been so; is it inconceivable that a thinking in this spirit could occur today?

Now if radical theology is understood as a solitary way, it cannot be an ecclesiastical theology, cannot be bound to any established norms or traditions, and here Kierkegaard is once again a primary model, and his final assault upon the church was a consistent fulfillment of the evolution of his thinking. Here, we can see all too clearly how the deepest

religious or theological thinking can be an anti-ecclesiastical thinking, and not only can be but must be an anti-ecclesiastical thinking, or must be so in a genuinely modern world. Not since Leibnitz could a major thinker be an ecclesiastical thinker, and if ours is a world in which ecclesiastical theology is all in all, or all in all in our theological worlds, nothing else has so estranged theology from our world, or so called it forth as a truly alien or archaic thinking. Hence the genuine theologian must now realize a new solitude, a solitude that is perhaps unique to the theologian today, nothing comparable to this solitude would appear to occur in other worlds of thinking, there are no academies or associations for the real theologian in our world, as witness the theological poverty of the American Academy of Religion, or the near collapse of genuine theological publishing or truly theological periodicals. For an enormous transformation has occurred in only a single generation, one comparable to the transformation of our political world, and just as only conservative politicians now seem to be actually possible, only conservative theologians are now manifest among us, and they inspire as little respect as do our politicians.

Genuinely radical theological thinking has always been an offensive thinking, and most offensive to the larger community of faith, or to an established religious world. So if such thinking were to occur today it would inevitably create an offense, and here, too, theological thinking is unique in our world. Who could imagine a poet or a philosopher creating an offense today? We even lack truly offensive politicians, or genuinely offensive public figures, and while many can respond to our world as the best of all possible worlds, it is apparently not open to an ultimate challenge of any kind. Yet this is precisely the calling of the radical theologian, for the radical theologian is dedicated to an ultimate challenge to our deepest ground, and even if such a ground is now seemingly unnameable, it is necessarily called forth in a truly radical theological thinking. Clearly such thinking cannot simply challenge the Church or challenge society, it must go far deeper than that, for it is inevitably a challenge to everything that we can know or name as God, or anything whatsoever with an absolute claim. But how is this possible today? Does it call for a stepping out from every community, and one not simply realizing a genuine solitude, but a truly new solitude, one only possible in our new world? Again, Spinoza, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche are genuine models, for each not only realized a truly new

solitude, but that solitude was absolutely essential to their thinking, and it made possible a new and liberating solitude for innumerable others.

Here, too, theological thinking differs from other thinking in our world, for it is inseparable from an intention to address the world at large, and even if this should occur only fragmentarily, it is nevertheless essential to theological thinking itself, and essential to the deepest life of the theologian. While that life may well be a truly solitary life, it can never be a private life, can never be divorced from the vocation of the theologian, for that calling is as ultimate as any other, and is perhaps unique in foreclosing every possibility of a private haven or ground. If only at this point, Nietzsche is a genuine theologian, for even if many are totally committed to their work or calling, it is perhaps the theologian alone who is truly homeless, and homeless if only because he or she must so ultimately challenge every possible Home or Haven. Thus the theologian is by necessity called to an exploration of the truly or even the absolutely negative, that pure negative that is the deepest challenge to all life, and which theologically is known as an eternal death or damnation. While damnation ever more progressively disappeared from modern theology as opposed to all previous Christian theology, it has truly been renewed not only in the horrors of our world but in the deepest imaginative enactments of the late modern world, enactments alien to all of our contemporary philosophy, but truly essential to genuine theology today. This, too, is a unique calling of theology, a calling to voyage into our most absolutely negative depths, a voyage apart from which theology could only be truly vacuous.

