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A Catholic Debate on God: Dewart and Lonergan

RUBEN L. F. HABITO

PARADOXICALLY, the proclamation recently made by a group of theologians, echoing Nietzsche in the nineteenth century, that God is dead has resulted in a revival of interest in precisely what was declared to be dead. Religion and God have again become topics of lively interest not only in the rarefied atmosphere of academe but likewise in the ordinary conversations of the man in the street. Such popular magazines as *Time* and *Newsweek* have kept the many who have shown interest in the question abreast of the latest developments.

Many point to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran pastor executed during the Nazi regime, as the precursor in the recent theological furor on religion and God. Variations on Bonhoeffer's themes together with a few substantial developments on these, have been served for public consumption in the form of theological paperbacks that have sold amazingly well. One of the noteworthy paperbacks that have come out is Anglican Bishop John A. T. Robinson's *Honest to God*.¹ In it the Bishop emphatically declares that "our image of God must go," and points out directions whereby a new image of God and a new understanding of Christianity may emerge.

¹ Bishop John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: SCM Press, 1964).

Leslie Dewart's *The Future of Belief* is an attempt of one, professedly with a Catholic background, to participate in the task of reformulating "our image of God."² "Catholic philosophical thought" has heretofore meant primarily scholastic thinking, and the author sets out to expose scholasticism for the "inadequate way of thinking it is for our time, and what is more, in its own terms and in terms of its historical origin, hellenic thinking."³ Dewart thus intends to point out grounds for a broader basis of Catholic philosophical thought than that found within a scholastic framework. He goes on to stress the need for a *dehellenization* of Catholic philosophical thought, to liberate it from its hellenic presuppositions, and thereby lead it to a broader foundation, one capable of supporting the contemporary reformulation of the meaning of God for the Christian, upon which he may reconstruct his image of God into one better attuned to contemporary needs.

The *Future of Belief* was the kind of book bound to be controversial from the start, not only for its subject matter but also for the mode of presentation the author used. Dewart has been taken to task by a group of serious thinkers for his sweeping and derogatory comments against scholastic epistemology and metaphysics, comments which, it has been said, betray a lack of understanding of the genuine scholastic tradition.⁴ Among these critics is Bernard J. F. Lonergan, author of that formidable philosophical tome *Insight*, a respected dogmatic theologian in his own right.⁵

² Leslie Dewart, *The Future of Belief: Theism in a World Come of Age* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1966).

³ See John W. M. Verhaar's review of Dewart's work in "Theism: Today and Tomorrow," *Philippine Studies*, XV (Oct. 1967), 632-698.

⁴ See Gregory Baum, ed., *The Future of Belief Debate* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), a collection of articles reviewing Dewart's work.

⁵ Due to Lonergan's reputation and his position in Catholic philosophical and theological circles, his critique of Dewart has been considered "most devastating." Dewart in turn has made explicit allusions to the philosophical framework of Lonergan and followers as one main target of his own critical comments. Lonergan's philosophy is enshrined in his monumental *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. (London: Longmans Green & Co. Ltd., 1957).

Partly in response to critics and perhaps principally as a follow-up on the strands of thought left hanging loosely in *The Future of Belief*, Dewart has recently come out with a bigger and apparently more serious work, *The Foundations of Belief*.⁶ Here he develops some of the points merely suggested in his earlier work, and presents a positive program for the "reconstruction of theistic belief" based on a restructuring of the epistemological and metaphysical foundations upon which theistic (specifically Christian) belief stands.

Dewart's work has been regarded as a great challenge by thinkers within the scholastic tradition; it is aimed at undermining the very foundations of the tradition which has for centuries been the frame of reference of Catholic thought. Some thinkers belonging to this tradition—the transcendental Thomists, have especially felt that Dewart has misrepresented scholastic thinking, especially that branch of it which they represented, one revitalized through the transcendental method developed by Joseph Marechal and since then given new thrusts by Karl Rahner, Bernard J. F. Lonergan, etc. Thus the debate between Dewart and some followers of transcendental Thomism continues. The underlying motivation for that debate is the concern with making the Christian faith more relevant to men of our era: the task of providing solid philosophical foundations for belief.

