

## Part Three

# Implications for 21st Century Theology

1. Three Types of Unitarianism
2. Living Outside the Boxes

## Chapter 1

# Three Types of Unitarianism

The Trinitarian vision was well maintained by each of the four theologians whose great paragraphs were considered in Part Two. We might say that Rudolf Bultmann leaned toward the first face, the Awesome Otherness of God, the Old Testament heritage, and its crucial importance for understanding the teachings of Jesus and for calling him the Christ. He loved the scientific approach to truth, and applied it in strong critique of all the doctrines of Christ, the Bible, and Church history. Though his master work was a theology of the New Testament, he did not focus much on the practical aspects of building Spirit community. And though he had deep roots in literature and in existential philosophy, he spent the least time on the life of the Holy Spirit. Paul Tillich worked thoroughly on the appropriate use of the word "God," but the appearance of the New Being in Jesus Christ was the core emphasis of his theology. His work on the Holy Spirit was also thorough, but he was still working on this portion of his thought when he died. Dietrich Bonhoeffer emphasized a Christ-centered theology, but he focused on the third face of the Trinity: life together in Christ, ethics, the reconstruction of religion in a more secular and a more "Spirit" expressive form. H. Richard Niebuhr's work on faith in God was very clarifying, but his emphasis on history, revelation, and overcoming individualistic overemphasis point to an emphasis on the We-approach to truth and thus also on the Jesus Christ face of the Trinity. His focus on responsibility and ethics reveal an emphasis on the Holy Spirit, but he did not push too deeply into our actual experiences of the various states of Awe.

Taken together these four men provide a strong balance of Trinitarian theology. And this triune wholeness is an important theme for a full and vital resurgence of Christian practice in the 21st century. Hence, it is important to be aware of triune incompleteness and imbalances. It was from H. Richard Niebuhr that I first heard the idea of three unitarianisms: the unitarianism of the Father, the unitarianism of the Son, and the unitarianism of the Holy Spirit.

### Unitarianism of the Father

Those religious groups who call themselves Unitarians might be termed "unitarians of the Father." Traditionally, at least, they have emphasized a general belief in God but neglected the Son and the Holy Spirit. They have seen themselves, quite correctly, as opposing the perversions of doctrinalism and superstition that they have observed in the more "Trinitarian" churches. These Unitarians of the first face of the Triune experience also tend to emphasize the scientific approach or the "It" approach to truth. They have sided with scientific discoveries, with evolution, and with historical and literary criticism of the Bible. They have been firm opponents of fundamentalists or any other religious group that tends to sacrifice scientific intelligence in favor of maintaining religious dogma.

The unitarianism of the Father is more widespread than those who call themselves Unitarians. Many who call themselves "atheists" are also first-face unitarians in their emphasis on scientific truth. Many secular movements emphasize experiences of wonder and mystery in nature and human history, but minimize Jesus and the Bible and any need for joining a community of the Awed Ones. Many Marxists might be seen as first-face unitarians, for they are, consciously or unconsciously, ex-Christians and ex-Jews who still take science and a scientifically based story of human history and social justice quite seriously.

What is most lacking in all of these movements is an emphasis on emotion, myth, and religious symbolism – on a rich nurture life and on Spirit experience. Indeed, rational beliefs or rational critiques are used as a substitute for Awe moments, ecstasy, trust, love, and freedom. This over-rational, Spirit aridity characterizes many more groups than Unitarians or Marxists. It

also shows up in churches that are formally Trinitarian. Whenever the Awesome has been reduced to an idea or a worldview, a unitarianism of the First Face is in operation.

### **Unitarianism of the Son**

A theology can be characterized as a unitarianism of the Son if it neglects or misunderstands the Father and Holy Spirit faces of the Trinity, but counts itself a Christian theology because of its emphasis on Jesus Christ. The scholars, theologians and lay Christians who comprise the Christian renewal movement initiated by the Jesus Seminar tend in this direction. Though these men and women do not all think alike about Jesus, Christology, the Bible, or Christianity, the main body of this thought seems to imply that finding an accurate approximation of the sayings of Jesus and the deeds of Jesus and thus of the historical person of Jesus will resolve the core issues for Christian theology. And it does resolve some important things. It cleans up the pervasive confusion that has resulted from a literal interpretation of the stories of the New Testament. It separates out the mythic and religious interpretation of Jesus from the historical person of Jesus. And it establishes beyond reasonable doubt that there actually was a person named "Jesus" who was indeed a remarkable person worthy of our acclaim.

