David Jahnke

Introduction

What is the world coming to? Ever since I watched "The Day After" at the age of 13, which dealt with nuclear devestation, the possibility of this nightmarish occurence has always been a part of my psyche. With the end of the cold war, we seem to have entered an age in which this is less likely but even this is debatable. Third world countries are now receiving the technology which brings them closer to the creation of the nuclear bomb. Those who have developed more rapidly have consistently imperialized less developed countries, imposing their beliefs through the use of force. Might these newly created nation-states want some physical retribution for oppression in the past? Let's hope not but the possibility exists.

With the economic modernization of these countries, major environmental problems have accompanied the benefits of civilization. Polluting the waters consistently at horrible rates is cutting off what once was the lifeblood of these peoples. Incessantly destroying the rainforests for agricultural purposes has immense environmental consequences and fails in the long run because the soil is not suitable for subsistence. Global warming and the depletion of the ozone layer are two

more global problems which make our task even more difficult. Is the earth going to be suitable for human life (not to mention other species) in the future, even if we avoid nuclear catastrophe? How do these recent developments affect the role of religion, and the format of theology? Gordon Kaufman addresses this last question in his book Theology for a Nuclear Age and this is what I will examine in chapter one.

William Placher presents an opposing viewpoint in which tradition places a vital role and this will also be discussed. Placher wants to argue that we live in a plural world in which dialogue will play a major role in attempting to solve these problems. In order for Christianity to have a strong voice in this conversation, we can no longer consider tradition to be a negative word. The traditions of Christianity are what unite Christians across cultures. Also, traditions overlap from one culture to another and so communication and positive conversation can begin with these aspects of life (beliefs, attitudes, and/or lifestyles) which we share with one another. Kaufman seems to over-emphasize the ways in which theology must be brought up to date to the point where you wonder why talk about God is even necessary. Kaufman's theology appeals to Western culture in order to determine the truth of theology and Placher

criticizes this over-emphasis on the superiority of one culture to another. Placher, on the other end of this polarity between novelty and tradition, believes in the authority of the Bible and interprets the Bible using a method created by Hans Frei. Placher's appeal to Christian tradition cannot account for the changes which Kaufman says has put is in a new and radical age. Placher is critical of the type of theology advocated by Kaufman and the opposite is true also. Although they both present interesting questions and possible directions for theology today, they both are unsatisfactory in the end for me because they do not sufficiently deal with the problems each present to one another. Kaufman's theology appeals too much to culture and Placher's relies too heavily on tradition and does not include tests to check the validity of Biblical claims.

One last point that needs to be made is that when Kaufman is critical of traditional theology, he is not specific in naming which theologians he is referring to. My analysis of traditional theology presented in Theology for a Nuclear Age may seem general but this is due to Kaufman's generalizations about this type of theology.

William Dean shows us how historicism with its emphasis on the finite events of this world is once again on the rise in American thought.

He argues that this way of looking at the world is American in that its roots go back to the philosophers William James and John Dewey. That which is common to and unites these historicists is the use of the pragmatic method, for one, and second, the denial of extra-historical realities. This denial of Idealism which is still present in many current philosophies and theologies is what distinguishes "new" historicists from "old" historicists. In chapter two, pragmatism and the distinction between old historicists and new historicists evident in Dean's History Making History will be discussed. Placher's reaction to these notions and Kaufman's relation to them will also be presented. Kaufman's novel concept of God working through the structures of history will be a primary focus and why Kaufman wants to call this a God will be addressed.

Dean is critical of the new historicists' refusal to give us an epistemology. There are values working through the positions of the new historicists which are hidden and not acknowledged. The new historicists are accused of being nihilists, and extreme relativists and subjectivists because of their refusal to give a basis for knowing what they claim. Dean says that they do not accept the position that any theory is as valuable as any other but criticizes them because they appear this way when they do

not ground their values in anything. Dean suggest that radical empiricism, an epistemology which does not revert to a foundationalism, (and so would seem to acceptable to the new historicists), and is historical would give the new historicists a completeness. A criticism of Michael Foucault given by Placher and a criticism of Richard Rorty by Dean along with the radical empiricism of William James will be shown in chapter three. This is primarily what distinguishes Dean from Kaufman. Concluding statements about the positions and possible problems of each of these theologians will conclude the paper.

Chapter 1- Tradition in Theology for Placher and Kaufman

The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 brought us into a new age in human history. In religious circles, the end of history is nothing really new as many "prophets" and religious thinkers have contemplated this possibility. Before the creation of the atomic bomb, however, this end of history always took on a mythological character. When the time came, the end of the world was going to be a battle between the powers of good and evil, God and Satan, and this is evident in the eschatological message of Jesus Christ and the book of Revelations. An omnipotent God would eventually defeat the powers of evil in one final decisive blow.

The difference in the age that we live in today is clear. The power to end all of human existence, and also animal and plant species, is no longer only in the hands of God but is attainable through the decisions of a few powerful leaders choosing to press a button. This is how we must look at this situation . Nuclear fallout, radiation, the damage to the atmospheric layers, and the smoke and soot that would cover the planet, not allowing the sun's rays to reach the earth, would most likely render human life impossible on this planet. Not only would we end the existence

of those living now but the unborn would not have the chance to live. "The possibility that the living can stop the future generations from entering into life compels us to ask basic new questions about our existence, the most sweeping of which is what these unborn ones mean to us" (1). Our own existence will end someday anyway but the possibility that future generations might not have the opportunity to live means that we cannot allow Hiroshima to happen ever again. We must preserve the world today in order for the evolution of humanity to continue.

There have been many other historical developments which have put us in a radically new age. We just recently learned that our planet does not have the resources to sustain life indefinintely. Science tells us the effects on the natural world of the destruction of the rainforests and the depletion of the ozone layer are tremendous. The formation of many new nation-states lessens the domination of a few countries but combined with the political ideal of national sovereignty also contributes to the instability of relations. The poisoning of the environment continues in acid rain, unclean waters, and damaged soil. Gordon D. Kaufman addresses how these historical develpments effect both how we should do theology and how a new method will allow us to conceive a new God which will

address many of the problems we face.

Religious authorities in the past did not anticipate these historical developments and were primarily interested in carrying on the traditions and values of their community. It was also understood, according to Kaufman, that a reconstruction of these traditions was necessary to give meaning to humanity in their particular situation(2). This means that the task of the theologian involves the use of the imagination. This also implies that the material world, what is going on physically in this world, had an impact on how the theologians reinterpreted the traditions. Kaufman believes that fundamentally new constructions of central Christian traditions should be expected. These symbols must be reconstructed in order to provide orientation in light of our radically new situation. Kaufman wants to argue that there has been an overemphasis on the authority of tradition and because of this, the necessary constructive and imaginative aspect of theology has not been the focus. Because of the radical nature of our situation, theology must be reoriented through constructive imagination in order to reorient our patterns of thought to this new age.(3) Let me point out that the following criticisms of "traditional theology" are Kaufman's and that their validity may be

questioned. His lack of specificity makes me wonder who the "traditional theologians" are that he is talking about.

In the past, questions of fact and questions of value were considered to be independent of one another. "The scientific or historical pursuit of truth-- of facts--is and must be, 'value-free'; moral and religious and other value commitments rest, and are to be justified, on grounds independent of existential or factual considerations"(4). Kaufman says that because of the threat of the end of human existence, these claims must be questioned. These claims presuppose that we live our lives out of given faith orientations and make religious judgements by what is already given to us in revelatory traditions(5). Whatever the future holds, we can deal with it by looking to the authority of our tradition. Kaufman argues that this kind of claim is not in touch with the fragility of our current situation. Religious judgements can no longer be based on revelatory fixed givens and science's claim for value-free inquiry should be questioned because, "Both fact and value, as the possibility of nuclear catastrophe makes clear, are always very fragile and unstable"(6).