In this article I will set forth a few key points regarding the present debate on God between these two camps, as shown in the principal writings of Dewart and Lonergan. Bernard Lonergan's *Insight* contains a thorough treatment of the question of God viewed from a vantage point within the scholastic (Transcendental Thomist) tradition; Dewart's *The Foundations of Belief* is clear on important points concerning the need for a reformulation of our image of God. My intention here is not to act as a referee in the debate, nor even to side with one or the other, but to introduce the reader to the discussions

⁶ Leslie Dewart, *The Foundations of Belief* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969).

going on and to emphasize the urgency of reformulating our image of God in terms meaningful to contemporary man.

LONERGAN: GOD THE FULLNESS OF BEING, EXISTS

Lonerган's treatment of God in his chapter on "General Transcendent Knowledge" is meant to lead to the affirmation that "God exists." In short, it is a presentation of an argumentation that would demonstrate the affirmability of God; it nevertheless inevitably ends up also with an *image* of the God that is affirmed. Ultimately, it results in what may be known as the transcendental argument for God's existence.⁸ The image of God that emerges from this approach is of the kind that Dewart criticizes as inadequate for our times.

Lonerган begins with what he considers the basic reality of human existence: the dynamism of man's mind, the desire *to know*. Man by nature desires to know. Lonergan calls the still-to-be-specified *objective* of that desire to know by the tradition-bound term *being*. This desire to know, he shows, is an *unrestricted desire*. At the same time, man's capacity for attaining knowledge is limited. Lonergan therefore introduces a convenient distinction apropos being: (a) "proportionate being," which is "whatever is to be known by human experience, intelligent grasp, and reasonable affirmation," and (b) "transcendent being," which is that domain of being lying outside man's outer and inner experience, which nevertheless can be the object of intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation.

God lies in that realm of being not directly "experienceable," the realm of transcendent being. Since there is no direct

⁷ Lonergan, *Insight*, "General Transcendent Knowledge," Ch. 19, pp. 634-686.

⁸ This argument is based on a scholastic appropriation of the transcendental method of Kant, but is an attempt to go beyond the latter. For a thorough and precise treatment of this argument, see Hermann Ebert, "Man As the Way to God," *Philosophy Today*, X (Summer, 1966), 88-106.

human experience (in Lonergan's use of the term)⁹ of God which can immediately lead to an intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation, one may proceed only by means of an extrapolation from the being which *does* remain within the limits of human experience. Extrapolation is the important step that provides the connecting link between man's direct experience and the notion and affirmation of God. The heuristic procedure for arriving at this notion, however, is revealed in the examination of man's unrestricted desire to know.

By examining this unrestricted *desire* we can posit (by extrapolation) that its fulfillment would lie in an unrestricted act of knowing or understanding, i.e., an act of understanding which grasps everything to be understood about everything, in a manner that leaves no question unanswered. The content of this unrestricted act of understanding, given the definition of being as the objective of the desire to know, is now simply the idea of being realized in its fullness. The implications of this idea may be analyzed as in fact Lonergan does, and that analysis would reveal that the idea of being as the actualized objective of the unrestricted act of understanding corresponds to the notion of God. To understand what being is in its fullness is to understand what God is.

The heuristic structure for determining the attributes of God is provided by the analysis of the implications of this extrapolated idea of being. Being in its fullness must be perfect, absolutely good, unconditional, necessary, simple, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, free, immutable. In addition, one can arrive at conclusions concerning God as creator, as conserver, as ultimate final cause of the universe (and any universe) as well as the ground of its value, and finally, as personal.

Lonergan, however, makes clear that this analysis remains on the level of extrapolation, answering the question of *what*

⁹ Lonergan uses the term, "experience" to mean "what the *senses* make directly available to the subject," a more restricted use than the usual meaning implied by the phrase "the richness of human experience." Lonergan's use follows that of the positivists and empiricists with whom he nevertheless takes issue in many places throughout *Insight*.

God is or *must* be, given the definition of the notion of God as corresponding to the idea of being grasped by the extrapolated unrestricted act of understanding. The question as to *whether* God is, or whether God can be affirmed as existing in reality, is left to a subsequent section for treatment. In this section which he entitles "The Affirmation of God," he puts forth the argumentation for such an affirmation of God's existence, and he points out that all the arguments for God boil down to the following general form:

If the real is completely intelligible, God exists.
But the real is completely intelligible.
Therefore, God exists.

