

BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY: Towards the Theological Implications of William Desmond's Thought *An Interview with John Milbank*

Philip Gonzales

PHILIP GONZALES [PG]: John, when and how, did you first encounter William Desmond's work?

JOHN MILBANK [JM]: Actually, it was first brought to my attention by David Bentley Hart who, in his inimitable way, said: 'You have never heard of Desmond? Read him at once'. I always do what David says, so I went away and read William, and I saw that he was, indeed, important.

PG: Would it be a safe to say that among the major living philosophers in Continental philosophy that William's work most resonates with the spirit of Radical Orthodoxy? And if so why?

JM: I think that is definitely the case. Really, for the quite simple reason that, I think, William Desmond has questioned the postmodern obsession with indeterminacy and difference. He has rightly said that's just another option, that's just another way of reading things. Whereas a lot of postmodern voices tend to suggest that the direction they're pointing in, is somehow the ultimate in terms of

critical suspicion. Not to see that they are, themselves, coating the world in terms of a certain preference and so on. In other words, what Desmond is pointing out is that to see everything in terms of difference is really just as rationalistic as to see everything in terms of some kind of rational unity. The idea that things are simply either the same, or their different, is also to remain confined within the idea that things are either universal or particular. The only Continental philosopher, I know of, who somewhat questions that is Agamben. Where he asks: Well isn't analogy the more radical possibility, where you go relationally from particular to particular? Or can a particular be also a universal and suggest the way to other particulars and can you can gather things together by combining particular with particular? But quite whether, those sorts of people—Agamben, Melandri, etc—in the end, stand for an analogical metaphysics is very unclear. I think, really, in the end, they don't. Whereas, Desmond obviously is standing for exactly that and this is very close to what Radical Orthodoxy has always been talking about. We have always been saying: yes, it's impossible to be dogmatic about things, everything is very fluid and very uncertain and so on. But, that doesn't necessarily point us in a nihilistic direction. It may more suggest that knowledge is always fragmentary, analogical, a sort of partial grasp of an always inaccessible plenitude of truth. And, in the wake of postmodernism, that's very much the way to try to recover a Catholic metaphysics. As you know so well, somebody like Przywara is already pointing in that direction. And I think Desmond is taking that project further. In a way, his category of the between is insisting on both analogy and participation and it is insisting both on sign and thing at the same time.

PG: Taking off on you mentioning Erich Przywara, one of the questions which I intended to ask is: If you look back upon the great towering figures of twentieth-century theology, which figure do you find that Desmond's thinking resonates with? I, personally, find it to be the work of Erich Przywara, namely, for the reason that both of them emphasize our suspended creatureliness, as well as both make use of dialectic in order to dynamize analogy into an open living real relationality, without thereby falling into dialectical closure. Likewise, both place great emphasis upon the asymmetry of the relationship between God and man. But an asymmetry which is there to make possible the *admirabile commercium*, or, a space

of living free exchange between God and man. My question, then, is would you agree with this assessment or do you see another theological figure in the twentieth-century that you think Desmond's thought has an elective affinity to?

JM: No, I would agree with you that, Philip. I think Przywara would be the most obvious person. But I further think there is a kinship with the thinkers of *Nouvelle Théologie* as well. Moreover, there is a profound connection between the stress on analogy, on the one hand, and the idea of a natural desire for the supernatural, on the other. It is in Przywara's phrase, a 'suspended middle' that best expresses this and that's what we are talking about. Because analogy is not simply a discourse on natural ontology, it covers both the natural and supernatural and, in a way, has to do with the dynamic between them. So, I exactly agree with you. The significance of Desmond's work is that he is dynamizing analogy. And that he is also bringing out what is always latent in analogy, that it is not a static thing or a measurable resemblance between two things. Rather, it is more about a tension between two things; that means you can only affirm analogy if the analogy is increased, if you like. If something is like God you have to make it more like God, that is, you have to make yourself more like God, for it to in any sense to work. And the crucial thing to see is that analogy understood that way is actually much more dynamic than dialectic. Dialectic is going to end in identity, or, in difference in the end and will, thus, not keep that play open. One of the things that we are needing to recognize, that again Agamben partially recognizes, but Desmond fully recognizes is this: That there is not really any mediation in Hegel. A lot of modern French thought has been about trying to escape from the dialectical because it is seen as mediatory and, therefore, on the side of identity. But what one needs rather to see is that Hegel is not really talking about mediation, but a progress towards identity, and that genuine mediation is no nearer identity than it is nearer to difference.