The future must become important again to theology in this day and age because we may not have a future if we don't begin to think about the

possibile consequences of the arms race and environmental destruction. Because fact and value were kept distinct, empirical disconfirmation of faith orientations was impossible. These faith orientations provided us with meaning and guidance and these beliefs could not be disturbed by historical realities. "But such a stance simply ignores the real openness and contingency of the future"(7). As Kaufman points out, possibility, what the future holds has always had an effect on our being because we explore this realm. It affects us in that we are grasped by a feeling of mystery, of awe; a lack of complete and total control over the possibilities that may confront us. The frightening possiblity that we may end our own existence in the future presents to humanity a major challenge in which theologians must now take action. The situation that we are in now in is radically new and according to Kaufman, a radical reformulation of what the major symbols should mean in this day and age in theology is necessary. Theology can no longer only be concerned with the values of a particular community because the entire world and all of its creatures are now endangered. Historical facts tell us this. If theology is to aid us in our current situation, it must take a fresh look at how the historical and the physical are interconnected with God and

perhaps new values are necessary if our primary concern is, as Kaufman argues it must be, the survival and continuation of humanity.

Theology in the past has used as its tools the traditions which stem from and grow out of its own community. These traditions have been considered to be authoritative meaning that the truth of theology already exists in these traditions and most significantly in the Bible. The truth is given to us through grace and revelation, not created by us. If the truth is already given and known, there should be no need to test the claims presented in theology and all that would be necessary is to seek an understanding of what is given to us in the Bible.

Many of the claims central to the tradition of Christianity are being questioned today. The impact of science and rationalism has been great and is evident in the secular attitudes of many today. Historical criticism has shown that the Bible is loaded with contradictions. Supernatural transcendence and miracles are no longer believed possible. The plurality of the world, the many different ways in which people can choose to lead their lives makes it difficult to believe that the truth is something given to us in ancient times. "What may have appeared to earlier Christians as certainties of faith have become for us problems"(8).

Kaufman says that traditional theology rests on monumental assumptions.

> "Traditional theological work presupposes that we already know even before we begin our investigations (a) who or what God is, (b) that God is self-revealing and trustworthy, (c) that God has revealed himself in the Bible and especially through Jesus Christ, (d) that the proper method of the interpretation of the Bible and tradition, enabling us to apprehend without serious error or distortion the divine revelation in them, is available to us"(9).

How are these things known? These claims cannot be put to an empirical test and so perhaps we must just accept or deny them. Kaufman says, however, that these clearly are theological issues and we must work to discover whether or not they are valid. Once again, the problem with this approach is that theological truth is given to us from something external to this world, and because of this, serious theological investigation of questions like, 'Do we know what God is?', 'Did God reveal himself only in the Bible?', 'Is there only one correct method of interpreting tradition?' is not necessary because it is assumed that the answer to this question is "yes"(10).

Kaufman believes that theology serves humanity and so as the world and the human situation changes, so must theology (and in reality it has even though this is not recognized by some traditional theologians). Theology serves this purpose through the creative minds of those that see

the problems of previous interpretations and bring them to light. These problems often times may be the result of theologians believing in the absolute authority of tradition and subsequently, not paying attention to the needs of those whom their theologies serve. These thinkers believed that they were working with the true word of God and so to criticize it radically or to reconstruct it seemed inappropriate. In light of recent developments, however, it is no longer justifiable to make this assumption for theology must help the individual to cope with and do something about the current crises we face. "Theology is not merely a rehearsal and translation of tradition; it is (and has always been) a creative activity of the human imagination seeking to provide more adequate orientation for human life"(11).

William Placher criticizes this aproach to theology. Kaufman's method is one in which theology has a public character, meaning it appeals to Western culture in general, not only to practicing Christians. The notion of God, varied though it may be, is central to varied lifestyles and transcends academic categories and therefore, theology cannot simply rely on Christian dogma and creeds in making claims. "The roots of theology . . . are found, rather, in the ordinary language of Western culture

at large, i.e., in the living speech of people for whom the word God has significant meaning" (12).

One reason Placher criticizes this is that our culture has focused primarily on God's will and power(13). These symbols have helped to foster the imperialistic acts of Western society and the ideal of dominating nature since to act in a ruling fashion is to act like God. Those who believe they truly know what God is, and then use their will and their power to control other people or to dominate nature can feel they are acting in accord with God since God is omnipotent and controls the world. Also if God is omnipotent, it must be 'his' will whenever we are successful in conquering others or else God would not allow it. Placher says Kaufman should be radically challenging this god of Western culture rather than making our culture the standard from which we judge other conceptions. Placher turns to the Christian tradition in saying, "If Kaufman wants to write a `theology for a nuclear age', surely he should start with the gospel's vision of a God whose greatness lies in humility and suffering"(14).

Kaufman recognizes these misleading images and does challenge this dominant picture of God and argues that it has been fostered in the

traditions of Christianity and those theologians who did not radically criticize it may be to blame for its success and subsequent misuse. The pictures of God as being "King of Kings" reigning over his people, of God's "sovereign will" transforming the face of the earth provide ". . . a very powerful motivation toward a disciplined and authoritarian pattern of life. . ." Kaufman does not stop here. "The power, faithfulness and majesty of God, if invoked in support of one's cause, one's way of life, is among the strongest motivations known to humankind". These symbolic attributes of God have been central to Christian faith in the past but have also, "...nourished and authorized massive evils: western imperialism and colonialism, slavery, unrestricted exploitation of the earth's resources, racism and sexism, persecution of those thought of as heretics and infidels, even attempts at genecide."(15) These symbolic aspects of God were justified in the past by traditional theologians because they are rooted in the Bible; but in our current situation, these symbols become dangerous and should become obsolete. We have the power, not God or Satan, and have used this power to completely destablize the eco-system, to create that which may destroy all, to put holes in the ozone or to stop these destructive patterns. Placher would ask here why talk about God is

even necessary if for Kaufman, it is utterly dependent upon us to change the world.

Placher argues in favor of the continuation of traditional Christian theology with its roots in the Bible and other creeds and dogma. This is the only option if Christians are to remain distinct in this pluralistic world. When theologians begin to appeal to criterion external to religion, the message of the gospel can become distorted because assumptions and values from a worldview different than the one presented in the Bible are used to interpret the Bible. To put it into Placher's words, the gospel may be "cut and trimmed" in order to conform nicely to philosophical, scientific or other modern categories (16).

Placher also shows us how many theologians, in their attempt to show how theology's character is public rather than parochial, private, and particular either must do this through finding universal standpoints which can all be agreed upon or by showing that classic books, or important concepts are of interest on a cultural level (17). A criticism of Kaufman will result because he uses the latter method. Kaufman uses the word "God" as the public character of theology because this word appeals to more than just the Christian tradition. Since Jews, philosophers, even

atheists, as well as Christians have an interest in the word "God" theology can enter into these cultural conversations. Placher argues that this gives special privilege to Western culture which cannot be justified. Why should the conversation taking place in our culture be of more importance than one going on elsewhere? How can one judge advancement and progress with respect to language in cultures? Are they really behind us or might there be something we can learn from them? This belief in the supposed superiority of one culture to another manifests itself in a non-pluralistic fashion. Placher's book is aimed at the need for genuinely pluralistic conversations which can take place because traditions overlap, but the belief in the superiority of one culture over another makes suspect the idea of overlap and hinders this conversation. When one believes that the cultures of Africa, Asia, and South America are not quite as advanced as ours is, learning can only work in one direction, to them from us. If we are not going to take their position seriouly because they are "behind us," they will probably return the favor by not listening to us. A stand-off will result, dialogue will cease, and no solutions will be gained.