The major premise may be understood easily enough from an examination of the terms involved: the real is *all that there is*, and all that there is as understood by the unrestricted act of understanding is the idea of being, which in a previous analysis has been seen to correspond with the notion of God. Therefore if the real is completely intelligible, i.e., if one can affirm that there is such an unrestricted act of understanding that understands all that there is, one can affirm that God exists in reality. The crucial point in the argument then is in the minor premise, i.e., whether in fact the real, *identified as being*, is completely intelligible—whether all that there is can be known completely to the point that all intelligent questions are answered without leaving any other question unanswered—whether there is an unrestricted act of understanding that understands everything about everything.¹⁰

Lonergan implies that the activity aimed at satisfying man's desire to know, that process which begins in experience and proceeds in intelligent grasp and culminates in reasonable affirmation, presupposes that the desire which is unrestricted can be ultimately fulfilled, or else the individual acts of knowing, the individual insights gained, have no real foundation. He therefore equates the acceptance of the minor premise with the acceptance of man's own intelligence and reasonableness

¹⁰ This is a highly simplified summary. Lonergan's text goes over each particular step in minute detail. See *Insight*, 669-77.

as valid guides for the unrestricted desire to know: the unrestricted desire calls for an unrestricted fulfillment, otherwise it would be an absurd, aimless and untrustworthy desire. To deny that such a fulfillment can be had would seem to imply the denial of one's own intelligence and reasonableness, and since this implies a self-contradiction, the affirmation of the minor premise can follow.

The conclusion is therefore established: one can affirm that God exists in reality.

What Lonergan has all along been doing for us is to lay out the ultimate implication of man's unrestricted desire to know, which is that this desire calls for ultimate fulfillment in an unrestricted act of understanding that understands all that there is. This affirmation of ultimate fulfillment leads to the next step, the affirmation of God who *is* this unrestricted act of understanding who fully understands himself and likewise understands everything else because he understands himself in fullness.

We have here two distinguishable elements: a heuristic notion of what God must be if he is to be God, and an affirmation *that* this notion does correspond to an existent reality. Lonergan makes clear that the one does not lead to the other, i.e., that the affirmation finds its basis *not* in the notion: real existence cannot be inferred from an analysis of the notion. Thus he states that the ontological argument (in the time-worn interpretation he adopts for it) is invalid.¹¹ Yet upon further examination, this very argument (seen in the light of more recent interpretations) is what holds his presentation together. His heuristic notion of God is no different from St. Anselm's definition of God as "that than which nothing greater

¹¹ There have been other facets rediscovered in the ontological argument since Lonergan published *Insight*. Discussions on this argument have proliferated in philosophical journals in the last few years. Two anthologies of these discussions are Alvin Plantinga, ed., *The Ontological Argument From St. Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers* (New York: Anchor Books, 1965) and John Hick and Arthur McGill, eds., *The Many-Faced Argument* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1967).

can be conceived," and his analysis of the divine attributes from the heuristic notion is one that can be performed as well as "that than which... [etc.]".

The basis for Lonergan's affirmation is likewise contained implicitly in St. Anselm's own argument (as opposed to the historical interpretations which tend to caricature one aspect of it)—the complete intelligibility of the real is *assumed* by Anselm as he proposes his argument, as an option with which he begins. For Anselm "that than which nothing greater can be conceived *must* be affirmed to exist, otherwise my mind with its unrestricted desire to understand which stops at nothing finite and which leaps toward that than which... [etc.] would be meaningless and inconsistent with itself." In sum then, what Lonergan unwittingly does is to expose the hidden thread on which the accepted version of the ontological argument hangs, i.e., the complete intelligibility of the real in all its implications.

Different reactions to Lonergan's presentation are possible. One may be led by his step-by-step exposition to the point where one may see, "Aha, the real *must* be completely intelligible, or else this drive to understand is pointless, these insights and affirmations are ungrounded; so God *must* exist, following the train of the argument." One could therefore grant validity to the argumentation. Yet this same one *could* still remain unmoved by the intellectualistic image of God that emerges from the treatment, a God that perhaps can lead the speculative person to admire His perfections but cannot move him to worship or even to give a religious response (although a fully understood affirmation could and *should* lead to these).