But the thinking of many, perhaps most, Jesus Seminar theologians is characterized by an imbalance from a full Trinitarian point of view. They assume that Jesus, the historical person, is somehow the answer when this historical person might more appropriately be understood as the question. Mark includes in the very center of his gospel this question put into the mouth of Jesus, "Who do men say that I am?" And the truth is that men and women have been saying quite different things from the very beginning. The gospel of Thomas (which perhaps should not be called a gospel at all) provides a quite different interpretation of Jesus from the gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John. These four canonical gospels all emphasize the title "Christ," the cross, and resurrection. The gospel of Thomas omits these themes of interpretation and instead sees Jesus as a mystical teacher bringing a kind of occult wisdom. Others in the early first century saw Jesus as a Mosaic prophet who simply improved or inwardly understood the moral teachings of Moses. Paul opposes both of these groups in rather harsh terms. Paul's interpretation of Jesus stood firmly between the noetic Greek mystics on the one hand and the legalistic Jews on the other. Like the canonical gospels, Paul emphasized the Christ interpretation of Jesus, the cross, and resurrection. These symbols were key to the core formation of the Christianity that became the history changing movement of those early centuries. Jesus as a real man, a teacher, and a prophet were important memories to be interpreted, but these characteristics were seen not as an answer but as part of the basic question, "Who is this guy?" "What does he mean to each of us, to the core meaning of human life, and to the course of history?"

The question of whether or not Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, the fulfillment of the core expectations or longings for an eternal resolution of the human predicament, was sharpened by the grim fact of Jesus' crucifixion. This disgraceful and frustrating early rejection and death seemed to contradict the "Messianic" expectations that people had for this person. In fact, as Paul and all the canonical gospels witness, to see Jesus as the Christ entailed dying with him and being raised up with him to newness of life. And this is the meaning of the resurrection, not something that happened to the body of Jesus, but something that happened to the body of his followers. They became through death and resurrection the Body of Christ. And out of this core experience they interpreted the life, teachings, and death of Jesus. This is the clear focus of all the books that were canonized as the Christian constitution. Often, this overall interpretation is not taken seriously enough by those who emphasize the importance of the historical Jesus.

Furthermore, many historical Jesus scholars read too much of their own modern ideology back into the life of Jesus. They want him to be a supporter of their modern views, so they interpret him in that direction and ignore some of the factual strangeness of this ancient person.

Rudolph Bultmann's Jesus scholarship has remained a good example of how to avoid this. One thing Bultmann makes clear in his book *Jesus and the Word* is that Jesus' view of God is not an "improvement" on the God of the Old Testament. The God of the Old Testament is the same God that Jesus calls "Papa." The God who destroyed the nations of Israel and Judea through Assyrian and Babylonian conquests is the same God that Jesus calls "Papa." The God who wrenched a third of the population of Judea off into Babylonian exile is the same God that Jesus calls "Papa." The God who called a remnant of exiles to return to a wrecked land and rebuild religious practice is the same God that Jesus calls "Papa." The God that the author of Psalm 139 wished to escape is the same God that Jesus calls "Papa." The God who is still knocking at our doors with world-ending power is the same God that Jesus calls "Papa." The Jesus scholars tend to sweeten up Jesus' view of God.

Marcus Borg, for example, speaks of God as if God were an idea in a religious worldview. But for Jesus, God was an Active Presence ripping religious worldviews to shreds. The God of Jesus is not "just an idea" but an Awesome Presence in the here and now of experience calling for a radical and practical response of total obedience. If Jesus had something new to say about the Old Testament God, it was that this same God was at the door, was coming to meet us in the here and now, was heading right at us like an onrushing hurricane. His core message went something like this: "The time for fiddling around is up. Repent, trust, and get ready to participate in the fullness of Reality." Jesus' emphasis on forgiveness, did not make God nicer, it disturbed religious worldviews with another ripping truth, namely that the Awesome Reality that most people were fleeing was also welcoming home to Reality any sinner who would come.

The Jesus scholars tend to de-emphasize this first face of God and focus on Jesus. Therefore, they do not see Jesus as a second face of God. They only see his humanness. They do not see him as the Awed One who mediates the experience of the Awesome and calls us to live the radical life of Awe. Unitarians of the Son end up being humanists with a very thin veneer of Christian ornamentation.