Yes, the theologian is a voyager, and above all so the radical theologian, but a voyager into the deepest darkness, a voyage apart from which every voyage into light is now wholly empty and unreal. How can the theologian become open to such darkness? First, this can occur only when every safety net has been removed, only when our innermost center is truly naked and alone, and we fully open ourselves to that absolute abyss that then inevitably engulfs us. While each of us is standing over an abyss, it is the theologian who is called to name that abyss, and to name it with an ultimate or absolute name, that name of names which is the name of God or the Godhead, and which here can be manifest only as an absolute abyss. And as opposed to every apophatic or negative theology, or every mystical theology, this is an

absolute abyss that is absolutely actual as that abyss, absolutely actual as a pure negativity, and absolutely actual not in an absolutely primordial horizon, but far rather in that horizon which is absolutely here and now. Hence a genuine Christianity has always known an absolute judgment, a total judgment inseparable from every possible joy, and if the theologian as opposed to the artist has only falteringly named joy, he or she can fully name judgment, and the fuller the theologian the fuller the naming of judgment and abyss. So it is that every genuine theology is a truly negative theology, and every genuine theologian a truly negative theologian, a negative theology inseparable from the most ultimate offense, and inseparable from a profound laceration that is the inevitable consequence of a genuinely theological calling.

Thus there are no innocent theologians, or none who are genuine theologians, for the theologian inevitably embodies that sickness which Kierkegaard knew as the sickness unto death, a sickness that is not only an ultimate *Angst*, but a sickness in which an actual nothingness or an actual abyss is here wholly embodied or enfleshed. Theological thinking is inevitably a pathological thinking, or surely so in our world, and if once again this is truly distinctive of theological thinking, a theological calling is a calling to an ultimate darkness, and a darkness truly visible in our new world. Yet if it is visible, and hearable, too, it is apparently unnameable, or perhaps nameable only theologically, for if theological naming is unique in naming an absolute darkness and an absolute abyss, then certainly there is an ultimate necessity for theological naming today. However, such naming can occur only through an incorporation of that abyss which it names, so it cannot be a vicarious bearing of abyss, nor can it be any form of game or play, for it is inseparable from an actual brokenness, an actual brokenness that is a sign or seal of the genuine theologian. Why then would anyone accept or choose such a calling? Because for the theologian that brokenness is inseparable from an ultimate joy, an ultimate joy that the theologian names as grace, but a grace inseparable and finally indistinguishable from brokenness itself.

Bonhoeffer is that theologian who most decisively drew forth the utter emptiness of a “cheap grace,” a wholly illusory grace that is indeed the very opposite of grace, and even if such grace is a mass phenomenon, it is the grace of “hollow men,” a humanity that is human only in its mask. Note how such a humanity is the very opposite of the

Here Comes Everybody of *Finnegans Wake*, an everybody that could only be an embodied everybody, as manifest in the total actuality of its voice. The enactment of an apocalyptic resurrection in the conclusion of *Finnegans Wake* is certainly the enactment of an absolute joy, but an absolute joy that is inseparable from an absolute chaos or an absolute abyss, and here we can decisively understand how a voyage into an absolute abyss is a voyage into an absolute joy. While there are few theological explorations of *Finnegans Wake*, this is nevertheless an apocalyptic epic for all of us, and perhaps that modern epic which most illuminates a theological vocation in our world, which most openly calls forth an ultimate identity of darkness and light. Consequently, a truly theological exploration of absolute darkness is precisely thereby an exploration of absolute light, so that here joy is realized through darkness itself, and if the theologian is enslaved to darkness, that is the theological way of realizing joy itself, and an absolute joy that is possible only through an absolute darkness. Yes, there is a deep joy in doing theology, and the deepest joy in doing the most radical theology, only that theology embodies such a *coincidentia oppositorum*, or embodies a damnation that is redemption itself.

Can the theologian taste such redemption, or is it possible only to know it vicariously? The answer to these questions is immediately manifest, for a vicarious theology is clearly no theology at all. Here, perhaps, theology differs most deeply from philosophy, or differs from every philosophy that is not an absolutely solitary philosophy, or every philosophy that is not finally a theological philosophy. Yes, a genuinely theological thinking is a tasting of redemption, that is the source of its ultimate joy, but this is a joy only realizable through an absolute darkness and abyss, or that very darkness which the theologian embraces in embracing her or his calling. The joy is so deep in this calling that it truly makes possible a solitary way, but a solitary way ultimately directed to the world itself, and to that world that is immediately at hand. Hence a theological language is inevitably a language of witness, and of confession, too, a confession of that absolute guilt which is called forth by the advent of an absolute joy, so this is a witness to guilt and joy at once, and to a joy that is only a “cheap grace” apart from an absolute guilt. Yes, Kierkegaard is our deepest modern theologian, or our deepest theologian who is only a theologian, and as he himself confesses he was called to be an ultimate witness, and a witness even in his all too

actual brokenness and despair, a despair that is the very signature of a genuine theology, but a despair inseparable from the most absolute forgiveness.