Or else one may take a different line: what is wrong with admitting that in the long run this desire to understand is unfulfilled, that ultimately everything is absurd? Am I not affirming too much beyond evidence when I affirm that ultimately reality is completely intelligible, when so much evil and suffering elude full explanation, so many questions defy any possible human answer? Perhaps I can only be satis-

fied with my limited certitudes, and never reach the ultimate satisfaction of my desire to understand. Therefore to affirm that being is completely intelligible is to affirm beyond evidence. I do not see the need to affirm the *complete* intelligibility of the real to be able to live on the limited intelligibilities that I can grasp, i.e., the truths of logic and mathematics, the regularities of the universe as mapped out by science, the common sense insights provided by day-to-day intercourse in the world of human affairs.

This latter attitude is precisely that taken by certain "types" of atheists, notably the existentialists who remain satisfied with the admission that ultimately the world is absurd, and who nevertheless declare that man must take full responsibility and make the best of everything within his given situation. Those who hold these attitudes can find little comfort in someone telling them that ultimately reality is intelligible and meaningful only if they would affirm God: for it is this affirmation that their very attitude initially precludes.

The two weak spots of the treatment of the question of God in the nineteenth chapter may be pointed out: the image of God that emerges from the heuristic notion is an intellectualistic image, Pascal's sense of the God of the savants and wise men, one that does not seem to have the quality that can evoke a religious response; and second, the affirmation of God is treated in a highly logical fashion that seems to place it on the same level as the reasonable affirmation given to directly experienced and intellectually grasped proportionate being. This treatment takes insufficient account of the underlying *option involved* in the affirmation: the very affirmation of the complete intelligibility of the real banks on an option to this effect, a commitment to the view that somehow "everything ultimately makes sense," that existence is ultimately meaningful. Thus, while even for him who grants validity to the train of argumentation, the image of God that emerges seems to fall short of the religious requirements; even more so for him who remains unconvinced of the necessity of affirming the complete intelligibility of the real, the thread that connects this image of God to human experience is cut. For these latter

the image of God is reduced to the status of an abstraction that is the product of rather ingenious minds.

But Lonergan seems to have more to say on the question of God than what he deliberately includes in this chapter entitled "General Transcendent Knowledge." The content and purpose of this chapter limits his treatment to the intellectual arguments involved in the question of God. In his next chapter a better picture emerges, and an image of God that more directly answers man's questions about the meaning of his life can be discerned.

Man's desire to know is a desire that remains operative throughout his life, ever seeking to fulfill itself in the accumulation of insights through experience, intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation. But man is not merely intellect; he is a doer. His action likewise must be integrated with his knowing: what he does or ought to do must fall under the light of the inquiring intellect which seeks what action is best or is called for in given circumstances.¹²

This need to integrate man's action with his intellect results in a tension: his action may not always conform to what his intellect dictates as best, either due to bad will or lack of self-mastery and control. Likewise, his reason may not always be attuned to seeing what is best due either to culpable blindness or to assumed biases and blind spots. This gap between what could have been the best course of action and what man actually chooses or lets happen results in what Lonergan calls a social surd, a situation brought about by human error and sin, a situation which in turn leads to the conscious recognition of the fact and the problem of evil.

The fact is that evils of different orders exist; the problem is that this somehow inclines man to deny the intelligence, power and goodness of God, and that it somehow serves as a

¹² Lonergan treats the parallelism between metaphysics and ethics in his eighteenth chapter, pp. 595-633. This twentieth chapter takes this parallelism as basis and works towards the understanding of God based on an understanding of man outlined in this article.

hindrance to the affirmation of the complete intelligibility of the real.

Lonergan's attempt to present a heuristic procedure towards the solution of the problem results in the emergence of God that makes up for inadequacies of the image in the nineteenth chapter.

The problem of evil as seen and presented by Lonergan originates in human error and sin, and the way to the solution is to be found in human attempts to overcome them in a higher integration of human living that reaches out beyond man. This integration can only be grounded in what Lonergan terms a solution of the supernatural type, one based on living faith, hope and charity. In following a life of faith, hope and charity man recognizes the call to transcend himself and his limitations, to effect that higher integration; by faith in higher truths that go beyond the reach of finite understanding, by hope in the realization of possibilities that exceed natural attainment, and by charity that results from the communication of the absolute love of God and from the response of man to this communicated love.