Fundamentalist Christians – those who insist upon a literal interpretation of the Bible, specific doctrines, and clear moral principles – are also unitarians of the Son. They think they are avoiding being humanists because of their supernatural literalism, but in the final analysis, they are also constructing a humanistic idolatry of their own making. They have avoided the true Awesome and the true Awe in order to be disciples of a Jesus who is no longer the Awed One, but an idealized supporter of a sectarian Christian belief system, morality, and basic bigotry.

### **Unitarianism of the Holy Spirit**

Pentecostal Christians might qualify as an example of the imbalance I am calling a unitarianism of the Holy Spirit. Martin Luther is reported to have said about one of the enthusiastic, Spirit-centered Protestants of his day that this man had swallowed the Holy Spirit feathers and all. Today on the North American continent, the most alive and challenging illustrations of a unitarianism of the Holy Spirit are outside the Christian community.

I want to spend this space looking in depth at the phenomena of revived interest in Eastern religions sweeping across Western civilization. Hinduism, Buddhism, and also Taoism emphasize the Holy Spirit third of the Trinity. They emphasize inquiry into the inner person. They emphasize the "I" approach to truth. Some of them neglect the "It" approach and the "We" approach altogether. Others accept these other two approaches in their proper place, but in the final analysis dismiss them as externalities of ordinary knowledge that are more of a barrier than a help toward experiencing the basic knowledge of immediate and direct consciousness of Reality.

There is truth contained in this “I” approach emphasis – namely, that we do indeed only know our consciousness of consciousness in the here and now of personal presence. And the Holy Spirit third of the Trinity, the Awe states, are only experienced in this here and now of self aware inquiry into the depth of our true nature. Ultimate Trust, Spirit Love, and Complete Freedom are aspects of our Holy Spirit being, and these aspects are only known to us in the here and now of contemplative awareness. The wind of Holy Spirit can be said to blow through both the interior person and our exterior behavior. Yet without the contemplative or “I” approach to truth, there is no direct experience of the Awe or Holy Spirit. And without the experience of Awe there is no experience of the Awesome or of the Awed portion of humanity. The Holy Spirit third of the God experience is essential to the whole experience. So as Christians we need to begin by thanking these Eastern religious movements for the help they are giving us in recovering the experience of Holy Spirit.

What, then, does it mean to have a unitarianism of the Holy Spirit? What does it mean to emphasize these inner states of being in an imbalanced manner? What does it mean to create an imbalance that neglects or denies the Awesome Otherness and/or the Awed portion of humanity? As a first hint toward an answer to such questions, consider this provocative dialogue suggested by some contemplative inquirers, “What time is it?” “Now!” “Where are you?” “Here!” This dialogue may be helpful for focusing the mind on the Here and Now of inward inquiry. But if one asks the question “What time is it?” in the context of trying to make an appointment on time, the answer “Now” will not do. The question “What time is it?” is actually a We-approach question. In our society we have conventions or agreements on how to reckon time. We have years, months, days, hours, minutes, and so forth. When we ask the question “What time is it?” we expect an answer that deals with those common social assumptions. If I have made an appointment based on these social conventions, the act of being on time for that appointment depends on information having to do with the “We” approach to truth. The time is indeed Now, but the time is also 10:32 A.M. on Wednesday the 13th of October or whatever. The “I” approach to truth is not sufficient for the entire round of living. We do indeed access the true nature of compassion only through the “I” approach, but a specific compassionate act, such as being on time, requires the “We” approach. This is true for all aspects of ethical living. Inwardly accessing our Awe or Spirit essence does not complete the picture. We must also feel and think our way through what it means to be an Awed portion of humanity at this time and place in human history. A unitarianism of the Holy Spirit neglects or minimizes the importance of ethics, history, and even of time itself.

The scientific or “It” approach to truth is also unavoidable in the actual living of our lives. Those who emphasize the “I” approach also speak of galaxies, of the cosmic flaring forth of the universe, and of biological evolution. But these “processes” would not be known without the work of modern science. One cannot know biological evolution through contemplative inquiry. If all the monks of the 15th century had sat in contemplation for five hundred years, they would never have come up with the truth of evolution. A here-and-now contemplative observation of nature does not advance scientific knowledge. Scientific truth about the world takes place in another way: the “It” approach. Only after we have participated in the “It” approach do we have the scientific pictures about nature that we take with us into our inner inquiry (the “I” approach) where we can inquire into the meaning of this scientific knowledge for our personal lives. Without the scientific approach to truth our inward approach to truth would be impoverished.