I think it certainly can be argued that Western society can learn from other cultures even though technologically and scientifically, we

appear to be advanced. Might not we in America learn about rituals, for example, that might add more structure, coherence, and perhaps meaning to daily existence? Or regain a sense of community which we seem to have lost from our individualistic society? Might a new appreciation of nature result from experiencing the culture, and talking with the tribes of Africa, Asia and South America? "We have to learn from traditional cultures as well as they from us, not only what we have forgotten and repressed, but something about how we might put our fragmented world back together again"(18).

Kaufman and Placher have very different views about the word "tradition." For Kaufman, we live in a radically new age; one which our traditions could never have anticipated and therefore do not address. The environmental crisis, nuclear bombs, and the spawning of many new nation-states are developments in only recent decades, impacting our lives in ways we cannot fully understand. For Kaufman, regressing to traditional ways of thinking cannot help for tradition knows nothing of these new developments. For Kaufman, we should hold onto the word "God" but cannot derive our concept of God from tradition. We must take a fresh look at the two most important Christian symbols, God and Christ, and imaginatively

reconstruct them. What we cannot do is consider tradition to have necessary authority or let tradition set the rules for theological investigation. When one relies on the authority of tradition, the theologian will not imaginatively construct new symbolic meanings to help us today. We will have to investigate later whether or not Kaufman's somewhat radical reconstructions are valid.

Placher, on the other hand, believes everybody lives in particular traditions, be it Christian, Buddhist, conservative, liberal, Western, or Eastern and these traditions affect the way one views these novel problems. In order to come up with solutions to these problems, dialogue is necessary in which we explore one another's traditions, find common ground, and move on from there. When it comes to theology, any attempt to go beyond one's tradition in setting up standards from which judgments can be made will fail. Why? For one, universal starting points which can be agreed upon do not exist because of our varying traditions. Secondly, the attempt to appeal to "culture" in general is not sufficient because the superiority of one culture to another cannot be demonstrated(19). Also, truly pluralistic conversation will then cease.

For a Christian, then, according to Placher, the Bible functions like a

narrative does. It is the most important story from which Christians pattern their lives. Most important because we are working from within the context of our own particular tradition and in this tradition, the Bible is the basis for our faith. Attempts to defend the Bible on rational grounds does not seem possible for Placher because of the plural nature of the world today. Everybody is working within particular traditions and have certain beliefs about existence that cannot be proven and are irreconciliable with other traditions. Rational grounds or universal starting points which can be agreed upon universally therefore do not exist.

Is it possible for Christians to still argue for the truth of the Christian faith if all we can or should work with is our own tradition and can not appeal to rational or cultural standards? Placher believes in the truth of the Christian message and even if this can no longer be proven with objective means, it is still defensible. This involves a distinction between truth and justification. One can make truth claims, in which one really believes these claims are right or true for everyone, but can only justify these claims from within the context of a particular tradition. Placher does not believe this is inconsistent. He argues for an emerging

pattern in Christian faith which, although the truth of this faith is not convincing to everybody today, will become evident as time continues. "First, Christian readers find in the pattern in Jesus' life, a pattern that occurs again and again elsewhere in the Bible, in extra-biblical history, and in their own lives"(20). Christians see an overall pattern occurring again and again in the similarity between Christ's teachings and Old Testament scriptures, in their own lives and the lives of those around them, and because of these consistencies, "Christ's story provides Christians ... with the center of a larger pattern that is for them the shape of all things"(21). Placher believes that in order for Christian theology to be the most persuasive, it must include both patterns. In traditional terms these distinctive patterns have been called typological interpretation and salvation history. Our individual lives have meaning because of Christ's story is how this happens is the function of typological interpretation and the larger, overarching pattern in which we must repond to God's gracious initiative is salvation history. When typological interpretation is over-emphasized we can ". . . forget that the transformation of our lives is possible only because of God's prior initiative," in giving us his son. If salvation history is over-emphasized,

however, theology". . . loses the sense of each individual life in faith"(22).

The way in which the stories of the Bible are interpreted can lead Christians to make different claims about reality. It is the Bible which allows Christians to make ultimate claims about reality, however, and not the sciences or culture. Any attempt to appeal to something besides our own tradition risks losing the distinct character of Christianity and just as important for Placher is that this risks cutting and trimming the gospel to fit into rational or cultural categories. Placher believes that we must remain within the context of our own tradition which, if we are faithful Christians, should be our basis of truth anyway. How then should the Bible be interpreted? Placher incorporates aspects of post-liberal theology. Post-liberal theology discards the claim for universal experience and justification, and emphasizes the picture of reality presented by the Bible. It also incorporates a novel method of interpreting the Bible conceived by Hans Frei which Placher endorses. This method helps theology to find a middle ground between salvation history and typological interpretation. "On this view, the Biblical narratives (1) lay out the shape of the world in which, we live and (2) depict the character of a God to whom they call us to respond"(23). When one reads the Bible in

this narrative way, the Bible does not become meaningful because of some general moral to the story or because it points to something transcendant or deep. Rather, when one reads a story, it becomes valuable simply if one understands the sentences. The stories in the Bible mean what they say. In order to do this, one must put oneself in the context of the Biblical world rather than starting from a modern standpoint and finding meaning for this world today(24).

A typical yet problematic interpretive method which Placher is not fond of has us start with this world and in doing this one incorporates modern assumptions which will make many stories historically inaccurate and scientifically implausible. Therefore, the conclusion made according to this method was that the only possible meaning the Bible could give is a moral lesson to the people of the present. Although the Bible certainly does this, problems arise due to the incompleteness of this type of interpretation. Placher criticizes this, "In a story, we hear something about particular characters and events; the moral of a story is not the whole meaning of a story"(25). By placing ourselves in Biblical times and places, "...our lives have meaning to the extent that we fit them into that framework" (26).

Placher wants to keep Christianity distinctively Christian by remaining faithful to the Bible and the picture of reality portrayed by the Bible and here Kaufman might jump in and ask us what the Biblical world knows about nuclear holocaust and environmental destruction. Also, might the force and the validity of what Christian theology has to say in this modern world lose ground if our picture of reality is limited (or over-extended) by the Bible? When one considers the extent to which science has had an impact on the cultures of the Western world, the inclusion of empirical checks to test the claims of theology might be a worthy move in order to give to theology a more public character. Placher and other post-liberals do not seem to include a way to test the claims of their theology because they accept the truth of the gospel and the authority of tradition. Placher quotes Ronald Thiemann,

> "Christian theology claims that Christian efforts in faith come as a response to God's gracious initiative. We do something because God did something first. Therefore, it cannot be the virtue of our people or the practices of our community that make true the story we tell about what God did" (27).

Christians respond to and lead their lives in accordance with the truth which God gave to us in his son Jesus Christ and which is known through the Bible. The problems with the "givenness" of this sort of claim have

already been pointed out. The belief in the given nature of truth can make us lazy. There would no longer be a need to look for truth in nature or in ourselves because it is given to us in the Bible. Novel claims about God imaginatively constructed for differing historical time periods would not be necessary and in fact would be considered negative because they may distort the picture of reality presented in the Bible. These new constructions of ultimate reality are necessary to meet the demands of the historical situation we are in. Placher and Thiemann might repond that I am not a true Christian and this is why I do not accept the grace and mercy of God in providing us with truth and forgiveness in the Bible and Jesus Christ. Quoting Placher, "Mysterious as all talk of God is, we believe that our actions in faith respond to prior acts of God...Christians mean at least that much when they say `This is what we believe'"(28).