It is in the light of man's striving to go beyond, to overcome obstacles to truth and goodness, namely error and sin, that the place of evil in the scheme can be discerned. It is likewise in man's striving towards more truth and goodness, towards fuller and fuller being, in other words, towards God, that the effects of evil are overcome, its power counter-balanced.

One realization that comes out of this presentation is that "to be just a man is what man cannot be," that to be truly a man means to keep on striving to transcend oneself, towards greater possession of truth and goodness. To reject transcendence is to reject striving for and the possibility of fulfillment, and is thus to be less a man.

This picture of what it means to be man discloses to us an image of God: God is the ultimate, and thus, the transcendent fulfillment of the human desire to know truth and of

the human striving towards the good, encountered in faith, awaited for in hope, and communicated with in love. But inasmuch as man tends to the fulfillment of his desire and his striving only as he proceeds in attaining particular insights and choosing particular goods, God is also disclosed as immanently present in every individual act of knowing and choosing: these individual acts are seen in full relief in the context of the general orientation of man towards fuller and fuller being, towards God, who is the fullness of being.

God is thus the goal of human activity as well as the *ground* of the totality of this activity—human activity finds full meaning only in the light of man's orientation to God, i.e., man's striving towards the fullness of being.

DEWART: GOD IS NON-BEING, PRESENT

At the crux of Dewart's salvo against "classical theism" as he calls it, represented by Scholastic thinking, is his attack on the traditional notion of being. In his attack Dewart holds basically the same assumptions as he had in *The Future of Belief*, namely that this notion which traces back to Hellenic thinking, is culturally determined and is therefore one-sided, as it is likewise an obstacle to a deeper understanding of the meaning of God.

Dewart's own understanding of this term "being" is likewise culturally determined, i.e., according to one strand of interpretation based on modern and contemporary philosophical currents. Dewart repeatedly stresses that *being* need not, may not be identified with *reality*. What a man can affirm empirically as an object of his consciousness is what Dewart understands by "being", the same understanding that derives from contemporary schools that hold "being" as essentially appearance, direct availability to experience. This is in fact an understanding influenced greatly by Kant for whom existence, synonymously being, meant affirmability within the limits of spatio-temporal experience. In this light then Dewart makes the emphatic statement that God *cannot* be being (understood in this way). The God that Christians affirm in faith cannot be affirmed to *exist*, if this is what it means to

affirm existence, or being. In this light too must be seen Dewart's further contention that being is not equivalent to reality. There is an affirmable reality *beyond* the bounds of being. This in turn is the basis for his two-pronged attack on contemporary atheism on the one hand, and classical theism on the other.

Classical theism, he writes, supposes that being is all that there is: beyond being is nothing. Therefore to affirm God must be to affirm him as being, albeit a First Being or Supreme Being. It is the task of the classical arguments for God to demonstrate the basis of this affirmation. But this concept of First or Supreme Being has been subjected to historical criticism, and it is the God so conceived who has historically become the basis for 18th century scepticism, nineteenth century anti-theism, and contemporary atheism. God as Supreme Being could not be conclusively demonstrated by reason, as shown by Kant, and therefore scepticism arose. Then such a God was found to be an enemy of human greatness and human freedom, as pointed out by Nietzsche and Feuerbach, and therefore the only recourse was to oppose such a God. Finally, experience does not seem to warrant the existence of such a God, and therefore contemporary atheism proclaimed Him as nonexistent, or better, dead.

Classical theism and contemporary atheism are based on this identification of being with reality. For the former, since being is all there is and God is, therefore God is being. For the latter, since being is all there is, i.e., there is no reality beyond being, which can be directly affirmed in experience, and God does not fall under the directly experienceable; therefore there is no God: atheism is a direct implication of contemporary thought.

Hence Dewart holds that the foundations of belief must be sought elsewhere than in scholastic thinking and contemporary thought: neither of these can provide adequate philosophical support for Christian theism as such.

A key to the understanding of Dewart's position is had by looking at his conception of what is real.