Now it is not to be forgotten that Kierkegaard was our first thinker to know an absolute *horror religiosus*, a horror whereby he could know himself as a second Job, and just as Job is the only ultimate No-sayer to God in the Bible, Kierkegaard is our only thinker until Nietzsche who could pronounce an ultimate No upon God. But Kierkegaard is a truly dialectical thinker, so that his No to God is at bottom an absolute Yes, and a Yes inseparable from that No, or a Yes inseparable from the most ultimate *Angst*. Once again we can see how a realization of the most absolute judgment is a realization of the most absolute grace, and this is a realization that the theologian is called upon not only to explore, but to realize in his or her ownmost center, a center that is body and soul at once, or is that body which is a fully embodied center, a center apart from which theological thinking is vacuous and unreal. Perhaps the very dominance of a vacuous theological thinking among us is a sign of a new theological call, a call arising out of this very void, and one inseparable from that void itself. And inseparable if only because we are now called upon to realize the greatest possible theological negation, a negation of every theology that is now manifest as theology, or every theology immediately nameable as theology today. But this can only be a theological negation, a negation wherein theology negates itself, a self-negation that is a self-emptying, and a self-negation of ultimate ground itself.

Here, Hegel is the supreme philosophical master, that Hegel who has given us the only absolute philosophy of self-negation, or the only one in the West, a self-negation that is an absolute self-emptying, and an absolute self-emptying embodying the Crucified God. Hegel is the first philosopher of the death of God precisely as a profoundly Christian thinker, that thinker who first actually thought the Crucifixion, a thinking revolutionizing philosophy, a revolution that for Hegel is a decisive sign of the advent of the third and final Age of the Spirit. Of course, this originally occurs in the Incarnation and the Crucifixion, but only now does it occur in thinking itself, a thinking that is the consummation of philosophy, and a consummation of world history itself. Hence Hegel is a truly apocalyptic thinker, but so likewise are his reverse descendents, Nietzsche and Heidegger, and it is only in Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger that philosophical and historical thinking are

truly conjoined. Inevitably, this is a radical theological thinking, the most heterodox theological thinking that has ever occurred, but only now has the occasion arisen to mediate that thinking to theological thinking as a whole. While that could only be a profound subversion of theology, that is a death that promises life, and promises life to theology itself, or to that theology which is capable of undergoing a resurrection through an ultimate and final death. Indeed, this is the path of the radical theologian today, a path of ultimate subversion that is just thereby a resurrection of theology itself. Although this is a path calling forth multiple ways, it is a path in which an absolute negation and an absolute affirmation are inseparable, and inseparable in that thinking which is a genuine theological thinking.

In this perspective, Hegel can certainly be known as a theological thinker, and Nietzsche, too, and here the deepest negation is the deepest affirmation, an absolute affirmation finally indistinguishable from an absolute negation. Is this a thinking that can be communicated to the world at large? Surely not in its Hegelian form, but perhaps in its Nietzschean embodiment, and above all so if that embodiment could be realized in a common language, or in a language understandable to all. Yet this has always been the mission of theology, to speak the absolute in the language of everybody, and to speak it in such a way that one immediately responds, and responds to that which one hears as our ultimate ground. Nor can we deny the enormous success of theology in this endeavor, at least in the Western world; even today the majority of humanity embrace such a theology, a majority that seemingly can speak the name of God without embarrassment or hesitation. Of course, this can no longer occur in our critical discourse, but it did so occur for almost two millennia, as theological language was the most powerful language throughout that period, and even political sovereignty could not then be separated from theological sovereignty. Yes, Christendom has come to an end, as Kierkegaard was the first to know, but does not a theological legacy remain that has enormous potential power?