Even to talk about inner and outer is to speak scientifically, for the inner world of pure awareness knows neither inner nor outer. When we engage in a strict focus on the “I” approach, inner and outer are simply simultaneous waves in the Oneness of Reality. Furthermore, the inner world of pure awareness knows no space and no time. It is always the timeless “Now.” And one is everywhere located at the spaceless “Here.” Space and time are

mental constructs of the “It” approach taken into the minds of the “I” approach inquirers. From the perspective of a strict “I” approach, the flow of time is simply the ever-changing quality of the timeless Now. The very word “flow” assumes the “It” approach. To see a “flow” means that our awareness has taken an imaginal trip beyond being *in* the flow and has observed the flow as a pattern of movement from there to there to there. This pattern of flow is then taken back into the contemplative sense of Reality and its meaning is explored. “My life is not as it was.” Or “my life may be different tomorrow.” Memory and anticipation are vibrant dynamics of the inner world taking place in the here and now. But without the functioning of the “It” approach to Truth there would be no memory and no anticipation. This is as true for a dog running to catch a Frisbee as it is for a human being recollecting the past decades and anticipating some fresh new life vocation.

What I am attempting to reveal with this intricate philosophical discussion is this: the “I” approach is not sufficient unto itself. Similarly, the Holy Spirit (which is our true nature, the deepest discovery of the “I” approach) is not sufficient unto itself. To the extent that contemplative religions emphasize the role of a teacher in enabling Spirit maturity in a novice, they are working with the “We” approach to truth. The teacher-student relationship is something more than the “I” approach can fathom. Being a Spirit guide to another person assumes conventions, methods, practices that are social in nature. It assumes that outside impacts from another person are helpful to an inward inquirer. The teacher, by being an Awed human, can indeed assist the novice in accessing his or her own Awe. But this teaching or guiding dynamic cannot be grasped using the “I” approach only.

Similarly, the first face of the Trinity cannot be realistically omitted or blended into the third face. The Awesome Otherness of Overall THUSNESS can not be avoided in the whole vision of Awe-filled living. Each Awe-experiencing person has his or her own dialogue with the specific events that are happening to him or her. The Awesome is present in these events, and if the Awesome were not present, the Awe or Spirit would not be present either. Indeed, when contemplators explore their true nature (that is, Awe or Spirit) to the furthest reaches, they come upon an awareness of those ultimate boundary moments of realization in which even the most aware states vanish into the Absolute NO-THING-NESS which is also the EVERY-THING-NESS in which all things cohere. This is the same Objective Otherness that the good scientist wonders about when the Mystery of it all keeps overwhelming the scientific quest to know. “The more we know, the more we know we don’t know” is the appropriate motto for all good scientists. This motto also applies to contemplative inquirers. “Who am I?” “I don’t know!” “Why don’t I know?” “Because I am confronting the Mystery of it All and experiencing myself as a Mystery experiencer who is as mysterious as the Mystery I am experiencing.”

Unitarians of the Third Face tend to blur the distinction between the Whole Mystery and the mysterious Mystery-experiencing Self. In Christian theology the encounter with the Whole Mystery is an encounter with an Absolute OTHER. My soul is also mysterious but in a subsidiary manner. It is not good Christian theology to say that I am the Whole Mystery. There is indeed only One Mystery and I am part of it, but I am not the whole of it. When Christian theology says the I and the Mystery are One, this does not imply a melting into the One or becoming the One. When Christian theology says that I and the Mystery are One, a reconciliation is meant – a return from estrangement, a coming home to Reality. Envisioning the Absolute Mystery as our ever-loving Parent is a different religious metaphor than the metaphor of identifying with the Absolute Mystery as my Ultimate Self. In Christian theology, I can be on Mystery’s team, so to speak, without being the Mystery in its entirety. I can agree that my soul is not fully realized without a full experience of the Absolute Void, Blackness, Silence, Stillness. Yet I can be united with this Absolute Blackness out of which all illuminations come without identifying with it. I can be united with the Absolute Silence within which all noises are heard without identifying with it. I can be united with the Absolute Stillness within which all motions

move without identifying with it. This Void, Blackness, Silence, Stillness is my Source, my Divine Parent, my Family, my Home, but good Christian theology distinguishes this first face of the Absolute Parent from the third face of the Essential Self or Holy Spirit.