PG: We have just broached the importance of analogy as keeping an open relation or moving state between univocity and equivocity, as well as, analogy avoiding dialectic's urge towards closure. Likewise, we have also seen, as you rightly say, that analogy plays between the natural and supernatural and is about far more than, as you said, a 'natural ontology'. So following from what you said, I would

now like to turn to a very important question which is, to my view, central to your work and to the stance of Radical Orthodoxy. Namely, that Radical Orthodoxy draws heavily from *Nouvelle Théologie*, and especially, from the work of Maurice Blondel and Henri de Lubac. And, in doing so, Radical Orthodoxy emphasizes the integral, always already worked on relation between nature and grace and thus the revolutionary impact this relation has for theology and theology's relation to all other disciplines. How, then, do you see Desmond's work fitting into this very difficult question of the relation between nature and grace? Does he make a specific contribution to the nature/grace problematic, maybe insofar as he enacts this integral relation in his thinking much in the way the Augustine did: Your thoughts on this?

JM: That's quite a difficult question because I am not sure how far he explicitly talks about that relationship. But, I think, on the other hand, it's always implicit and that he is quite happy to introduce theological themes and sometimes to talk about the Trinity. Maybe his work could point more explicitly towards something like a Trinitarian ontology. But the dynamic aspect of analogy, the fact that we can only relate to God by becoming ever-more like God, by being raised above ourselves towards God must be always the work of grace in us. Then you could say, at that point, that our aspirations towards God are overtaken by God's advance towards us. And that, therefore, being is overtaken by event or we see that being is event. And, if we want to fully understand God as an action, as a living reality, as in Himself an occurrence, then that can only be revealed; which means that the full personality of God can only be revealed. Thus, in that way, you might say the *metaxu*, the in-between between us and God, finally, has to be God himself. It has to come from the divine side. I think with Desmond the further his work moves in more of a poetic vein, then the more it's not that he's merely illustrating something when he introduces a poetic epiphany, but rather that that epiphany is a necessary paradigm for what he's saying. In other words, only something very particular can alone convey the universal. And, in that way, he is building up towards a sense of revelatory disclosure that would be fully present in the Incarnation. Maybe, the questions of how you would have a metaphysics of the Incarnation as well as of the Trinity is a horizon for the work of Desmond.

PG: Would it be fair to quickly sum up the above question by saying that Desmond's move in his later work towards, as you rightly said, a poetics is necessitated by the between itself? And also that the primary 'between faculty', if one wants to say it that way, would be the imagination? So you find in Desmond that beauty is this kind of mediation between the truth of being and the self which could, also, be related to a Christian understanding of grace. And Desmond's work could, perhaps, open one up to and offer an entry point into a theological aesthetics. Would you agree with that summation?

JM: I would totally agree with that summation, Philip, because if you are talking about analogy and the between then you are talking about the way things hold together and that cannot be fully analyzed. That is, you cannot bring it either under empirical observation or *a priori* logical judgments, as Kant says, in relation to the judgment of beauty. So there's a sense here that although beauty is apparent, it has oddly to be affirmed; that in recognizing beauty you have to repeat it, if you like. And that your act of, even passively seeing it, is in some way active. This is because, in yourself, you are repeating something that is not completely given. It is an active judgment and a kind of performance. That's why, I think, the issue of beauty is very close to the issue of liturgy. In a liturgical act you are recognizing the numinous by doing it; it's both performative and esoteric. So beyond Kant these kinds of questions have become questions of aesthetic ontology. And the issue of the imagination is very central here because the imagination mediates between the understanding and the senses; the imagination is somehow recognizing a real realm, a real ontological realm. This is how Neo-Platonism would see it. Or, a lot of Islamic mystical thought would see it: that when you imagine something it's a genuine dimension that hovers between the material and the intellectual. And, maybe it's that realm which holds them together. And whatever bond it is which holds together the spiritual and material, is then very close to the bond that holds being together at all, or, that holds being together in relation to God. And, I suppose, that's the human access to the bond of the between because we are half-material and half-spiritual. And all the time, in what Coleridge called our 'primary imagination', we are having to cross that bridge of the imagination without noticing it; we are having to convert the sensible into the

intellectual and the other way around. Quite apart from imagining things that are not there ('secondary imagination') we are then having to imagine what we see in order to be able to see it. This is what Aquinas says when he talks about conversion to the phantasm—it is close to the meaning of Coleridge, though Coleridge goes further to see the work of the imagination as the prime work of thought and echo of the divine Logos within us.