This is a power that the radical theologian seeks, a power to move the world at large; thereby theology is truly unique, and unique in seeking to address in depth the world as a whole. Indeed, this is just the power that a radical transformation of theological language promises, for if that language can remain itself even in this transformation, it will embody such a power and be greeted with ultimate response. Every theologian who is a homoletical theologian knows this well, and if

every ultimate proclamation is a theological proclamation, at least in its impact, again we can understand Nietzsche as a theologian, and a theologian who is here a primal guide for a new radical theologian. This is the theologian who can greet Nietzsche's absolute theological negations as being at bottom theological affirmations, affirmations making possible what Nietzsche ecstatically proclaimed as Eternal Recurrence, and an Eternal Recurrence that is certainly a theological Eternal Recurrence, for it promises the most ultimate redemption, and a redemption from the most ultimate guilt and *ressentiment*. Nietzsche could know his world as the emptiest world in history, a world not only foreshadowing our own, but far more fully embodied now than then, yet only such a dark and empty world is open to an apocalyptic proclamation of Eternal Recurrence, or to an apocalyptic Yes. Can such a Yes be pronounced today, and be pronounced so as to be heard? Is this not the mission of theology today, even if it can be realized only in the most radical theology?

Without any question theology is a truly audacious enterprise, and while it is commonly ridiculed as such, it can inspire deep dread, for it certainly can be pathological in its effect, and more universally pathological than any other discourse. This, too, is a decisive sign of its power, and how significant that Heidegger could so fully employ the theological language of fall, guilt, and dread in his greatest work, language inseparable from the ultimate impact of Heidegger, and of that Heidegger who is the only twentieth-century philosopher who came out of a theological vocation and underwent a full theological education. There are few theologians who know as much theology as Heidegger, and none who could so powerfully know authentic existence as "being toward death," a uniquely Christian motif, but one fully explicated only by Heidegger himself. Can the theologian forget what an enormous impact this explication had, or forget that he realized this understanding while at Marburg, where he deeply participated in a New Testament seminar and himself became a master of Paul. This is evidenced already in 1920 in his lectures on the phenomenology of religion, where he identifies Paul as an apocalyptic thinker, which was not discovered by New Testament scholarship until the publication of Schweitzer's great book on Paul in 1927. How can one deny Heidegger as a great theologian, for even if he is silent about God until his posthumously published *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Contributions to*

Philosophy), this is a theological silence about God, and one that many theologians have embraced.

All too significantly an ultimate assault upon the Christian God again and again occurs in *Beiträge*, where there is a deep emphasis upon the abandonment of Being, one that first happens in Christianity and its absolutely transcendent God, an abandonment in which Being abandons beings, but this abandonment is the fundamental event in our history, and one that is now being reversed in the apocalyptic advent of *Ereignis*. While *Beiträge* is a much too difficult a book to have a universal impact, its impact could be mediated through a more common language, and this is just the task of the theologian today. For the theologian is a mediator, and a mediator intending to communicate an ultimate language to all and everyone, and even if this entails a transformation of that language, it is just such transformations that have most transformed the world. Even if it is impossible to deny the pathological impact of theology, it can be understood that this is inseparable from the positive impact of theology, an impact wherein theology makes possible an ultimate language for everyone, a language not only confronting but finally blessing our most ultimate ground. Although that ground can be known as an awesome abyss, as it has been known and envisioned in the late modern world, that is an abyss which is inseparable from our deeper life and existence, and which we must speak if we are truly to confront the world, or truly to confront our existence itself. Finally we must say Yes to that abyss, and this has always been the deepest language of theology, and a language that must now be recovered if we are to speak, and speak in a new world of an absolute and universal speechlessness.

Yet how is the theologian to speak this Yes? Is that actually possible today, could it be dialectically possible, could we become open to that Yes by realizing its very opposite, a truly and finally absolute No? Certainly our new condition is open to such a venture, and most manifestly so in our new emptiness, an emptiness harboring a new abyss, and while that abyss is seemingly unspeakable as such, it could be nameable by the theologian, and by that theologian who has accepted a calling to name God, and to name God in her or his world. Is that name speakable today? It surely is so insofar as it evokes an absolute abyss, and that naming has overwhelmingly occurred in the late modern world; one has only to think of Kafka, and of Beckett, as these primal writers

are inheritors of an ultimately dark actuality in the modern world, and one that finally and theologically can only be named as God. Perhaps this naming most powerfully occurs in Melville's *Moby-Dick*, and if the White Whale is an absolute nothingness consuming everything in its wake, that all too actual nothingness can only theologically be named as God, a naming that itself is an ultimate source of the namelessness of God in our world. If the theologian is to meet the challenge of naming God in our world, and hence of becoming open to this abyss, this will require an ultimate courage, a courage making possible a voyaging into absolute abyss.