This encounter with the MYSTERIOUS OTHER seems to reintroduce a separation between object and subject – Thou, the Mystery, and I, the Mystery experiencer. But any sort of strict dualism is another conceptual distortion. In actual living, the Awesomeness that is encountered and the encountering Awe-Self are parts of one experience. That is, when the external is pushed to its furthest limits and the internal is pushed to its furthest limits, we experience a state of awareness that blows open the concepts of “external” and “internal.” The Awesome and the Awe are one, because the Awe manifests in knowing the Awesome and the Awesome is experienced as the presence of Awe arising within us.

The “It” approach cannot examine the experience of Awe, but it can usher us to places of perception that confront us with fresh experiences of the Awesome. And while the “I” approach does experience Awe directly, intensive inner inquiry also brings us to the final boundary of consciousness where we directly experience the black abyss of that objective Awesomeness that encompasses both inner and outer components of Reality. But this direct experience of the Awesome does not make the Awesome an aspect of the Awe-filled self. Rather the Awesome is the absolute boundary of all experiences of self. Confronting the Awesome boundary and being an Awed Self are two aspects of one experience; nevertheless, the Awesome and the Awe are not the same. The Almighty and the Holy Spirit are One, but not the same.

The “We” approach is also required to complete the picture of the experience of ONENESS. In every experience of the Awesome and the Awe, there are always some members of our sociologically-arrayed, blood and bones human species who are the ones being Awed. The contemplative or “I” approach (like the “It” approach” and the “We” approach”) is a limited approach to truth. It takes all Three to make One. The ONENESS cannot be found in any one of these three approaches to truth. Only when all three are taken together and pushed to their furthest limits do we at last see that the AWESOME OTHERNESS, the AWE STATES, and the AWED PORTION OF HUMANITY are indeed ONE.

Who am I? Even this question vanishes in this final realization of ONENESS. Good Christian theology cannot say that I am the AWESOME OTHERNESS. That would be sheer idolatry. Good Christian theology cannot even say that I am the AWE STATES. Rather AWE or SPIRIT blows through me like a wind I cannot source, anticipate, or control. And I am not even the AWED PORTION OF HUMANITY; I merely participate in it. I remain human as well as divine. As a human I remain tempted to abandon my divinity. As a human I remain imperfect in my manifestation of my divinity. As a human I remain a sinner, a stranger, an estranged prodigal son or daughter who is perpetually being welcomed home by the divine and its boundless forgiveness.

Am I on a journey toward my full divinity? Yes, and it seems to me that I have come a long way. But the journey is endless. I do not arrive, yet I am always arriving. And the ONENESS is guiding me on this endless path. My only necessity is to take the next step. So who am I? I am a “next stepper” on the endless journey of participating in the AWED PORTION OF HUMANITY. In this sense I am the Body of Christ. I am the Buddha. And as such, I participate with them and with all the saints of every cultural background in The AWESOME, The AWED, and The AWE.

## Chapter 2

# Living Outside the Boxes

A fully developed Trinitarian theology is not a theology in a box or a theology in three boxes. It is a permanent commitment to living outside all boxes.

By “boxes” I mean mental containers, humanly constructed pictures of reality. These boxes in which we all must live and think and rethink are not synonymous with the Fullness of Reality, with the Reality that Trinitarian theology is pointing to. In order to picture this unpicturable assertion, take a blank sheet of paper and draw a box on it. Now imagine that this full sheet of paper is the Fullness of Reality. Inside the box is part of reality, but then there is much more reality outside the box.

If that box is Newtonian physics, we have a good illustration of what I am pointing to. Newtonian physics was and is a valid insight into the functioning of reality. For many purposes it is still a very good model. But for other purposes – like the behavior of light, galaxies, gravity, and high speed relative motion – we have to think outside the Newtonian box. The genius of Einsteinian physics is that it is a box that includes everything in the Newtonian box and a great deal more. This is like drawing a bigger box with the Newtonian box inside it. But the Einsteinian box is still a box. Much reality is still outside the Einsteinian box. Part of the reality that is outside the Einsteinian box is described by quantum mechanics, the branch of contemporary physics that illuminates the behaviors and interactions of elemental particles and electromagnetic waves. To picture this we need to draw a box that overlaps the Einsteinian box, for part of the reality of each of these two branches of physics is outside the other. And so far no consistent rational box has been constructed that entirely contains both branches of physics.