Placher also says, "Christian theologians ought to avoid letting philosophers or anyone else set their agendas or rules"(29). But if the rules are limited to coincide with the Christian tradition, are we to ignore or disbelieve the rules of science and philosophy that may benefit theology? For example, a central rule of science is the testing of a hypothesis. Because of this, relevant theories are acknowledged and

irrelavent ones ignored. Might this be a beneficial rule for theology? I think we could weed out "irrational" and problematic claims of the Bible with pragmatic and/or empirical tests. Also, if the truth is given to us we should not need to look for help or truth anywhere else with regards to theology. Must the "advancements" of science, philosophy, and other fields be denied or be "cut and trimmed" to fit into the notions of truth and reality made by the gospel? Kaufman priveleges western culture, but Placher absolutizes the Christian tradition to the extent that its claims are really true--". . . not just one perspective among others but the right perspective"(30). Because Placher does not include a test for the claims of the Bible, I do not think he could say no to the next three questions. Are we to accept that Christ will one day return, as it says in the New Testament, to save the world from its potential destruction? Is God to be still revered as a omnipotent Being supernaturally transcending from some other sphere of existence even after the holocaust of World War 2? Are the destructive characteristics of God in the book of Job really aspects of an omnibenevolent deity and are we to accept this God because it is part of the Christian narrative? Isn't the character of God varied and somewhat contradictory in the Bible from one book to another? Aren't

women second class citizens in the Christian tradition?

These are some of the questions I might have for Placher and his acceptance of the authority of the Christian tradition and lack of tests. When we place ourselves in the Biblical framework, "They [the Biblical narratives] describe the real world."(31) The problem with this is the world that is described does not account for the monumental problems that we face today. If one is to find the Bible meaningful in this day and age, this may be the only way to do so without distorting the message but my point is that we cannot rely on the authority of tradition in formulating theology because it does not take into account our current situation. The values in the Bible and other Christian traditions should be accompanied by empirical and pragmatic tests to disconfirm those traditional claims which are not relevant and possibly dangerous today. "If theology is truly to help provide meaning and orientation for human life in today's world - its perennial task - it must come fully to terms with the facts of that world, including especially that peculiar fact-which-is-not-yet-a-reality, the possibility of annihilating future human existence"(32).

What do we have so far? Of main importance is the critique of

Kaufman's theology in which genuinely pluralistic conversations between Westerners and other nationalities would not be possible because of the inherent superiority of Western culture in Kaufman. This would inhibit our abilities to solve many of the problems which take place in third world countries. Let us allow them to join in on the conversation and learn from them and teach them. Kaufman, however, would be critical of the type of theology Placher is doing because it gives too much importance to the traditions of Christianity and does not include tests. It takes for granted that the view of reality created in the Bible can provide us with faith orientations which will help us to deal with current problems. Kaufman believes that the Bible and other traditions cannot address many recent developments and so Placher's theology will not help us to come to terms with the current crises we face.

Notes

(1) Gordon D. Kaufman. Theology for a Nuclear Age. (Manchester University Press) p. 4
(2) Ibid., p. 12
(3) Ibid., p. 14
(4) Ibid., p. 10
(5) Ibid
(6) Ibid
(7) Ibid., p. 11
(8) Ibid., p. 19
(9) Ibid., p. 18
(10) Ibid
(11) Ibid., p. 20
(12) Gordon D. Kaufman. An Essay on Theological Method. (Missoula Mont. Scholars Press, 1975), p.15
(13) Bill C. Placher. Unapologetic Theology. (Westminster/John Knox Press 1989), p. 160
(14) Ibid
(15) Gordon D. Kaufman. Theology for a Nuclear Age., pp. 31-32
(16) Bill C. Placher. Unapologetic Theology., p. 160
(17) Ibid., pp. 156-160
(18) Thomas McCarthy. "Rationalism and Relativism" in Thompson and Held, Habermas: Critical debates, p. 78
(19) Bill C. Placher. Unapologetic Theology., p. 160
(20) Ibid., p. 127
(21) Ibid., p. 128
(22) Ibid
(23) Ibid., p. 131
(24) Ibid., p. 161
(25) Ibid
(26) Ibid
(27) Ibid., p. 165
(28) Ibid., p. 166
(29) Ibid., p. 165
(30) Ibid., p. 130
(31) Ibid., p. 160
(32) Gordon D. Kaufman. Theology for a Nuclear Age., p. 13

Chapter 2- New Historicism, Pragmatism, and Kaufman's God

In this chapter, I will explore further the reconstruction of God by Kaufman and bring forth some possible problems with this concept. The importance of God in the overall scheme of Placher will also be examined. I will also bring into the conversation the writing of William Dean and his discussion of the new historicists. Let me begin with Placher.

The theology of Placher suggests to me that there is an ideal, a deeper truth that is somehow guiding history to meet its fulfillment. This underlying reality which provides us with meaning and truth is the Christian narrative and God. The narratives of the Bible which Placher considers authoritative allow us to see a pattern in the events of this world which will eventually become evident to all. "...someday, as the picture of things emerges more completely, the pattern I see which I concede is at the moment tricky to catch a glimpse of, will emerge so clearly that anyone who looks will basically see things this way"(1). The theology of Placher escapes the dangers of relativism by claiming that there are patterns in history which make the Christian believe that his way of looking at the world ". . . is true, not just one perspective among others but the right perspective"(2). The belief in the universal truth or

value of the Christian scriptures also denies historical contingencies. Placher knows that right now, the Christian perspective is not universal but believes that eventually it will be. "We believe that the pattern of which Christians now catch a glimpse will ultimately be perspicuous to all"(3). William Dean discusses the challenge of today's new historicists to all theologians and historicists that claim there exists a perspective, a message, or an experience which is not subject to time and space.

Dean shows what is common to these historicists,"The new historicists, then can be seen to share these points: they reject (1) foundationalism, (2) realism, and (3) the transcendentalization of the subject; they accept (4) pluralism, and (5) pragmatism."(4) By foundationalism, Dean means the attempt to find universal realities or truths that transcend space and time and also the given universal truths of many traditional religions. Both the pre-modern foundations in which an extra-historical reality simply gave us the truth but also the foundations of modernism through which we can discover universal truth are denied by the new historicists. Modernists thought that structures of the mind or scientific laws were universal starting points which could lead us to objective reality. This is what is meant by realism. The

transcendentalization of the subject is the idea that there is primal experience, ultimate concerns, or existential freedoms which are not subject to historical contingencies and therefore break cultural relativities and allow for universal truth(5).

Placher goes along with this denial of foundationalism, universal starting points, uses pragmatism, and envisions a plural world but still believes in the universal truth of the Christian message. God becomes the basis for truth because God gave us the universal Christian message through Jesus Christ. Placher cites Kiekagaard, "...in the end, subjectivity is untruth, because sin distorts our subjectivity apart from grace."(6) Is it consistent to deny objectivity in saying that one can only argue from within one's particular context and then call subjectivity untruth? Placher is inbetween traditional theology and new historicism. His connection to new historicism is his denial of foundationalism; his acceptance that we can only argue from within particular traditions and cannot find universal starting points. What distinguishes him from these new historicists is the Christian God which through the narratives of the Bible, allow us to see a pattern which is belived to be right for all people. The signified, that which is referred to, seems to be extra-historical

because it is beyond the confines of the finite world, and is not subject to historical change through differing interpretations. Placher cites Aquinas, " 'The way we signify does not correspond to anything in the divine being, but what is signified does.' Our language about God can be like that"(7). The new historicist denies the existence of anything which is beyond history and lacks because of this the comfort and security of absolutes and objective truth. "By comparison, a new historicist theology can know no extrahistorical principles, but only a contingent interpretation of the contingencies of history, and must live with the resulting lack of confidence"(8).

A disbelief in the existence of objective and universal truth and meaning does not mean that meaning is not possible at all which many philosophers and theologians accuse the new historicists of saying. Some of the men behind the label "new historicists" are neo-pragmatic philosophers Jeffrey Stout and Richard Rorty, and post-modern theologians Mark Taylor and Cornel West. They are at times considered to be mere subjectivists, relativists, and nihilists because according to them, truth, meaning, and reality are limited to the context in which the person lives. Dean argues that because we experience truth

and meaning within particular contexts, this philosophy is not nihilistic. The new historicists are also presenting new alternatives to what they consider to be false dichotomies: if not objectivism, then meaningless subjectivism; if not absoluteness or ultimateness, then mere destructive relativism. Reference to the realm of the objective, the absolute, and the ultimate are abstractions which take us "away from the relations between beings and beings" and these relations are all that we have(9). Pragmatism, on the other hand, demands that we look at these relations and the consequences of them. A fuller discussion of pragmatism will be presented later.