Courage is not a virtue that we commonly ascribe to the theologian, indeed, the very opposite would appear to be true. Is theology not a deeper if not the deepest source of our backward movements and of our purest *ressentiment*? Perhaps no body of thinkers has a more negative image in our world than do theologians, who are certainly scorned in the academic world, treated with condescension if not contempt by our liberal and radical circles, and even largely if not wholly ignored by our churches and synagogues. If radical theologians are exempt from such indifference or contempt, this is simply because we are virtually unknown, but that might give us a freedom that is otherwise unavailable, a freedom to move invisibly in a world alien to our calling without attracting any attention at all. So let us be invisible theologians, wearing whatever mask might be at hand, masks necessary if only to preserve our own sanity, and perhaps masks truly necessary to ourselves, for we are venturing upon an awesome task. Then perhaps the requisite courage will be given us, for even if it is absent in ourselves, we can hope for it as a free gift of grace, and if we know that a genuine grace can only be a free and wholly undeserved grace, that may well be a grace freely given us in our radical calling. For ours is not simply a voyage of our own, it is a voyage for others, and not for an elite body but rather for everyone and everybody, for ours is finally a universal voyage, finally a voyage that will be undergone by all.

Initially, this appears to be an impossible voyage, but let us recall the voyage of the Christian epic tradition, a voyage that always begins by way of an entrance into absolute abyss, and this epic voyage is enacted as a voyage for everyone, for the Christian epic hero is everyman or everybody. So each of us is called to voyage into that abyss, and here the theologian can be no more than a surrogate for others, but we must be a willing surrogate, one who freely accepts this voyage, and

does so even knowing its terrible risks and its seemingly devastating consequences. No vicarious participation is possible here, nor could we possibly be simply spectators of this voyage, for this is a voyage that can truly be a voyage only by actually being enacted, and enacted in our own center. That is the center that will be transfigured by this voyage, a transfiguration only possible by an inversion or reversal of ourselves, but that reversal is the very essence of this voyage, so our voyage begins with a sinking into the depths of chaos itself. Little wonder that theology can truly be known to be a pathological way, or an ultimately negative way, but that negation is essential to this calling, for there is no actual way to theological light apart from an immersion in darkness itself. Finally, we must bless the darkness that overwhelms us and ecstatically greet an absolute darkness, for that is the darkness which will finally become light, as epically enacted for us in the uniquely modern epics of Blake and Joyce.

Blake is that ultimate visionary who first dialectically and apocalyptically enacted a *coincidentia oppositorum* between Christ and Satan; this is realized in the culmination of that epic voyage here enacted, but Blake is also our first prophetic visionary of the death of God, and he finally envisioned Satan as the dead body of God. That is the body that is incarnate in a uniquely modern abyss, and that is the body which we initially enter on our voyage, a body which we can know as the White Whale, or as that absolute abyss that a Kafka or a Beckett call forth. So there can be little doubt of its ultimate actuality, but if we can truly know this abyss as the dead and alien body of God, or as that negative pole of the Godhead when it is wholly severed from its contrary or opposite, then we can become open to that absolute Yes which is the absolute opposite of this absolute No. Yet we can become so open only after having passed through that absolute No, hence we must fully and actually know an absolute *horror religiosus* if we are to become open to a final and apocalyptic Yes. Of course, this is the very path of Nietzsche, just as it is of Joyce, but our calling is to open the way of these great visionaries to all and everyone; this we can do only by enacting this voyage ourselves, doing so in the specific world of theology, and doing so in such a way that a path is thereby established for everybody, for we are Here Comes Everybody.

Now if Christianity knows the Crucifixion as the one source of redemption, that is a crucifixion which full modernity knows as an actual and final death of God, a death of God releasing an awesome and