PG: Switching the register a bit, we have seen in the foregoing questions some of the tremendous overlap between your work, in particular, and Radical Orthodoxy in general, with Desmond's work. I would now like to broach some of the differences between you and Desmond. In your essay on Desmond in a volume dedicated to his work entitled, *Between System and Poetics*, you say, "Since I agree with nearly everything that Desmond has to say, apart from some minor divergences or hesitations that are scarcely worth discussing in print, there seems little point in offering a critique of his philosophy."¹ However, in *The Monstrosity of Christ*,² you do voice some of these hesitations, namely, some interpretive differences in respect to Hegel as well as Desmond being a bit too Levinasian in his approach to *eros*. So even if you do not see these to be very great differences, what do you see to be the greatest difference between Desmond and yourself?

JM: First, I would like to reiterate the massive amount of common ground because, I think, that is, by far, the overwhelming factor. And recently I've been talking about a fourfold classification of being which very much corresponds to Desmond's in respect to talking about how modern thought seems to fall. It seems to fall either into an enchanted immanence, or, a disenchanted immanence, or, a disenchanted transcendence and an enchanted transcendence. I think, this is very near to Desmond's way of looking at things with the idea of the between being very close to the idea of an enchanted transcendence. And what is crucial is that that puts one in continuity with the Romantic project, essentially. I think—and

¹ John Milbank, "Glissando: Life, Gift, and the Between," in *Between System and Poetics: William Desmond and Philosophy after Dialectic*, ed. Thomas A. F. Kelly (Oxon and New York: Ashgate, 2007), 217–238 at 217.

² John Milbank and Slavoj Žižek, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 146–47.

Desmond often refers to these kind of things—that the early Romantics after Jacobi, Hamann, people like Novalis and Schlegel in Germany: in England, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Blake: in France people like Joseph Joubert, Maine de Biran and Chateaubriand: that what we have now understood is that these people are not idealists. They are realists who stress that the kind of poetic making they advocate is a making of real symbols in the outside world and that this is a kind of fragmentary approach to the divine in which they tend to invoke the Platonic, and often, in its theurgic mode. They also offer a richly populated cosmos. They speak much about gods and fairies but don't see these as competing with God himself. Whereas, I think, the opposite way to go here is to have a totally disenchanted transcendence where you insist on God's otherness because he's a sort of bolt from the blue into a symbolic desert. So you get a disenchanted nature and then, by contrast, grace and, perhaps, the sacraments. I always think that this, in the end, makes things like sacraments kitschy and unbelievable. Then it becomes the province of fantasy and fanatics, which is the extreme danger of a disenchanted transcendence. So what we need is an enchanted transcendence, and that is my profound common ground with Desmond.

If I have any hesitations at all, and I am never quite confident that I am reading things right, it is at the point where he tends to associate the dialectical with the erotic. And then to say that beyond the dialectical we need to insert more of a sense of distance which he associates that with the agapeic. And this is not to say that he wants to completely divide the agapeic and the erotic, but that my reading of dialectics might be slightly different. I agree that dialectics tends to lead to swallowing everything into an identity. However, it is a quite sterile identity that is not really erotic, except in the sense of complete possession. But I also think that Žižek is right that dialectics can go the other way (or the other way at the same time) of leaving a remainder of totally meaningless difference. In that sense Hegelian dialectics is very disenchanting indeed, in that it splits complete unity and difference in the very final instance of uniting them. And, therefore, it's quite important when one is thinking about going in the direction of the between and analogy not to suggest that there is a unification with the other, but then that we *also* allow for the absolute difference of the other. Rather one should say that the