It is not possible according to the new historicists to refer to an extra-historical because of a difference in the function of the imagination between new historicists and old historicists. Old historicists felt that the imagination could refer to something beyond historical particulars. It can intuit a notion of that which is not subject to historical contingency and can give meaning to the rest of history. "The rationalists--from Descartes, to Spinoza, Leibniz, Hegel, Husserl, and Einstein--authorized a structure of reason or thought," which would give meaning and truth to history (10). Dean says that according to the new historicists, the

imagination is interpretive meaning that it can refer only to historical particulars and these historical particulars are constructed by the intepreter. The values inherent to the tradition and community of the interpreter of history will always play a role in this construction because he or she cannot escape their own particular history by reference to a realm of objective truth.(11)

This function of the imagination parallels Kaufman's imaginative construction and Kaufman and Dean both want to apply it to theology. Dean says, "A new historicist theology would apply the interpretive imagination to a particular religious history"(12). This is similar to what Kaufman means when he says, "All thelogy, in its attempts to analyse, criticize, and reconstruct the image concept of God, is an expression of the continuing activity of the human imagination seeking to create a framework of interpretation which can provide overall orientation for human life"(13). Dean seems to want to keep a more particular role for theology then Kaufman does.

Dean looks more fully and specifically at the history of Christian thought. He discusses the role of historicism in the religious studies of George Burman Foster, Gerald Birney Smith, Shirley Jackson Case, and

Shailer Mathews. He looks at the role of radical empiricism in the works of two more Chicago school theologians Bernard Loomer and Bernard Meland. Where Kaufman seems to ignore the possible insights of historical Christian theologians and instead creates a radically new concept of God, Dean explores these theologies which will eventually, I believe be the basis of his own notion of God.

Dean goes on to say that the physical, natural world should not be isolated from theology, "The Christian, all the same, would look at a specific material history in which a God and a people were thought to interact"(14). This is in line with Kaufman's need to include the facts of our current situation in formulating theology. The material world is not static; it is molded by human hands. We have created culture over the course of history, we have used nature for our own purposes, and because of a material invention, we now have the ability to destroy the natural world. We are fundamentally related to this world and it therefore should be included in theology. Darwin's theory of evolution also supports this in that we are thought to have evolved in relation to the biological and material conditions which supported and gave rise to human life. Over the course of hundreds of generations, life evolved from lower forms to higher

forms due to biological, chemical, and physical changes in the material world. Kaufman says, "We humans must understand ourselves in the first place, therefore, as one strand in the very ancient and complex web of life, a strand, moreover, which would not exist apart from this context which has brought it forth and which continues to sustain it at every point"(15). This will bring to theology a knowledge of the importance of the natural world. In this day and age in which this natural world is in vital danger of being depleted of its resources, deprived of many unique and important species, and always threatened by human waste and destruction, this knowledge is vital to the future of the planet and God's relation to it.

Many of the new historicists do not care to talk about religion or about the word God. Cornel West and Mark Taylor would be exceptions to this. For the others, their positions are so grounded in history that God is deemed unnecessary or is an abstraction from history. What these historicists do share is an acceptance of pragmatism and a belief that this method may be universally applied to communities looking for a test which will help to make communal decisions by showing the consequences of alternative ideas. The content resulting from pragmatic inquiry will be

dependent upon the community which is using the method, however, and so universal principles which are not subject to time and place are unlikely. Principles which will be true across all cultures and times will certainly not result. They are therefore consistent despite their call for the universal application of pragmatism because the content resulting from this application will not be universal.

What is pragmatism and how can it be applied to religion? Pragmatism has two functions. It is primarily a method for solving disputes by looking at the possible consequences of each alternative. Knowledge of the consequences of philosophic inquiries have no meaning unless they in some way affect our lives. William James sees pragmatism as primarily a method to solve metaphysical disagreements and these disagreements matter only if they somehow have a concrete affect on our lives. Theories and words work more as instruments in which we need to check out the possible consequences they might have on our lives rather than finalizing whatever the debate is about. "You must bring out of each word its practical cash-value, set it at work within the stream of your experience. It appears less as a solution, then, than as a program for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing

realities may be changed"(16).

Gordon Kaufman uses the pragmatic method in determining how the notion of God affects our existence. Through knowing this, our work doesn't cease but continues for once we know the effects of certain theories about God or conceptions of God, we must continue our job of reconstructing what God can do for us in the present. What have been the most important functions of the word God as we know it? This is a pragmatic question and Kaufman responds ,". . .that the conception of an ultimate point of reference for human existence and the world, as it is expressed in the Christian understanding of the God, performs two indispensable functions for human life, what we may call a 'relativising' function and a 'humanizing' function"(17). By relativising, Kaufman means the feeling of not being in complete control; the fear and awe of the mystery which transcends our immediate existence. By humanizing, Kaufman means the notion that God cares for us, sustains us, and forgives us. Once this is established, the work continues in that we must create a new conception of God which will work in our current situation. Kaufman sounds like an old historicist here. History can give to us a universal principle regarding how an ultimate point of reference works in the lives

of people. He is applying the pragmatic method not to what God might mean for a particular community but to human existence in general. He seems to make a universal claim for what an ultimate point of reference does for all of humanity and this does not take into consideration how the traditions of varied communities effect what their definition of ultimacy might be.

For Kaufman, then, in order for the symbol of God to effectively contribute to humanity today, it must then be understood through the concepts of relativization and humanization because this is what an ultimate point of reference, God, does. Kaufman examines how we must use the symbol of God by first examining how it is that human life has evolved in history. First off, he says that it is generally understood that we evolved over hundreds of generations due to biological, chemical and physical conditions that were out of our control. This does not completely explain human evolution as we know it, however. Historical developments also helped to create human life. Language became more complex, memory and imagination more differentiated and stories began to shape humanity as well as hopes for the future(18). "Human creativity was born, together with intention and action, as humans found they could themselves

actualize some of these possibilities and hopes"(19). If one accepts that this is how human life was created and sustained, and how humanity was humanized and relativized, it is in these terms and under these conditions that we must talk about God.

Because human life evolved due to historical considerations as well as natural ones, a God defined in terms of biological evolution is not enough(20). It is in these terms that we are relativized by God, however, because we could not manipulate these conditions and therefore had no connection to this process. God would still be considered to be the force making human existence possible and we would have a feeling of awe and mystery for how this may have happened. This concept is not sufficient, however, for it does not consider how we are humanized by God because human activity is not part of this picture.

The ways in which God has created and sustained us according to Kaufman are somewhat abstract. God is no longer a force which transcends history and therefore can only influence history through supernatural miracles. It is not a God whose will is sufficient to fulfill the destiny of humanity. We have put ourselves in the situation we are in today because of our freedom, wills, motivation and action. "Human

existence has been shaped by the institutions and language, the customs and skills, which women and men have themselves created, and human purposes and meaning have come to permeate every dimension of life"(21). If human life has been created and sustained by our own hands in the evolution of languages, and institutions, how can God be meaningfully understood as the creator and sustainer? The word God seems to have lost much of its meaning in today's world but maybe this is because God was thought to have been a force influencing our existence externally, from something beyond history, and outside of ourselves and the world. If it was thought that God was working within these structures and within ourselves than it is still possible, in fact, necessary that God become meaningful to us. How is it, then, that we can conceive of God working within history if history seems to be primarily our own creation?