I use the term [reality]...in the contemporary, everyday sense, which is distinctly affected by the existentialistic consequences of St. Thomas' ascription of contingency to the distinction between essence and existence. Thus, by reality in today's ordinary language we usually mean that which transcends consciousness, that which is other than oneself.¹³

In questioning the identification of reality with being, Dewart likewise points out the fallacy of common sense in supposing that there is no reality which *is not* (i.e., is not being). Being is empirically given reality, in Dewart's own conception; yet there are aspects of experience which point to reality beyond the empirically given.

Experience always, without exception and by its very nature, exhibits the duality of the self and other. The reality, the otherness of the other, is not open to doubt or question: whether its otherness lies in being, that is, in existing is of course another matter, about which nothing can be said conclusively at this point.¹⁴

Thus Dewart exposes the root of his contention that reality is not identifiable with being: his conception of being as empirically given reality is much narrower than the understanding of the notion of being as Lonergan explains it in *Insight*, which follows scholastic tradition.¹⁵ This indicates that Dewart has misconstrued a key notion in this tradition.

However, if we granted his starting-point, we would see, indeed, that his reconstruction of theism provides an avenue for avoiding the confusion inherent in the traditional theistic affirmation, "God exists," or "is being." He thus comes towards a formulation of an understanding of God based on the unscholastic premises of contemporary thought and ordinary language. For, granted that Dewart may be amiss in his understanding of certain aspects of scholastic tradition, one must likewise grant him credit for pointing out the fact that this

¹³ Dewart, *Foundations of Belief*, p. 397.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 398.

¹⁵ See Lonergan's chapter on the Notion of Being, *Insight*, pp. 348-374.

tradition hardly remains an operative framework in contemporary minds. Thus, Dewart is strong in his thesis that the philosophical foundations of a *relevant* and *contemporary* theism cannot be sought in a scholastic framework.

Again Dewart makes clear that he does not just embrace contemporary thought as an alternative, or for the mere sake of being "contemporary". He emphasizes that contemporary thought by itself cannot support theism, with its assumption that beyond being, i.e., beyond the empirically given, there is nothing. Dewart tries to provide a middle way that will lead to an affirmation of a reality beyond the empirically given, yet an affirmation *based on experience itself*.

Dewart's starting-point is the problematic character of human consciousness, the same starting-point assumed by many recent and contemporary thinkers in their endeavor to treat basic philosophical questions. This starting-point marks the tenor of philosophizing in our day as definitely *anthropological*, i.e., centering on the self-questioning of conscious man.

Man primarily becomes aware of himself as existing, as being, yet existing in a contingent way: he is not governed by necessity as far as his existence goes: he can not-be. But the fact that man becomes aware of himself as existing, though in a contingent way, presents an unconditioned demand upon this being: man is called to affirm himself as such, and live out the implications of being.

To the degree that a being becomes conscious of its being, its existence loses its automatic character and demands instead a conscious *effort*, as it were—and the rejection of existence witnesses to this no less forcefully than does the affirmative choice. Even the choice to drift with existence, or to avoid encounter with life, implies the self-same requirement of consciousness as it brings man face to face with himself. In the moral order this is reflected in the fact that no one can abdicate his conscience in favor of someone else's judgment unless he *judge* that *someone else's judgment* is for *some reason* to be preferred over his own.¹⁶

¹⁶ Dewart, *Foundations*, p. 439.

The call that man discerns to affirm his own self, a call that comes from the very core of what he is, is a call to transcend the givenness of being, to "stand out" of brute empirical existence and affirm something "higher" than it. This is further indicated by man's inevitable task of questioning after the meaning of his own existence—a quest which thereby implies a going-beyond this givenness of being. For Dewart then, consciousness does not only transcend itself: it transcends being as such. The way for an understanding of the "reality of non-being," a "reality other than being," is thereby opened.

Dewart situates religious experience with this experience of going beyond being towards that reality which transcends it. But he warns against the objectivization, the conceptualization of this reality in terms of "*being*": "religious experience... does not reveal a transcendent being: what it reveals is that being exists in the presence of a reality which transcends it."¹⁷ This reality, transcending being while being *present* to it, is thus likewise *immanent* to being. First of all, experience reveals this reality to be in relation to being, for it is the conscious experience of being that points to this reality that goes beyond: it is manifested in and through being.