more there is difference the more there is unity. And in that sense, the agapeic and the erotic coincide rather as they do for Dionysius the Areopagite. In other words, that one's absolute love of the other, as the other, is equally a profound sense of intimacy with the other. Just like the divine love for us is always a love for the absolute particular, and so, as Pope Benedict has said, in that sense it is a divine *eros*. It is a willing of the good for the sake of the other, but also as that particular other that you love as the other in unitive relation with her. But, of course, we are not capable of that love for everyone. Only God is capable of that. But it's just for that reason that Augustine and Aquinas insist so strongly on the so called *ordo amoris*—that you should love those closest to you and those with whom you are really conjoined. Because you cannot, as yourself, love the whole world. The Church may try to love the whole world but you can't do it. You have a particular world and responsibility, and we have some kind of affinity with the whole world and some kind of affinity with all other human beings. And, in some sense, we can love each and every human being in their particularity, but only to a limited degree can we do that with everyone. But any and every love involves a certain mutuality and affinity. So I would insist more on the absolute coincidence of *eros* and *agape* more than it, sometimes, sounds as that Desmond is doing. I would make fewer concessions to Levinas and stress the paradox that absolute distance is absolute proximity.

PG: When you gave the St. Thomas Aquinas lecture in Leuven back in 2002 William introduced you and in his introduction he remarked that, '...You must be included in spirit within the great tradition of philosophy where the efforts to think God found a hospitable home'. Would you be willing to say that it is time that we start to include Desmond within the spirit of the great theological reflection on God? Especially, given the publication of *God and the Between*³ which presents a kind of speculative theology which has not been seen amongst the ranks of the philosophers for quite some time. And, if so, would you agree or disagree with Christopher Ben Simpson's critique of Desmond in *Religion, Metaphysics, and the*

³ William Desmond, *God and the Between*, Illuminations: Theory & Religion (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

Postmodern,⁴ in which he seems to encourage Desmond to come out of the closet as a theologian? So, in other words, my question to you, as a theologian who has a great respect for Desmond and finds his work nourishing for your own thought, how would you like to see Desmond's thought unfold in the future, in relation to theology?

JM: Well I am very honored if Desmond thinks that I've done even a tiny bit of philosophy. The older I get the more convinced I am that we've all got a very long way to go in retrieving, rethinking, and repairing the great tradition and I think we have only just begun. Maybe, the clue to all this is the Trinity. The Trinity, if you like, is the doctrine of the absolute coincidence of being and event. That, if God is being itself, He's the *actus purus* and the *actus purus* is not just some sort of praxis in opposition to *poesis*, it is somehow both at once. God is the *Perichoresis*, the Trinitarian dance, and that metaphor of dance is interesting because in a certain way dance is between *praxis* and *poesis*. Dance is an external art, but it doesn't leave you. And yet, it's you going outside yourself, tracing an ever-vanishing spiral mark, because there also is a *poesis*. That is, there is an art of the Father in the Son. So it is like a dance that after all leaves a recording of itself, in that sense, and yet the recording is the dance, if you will. It is somewhere halfway between a dance and an exteriorized, fixed work of art. And so, in a very radical sense, what we have in God is a complete act that goes beyond any contrast between *praxis* and *poesis*. It is a production of something, where God infinitely is that production, and God goes out of himself within himself. He is the production of the world as its Creator, and yet, he is only the production of a world in himself as his Son and that is unthinkable. One might say that, on the one hand, we have to grasp that activity in relation is, in the end, eternal and that, if you like, is the speculative task of philosophy. The task of philosophy is to grope its way towards seeing the reality of the Trinity. But, on the other hand, we have also to say that being can only be grasped as event and that has to occur. So we don't really know this outside divine revelation, we don't have a secure knowledge of anything outside of divine revelation. Its only when God appears in the flesh that our conjecture on the way

⁴ Christopher Ben Simpson, *Religion, Metaphysics, and the Postmodern: William Desmond and John D. Caputo* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009).

the world holds together analogically, our conjecture about the way words point to things, is confirmed. Because here we have the *Logos* Himself, here we see the full pattern of the way things look. And, again, it's a strange kind of confirmation. It is a confirmation that we can only judge and reenact, that we can only repeat differently. So its certainty remains an aesthetic kind of certainty, but it's the absolute paradigm. It's as if the confirmation of beauty would only be this entirely beautiful reality, this perfect instance. And that has to arrive as an event just as the repetitions of that event are sacramental and Eucharistic. Thus, as Catherine Pickstock has argued, the veracity of language is confirmed by transubstantiation when our words are alone fully effective. Because what we say of God is that he is eternally a Word that is effective, because reality itself, being as such is this effective word. You can know that speculatively, to some degree, but really it has to arrive and be enacted. It is in that sense—again this is what Catherine's book *After Writing* says—that philosophy builds up to liturgy.⁵

PG: If you allow me to interrupt: Is it safe to say that you are happy or satisfied with Desmond's work building up towards revelation and you would not like to see him take a more explicit theological turn?