Kaufman admits himself that this knowledge complicates the process of reconceiving God for today and this is where his argument becomes somewhat abstract. Kaufman argues that human intention cannot account for the grand structures of history and culture(22). Although human creativity is responsible for the creation of history and culture in a particular sense, the whole of history cannot be explained by reference to

human intention. Some examples which he gives basically seem to say that culture and history are products of creativity but their evolution can not be explained solely by human intention.

> "Though innumerable decisions and actions were certainly involved in the gradual evolution of modern democratic parliamentary institutions, no one simply thought out this mode of political organization and then directly produced it. . . . The English language-- or Chinese or Sanskrit-- is certainly a human creation but who could be said to have taken thought and decided deliberately to create it?"(23).

Therefore, we must account for this historical evolution of man through a force distinct from human purposes.

This force is God and the humanizing aspect of God is evident in the following passage. "There is a hidden creativity at work in the historico-cultural process, and it is this which has given us the basic social and cultural structures which have actually created and sustained human existence"(24). One may ask why Kaufman needs God if he so thoroughly grounds humanity in history and culture? Why is God important when history and culture seem to determine what God is for us? Why not just refer to history and culture and drop this "hidden creativity"? Firstly, the forces which have given rise to humanity are very diverse and complex.

Biological, chemical, physical and historical-cultural forces and the languages that accompany these forces are not easily understood and are very diverse. Kaufman suggests that God is a symbol which unifies these conditions that make human life possible and sustain it. "The symbol 'God', as no other name or concept in our western languages, holds together in a unity that complex reality which grounds and sustains our human existence, which both relativizes and humanizes us. . . Only such a symbol or concept, which holds all this together in one, can enable us to focus effectively our meditation and activity"(25).

Kaufman's God appears to me to be an example of what Bonhoeffer referred to as a God of the gaps. Since humans cannot explain this hidden creativity, this force which works to fulfill human intention, Kaufman calls it God. Why call it God? How something so abstract could become an ultimate point of reference confuses me. Will this idea of a hidden creativity working through the structures of history and culture be ultimate to humanity? Many people, myself partially included, would have a tough time even understanding this much less believing in its ultimacy which makes it unpractical. I do not know of the success of this concept of God but I believe that most Christians would consider it to be rather

foreign to what they have previously perceived as God and out of touch with other aspects of their faith.

Dean says that for Kaufman, because God is solely imaginatively constructed, value of this construction is dependent upon whether ot not this God has utility. Dean says, ". . . Kaufman can see no more in the concept of God than a heritage of lucky and unlucky guesses-lucky when they turned out to have some utility, unlucky when they do not" (26). If the pragmatic consequences of this God are beneficial, this makes the notion of God a good one. Because of this, Dean says, "There would be no point in attempting to look at past history for insight about what God means"(27). Kaufman does not look at the history of theology for help, he in fact generalizes about theology's faults in the past and this is what distinguishes him from Dean (although Dean is also critical of certain types of theology.) Dean looks to the insights of James, Dewey, and the Chicago School theologians from Foster and Mead, Mathews and Case to Loomer and Meland in History Making Hiatory and I am sure he will continue this when he moves on to constructive theology.

Can Kaufman's God have some benefits? Let me try to point out some possible practical consequences of this concept of God. If God is

considered to be a unifying force, perhaps we will begin to give up the particular loyalties of nation, race, and religion in hopes of a more unified whole. But do not newly developed nations need a strong sense of national identity to flourish, and is it right to ask oppressed races to de-emphasize their heritage in the hopes of unity? If God is tied to the natural world through biological, and chemical forces, we would have an addtional reason to stop poisoning the environment (although I do not know that we need another reason). If God has irrevocably bound Godself to the course of human history, perhaps we would be more active in stopping what may be the end of history. For if God is beyond the natural world and beyond history, which traditional Christianity tells us God is, devotion to God has nothing to do with stopping environmental destruction or preventing the end of history. Notice that in all these, the responsibility lies in human hands and God is a reason to become responsible. Perhaps it is selfish to put ourselves before God; one could say it implies that God only has meaning to the extent that humans can use God but in order to serve that which gives us life and sustains it, we must first become aware of how we are destroying life and begin to find ways to stop it. "Awareness of God means that . . . since we humans have the power to

destroy human life on earth completely, what we do can have disastrous consequences for the divine life itself. Devotion to God today means, thus, that we resolve to make ourselves fully accountable for the continuance of life on earth"(28).

Notes

(1) William C. Placher. Unapologetic Theology., p. 130
(2) Ibid
(3) Ibid., p.166
(4) William Dean. History Making History. (State University of New York Press 1988)., p. 7
(5) Ibid., p. 19
(6) Placher. Unapologetic Theology., p. 172
(7) Ibid., p. 173
(8) Dean., History., p. 18
(9) Richard Rorty. Consequences of Pragmatism (Essays: 1972-1980). (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982)., p. 52
(10) Dean., History., p.4
(11) Ibid., p. 3
(12) Ibid., p. 17
(13) Kaufman., Theology for a Nuclear Age., p. 26
(14) Dean. History., p. 17
(15) Kaufman., Theology., p. 35
(16) William James. Pragmatism (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975)., p.28
(17) Kaufman. Theology., p. 33
(18) Ibid., p. 37
(19) Ibid
(20) Ibid., p. 39
(21) Ibid., p. 40
(22) Ibid., p. 41
(23) Ibid., pp. 40-41
(24) Ibid., p. 41
(25) Ibid., p. 43
(26) Dean., History., p.143
(27) Ibid
(28) Kaufman. Theology., p. 46)

Chapter three- Radical Empiricism

In the preceding chapter, Kaufman ran into some problems as to why this hidden creativity should be called God and why this concept may not be effective. Another criticism which was not voiced is how this God is derived. For Kaufman, God is just a conception and conceptions do not need to be derived from anthing except the mind. We use our abilities of imagination to construct God. In this chapter, I will begin with the criticisms of the radically relative appearence of two historicists. This will lead into a discussion of what is lacking in the new historicists that would give to them a source for their values. The radical empiricism of William James and John Dewey would fill this role. Radical empiricism also gives to these philosophers along with Dean a basis or a means for theistic work which is more than just pure conception.

Dean and Placher both criticize the appearence of radical relativism in the positions taken by the new historicists but perhaps for different purposes. Dean argues that the new historicists do not account for values which are hidden in their historicism. This weakens their pragmatism. Thier pragmatism lacks an "empirical piety" which results in an inability to explain why one worldview is more valueable than others. The

pragmatism of the new historicists is raised to the level of action when they test how theories will interact with future events(1). The new historicist considers epistemology to be a regression back to a modern ideal of attempting to find foundations for truth. Since these foundations do not exist, epistemology is a waste of time and can become dangerous. This is evident in the writings of Michael Foucault.

Foucault argues that theories which attempt to explain a greater value of one position over another is just another attempt to impose the authority of one onto another. Theories in general are oppressive in nature because inherent in these theories are the values of the powerful. When philosophy attempts to come up with theories of objective truth, they are deceiving the oppressed and joining the oppressors in that truth, justice, and right, are no longer creatures of this world but are rather based on universal and timeless standards. This gives the powerful a basis for imposing what really are their own standards of right and wrong, truth and falsity, on the people of a society. "When reason thus becomes the accomplice of repression, Foucault argues, it is time to show how the very definitions of what is rational grow out of the interests of the powerful" (2).