This notion of a reality that transcends being while being present, immanent, related to it, is proposed by Dewart as a framework for reformulating the image of God. In the light of this notion, one can now understand how God can be non-being, yet affirmable as real, as present to man. The affirmation of God in this, will in fact be a deeply meaningful affirmation since it becomes an answer to the initial question of meaning that the consciousness of being gives rise to.

In this context then the theist need not argue with the atheist on the question of God's existence: for him it becomes an irrelevant and therefore misleading issue. God does not exist in that he is not being (in Dewart's understanding of this). But the problematic character of man's consciousness ushers in a different type of questioning about God, a questioning intimately connected with the very meaning of man's own existence: and this type of questioning leads one to con-

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 443.

sider the present reality beyond being that *grounds* the meaning of being itself, and which looms present as the *goal* of human existence. This type of questioning then relates God to the *ground* and *goal* of existence, and situates him in a dimension that goes beyond man's limited understanding of existence: God remains in mystery, yet ever present to man asking the meaning of his own being.

In thus situating God away from the traditional categories of existence and non-existence and in a realm that touches on the *ground* and *goal* of existence itself, Dewart is trying to lay out foundations of Christian belief that can meet in dialogue with contemporary thought and with presuppositions of ordinary language. These foundations can then serve in the reconstruction of theistic belief, specifically in the re-presentation of the meaning of the Christian faith to contemporary man, a task deemed so urgent today.

It may be pointed out that Dewart does not really end up with a "doctrine on God" that is opposed to that found in scholastic tradition: he is content with the attempt at *laying the foundations* for a task that demands communal intellectual effort not only of philosophers and theologians but also of sociologists and psychologists.

CONCLUSION

A careful observer will note that beneath the differences professed by the two camps, there remains a deep-seated unity of motivation and orientation. Both Lonergan and Dewart are concerned with providing philosophical foundations for belief, each in his own way. Though the author of *Insight* might disagree with this description of the aim of his work, in that *Insight* attempts to cross religious barriers by inquiring into the universally common structure of human knowing, nevertheless the author's own cultural heritage and intellectual presuppositions as well as his Christian faith all leave their mark upon his work. Dewart is more explicit as regards his intentions.

The starting-points of both are remarkably similar: for Lonergan it is man's unrestricted desire to know as well as

the inevitable call to act upon being, while for Dewart it is the problematic nature of man's consciousness which leads him to seek the meaning of his existence. These point to basically the same reality in man, that dynamism to go beyond. The recognition of this dynamism becomes the basis for an understanding of transcendence, again the basis for an understanding of the meaning of God for man.

For Lonergan God is the term of man's striving: man strives towards fuller and fuller being, and God is understood as the fullness of being: thus man is seen as basically one striving after God. Dewart seems to be expressing disagreement by criticizing the identification of God with being, but on a deeper level he is concerned with the same reality, though in different words. Man is dynamically oriented to go beyond, to transcend: this is the same in both Lonergan and Dewart. But Dewart's conception of being prevents him from calling, with Lonergan, the terms of such dynamism being: being is precisely what is transcended, into a realm of reality that is beyond, therefore not being: a transcendence which is nevertheless based upon and related to being though not identified with it.

Lonergan and Dewart may seem to be diametrically opposed in that one affirms God as being, as existing, while the other denies God the status of being: but an understanding of the different frameworks of the two will reveal a point of convergence in the image of God presented by each. Thus, it appears that the central difference between the two lies not in the image of God, but in the understanding of the notion of being.¹⁸

¹⁸ In an article discussing his differences with Lonergan's thinking, Dewart writes that he finds himself in agreement with the former in many epistemological and metaphysical questions, and notes that the greatest difference between them lies in the conception of God. See Dewart, "The Nature of Truth in Relation to Language," *Continuum*, VII (Summer, 1969), 332-340. Here however I maintain that this "difference" is really based on a difference on the metaphysical level, and that Dewart's main contention is for a revision of the *metaphysical* framework that serves as the basis for the understanding of God.

Dewart's work, nevertheless, shows that reformulating our image of God implies providing philosophical foundations that will meet the demands of relevance to the thought-patterns of contemporary man, and that will not merely echo traditional themes based on a framework no longer operative for many. To what extent Dewart personally succeeds in providing this foundation is a question still under discussion.