Even if such a box were “conceived” and “discovered” to apply, it would only be another box. And it would be an “It” approach box. Outside all “It” approach boxes are the boxes that can be drawn using the “I” approach, the approach of contemplative inquiry. Sigmund Freud advanced our sense of reality by drawing such a box. The id, ego, and superego are key rational components of Freud’s box. This picture of reality did not arise from “It” approach data alone. This box was constructed by Freud by looking within his own psyche. He observed many reports from his clients, but he did not look inside their psyche – only his own. He interpreted the data of “objective” reports from other people’s subjectivity by using his own direct experience of his own inner being. And he built a box, a rational box, that pictured and discussed these perceptions of reality.

Karl Jung did not think Freud’s box was big enough to include insights in literature and religion that Jung found compelling relative to his own inner experience. So he constructed another box, one that included much that was in Freud’s box but also included other reality that was not in Freud’s box. Similarly, Karen Horney perceived that Freud and Jung and others were better at describing the male psyche than they were the female psyche, so she created another box that included her insights. In such a manner, contemporary psychology has unfolded. There are now many boxes overlapping each other and criticizing each other for what is left out and what is overemphasized, twisted, incomplete, and so forth. All these psychological boxes include some vision of reality. Yet at the present time I know of no psychological box that has convincingly encircled all the other boxes.

This same story could be told about Christian theology. The four theologians I commented upon in Part Two each constructed his own box. These boxes overlap significantly, but not entirely. In my own appropriation of these four theologians, I have also constructed a box – a theological vision that attempts to include much, perhaps most, of what all four of them have said. In order to do this I have had to be willing to think outside the Bultmann box, the Tillich



box, the Bonhoeffer box, and the H. Richard Niebuhr box. My commentary on these writers has attempted to both see their vision and to see around it or beyond it to include a bit more of the Final Reality which we all confront.

The Awesome, the Awe, and the Awed are rational elements that organize my theological box, but the Reality to which I intend to point with these words is outside my theological boxes. This Reality is outside everyone's boxes. The Awesome Final Reality is not just another box. It is the annihilation of all rational boxes. It is the annihilation of all perceptions of reality, every sense of reality, every worldview, every set of religious beliefs. The Awesome points to a direct experience of pure Mystery – that Unfathomable Blackness in which all illumination appears that Infinite Silence in which all sounds sound – that Absolute Stillness in which all motions move.

This Mystery, this Blackness, Silence, Stillness is a Complete Otherness. It is not "I"; it the boundary of everything that is "I." I can be conscious of this Otherness, and yet it a boundary beyond any and all human consciousness. It is useful to picture human consciousness as a long string that stretches all the way from this Final Mystery through all my boxes to the core of my animal consciousness. By "animal consciousness" I mean that inner core of aliveness, of sensitivity and responsiveness that every living animal manifests. Human consciousness is a string that stretches from the consciousness we share with other animals to that Mysterious Otherness of which only our species is aware. And this string has the ability to be conscious of itself, to be conscious of consciousness. As consciousness of consciousness moves its focus toward the animal end of the string it meets the boundary which psychology has called "the unconscious." As consciousness of consciousness moves its focus along this string toward the Absolute, Black, Silent, Still, Otherness at the far end of the string it meets another boundary, a boundary that both annihilates consciousness and yet supports it, blesses it, welcomes it, honors it with its boundless inescapable Presence. Christian, Jewish, and Islamic theology has called this boundary "God."

At some point this vision of living outside the boxes becomes very personal, because the most prominent box in which each of us lives is our own personality. Any of the rational constructs mentioned above may be part of our specific personality. Personality is a person's habits of thought, perception, behavior, style of living, conscience, superego – a pattern which that person has laid down year after year since birth. Our personality is our past-oriented default program for living. It would be impossible to function in a human fashion without a personality, and yet that personality is a box. Accessing the Reality of Spirit means experiencing the Awesome Blackness and the Awe that attends that fellowship with sheer Mystery. So Spirit living means living outside the box of personality. Living in Awe has sometimes been described as being "beside ourselves." "Beside ourselves" means beside our personality. "Beside ourselves" can also mean experiencing our true nature. The term "ecstasy" has been associated with being beside ourselves our personality. The ecstasy of our true nature is beside or beyond rather and within the box of our personality.