JM: No, I am not saying that at all. Actually, I think in some sense he has already done enough. He doesn't need to do any more at all. But I also think it would be perfectly natural if he went on to articulate a theology. You know Philip I don't see any division between philosophy and theology. If you have this theory of being as act and event then you can't make an artificial divide at all. The theological task is also speculative and the philosophical task is finally to expound on the meaning of revelation. And, I think, historically that when there is some kind of sharp divide between philosophy and theology, it does not have any clear grounds at all. This is all something very modern.

PG: To conclude this interview and conversation together, which has been centered around the work of William Desmond, we have spoken about the importance and necessity for an analogical between, a metaxological between,

⁵ Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

which opens up a kind of space of freedom, of free-play and beauty which is fluid and moving and thus allows for real relation. This then, in turn, as we say, touches upon the age old problem of nature and grace and a natural desire for the supernatural and analogy's mediation between the natural and supernatural. Likewise, we have seen that because of this, a sharp divide between philosophy and theology is ungrounded. So my last question to you, while I have you here, is a bit of an expansive one which seeks to continually reflect on the important relation between philosophy and theology that has been attested to in this interview: In our twenty-first century secularized world of nihilistic global capitalism, what do you see to be the primary prejudices, challenges, and barriers which continue to prevent a genuine dialogue and integration of philosophy and theology on a cultural, ecclesial, as well as on an academic level? And the second part of my question, ending on a more existential note, is what sort of spirit would you say is necessary to try and encounter, counter, and resist these powerful barriers or prejudices?

JM: That's an extremely complicated question, Philip. I think what is perhaps above all important to realize is that antique philosophy was a kind of spiritual exercise. In a way Christianity had to read pagan philosophy as more rationalistic than it really was because it was suspicious of the pagan spiritual elements which continued in currents influenced by Arabic philosophy. And to some extent, I think, elements of the Renaissance are about trying to undo that mistake and allow once again the spirituality of pagan philosophy as a preparation for the gospel. But, then, I also think that once you have the mistake of the doctrine of a *natura pura*, the idea that there is a natural end that is totally self-contained and autonomous, then you've got the idea that it is complete in itself. And from there you get the kind of terrain of pure philosophy and the rather artificial idea that philosophy can know all there is to be known about the nature of the world. Then you almost inevitably have a very rationalistic and non-teleological view of the world where you lose sight of symbolic realism. By contrast, if one sees the world the way Middle Ages did, as a book of nature that points to God, then you can't make any artificial separations between the natural and supernatural. It is impossible. But once you get pure nature you lose that sense that the world is full

of symbols and signatures and it becomes something that we just banally represent, a series of facts and objects that we describe. Then philosophy comes to be like that and, in that way, the wrong kind of theology has helped to invent a dry, self-enclosed kind of philosophy that cannot really engage feelings and imagination. Because once you've engaged feelings and imagination people are not going to see the world as a series of facts. Rather, the world will be seen as pointing beyond itself as a puzzle, an enigma or a mystery that we can only know by resonating with it, a world that we try and decipher like an enigmatic book that leads beyond itself. Thus once you get on to the terrain of feelings and imagination you get on to an area that is going to mediate between reason, on one hand, and revelation on the other. If you have a Neo-Scholastic view of revelation then you are going to see revelation as just another set of facts and not as something which we can experience. So, somebody like Suárez drains the experience away from faith with an aridly rationalistic philosophy and theology. Revelation thus becomes a positivistic collection of facts that reason then represents. So, I think, there are those kinds of inherited theological barriers and those arid habits of mind that are used to tyrannize people, especially inadequate young men. There are few people who have a sense of imagination and affectivity and yet are speculatively good enough to face up to these rationalistic Neo-Scholastic thinkers and who can challenge their assumptions. The other problem that we face with philosophy is from a completely different quarter: from people who say, well, right from the outset, beginning with the pre-Socratics, philosophy was challenging a mythical worldview. That it was challenging the bond between *logos* and *nomos*, on the one hand, and *physis* on the other hand. Philosophy was sundering that bond, so you get a divorce between human words and natural reality. The issue then becomes whether that challenge is not a kind of proto-physics and an anticipation of a world divided between what the physicists say, on the one hand, and the sort of fantastic human production of completely meaningless signs that just belong to fashion and commerce, on the other. The world as we have it today is one very much divided between the pre-Socratic, as it were, Darwinians in one camp and the sophisticated masters of culture in the other camp. But you could argue instead, and in his own way Badiou does this, that philosophy is really invented when you get Socrates and Plato (maybe preceded by the Pythagoreans, who, on the