Foucault attacks the system and theories which are based on universal, objective grounds because they contribute to the repressive power of the system. Central to the system are social structures and theoretical language foreign to the oppressed and so the ideas of the oppressed are not being heard, ignored, or overlooked. Foucault advocates local knowledge and practical reform; enough with general theories which do not consider the point of view of the oppressed he would say. Placher states that in order for Foucault to be critical of the notions of good and bad, right and wrong imposed upon us by the powerful, Foucault must believe the ideas of the powerful are really wrong. By criticizing the powerful, Foucault must have values of his own that are more just and fair than those of the oppressors. What makes his values more righteous than those of the powerful? In order to answer this question, Foucault would have to come up with a system or a theory of his own that explains why, for example, freedom is to be valued more than repression. Theories like these are what contribute to oppression, however, and so Foucault is stuck between a rock and a hard place. "This puts Foucault in the paradoxical position of being unable to account for or to justify the sort of normative political judgments he makes all the time"(3). In radically

challenging the structures of the system, Foucault should have to defend why we should challenge the system. What makes Foucault's challenges to the system more satisfactory to the system itself? This Foucault refuses to do. "Foucault believed that general principles always turn into an excuse for oppression. But only by appealing to such principles, it seems, could he justify the radical challenge to current forms of oppression that he wanted to make"(4).

Richard Rorty, another new historicist, runs into similar problems. Rorty believes that epistemology, explaing how we know what we know, is a regression to modern foundationalism. But implicit to Rorty's own position are values which are not made explicit because he then would have to explain where these values come from. In order to do this, epistemology is necessary. Some examples of Rorty's values become evident in his denunciations of past philosophies. Does not Rorty's denial of foundations imply that a non-foundational world should be valued? Rorty denounces positivism, idealsim and Platonic forms and doesn't this mean that his stance rests on anti-idealistic, anti-positivistic values? William Dean asks time and again where the values implicit in Rorty come from. "When Rorty denounces the norms operative in the philosohies of

others, does he not express norms of his own-- norms that drive his denunciations? Further, if he has such norms, how does he know them?"(5) Rorty and other new historicists often say we must turn to the community to help people understand and be comforted by a feeling of being connected rather than look for objective, extra-historical standards for meaning. Dean asks, "Criterion for criterion, is Rorty's criterion of the good in communal relations less a moral criterion than some extra -historical criterion of the good in objective truth?. . . how does Rorty come to know that it is true in his world?"(6) Rorty refuses to explain from where he receives his values and this makes him ". . . unable to say why one theory with one historical outcome is to be preferred to others"(7). Because of this, he along with the other new historicists are accused of being relativists, mere subjectivists, and relativists which they are not because they advocate pragmatism, and communal relations over idealism and objective truth, for instance.

Dean believes that Rorty and the other new historicists are ironically working out of a false dichotomy. This is ironic because many of them are bringing forth new alternatives to what they perceive to be false dichotomies. The false dichotomy that Rorty and Foucault are

working out of is when one does epistemology, one is looking for foundations. Therefore one must accept foundations or one denies that these frameworks or structures for rational agreement exist. For Dean, there is third possibility rooted in the philosophies of James, and Dewey. The new historicists, in neglecting where their historicism was derived, do not consider this third possibility which is an epistemology which is both historicist and non-foundational. Dean is advocating that the new historicists get in touch with their own history, (since they say that this is why philosophies and theories often times fail), and consider this third alternative which was so important to the writings of James and Dewey. This non-foundational and historical epistemology will give them a source for values without referring to supra-historical priciples. This was called radical empiricism by James and immediate empiricism by Dewey.

Dean, unlike many of the new historicists, traces his historicism back to the original American pragmatists, James and Dewey. These philosophers, in turn were greatly influenced by Charles Darwin. Darwin described humanity as being shaped by variation and selection instead of determined by rational or scientific laws which are beyond what is experienced in history. This necessitated an expansion of their

empiricism to include values and the relations between things. James abandoned positivism and its limitations to what is experienced to the five senses and to the idea that objects themselves are what constitute reality. This led to what James' termed radical empiricism. "James radical empiricism was his claim (1) that experience alone is reliable testimony about the world, (2) that what is experienced are relations between things as well as things themselves, and (3) that beyond experience and the relations of things experienced, there is no transempirical whole"(8). In existence, we experience both the object of experience and how this experience is related to previous experiences in history.

Values are experienced in history in these relations among things that are external to ourselves. These values are no longer a matter of subjectivistic opinion, however, because nature and history are the bearers of good and evil. Life is seen as a struggle to survive in this world in which species are destroyed and survive due to the values working in the process of natural selection and variation. For humanity, it is not just a question of reacting to the material world, of mere survival; we desire a greater richness of experience which we can find in the

relations of things. Our relations to one another and to the things of this world are what the values and qualities experienced and subsequently discussed refer to.(9) This is evident in the writings of the new historicists in that they consistently refer to the importance of communal relations and conversations in attempting to improve the situation of the world. They do not however say that the source of this importance is found in nature or in history and this is what distinguishes them from their predecessors.

This radical empiricism leads to a radical historicism because truth and meaning are in part derived from experience and created through experience. ". . . the individual is the source of growth, for the individual is not entirely passive to the realities of the past but active- that is, creative-in reading those realities in light of what the individual brings to the world"(10). The individual is not the final determinant of truth and meaning, however; this is dependent upon the socio-historical situation and community of which one is a part. For example, a Christian may have an experience which transforms him to an extent and brings to light new possibilities. These new possibilities will occasion the formulation of a new truth but this truth will still be in part determined by the community

of which the individual has been a part or in other words the history of the individual. For stability, consistency, and order, this new truth cannot be irreconciliable to past truths or irreconciliable with the values of the community of which one is a part and so it is shaped by history. If the Christian experiences Buddhist meditaion, the purpose and benefits may be tranquility, passivity, and ease of mind but will not be to reach nirvana. The truth of meditation may turn out to be a greater ease in turning the other cheek, or more simply to relax which stem from the individual's history whereas for Buddhism, the truth of meditation is that it allows one to reach nirvana. Dean sums up this dichotomy between the individual and history. "The self, in short, generates the variations which fuel history. However, James moved on to a historicism: while the self is the source of variation, it depends on history and on nothing beyond history, the past history it perceptually feels and the future history that pragmatically selects its variations"(11). This historicism allows one to show where one has recieved one's values, (from history) and yet is not foundational because the socio-historical situation is still the evaluator of truth and meaning. "James' recognition of this valuational dimension of history and the epistemology attuned to this recognition, gives to James's

work a completeness and, thus, a persuasiveness lacking today [in the new historicists]"(12).

What does all this mean for Dean's theology? The answer to this cannot be completely known because Dean is writing that book right now, but he does give us some clues in the final chapter. Firstly, he criticizes the new historicists for focusing only on method, on how we can get at the truth. The original pragmatists and naturalists, on the other hand, were more interested in the truths and meaning that the world may actually contains then the possible ways to reach this truth. They took a third position beyond objectivism and relativism, and in defiance of the extremes of both the unity of monism and the difference of pluralism. Their world was one in which the historical process itself was ultimately real. The individual is an interpreter of this historical process and present truth is shaped by past interpretations and future truth is created in current interpretations. It overcomes monism because every interpreter shapes the world in a distinct way but is not reduced to a nihlistic pluralism because the one historical process is created through these differing interpretations. The world is created through the experience of subjective interpretation but it is not a subjectivism

". . . for subjective experience is understood to arise from past objects and go be validated or invalidated by reference to future objects"(13). This allows these philosophers to speak of God in positive, naturalistic terms which the new historicists cannot because their work over-emphasizes methodological mistakes in the past and how to correct these mistakes.

Because the subject interprets from a particular standpoint, Dean emphasizes that an American religious historicism should be rooted in those past interpretations that would shape this historicism. Current historicists ignore the impact of the classical philosophies of James, Dewey on their thought and are weakened because of the omission of the radical empiricism of these philosophers. An American religious historicism would include radical empiricism to give it a source for values. This would also enable Dean to say from where his God is derived. The values inherent in nature and history would allow him to construct a God based on these values and from the insights of previous theologians. "With a radical empiricism, they [James, Dewey, Meland, Loomer] can explain . . . how it is that the religious person is able to arrive at a theistic hypothesis that has even the remotest chance of pragmatic confirmation"(14). Kaufman's theism is conceived and not derived from

the values of history or nature and so why his hidden creativity should be called God is really left unanswered.