Living in awareness of the Awesome Blackness of Final Reality is what it means to be my true self. Being my true self also means identifying with the community of the Awed Ones. Being my true self means being filled with Awe – with Holy Spirit of Trust, Love, and Freedom. The whole Trinity points to living outside the box of personality. And this triunely experienced ONENESS supports me and you and everyone in being the box maker, a worker who creates ever-better boxes outside of which to live. All our boxes, unless they are sheer fantasy or madness, hold some reality. But Reality is more than what is held in our boxes. And I am more than what is held in the box I typically call "me."

Oh, the wonder and the glory of it all, of being an Awe-filled box-maker who can live outside of every box I make, and yet endlessly make more boxes!

## Conclusion: Theology as a Systematic Knowing of the Unknowable

Though the God of Christianity is the Absolute Mystery, the Unknown, the Unknown Unknown, indeed the Ultimate Unknowable, yet every moment of Awe is experienced by human consciousness as a knowing of this Unknowable God. This knowing of God is a direct knowing, a direct experience, a direct perception of Reality. Knowing God does not mean adopting some theistic ideas. Knowing God means directly knowing the Unknowable.

At the same time we can be systematic about this knowing. We can know that Awe has three interlocking forms: **Ultimate Trust**, **Spirit Love**, and **Complete Freedom**. We can build an endless variety of sermons, lectures, and poems that illustrate these states of Awe. We can discern subparts of our experience of the Absolute Objective All-Encompassing Unknowable: **The Void**, **The Fullness**, and **The Total Demand**. And we can know that the Awed portion of humanity manifests as a real human community describable in three major functions: a Spirit hospital in which **Events of Grace** happen; a **Communion of Saints** in whom the sacredness of Awe is blowing; a **Vanguard Community** of people whose presence, witness, and service is a revolutionary leadership within the stodgy obsolete structures of inherited society. We can know all this with increasing precision and overarching rational order. We can be systematic theologians.

Christian theology has a tendency toward being systematic. We see this tendency in the writings of Paul as he pulled together all his thinking in his letter to the Romans. We see it in the four dramatic creations known as the Gospels. We see it in the works of Tertullian who was the first to explicitly use the Trinitarian formula. We see it in the master works of Augustine and in his systematic predecessors. We see it in the works of Thomas Aquinas. We see it in the works of Luther and Calvin. And we see it in the works of the theologians whose great paragraphs I have chosen for this book. This trend toward being systematic is due in part to the rational power captured in the Trinitarian model. And there may be other sources of this systematic passion, like the Christian baptism of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical systems. Perhaps the Trinity was born as a result of this baptizing of Greek thought. But however it happened, Christianity differs from some religious traditions in its tendencies toward systematic thought. For example, in spite of its patches of systematic thought, Hinduism tends to be a loose assembly of thousands of symbols, rituals, and methods that defy definitive organization even by its most systematic thinkers.

I also feel the systematic impulse. This is the second book I have written that seeks to elaborate the Trinity of The Awesome, The Awed, and The Awe. The first was entitled *The Call of the Awe: Rediscovering Christian Profundity in an Interreligious World*. In that book basic definitions and illustrations of Awe are developed into a fresh overview of the entire Christian breakthrough. This book also illustrates how the Christian tradition can meaningfully dialogue with all the religious traditions of the planet when Awe is the mediating awareness.

I am also in the process of completing a volume entitled *Jacob's Dream: Seeing the Soul as a Ramp from Here to Eternity, A Christian Inquiry into Spirit Realization*. This book takes a detailed look at how Awe as a lived Spirit Reality can become our basic identity and how we can mature in our Spirit living, moving ever more fully beyond the box of our developmental personality. The book will also explore how Spirit-identified persons can be guides to one another in realizing these ever increasing depths of Spirit experience and living.

My experience in writing these books can be described as a semi-systematic march into the always surprising Unknown. This book on great paragraphs of 20th Century Protestant theology has also been an adventure into semi-systematic knowing of the Triune Unknown. My aim has been to provide some connection with and celebration of four of the great theologians of the past century. In my choice of paragraphs, my commentary, and my opening and closing chapters, I have aimed to provide a small conduit through which the vast energies of the 20th Century theological revolution can more easily enter the theological dialogues in the 21st Century. I hope this book has been useful in welcoming its readers into this ongoing conversation.

Gene W. Marshall  
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