contrary, are wanting to insist that nature and culture belong together). And that humanity is a hybrid animal thus trying, in some way, to think together nature, love, the soul and art—all those things belonging together to one reality that inevitably goes beyond nature. So that—as Eric Voegelin argues—the Greeks are really already anticipating the supernatural, that there is something beyond the cosmic. And so, I think, Christian philosophy picks up that legacy and it's not an accident. Thus Plato is concerned with myth and ritual, he doesn't make a neat divide between religion and philosophy.

PG: In summary, then, would you agree that it is necessary for philosophy and theology to return to a sort of spiritual practice where both disciplines are seen in close unity with one another and a unity through which philosophy and theology are performed? They are then, one could say, certain practices and disciplines which thrive upon the spirit of wonder, and in doing so, they open themselves up to a certain metaphysical and theological vision of the world in which their desire is enraptured by the beautiful; so there is a necessity, and urgent need to reintegrate philosophy and poetics, philosophy and myth, and philosophy and revelation so that there can again be a unified vision of the world which is also tied to a very personal engagement and performance of the thinker himself.

JM: Well, Philip, I just couldn't put it better than you've just to put it. I think that is absolutely the case. Things like poetry and history, because they are exploring the contingency of the world opened up by the imagination, the contingency of the world in time are always mediating between being and the radically new event that is revelation: because it's the disclosure of God himself. And I think too that philosophy needs to be a spiritual engagement with the natural world and equally theology needs to be rooted in liturgy, the reading of the bible and in prayer. It is important to put it that way. They both need to be spiritual practices and they need to be conjoined to each other as both practice and theory. The best way of putting that is the medieval idea that there's a book of nature and the book of scripture (and the book of scripture as not separable from its liturgical performance). These two books constantly read each other, and for this reason we cannot possibly use theology to suppress the freedom of inquiry into nature. Then we would miss both what is revealed in creation and the full meaning of grace.

Just as we cannot constrain the freedom of human political practice in an explicit and ecclesially controlled way, because then you will lose the God-given ability of human beings to invent new and fruitful things. But, at the same time, you cannot inhibit the light that grace will cast on nature and society. There are infinitely new things that are going to emerge from this scriptural tradition that will enable us to have endlessly further perspectives on nature that will open up nature, including human political nature for us, in the light of grace. By contrast any sort of neutral approach to nature is a methodological atheism may allow you to see certain things but would surely block off other essential things. It would certainly block off the possibility that nature is richly and poetically meaningful in a way that Goethe, for instance, was trying to recover. So I completely believe that philosophy and theology have to be pursued in alliance. And, in the end, I think that the question we have to ask is about the entire nature of human existence. You could argue that human existence is a sort wager on language. We think that somehow language can disclose reality, or language can bind us by the promises we make, the words we give to do something, so that words can somehow secure in advance our action. Or that words can somehow disclose to us real things. It seems to me it's very hard, if you think of language that way, and yet clearly there is no objective way of confirming the truth of language. If you expect language to do more than pragmatically move about in the world, which is perhaps what animal language is, it seems to me it is very difficult to escape the idea that language is both a religious and a political project. Then, I think, at this point you either say, well we just need to get out of that. It's been a bad deal, as Agamben says, but this seems to be just a despair of the whole human project. But if we want to go on affirming the human project then, I think, we are bound to see it in terms of all our human religious traditions and also our philosophical traditions. I think that the Christian understanding is that God is, in himself, the Word and that God in himself as the Word has arrived in time and confirmed, through a transformation, our language through time and given us the Spirit by which we can trust our words and trust in infinite reality. If you like, it thus seems to me that you can say that Christianity is the most radical manifestation and occurrence of the religious spirit and that it is the truest representative of the human spirit as such.