absolute emptiness or nothingness, a releasement whose consequence is the advent of an ultimate nihilism. All of us know that nihilism, even if we do so only vicariously, and if that nihilism is an apocalyptic nihilism, if it is the consequence of the ending of our history, it is finally inseparable from an apocalyptic light. We must pass through that nihilism to realize that light, so even theology must become nihilistic today, and just as many of our most astute thinkers know that genuine theology is inseparable from a nihilistic ground, or is finally inseparable from an ultimate dissolution of every historical and cosmic ground, as is fully manifest in our purest mystical theology, then the theologian today must become open to the most ultimate nihilism. Indeed, we cannot enter an absolute chaos and darkness apart from a fully nihilistic ground, apart from knowing absolute nothingness itself, and even as our deeper mystical theologies have ever known an absolute nothingness, and known it as Godhead or *sunyata* itself, we must know our actual nothingness as the body of God, and thus we must inevitably become nihilistic theologians. This may be the very point at which our work is most open to others, for everyone inevitably struggles with nihilism today, even when unable to know it as nihilism, but if theology can call forth a nihilism that finally reverses itself, then even in our world theology could be known as an ultimate blessing.

Yes, our voyage must necessarily take us into the center of nihilism, and we will no doubt incur incurable wounds thereby, but our goal is to pass through that nihilism, or to pass through a wholly alien darkness and abyss. Already our greatest modern visionaries have accomplished this; our task is to accomplish this movement in an all too common way, so that it can be mediated to everyone. Hence our language must be neither abstract nor arcane, it should be exoteric rather than esoteric, written in the *koine* of our world just as was the New Testament itself. While this is an extraordinarily difficult task, and few realize what a miracle the New Testament is at this point, this at least must be our goal, and to the extent that we fall short of it we will have failed theologically. But theological language itself has immense power here, and even as it has been overwhelmingly powerful in the past, it could become so once again, but only if it is a truly and even absolutely new theological language. Again, Blake and Nietzsche could be models for us, for both could employ an immensely powerful language that is immediately understandable, and this despite the fact that scholars will never cease to unravel the intricacies of their texts. Indeed, the most

common language ever employed by a prophet was employed by Jesus in his parables, parables that we have finally begun to understand in their overwhelming power, a power that was lost when they were understood as moral or mystical allegories.

Now we know that those parables are parables of the Kingdom of God, hence they are apocalyptic parables, but they are vastly removed from the genre of apocalyptic discourse, distant from all esoteric vision, and they apparently were immediately understandable by their hearers. Could an apocalyptic Yes for us be one that we could immediately understand? Or understand once we have passed through our dark abyss, or perhaps understand even as we are passing through that abyss? Would such a passage be possible apart from some such understanding? If we can actually name our darkness, we can truly stand within it, hence the deep grace of an apocalyptic naming of darkness, for if it is a genuinely apocalyptic naming it is inseparable from an apocalyptic naming of light. An apocalyptic light dawns only in the deepest darkness and is impossible apart from the total realization of that darkness, for the very advent of an apocalyptic darkness is inseparable from the advent of an apocalyptic light. This ultimate truth is fully manifest in all of our truly apocalyptic visionaries and thinkers, and most clearly so in Blake and Nietzsche, so that we are called to greet that absolute darkness which we confront as an absolutely gracious darkness, a darkness inseparable from an absolute Yes. So that this absolute No is inseparable from that Yes, and finally to know this No is to know that Yes, and to embody this No is finally to embody that Yes.

Is this a truth that we can truly know, indeed, is it possible to be open to this truth without knowing it, and actually knowing and actually embodying it? The deepest grace may well be the most immediate grace, that grace which is most actually at hand, but a grace that we inevitably lose when we turn away from that immediacy, a turning that is a universal turning, and one becoming ever more universal as it evolves. So it is that all our deeper religious ways initially call forth a universal darkness or a universal fall, a darkness that is a totality of samsara or sin, but that is the very darkness that is reversed in enlightenment or redemption. Then a redemptive grace is all in all, but this is a grace that is manifest or knowable only insofar as it is embodied, otherwise it is wholly illusory or only a "cheap grace," or a negative grace deepening an unregenerate condition. Now even if a genuinely redemptive grace is an absolutely impossible grace, and absolutely impossible for us, that

very impossibility evokes its possibility as grace, and to know that possibility is to know an absolute Yes. And genuinely to hear that Yes is to embody it, so that if we hear that Yes we will embody it, and do so even in a wholly broken condition. Then we can and will say Amen, and say Amen even if we know ourselves to be wholly empty or dead; indeed, it is only the truly dead or the truly empty who can hear that Yes, but in hearing that Yes, death becomes life itself, and even we can not only know but thereby embody resurrection itself, a resurrection that could only be an absolute Yes.

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