Dean says that to do theology and be consistent with a historical method, an American religious historicism would have to work within the naturalistic tradition. A non-naturalistic historical theology would not be able to say anything of God's importance to this world because of an over-emphasis on method and a subsequent lack of propositions about how God may effect our understanding of the historical process(15). The naturalism of James, Dewey and Whitehead does make claims about the world, that it is a historical process, and so a natural theology would try to explain how God is involved in this process and can aid us in understanding this process. Finally, this type of theology, if it is to be American, would have to be work with the Christian and Jewish traditions. Along with the omission of context-independent claims about God,

> ". . . this theology would recognize the extent to which the American context and its God are recurringly radically empirical, radically historicist, and naturalistic; and it would develop that tradition in its new context. Third, it would recognize that the American context is clearly and obviously Jewish and Christian in ways not described here, but which must be recognized in any historically adequate account of American theology"(16).

It is hard for me to come to any grand conclusions about the claims

made by these three theologians. One of the main issues seems to be what standards we need to appeal to in making theological claims. Kaufman wants to make the character of theology public and so discusses the ways in which God is still relevant in this basically secular world in that God works through the structures which lie behind history and culture. An insistence on doing private theology limits the rules and the standards from which theology works and will not appeal to a broad range of people. Theology needes to reach a large audience for Kaufman insists that huge changes are needed across many areas of life and the more areas theology can impact the greater its success. It is no longer of extreme import to remain loyal to Christian tradition for we are living in world in which working together to stop the arms race, and to stop environmental destruction takes precedence over particular loyalties. His talk about God is based excessively on Western culture to the point where pluralistic conversation would cease. It also reconstructs God to the point where one wonders, for one, why it should be called God and second whether it is a God which will appeal to the wide range of people that Kaufman wants to reach.

Placher insists that it is the narratives of the Bible which give

meaning to the lives of Christians and this meaning can be lost in attempting to appeal to standards external to Christianity. Christian theology has lost its distinct character by appealing to cultural or scientific standards and this has weakened the force of what Christianity has to say. Placher might say that the unifying power of the Christian traditions among different sects is necessary for Christianity to have an impact. What does it mean to be a Christian if the meaning of God and Christ is relative to the history and culture of the Christian? Christianity becomes so diverse according to these standards that the power of the message is lost. Doesn't Christ's life become meaningful to American, Italian, Latin American, and African Christians because of the loving, caring, suffering and dying picture of Jesus in the Bible? Don't Christians of varying cultures and histories see this same pattern of existence in which humans suffer and love and care for one another? Placher believes that Christian theology must remain loyal to the narratives of the Bible because these narratives are what unify Christians and give Christians a distinct voice. Placher grants that the interpretation of these narratives are varied and suggest that the best approach is one in which Christians do not start from their modern perspective or their historical and cultural

situation but rather in the Biblical world itself. This will negate the relativity of culture and history in interpreting scripture and will provide meaning to the extent that Christian lives conform to the world described in the Bible. This theology becomes problematic to me, however, because one wonders because of the lack of tests what makes his claims true and secondly if we may challenge irrational aspects of the Bible if tradition is considered to authoritative.

Dean, like Kaufman, believes that theological truth is context dependent. The final determinant of whether or not theological work will have benefits is the application of the pragmatic test to the construction of God. "Although it is not the first question, the last question is, 'To what extent will an American historicist concept of God make a practical difference in the lives of those who accept it?'" (17) I believe that Dean will look for another third option in his follow up to History Making History; one in which theology will still be culturally relavent but will remain within the Jewish and Christian traditions. Dean's God will have to be within the historical process itself for him to remain consistent within his own perspective and to be in touch with the naturalists who preceded him. This God will more than likely have cultural significance

much along the same lines that the God of process theology has but how it will remain ". . . a . . theology within the Jewish and Christian traditions," I do not know(18). We can look forward to this in his next book.

Notes

(1) Dean. History Making History., p. 81
(2) Placher. Unapologetic Theology., p. 94
(3) Ibid
(4) Ibid., p. 96
(5) Dean. History., p. 84
(6) Ibid., p. 86
(7) Ibid., p. 82
(8) Ibid., p. 103
(9) Ibid., p. 103
(10) Ibid., p.105
(11) Ibid
(12) Ibid
(13) Ibid., p. 132
(14) Ibid., p. 142
(15) Ibid., p. 136
(16) Ibid., p. 144
(17) Ibid
(18) Ibid

Appreciation and Comment

Garrett E. Paul, Instructor

These senior theses were challenging and instructive to assist in their development, and to read when completed. Each covers a topic of great importance. Each required its writer to delve deeply in an area that demands great sophistication and analytical skill. No one chose an easy topic.

While it is true that there is no common thread that ties them all together, there are several threads (plural) that weave in and out of these papers.

The first of these threads is simply the diversity of the subjects: ranging from the Brooklyn neighborhood of Williamsburg to the Ancient Near East, from the slavery debates of the 19th century to the homosexuality debates of the 20th, from the nurseries of churches to physical rehabilitation centers, the breadth covered by these papers is breathtaking. These students have had to adjust to a far, far broader field of inquiry than was customary when I was an undergraduate 20 years ago. "Diversity" is a word that has recently been cheapened by excessive use, but it is truly appropriate to describe these theses.

Another important thread is the evaluation of history. Sara Johnson struggles with the historicity of the figure of Lilith and with what that historicity means; David Jahnke struggles with Gordon Kaufman's rejection of tradition, William Placher's lionization of tradition, and Dean's critical approach to history. Jeanie Reese struggles with what Biblical images of covenant meant then, and mean now, for Christians. All three papers must ask, what is history? and what do we make of it? Is it a record of development, of progress, of oppression, of irrelevance? Are historical accounts of Lilith simply reflections of patriarchal culture and therefore modern women are free to do with them whatever they choose without respect to history? Or has slipshod scholarship tarnished recent attempts to restore Lilith? Does the threat of nuclear holocaust render Luther and Augustine irrelevant to our needs, or more relevant? Are suzerainty covenants irrelevant to modern egalitarians, or still part of Christian experience? And so on.

A third thread is that of conflict: conflict between points of view and between cultures. Hasidic Jews define themselves through separation from others, from the demonic. Homosexuals define themselves, and are defined by others, in terms of sexual activity. Pro-life and pro-choice groups confront one another in vivid conflict. Bethany Dahlen and Heidi Flugstad both enter sympathetically into different ways of life and try to understand why they are different. Dahlen and Kristin Mesrobian both explore hotly contested issues to which no immediate resolution seems apparent. Theodore Niemi confronts the question of what we are to do in light of the religious pluralism and conflict of the

present, and insists on the necessity of dialogue as a method to deal with them. All of them explore the contours of these conflicts and the role that religion plays in them.

Yet another--the fourth--thread is that of personal development and narrative. Amy Finden looks at the spiritual life of children and the ways in which it relates to child development. She assesses the ways in which the church, in particular, responds, and finds them wanting: too much doing, not enough contemplation. Kimberly Becker looks at another kind of spiritual life: the confrontation between a person and a disability, the disability caused by spinal column injury. While the injury sets the question apart from children's development in general, it is still a matter of how a person--whether a child or physically challenged--confronts basic questions about life, death, and God. Becker finds that religion can play a crucial role in rehabilitation; perhaps we could apply some of her insights to the spiritual development of children.

Careful readers will, no doubt, identify other threads in this rich tapestry (or patchwork). Yet, as I reflect more and more on these papers, it seems to be that they all touch upon one of the most fascinating, and frustrating, of the perennial issues of human life: identity and otherness, and how we will deal with them.